

Developing the EU-Japan Strategic Partnership

An analysis of European Union member states' relations with Japan



Edited by
Andreea Brinza & Andrei Lungu



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Contents

Acknowledgments	4
Introductory remarks	9
<i>Andreea Brinza</i>	
EU-Japan relations: A comparative overview of relations between EU member states and Japan	12
<i>Andrei Lungu</i>	
A long-lasting friendship: The case of Austria and Japan	47
<i>Lenke-Laura Molnar</i>	
The bilateral relations between Belgium and Japan: Where the royal and imperial families meet	76
<i>Anke Kennis</i>	
Bulgaria toward Japan: From incidental enemy to a role model	97
<i>Evgeniy Kandilarov</i>	
Croatia-Japan relations within the European Union framework: Disregarded potential	127
<i>Marcela Perić</i>	

**Celebrating 60 years of Cyprus-Japan relations: A great potential
to expand cooperation** 154

Thomas-Nektarios Papanastasiou

**The Czech Republic-Japan relations: Stable yet still with
unfulfilled potential outside traditional spheres** 174

David Kozisek

**Denmark-Japan relations: Diversifying political and economic ties
to East Asia** 195

Raymond Yamamoto

**“Reading the air” between Estonia and Japan: Why digitalization,
culture and language matter in mutual relations** 219

Eva Liias

**France-Japan relations: An exceptional partnership – security,
trade and culture** 242

Xavier Mellet

**Germany-Japan relations: New challenges, new options for a
strategic partnership** 268

Torsten Weber

Greco-Japanese diplomacy: An amiable relationship that leaves a lot to be desired 298

Giannis Diamantakos

From mutual fascination to strategic cooperation: Italy and Japan in the face of the 21st century's global transformations 323

Marco Zappa

Lithuania-Japan relations: From life-saving visas to lasers 360

Arvydas Kumpis

Van hier tot Tokio: The 400-year-old bond between the Netherlands and Japan continues to prosper 387

Maaïke Okano-Heijmans and Kayle Van't Klooster

Relations between Poland and Japan: Sympathy despite remoteness 413

Karol Żakowski

Portugal and Japan: Commercial and cultural relations grounded in historical bonds 434

Mariana A. Boscariol

A new horizon for Romania-Japan relations: The common path of Bucharest and Tokyo	455
<i>George Boghean</i>	
Slovakia-Japan relations: Valuable, yet underestimated	487
<i>Róbert Vancel</i>	
Slovenia-Japan relations: A new hub for the Japanese robotics industry in Central Europe	505
<i>Boštjan Bertalanč</i>	
Spain-Japan relations: From mutual indifference toward an emerging strategic partnership	532
<i>Just Castillo Iglesias</i>	
Sweden-Japan relations: From economic partners to geopolitical allies?	574
<i>Erik Isaksson</i>	
Authors	604

Introductory remarks

By Andreea BRINZA*

Relations between the European Union (EU) and Japan have considerably strengthened over the past few years, especially after the signing of the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement and the EU-Japan Strategic Partnership Agreement. These partnerships have further consolidated the EU-Japan relationship as one of the most important in the world, as the two sides have been working to define a common agenda in an increasing number of areas, from climate change to infrastructure building.

Unfortunately, while EU-Japan relations have been carefully analyzed, there has been significantly less emphasis on the bilateral relations between EU member states and Japan, especially in a comparative or holistic manner. As EU foreign policy depends on input and support from national governments, the views of each member state are important to determine the future of EU-Japan relations and how they can be further developed. At the same time, most of the progress in EU-Japan relations in areas such as trade, investment, cultural and academic ties, or security cooperation has been achieved at member states level. How relations between EU member states and Japan evolve will largely decide the future trajectory of EU-Japan relations as well, especially in terms of results and tangible cooperation. It is in this context that it is important to study and understand the state of relations between EU member states and Japan.

The research project *Developing the EU-Japan Strategic Partnership: An analysis of European Union member states' relations with Japan* aims to fill this research gap. With support from Toshiba International Foundation (TIFO), the project gathered 21 scholars to analyze the relations between Japan and 21 EU member states, in a variety of areas: political, strategic, economic, cultural and people-to-people relations. The countries involved in this project are: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia,

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Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden. Each chapter was written by a European researcher specialized on the study of Japan, from the EU member state whose relations with Japan were analyzed.

This holistic analysis at member states level aims to facilitate a better understanding of EU-Japan relations, their strong suits, their less developed dimensions, and the best way to improve them and to develop the EU-Japan strategic partnership. Thus, this book serves to increase understanding of EU-Japan relations in both Tokyo and European capitals, by taking a bottom-up approach to analyzing EU-Japan relations. By combining a multidimensional analysis of bilateral relations with recommendations to strengthen these relations, the book hopes to contribute to the ongoing process of development of EU-Japan relations, allowing them to achieve their full potential.

The project was implemented between the summer of 2021 and the summer of 2022, with the first drafts of the chapters received in 2021. In order to facilitate the reading and unity of this book, the chapters dedicated to each EU member state follow a similar template, composed of an overview, the history of relations, political relations, security and military relations (where applicable), economic and commercial relations, cultural and people-to-people relations and perceptions of Japan, ending with conclusions and recommendations. The book also includes an overview chapter, structured on the same template, which provides an overview of EU-Japan relations and analyzes and compares the results of the 21 chapters on bilateral relations, while providing EU-wide recommendations based on them.

To facilitate reading for those unfamiliar with Japanese names and for the sake of uniformity among chapters, all Western and Japanese personal names included in the book follow the Name Surname order, regardless of historical era.

The chapters of this book aim to provide a better understanding of the state of relations between the 21 EU member states and Japan. Bringing all these analyses together, with their varieties and particularities, also allows readers to gain better insights about EU-Japan relations, allowing for comparisons and lesson learning among EU member states. We therefore hope this book will be of great use to European, Japanese and international readers, and will help encourage further discussions and

debates regarding relations between the EU and its member states and Japan and how to best overcome barriers and strengthen these ties, in this way contributing to a brighter future for EU-Japan relations and cooperation. While EU-Japan relations have significantly progressed over the past years, as the chapters of this book show, there are still many areas in which cooperation can be enhanced and more work is necessary in order for relations between EU member states and Japan to unlock their vast potential. It is our hope that this book and the careful and elaborate work of the many researchers involved in this project can contribute toward this goal.

EU-Japan relations: A comparative overview of relations between EU member states and Japan

By Andrei LUNGU*

A unique window of opportunity for EU-Japan relations

After reaching an agreement in the negotiations for the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between the European Union (EU) and Japan, European Commissioner for Trade Cecilia Malmström and Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida each drew the second eye of two Daruma dolls, one doll painted with the flag of the European Union and the other with the flag of Japan.¹ According to tradition, the gesture marked the accomplishment of a goal that was set when the first eye of the doll was painted. While the ceremony was meant to signal the successful conclusion of the negotiations for the EPA, one could argue that a different gesture was, in fact, required: painting the first eye of a Daruma doll, as the conclusion of the negotiations for the EPA is not the end of a journey but the beginning of one – that of a strong and fruitful EU-Japan partnership, yet one whose goal of success will be achieved not through inertia alone but through future hard work and close cooperation.

Europe's ties to Japan go back centuries, while the EU's relations with Japan go back decades. Today, the EU and Japan enjoy not just the EPA but also a Strategic Partnership Agreement, setting the foundation for stronger and closer bonds. Yet Japan's main interactions with the European Union happen at the level of member states, where

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¹ European Commission (2017) *Visit of Fumio Kishida, Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs, to Cecilia Malmström, Member of the EC: Painting Traditional Japanese Daruma Dolls Following the Agreement Reached at Ministerial Level on an EU/Japan Trade Deal*, Available at: <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-141331> (Accessed 10 September 2022).

there is greater diversity in the levels of cooperation and in the pace of strengthening this cooperation. EU-Japan relations and Japan's relations with individual member states have deepened considerably over the past decade and are now in a pivotal period for their future development, with numerous opportunities ahead.

While enjoying traditionally close and friendly relations with Europe, Japan was not the primary focus of Europe's attention in Asia in the new millennium, because of its period of economic stagnation since the 1990s. Even though it is a member of the G7, along with three other EU member states,² for more than a decade, until the second half of the 2010s, Japan used to receive less attention and courting from Europe than China. One eloquent example in this regard is that of Germany – former Chancellor Angela Merkel visited China twice as often as she visited Japan (12 versus 6 visits, over 16 years).³ The same was true for many other EU member states, both in Western and Eastern Europe. This happened, in some cases, even though economic ties to Japan were stronger than those with China.

This started changing over the past years, in tandem with the rising worries about, distrust of and distancing from China. However, it is important to underline that, while this parallel trend helped place more focus on Japan, the strengthening of EU-Japan relations and of EU member states' relations with Japan was mainly based on a greater understanding of Japan's importance, the opportunities it presents and the prospects for cooperation. A vital role in this regard was played by the Economic Partnership Agreement and the Strategic Partnership Agreement, both years in the making, negotiations having begun in 2013⁴ and in 2014, respectively.⁵ It is telling that, while the EU and China agreed to launch negotiations for a bilateral investment treaty

² France, Germany and Italy, though the EU itself is a member of the group, represented at its summits by the president of the European Commission and the president of the European Council.

³ See the section on Political relations, in the Germany-Japan chapter.

⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2018) *Negotiations on the Japan-EU EPA*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/ecm/ie/page25e_000233.html (Accessed 10 September 2022).

⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2022) *Japan-EU Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA)*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/ep/page22e_000707.html (Accessed 10 September 2022).

in 2012,⁶ which hasn't entered into force even a decade later, the EU and Japan not only moved quicker but successfully completed both these negotiations, showing not just determination but also a convergence of political and economic interests and visions.

The growing European engagement of Japan has been rising in tandem with the increased interest in Europe for, at first, the broader Asia-Pacific region and now the Indo-Pacific (though defined differently by EU member states⁷) – a term which showed a realization that the prior level of attention placed on China, at the expense of so many other important countries and the opportunities they provide, was mistaken. EU member states, such as Germany,⁸ France,⁹ the Netherlands,¹⁰ and the European Union itself,¹¹ have published Indo-Pacific strategies or guidelines.

The emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a concept is, of course, the merit of Japan itself, which promoted the Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision,¹² later adopted by the United States, now also endorsed by Europe. Japan had long tried to connect with Europe and the rest of Asia through a shared vision, for example, through the Arc of

⁶ European Commission (n.d.) *EU-China Agreement: Milestones and Documents*, Available at: https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/china/eu-china-agreement/milestones-and-documents_en (Accessed 10 September 2022).

⁷ Frédéric Grare and Manisha Reuter (2021) *Moving closer: European views of the Indo-Pacific*, Available at: <https://ecfr.eu/special/moving-closer-european-views-of-the-indo-pacific/> (Accessed 10 September 2022).

⁸ Federal Foreign Office of Germany (2020) “*Germany-Europe-Asia: Shaping the 21st Century Together*”: *The German Government Adopts Policy Guidelines on the Indo-Pacific Region*, Available at: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/regionaleschwerpunkte/asien/german-government-policy-guidelines-indo-pacific/2380510> (Accessed 10 September 2022).

⁹ Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (2022) *France's Indo-Pacific Strategy*, Available at: https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/en_dcp_a4_indopacifique_022022_v1-4_web_cle878143.pdf (Accessed 10 September 2022).

¹⁰ Government of the Netherlands (2020) *Indo-Pacific: Guidelines for Strengthening Dutch and EU Cooperation with Partners in Asia*, Available at: <https://www.government.nl/documents/publications/2020/11/13/indo-pacific-guidelines> (Accessed 10 September 2022).

¹¹ European Commission (2021) *Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council. The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*, Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_2021_24_1_en.pdf (Accessed 10 September 2022). Council of the European Union (2021) *Council Conclusions on an EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*, Available at: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7914-2021-INIT/en/pdf> (Accessed 10 September 2022).

¹² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2022) *Free and Open Indo-Pacific*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/page25e_000278.html (Accessed 10 September 2022).

Freedom and Prosperity, proposed by Foreign Minister Tarō Asō, in 2007.¹³ While that vision did not have staying power, today Europe is indeed connected with Japan, including in the Indo-Pacific, at least when it comes to rhetoric. While the practical details are still left to be constructed, the political convergence leads to numerous opportunities for cooperation in this broad region, on top of the existing possibilities for developing bilateral relations.

There are numerous signs of Japan's growing importance for Europe, some of them being very recent. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz made his first visit to Asia in Japan, not in China.¹⁴ President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen and President of the European Council Charles Michel visited Japan in May 2022, for the EU-Japan Summit,¹⁵ but haven't yet visited China together. French President Emmanuel Macron attended the opening ceremony of the Tokyo Olympic Games, in 2021,¹⁶ but did not attend the opening ceremony of the Beijing Winter Olympic Games, in 2022, which was boycotted by most European governments. Taken together with other developments, all these show that Japan has become Europe's preferred partner in Asia.

On the other hand, in 2022, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida visited Europe three times, two of them¹⁷ being visits occasioned by international summits: for the G7 summit in Brussels¹⁸ and then for the NATO summit in Madrid and the G7 summit in

¹³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2007) *On the "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity" – An Address by H.E. Mr. Taro Aso, Minister for Foreign Affairs on the Occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the Founding of the Japan Forum on International Relations, Inc.*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/pillar/address0703.html> (Accessed 10 September 2022).

¹⁴ Andreas Rinke and Ju-min Park (2022) *Germany's Scholz Visits ally Japan, not China, on First Asian Trip*, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germanys-scholz-says-putin-clinging-idea-forced-peace-ukraine-2022-04-28/> (Accessed 10 September 2022).

¹⁵ Council of the European Union (2022) *EU-Japan Summit, 12 May 2022*, Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2022/05/12/> (Accessed 10 September 2022).

¹⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Japan-France Summit Meeting and Luncheon Meeting*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/we/fr/page4e_001159.html (Accessed 10 September 2022).

¹⁷ The third was a visit to Italy, the Vatican and the UK. See: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2022) *Prime Minister Kishida Visits South East Asia and Europe (April 29 - May 6, 2022)*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/s_sa/sea2/page6e_000284.html (Accessed 10 September 2022).

¹⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2022) *Prime Minister Kishida Attends G7 Summit in Brussels (March 23-25, 2022)*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/ecm/ec/page6e_000278.html (Accessed 10 September 2022).

Elmau.¹⁹ Kishida's first international visit as prime minister was also in Europe, though again on the occasion of a summit, the COP26 summit in Glasgow, in November 2021.²⁰ This increased diplomatic activity creates the conditions for greater cooperation and more results in all spheres, from economic relations to security cooperation, from cultural and people-to-people relations to international aid and global governance.

While Japan has had decades, if not centuries, of productive relations with European countries, especially Western European ones, the current geopolitical context and political environment generate the sense that this is a special period that provides opportunities to develop EU-Japan relations to a whole new level. It is in this context that the idea behind this book came to life, in an attempt to shed light on and analyze the state of Japan's bilateral relations with EU member states, to identify both opportunities for and barriers to improved cooperation, thus helping to contribute to achieving the full potential of Japan's relations with the EU and its member states. The convergence between so many factors – the recent strengthening of EU-Japan relations, the geopolitical context, especially involving the People's Republic of China and Russia, the COVID-19 pandemic and the risks of future pandemics, the climate crisis, the growing interest for global development and infrastructure initiatives, the emergence and popularity of the Indo-Pacific framework, just to name a few – creates a unique window of opportunity for the EU and Japan to build stronger, broader and more productive relations. Whether or not Europe and Japan will take advantage of this window of opportunity largely depends on decisions taken in European capitals and in Tokyo and on the effort they will expend in the coming years.

With all this in mind, the next pages will present an overview and a comparative analysis of the multiple dimensions of the relations of EU member states with Japan, based on the chapters of this book, while also providing recommendations for strengthening these relations and EU-Japan relations.

¹⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2022) *Prime Minister Kishida Attends G7 Summit 2022 and NATO Summit Meeting*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/ecm/ec/page6e_000287.html (Accessed 10 September 2022).

²⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Prime Minister KISHIDA Fumio Attends the COP26 Summit Meeting*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/ic/ch/page6e_000257.html (Accessed 10 September 2022).

History of relations

There is a wide variation among EU member states when it comes to the history and length of relations with Japan. Countries such as Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands and Italy have centuries-old ties, though, in most cases, these were led especially by missionaries and traders and less by European rulers and governments. On the other hand, most countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) have shorter histories of relations with Japan, though, in their cases too, unofficial contacts usually predated the establishment of official relations. But because of Japan's more than two centuries of isolation, most European countries established relations with Japan in the decades after 1854.

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to engage with Japan, arriving on the archipelago in 1543, with the news soon spreading throughout Europe and attracting travelers from other European nationalities.²¹ The Spanish and the Dutch soon followed. Relations were mostly developed by Christian missionaries and traders, with limited government involvement and diplomacy.

In the late 16th century and the early 17th century, two embassies from Japan visited European countries: the Tenshō Embassy and the Keichō Embassy. Their itinerary mainly took them to the territory of today's Portugal, Spain and Italy, though the Keichō Embassy also made a brief stop in southern France.²² The Keichō Embassy also left an interesting legacy in Spain: a few hundred residents of the town Coria del Río, near Seville, bear the surname Japón (which means Japan), being considered descendants of envoys of the embassy.²³

Nonetheless, this period of engagement wouldn't last long, as Japan's relations with the outside world were suspended during the *sakoku* period, beginning in the 1630s. The Dutch were the ones who maintained a longer relationship with Japan, through the presence of Dutch traders on the artificial island of Dejima, in Nagasaki, during this period when Japan was isolated for almost two centuries.²⁴

²¹ See the section on History of relations, in the Portugal-Japan chapter.

²² See the section on History of relations, in the France-Japan chapter.

²³ See the section on History of relations, in the Spain-Japan chapter.

²⁴ See the section on History of relations, in the Netherlands-Japan chapter.

But the legacy of these old ties can still be seen in Japanese words borrowed from Portuguese or Dutch, such as *bataren* (priest) and *tabako* (tabaco) from Portuguese,²⁵ or *lampu* (lamp) and *pisutoru* (pistol) from Dutch,²⁶ or even in cuisine, as *tempura* was introduced in Japan by Portuguese visitors to the archipelago.²⁷

After the opening of Japan to the outside world and, later, after the Meiji Restoration, Europe reestablished relations with Japan, though initially this was done through unequal treaties imposed by the European great powers. On top of the countries that had already engaged Japan in the past, countries such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany (back then, the Kingdom of Prussia), Italy, Belgium or Austria-Hungary established relations with Japan, leading not just to trade but also to military cooperation and, most importantly, providing Japan with inspiration for its modernization. On the military side, during the Boshin War, for example, France provided military support to the Tokugawa shogunate.²⁸

Cooperation bloomed after the Meiji Restoration, when Japan looked toward the West for inspiration for its political and technological modernization. This period also included a series of missions to Europe, such as the Iwakura Mission, which reached numerous European countries. The history sections of this book highlight many instances of cooperation dating from this period and how Japan found inspiration for some of its reforms in different European countries.

In the eastern half of Europe, interest for Japan was also emerging, as nations were also winning their independence. Bulgaria, Greece and Romania established their first diplomatic contacts with Japan relatively quickly after their independence, which Japan recognized. Yet, because of the large distance, establishing legations or embassies took a few more decades.

Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 had a lasting impact on European perceptions of Japan, especially in Eastern Europe. In Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Romania, or even Sweden, interest for Japan grew and some saw in Japan a

²⁵ See the section on Cultural and people-to-people relations, in the Portugal-Japan chapter.

²⁶ See the section on History of relations, in the Netherlands-Japan chapter.

²⁷ See the section on Cultural and people-to-people relations, in the Portugal-Japan chapter.

²⁸ See the section on History of relations, in the France-Japan chapter.

model to emulate or a potential ally against the Russian Empire and, later, the Soviet Union. For example, the future leader of Poland, Józef Piłsudski, traveled to Japan during the war, hoping to attract Japanese financial and military support for an armed uprising in Poland against the Russian Empire, though his plan was unsuccessful.²⁹ Nevertheless, as with other countries in the region, Poland would later cooperate with Japan on intelligence matters regarding Russia and the Soviet Union. This growing interest and support for Japan appeared even if, in the cases of countries such as Poland or the Baltic states, then part of the Russian Empire, their nationals were fighting against Japan, incorporated in the Russian army. Interest for Japan and its military power arose in other European countries as well, like in Sweden.³⁰

By the beginning of the 1920s, most European countries had established relations with Japan, though their breadth, of course, varied. The interwar period led to the strengthening of the relations of some countries with Imperial Japan but the cooling of others. After the beginning of the Second World War, Japan's relations with European countries were split in two: Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy were its allies in the Tripartite Pact, while France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom were fighting against Imperial Japan in East Asia.

The war left a mark on Japan's relations with some European countries – for example, in the Netherlands, the wounds of this period are still felt, as some Dutch survivors of the Japanese camp system still protest once a month in front of the Japanese embassy.³¹ However, after the end of the Second World War and later, after the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, Western European countries reestablished diplomatic relations with Japan and treated it as an ally in the Cold War. Japan established diplomatic relations with the European Communities (the predecessors of the European Union) in 1959,³² through the accreditation of its ambassador to Belgium. In turn though, it was only in 1974 that a European delegation was established in

²⁹ See the section on History of relations, in the Poland-Japan chapter.

³⁰ See the section on History of relations, in the Sweden-Japan chapter.

³¹ See the section on History of relations, in the Netherlands-Japan chapter.

³² Delegation of the European Union to Japan (2014) *Chronology of EU-Japan Relations*, Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20150629205342/www.EUinJapan.jp/en/relation/chronology/> (Accessed 10 September 2022).

Tokyo.³³

Throughout the next decades in the post-war era, as Japan experienced its economic miracle, while Western Europe also rebuild itself after the war and began the process of European integration, bilateral trade and cooperation developed. Usually, tensions were limited, though in the 1970s and 1980s, when Japan became a trading powerhouse, some problems did appear, for example, in France-Japan³⁴ or Italy-Japan relations.³⁵ At the same time, cooperation strengthened through the establishment of the Group of Five (G5) and, shortly afterward, the Group of Six (G6), which included France, West Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States.³⁶

On the other side of the Iron Curtain, relations took more time to develop, as the Soviet Union was initially the one dictating the terms of engagement with Japan. Thus, relations were reestablished only starting in the late 1950s. Later on, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia intensified their relations with Japan in the 1970s and 1980s. Yet relations really blossomed only after the fall of communism and the transition of the region to democracy and capitalism, when Japan provided generous financial aid and technical expertise and assistance, strengthening its relations with the region. As many CEE countries went through the process of integration in the European Union and experienced consistent economic development, they also benefited from Japanese investments, which are quite prominent in some CEE countries, especially in the manufacturing sector.

Japan's relations with European countries and with the EU itself continued to develop and deepen after the end of the Cold War, even though the Japanese economy went through a period of stagnation. Yet, as detailed and analyzed in the pages of this book, progress in bilateral relations has been uneven, both between different EU member states and between different sectors of cooperation, with some thriving and others lagging.

³³ Ibidem.

³⁴ See the section on History of relations, in the France-Japan chapter.

³⁵ See the section on History of relations, in the Italy-Japan chapter.

³⁶ The G5 became the G6 after Italy's admission in 1975. The G6 evolved into the G7 just one year later, when Canada was welcomed.

Political relations

As the history section highlights, even though they share certain similarities, there have been differences among EU member states when it comes to the history and evolution of diplomatic relations with Japan. That remains true today, with the intensity and closeness of political relations varying throughout the continent. But all EU member states have friendly relations with Japan and a sanguine outlook on their future development, and there are few political problems that mark relations between EU member states and Japan.

One similarity shared by EU countries and Japan and highlighted in many chapters of this book is represented by the common values of democracy, freedom, respect for human rights and support for the liberal international order. This shared political vision underpins Europe-Japan relations, both at member states level and at EU level. Especially in the current international geopolitical environment, when the dichotomy and adversarial state – if not outright conflict – between democracies and autocracies is growing, these political values enable the EU and Japan to cooperate, not just in areas of bilateral relations but also on the international stage, be it to strengthen or to defend the world order, to fight global warming, to provide development aid, or to promote high standards in infrastructure and physical or digital connectivity. Japan's longstanding democracy and pacifism contribute to making it the preferred and go-to partner in Asia for many EU member states.

The stable development of Japan's relations with EU member states is buttressed by an extensive diplomatic footprint. With the exception of Malta, Japan has embassies in all the other 26 EU member states. On the other hand, all EU member states have embassies in Japan, though with considerably different staffing levels and resources. This impressive diplomatic footprint facilitates the development of political relations, along with economic and cultural ones, though there is room for better coordination and, thus, increased efficiency among EU member states, in order to support those countries that can dedicate only limited resources to their presence in Japan. This notable point will be further highlighted in the sections on economic and cultural relations.

When it comes to visits and meetings, diplomatic activity has increased over the

past few years. The leaders of the largest EU member states regularly interact with Japanese leaders, either in multilateral forums or through bilateral visits. In other EU member states, top-level visits are rarer, though ministerial engagement is robust. There are also a few more surprising cases – for example, with the exception of Prime Minister Kishida’s recent visit to Madrid for the NATO summit, Spain has received only three visits of Japanese prime ministers in the past three decades, two of them having been made by Shinzō Abe.³⁷ Smaller EU member states have relatively few high-level engagements. Considering the distance, the comparatively lower degree of attention these countries pay to East Asia and Japan, and, conversely, the limited attention a country like Japan can pay to smaller distant states, this is understandable.

Nevertheless, Japan has made efforts to increase and diversify engagement with the EU, over the past decade its prime ministers and foreign ministers undertaking visits to other EU member states other than the largest ones. This was especially true during the long tenure of Shinzō Abe, who became the first Japanese prime minister to visit countries such as Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, the Baltic states³⁸ or Ireland.³⁹ This period of more intense Japanese engagement with Central and Eastern Europe coincided with the region’s increased geopolitical profile, after China established the 16+1 mechanism for cooperation, in 2012, followed by worries that Beijing is accumulating influence over the region. On the other hand, interest for Japan in the CEE region was already strong, visits of national leaders to Japan being a common occurrence.

Parliamentary diplomacy plays an important role in Japan’s relations with EU member states. Most EU member states have parliamentary friendship groups with Japan, while Japan also has corresponding groups. Still, there is room for improvement in the frequency of parliamentary exchanges, especially when it comes to tours through Europe of delegations from the National Diet of Japan.

One interesting particularity of the relations between some EU member states

³⁷ See the section on Political relations, in the Spain-Japan chapter.

³⁸ Andreea Brinza (2018) *Shinzo Abe’s East European Tour*, Available at: <http://risap.ro/en/shinzo-abes-east-european-tour/> (Accessed 10 September 2022).

³⁹ Patrick Smyth (2013) *Abe the First Serving Japanese PM to Visit Ireland Since Independence*, Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/asia-pacific/abe-the-first-serving-japanese-pm-to-visit-ireland-since-independence-1.1434033> (Accessed 10 September 2022).

and Japan is represented by the special relations formed between their royal families and the Japanese imperial family. Countries such as Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden or Spain have benefited from those long-lasting and deep connections, which have facilitated diplomacy. Some personal relationships have been especially strong, as has been the case of the relationship between King Baudouin of Belgium and Emperor Akihito.⁴⁰ Members of the Japanese imperial family and Japanese emperors Hirohito and Akihito have played important roles in fostering relations between Japan and all European countries, conducting diplomatic visits and contributing to the strengthening of bilateral relations.

Another interesting aspect of political relations between EU member states and Japan is Tokyo's use of smaller multilateral formats of diplomatic engagement, for example, the Visegrad Group (V4) plus Japan Summit Meeting or the Japan-Baltic Cooperation Dialogue.⁴¹ Such formats allow for more frequent contacts between Japan and their respective members, compared to simple bilateral meetings, as Japanese leaders, diplomats or officials couldn't engage in frequent trips to so many individual countries. Such formats are useful to increase diplomatic and political engagement and, in fact, a Japan-Nordic countries⁴² format, with regular meetings, could also be a useful possibility.⁴³ In the meantime, organizing regular meetings of the current formats, at various levels, is advisable.

The EU and Japan signed the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) in 2018, five years after the beginning of negotiations.⁴⁴ Japan also has such strategic partnership agreements with some EU member states, such as the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Poland or Spain, while negotiating new ones with countries

⁴⁰ See the section on History of relations, in the Belgium-Japan chapter.

⁴¹ Outside of the European Union, there is also the Japan-GUAM format (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova), though it hasn't been active lately.

⁴² These are Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

⁴³ Japanese Prime Minister Ryūtarō Hashimoto participated in a Japan-Northern Europe Summit, in Bergen, in 1997, but this format didn't become a regular occurrence. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (1997) *Joint Press Conference on the Occasion of the Japan-Northern Europe Summit in Bergen*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/eu/summit/bergen.html> (Accessed 10 September 2022).

⁴⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2022) *Japan-EU Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA)*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/ep/page22e_000707.html (Accessed 10 September 2022).

like Romania. Nonetheless, the process of establishing such partnerships is rather unsystematic and, in the case of Romania, for example, has been quite slow – even though the EU-Japan SPA provides a model and a general framework, negotiations between Bucharest and Tokyo have been going on for almost 5 years.

While the importance of such documents is debatable, they do bring two clear benefits. First, they create an agenda and a framework for further developing relations, making it easier for institutions and officials in the two countries to work together toward clear goals. Second, they shape a narrative, by illustrating the importance that each country places on relations with the other, which also helps officials focus on bilateral relations. Obviously, for Japan, it would be impossible to focus on all 27 EU member states. But many of these European countries have only one or even no strategic partners in Asia. For them, designating Japan as a strategic partner would signal a clear interest for strengthening and prioritizing relations with Tokyo, so their institutions and officials would focus more attention toward Japan, compared to other countries in the region. As interest for the Indo-Pacific grows, it would be a benefit for Japan to be considered the regional strategic partner of most EU member states. Japan would thus be well served by pursuing such strategic partnerships, and it would be useful for Tokyo to be the one engaging as many EU countries as possible, to negotiate strategic partnerships agreements, which can be based on the broader EU-Japan SPA and can then provide a framework for the structured development of bilateral relations.

Security and military relations

The security and military domain is probably the one with the greatest potential for stronger relations, simply because of the relatively weak ties and paucity of current cooperation. With the exceptions of France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain, most other European countries have very limited security ties to Japan.⁴⁵ This is understandable, considering the vast distance between Europe and Japan and the fact

⁴⁵ The 2022 Defense of Japan White Paper provides an overview of Japan's recent security engagements with EU countries. It is notable that, with the exception of France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain, the only other EU member states mentioned in the Europe section of the chapter on Security Cooperation, in the past three White Papers (2020-2022), have been Poland, Estonia, Finland and Denmark. See: Ministry of Defense of Japan (2022) *Defense of Japan*, pp. 348-358, Available at: https://www.mod.go.jp/en/publ/w_paper/wp2022/DOJ2022_EN_Full_02.pdf (Accessed 10 September 2022).

that they have quite different security and risk perceptions. But now, the geopolitical environment and especially the risks posed by Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC) create space for broader cooperation in the field of security, supported as well by the fact that Europe and Japan share strong military ties with the United States. At the same time, there are numerous opportunities for cooperation between Europe and Japan on global security issues, especially now that the EU and its largest member states plan to focus more attention on the security of the Indo-Pacific and to dedicate more military resources to this area of the world.

Engagement and cooperation between Japan and EU member states in the military domain are already materializing. In the first half of 2021, France dispatched the Mistral-class amphibious assault ship *Tonnerre* and the frigate *Surcouf* in the Indo-Pacific, in the *Mission Jeanne d'Arc 2021*, a training exercise that extended all the way to Japan, where they docked.⁴⁶ Later, the French vessels participated in the multilateral exercise ARC21, with Japanese, US and Australian vessels.⁴⁷ Thanks to its territories in the Pacific Ocean, French military forces can engage in regular contacts with the Japanese armed forces, like when a Japanese destroyer made a port call in New Caledonia, in September 2021, and conducted the “Oguri-Verny” bilateral exercise with French forces.⁴⁸ In November 2021, the German frigate *Bayern* docked in Tokyo and Yokosuka, in what was the first port call of a German warship in Japan in almost two decades,⁴⁹ later participating in monitoring the enforcement of the UN embargo against North Korea and a multilateral exercise.⁵⁰ The same year, the Dutch frigate HNLMS *Evertsen* also made a port call in Japan and participated in multilateral exercises, having

⁴⁶ Naval News (2021) *French Amphibious Ready Group Set Sails For The Indo-Pacific*, Available at: <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2021/02/french-amphibious-ready-group-set-sails-for-the-indo-pacific/> (Accessed 10 September 2022).

⁴⁷ Naval News (2021) *Amphibious Exercise ARC 21 Underway With Australia, France, Japan, United States*, Available at: <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2021/05/amphibious-exercise-arc-21-underway-with-australia-france-japan-united-states/> (Accessed 10 September 2022).

⁴⁸ Ministry of Defense of Japan (2022) *Japan-France Bilateral Exercise “Oguri-Verny,”* Available at: <https://www.mod.go.jp/en/article/2021/09/fb60fce8164f6c6fcf5213118152be04963e8c70.html> (Accessed 10 September 2022).

⁴⁹ See the section on Security and military relations, in the Germany-Japan chapter.

⁵⁰ Bundeswehr (2021) *Naval exercises: The “Bayern” at ANNUALEX 2021*, Available at: <https://www.bundeswehr.de/en/organization/navy/news/naval-exercises-frigate-bayern-at-annualex-2021-5320470> (Accessed 10 September 2022).

been deployed to the Indo-Pacific as part of the British Carrier Strike Group 21.⁵¹ EU-Japan military cooperation goes beyond the naval domain: Italy and Japan reached an agreement for the Japanese Air Self-Defense Force to send pilots for training at the International Flight Training School, in Italy.⁵²

There have been some instances of cooperation with Japan in the field of security and defense among other EU member states as well. In 2018, a delegation from the National Diet of Japan visited the Deveselu military base, in Romania, which hosts the Aegis Ashore Missile Defense System in Romania.⁵³ In February 2022, Poland and Japan signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Defense Cooperation and Exchanges,⁵⁴ which could facilitate more intense military cooperation between the two, especially in the context of Japan's growing support for Ukraine. Yet, most EU member states engage in little to no cooperation with Japan in the field of security and defense, showing that more progress can be done in the coming years.

Japan has signed security agreements with only a handful of EU member states: France, Germany and Italy have all signed both an Agreement Concerning the Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology and an Agreement on the Security of Information with Japan. These are important agreements that underpin security cooperation that goes beyond simple meetings or military exchanges and it is advisable that Japan and more EU member states sign such documents. Other countries have also signed other types of defense cooperation documents – for example, Spain, the Netherlands and Poland have each signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Defense Cooperation and Exchanges with Japan.⁵⁵

Some EU countries – mainly the largest ones but also countries such as Romania – maintain military attachés in their embassies in Tokyo, as does Japan in some of its embassies in the EU. Yet most EU member states do not have such attachés, as their embassies mainly focus on political, economic, cultural and consular affairs.

⁵¹ See the section on Security and military relations, in the Netherlands-Japan chapter.

⁵² See the section on Security and military relations, in the Italy-Japan chapter.

⁵³ See the section on Political relations, in the Romania-Japan chapter.

⁵⁴ See the section on Political relations, in the Poland-Japan chapter.

⁵⁵ See respective chapters.

Very few EU countries sell or buy military equipment to or from Japan – one example is Italy, as Japan is its third largest client of military equipment in Asia.⁵⁶ Considering Japan's traditional reluctance to engage in arms transfers, this isn't surprising, but now that Japan is slowly becoming more active in this area, there are opportunities for cooperation. Poland's recent decision to sign multi-billion dollar contracts for tanks, howitzers and fighter jets with South Korea⁵⁷ illustrates the scale of potential cooperation between Europe and Japan, considering the threats that both face.

Looking at Japan's security cooperation with EU member states, it is clear that there is ample space for broader cooperation. This is true both in the sense of tighter and more intense cooperation in the case of countries that already engage with Japan in this field but also when it comes to Japan extending cooperation to other EU member states, even if only through symbolic actions.

On the European side, it is important and recommended to involve representatives of smaller EU member states in the military missions deployed to or near Japan by countries such as France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands or Spain. While the armed forces of smaller EU member states, some of them even lacking a navy, do not have the resources or the reasons for engaging in such deployments on their own, embedding members of their armed forces in these deployments will allow for opportunities to engage with Japan's Self-Defense Forces. There are many things that both sides can learn from such interactions or even joint exercises, however limited they might be.

At the same time, and this has been a subject that has received comparatively less interest, Japan can also engage in military deployments to Europe, either for joint exercises or just for port calls and exchanges. There have been such instances in the

⁵⁶ See the section on Economic and commercial relations, in the Italy-Japan chapter.

⁵⁷ Brad Lendon, Yoonjung Seo and Joseph Ataman (2022) *Poland to Buy Hundreds of South Korean Tanks, Howitzers after Sending Arms to Ukraine*, Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/07/27/asia/south-korea-poland-tanks-howitzer-ukraine-intl-hnk-ml/index.html> (Accessed 10 September 2022).

past,⁵⁸ but it would be useful to make them regular, while also diversifying the types of engagements, to include more EU member states.

There is a broad space for cooperation on cybersecurity issues. Japan has already joined the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence in Tallinn as a Contributing Participant.⁵⁹ Unlike other forms of military cooperation, cybersecurity is a field in which Japan can deepen engagement with EU member states that do not show much or any interest for military deployments to Asia but which would be keen to cooperate on cybersecurity, where they face similar threats, be they from state or non-state actors.

There are many possibilities for more intense cooperation when it comes to intelligence and this is true also in the cases of countries with limited security cooperation with Japan, as are those in Central and Eastern Europe. In their case, there is a longer tradition and history of such cooperation on which to build, as the CEE and Japan shared concerns about Imperial Russia or the Soviet Union, in the first half of the 20th century. Now, with the PRC appearing more frequently on the defense agenda in Europe, Japan also has much to contribute to supporting its European partners.

While it is understandable that security cooperation between Japan and EU member states isn't very developed, this is an area that deserves greater attention and energy over the coming years. As great power politics is back and Russia's invasion of Ukraine has shown that large-scale military conflicts are not a thing of the past, defense cooperation is an important topic. Europe and Japan already share strong political relations and similar values, yet it is noteworthy that they also share similar threats and concerns, with Russia and the PRC figuring prominently on their radars. This is why Japan and EU member states must engage and make more progress on security cooperation over the next few years.

⁵⁸ NATO (2018) *NATO Maritime Group Sails with Japanese Training Squadron*, Available at: <https://mc.nato.int/media-centre/news/2018/nato-maritime-group-sails-with-japanese-training-squadron> (Accessed 10 September 2022). US Navy (2022) *NATO Ships Train with Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force in Mediterranean Sea*, Available at: <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/3057256/nato-ships-train-with-japan-maritime-self-defense-force-in-mediterranean-sea/> (Accessed 10 September 2022).

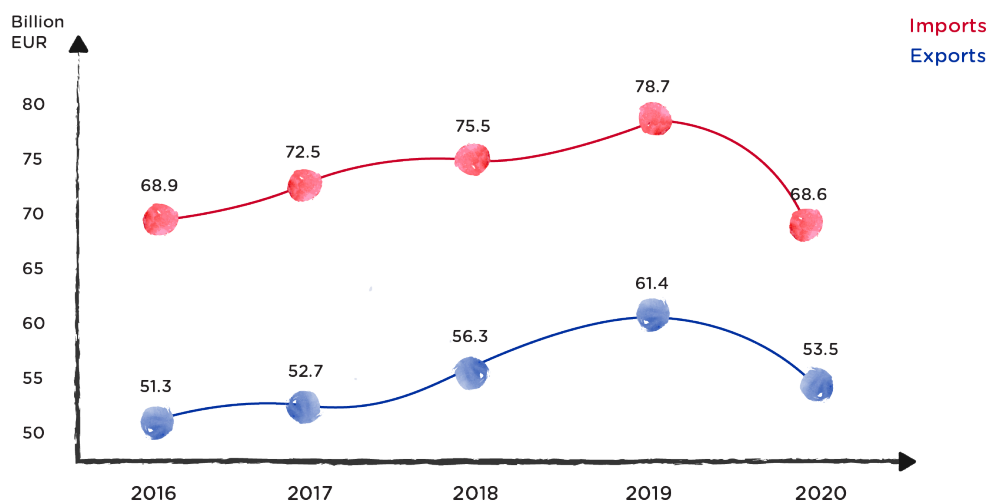
⁵⁹ NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE) (n.d.) *Japan to Join the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence in Tallinn*, Available at: <https://ccdcoe.org/news/2018/japan-to-join-the-nato-cooperative-cyber-defence-centre-of-excellence-in-tallinn/> (Accessed 10 September 2022).

Economic and commercial relations

Economic ties between EU countries and Japan are probably the most important and most developed sector of their relations. Yet, there is a wide variation in the strength of economic relations with Japan among different EU member states. At the same time, EU-Japan economic relations are far from reaching their full potential and, in many cases, there is still more work necessary for the benefits of the EPA to come to life.

Japan is only the EU's 8th largest import source and its 7th largest export market, with trade numbers rather similar to those of South Korea, even though Japan's GDP is almost three times larger.⁶⁰ Taking EU-South Korea trade as a point of comparison illustrates a contrast between the two: in the decade between 2011 and 2021, the value of EU-Japan trade has grown by only 20%,⁶¹ while the value of EU-South Korea trade has grown by an impressive 70%.⁶²

The EU's trade with Japan in billion euros



Source: Trade Map

One explanation could be that the EU-South Korea Free Trade Agreement

⁶⁰ European Commission (2022) *European Union, Trade in Goods with Japan*, Available at: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/isdb_results/factsheets/country/details_japan_en.pdf (Accessed 10 September 2022).

⁶¹ Ibidem.

⁶² European Commission (2022) *European Union, Trade in Goods with South Korea*, Available at: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/isdb_results/factsheets/country/details_south-korea_en.pdf (Accessed 10 September 2022).

entered into force in late 2015, three years before the entry into force of the EU-Japan EPA, in early 2019. The EU-South Korea FTA was, in fact, provisionally applied since 2011.⁶³ Nonetheless, this doesn't seem to be the main reason for the wide difference in the growth of trade: the value EU-Japan trade rose by just 6% between 2018 and 2021,⁶⁴ while the value of EU-South Korea trade rose by 19% in the same four-year period.⁶⁵ This shows that, while both Japan and South Korea have free trade agreements with the EU, South Korea's trade with the Union has seen a consistent boost and is on a clear upward trend, while EU-Japan trade hasn't yet experienced a similar development.

On the other hand, while the value of Japan's imports from the EU is similar to that of its imports from the US, the value of Japanese exports to the EU is only half of that of exports to the US.⁶⁶ These statistics show that there is still room for growth in EU-Japan trade on both sides and that more work is necessary in order to take advantage of all the opportunities of the EU-Japan EPA but also of other contemporary economic and trade trends.

One important characteristic of EU-Japan commercial relations is the concentration of trade in a few member states. In 2019 and 2020, only five member states accounted for almost 73% of the EU's trade with Japan: Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy.⁶⁷ This is even though the combined GDP of these countries represented just 64% of the EU's GDP. While this is partially explained by the fact that some imported goods are re-exported, Belgium being the second largest EU importer of goods from Japan and playing a key role in their subsequent distribution in Western Europe, Germany alone accounts for almost 32% of the EU's trade with Japan

⁶³ European Commission (n.d.) *South Korea. EU trade relations with South Korea. Facts, figures and latest developments*, Available at: https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/south-korea_en (Accessed 10 September 2022).

⁶⁴ European Commission (2022) *European Union, Trade in Goods with Japan*, Available at: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/isdb_results/factsheets/country/details_japan_en.pdf (Accessed 10 September 2022).

⁶⁵ European Commission (2022) *European Union, Trade in Goods with South Korea*, Available at: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/isdb_results/factsheets/country/details_south-korea_en.pdf (Accessed 10 September 2022).

⁶⁶ European Commission (2022) *European Union, Trade in Goods with Japan*, Available at: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/isdb_results/factsheets/country/details_japan_en.pdf (Accessed 10 September 2022).

⁶⁷ According to Trade Map data.

but just a quarter of the EU's GDP.

For many smaller EU member states, Japan is a relatively peripheral trade partner. Among these countries, with a few exceptions, there generally isn't a clear impact of the EPA in their trade statistics with Japan, either in exports or imports. France and Italy alone account for 46% of the growth in the EU's exports to Japan in 2019, compared to 2018, in the first year after the EPA's entry into force.⁶⁸ This is in a way understandable, considering that many of their food products benefited from the provisions of the EPA. France, Italy and Ireland together accounted for 67% of the growth in the EU's exports to Japan between 2018 and 2019.⁶⁹

It is clear that the reason for this concentration of trade goes beyond national economic circumstances or the specifics of the EPA. The main problem is that smaller EU member states simply do not have the resources to support trade with Japan and don't see Japan as an important trade partner. For the larger EU countries, Japan was never that far away – distance isn't just about the number of kilometers but also about perception. And in the larger countries, Japan was already an important market, with companies from these countries exporting or already being present on the Japanese market as well. On the other hand, companies from smaller countries, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, do not have established ties to Japan, nor enough resources to develop them. For a company in the CEE, it would be easier to export its products to France or Germany, instead of exploring faraway East Asia on its own. And this is where the role of government is vital, as it can help companies better understand and better connect with such a distant country, whether for exports, imports or investments. However, because of their size and their budgetary resources, many EU governments are limited in how much support they can provide to private sector actors. The problem is compounded by the fact that governments prefer to spend those limited resources on economic diplomacy in Europe or in the trans-Atlantic area in general, not paying as much attention to Japan and Asia.

Considering that, unfortunately, in many cases there doesn't seem to be much initiative coming from national governments in solving this problem, the EU can help,

⁶⁸ According to Trade Map data, expressed in euros.

⁶⁹ According to Trade Map data, expressed in euros.

by providing more proactive support to European companies. The EPA itself is just the beginning of the journey – while a very important and useful instrument, it remains just a document unless European companies take advantage of the opportunities it offers. The EU can help pool resources to provide support to European companies in better understanding the Japanese market and what specific opportunities it can provide. This support can come in many forms, from trade missions, to market intelligence, to language and cross-cultural assistance. However, without EU involvement and support, to proactively guide and assist European companies in exporting to Japan, it is difficult to believe many EU member states will experience a boost in trade with Japan, except for the largest ones.

The story is similar when it comes to investments, where support in the form of market intelligence or language and cross-cultural understanding can facilitate the process of investing in Japan for companies from EU member states which cannot provide much assistance in Japan. The EU-Japan Center for Industrial Cooperation⁷⁰ already plays an important role in these areas, supporting European companies in trade and investment activities, but more resources can and should be dedicated in the coming years.

In the other direction, the EU can also support member states in attracting Japanese investments, through a common approach. While larger countries can easily promote their markets, smaller ones don't have the necessary resources for such promotion on the ground in Japan. Most embassies have only a handful of officials focusing on economic issues. A joint EU approach can increase both efficiency and impact, as it can help potential Japanese investors find the best place to invest all throughout the EU – something national offices can't do. While it is natural that there would be a level of competition between EU member states when it comes to attracting foreign investments, an investment in any country still provides benefits to others. Either by providing direct assistance to Japanese investors or, in other cases, just serving as an initial point of contact between them and officials from EU member states, a common EU effort can have a greater impact.

⁷⁰ EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation (n.d.) *Activities of the EU-Japan Centre in a nutshell*, Available at: <https://www.eu-japan.eu/summary-activities> (Accessed 10 September 2022).

The growing interest for establishing secure and resilient supply chains provides another opportunity for the EU and Japan to work together, both in trade and investment. As worries about a possible military conflict involving the PRC are growing, there is pressure to make real progress in this area. Considerable financing will be necessary in order to achieve these goals, but duplicating efforts will lead to higher costs for the companies involved, which in turn make it less likely that such efforts will succeed. Instead, working together, preferably with other allies as well, especially the United States, will help keep costs lower and improve efficiency, while still increasing resiliency for the partner countries involved. The EU and Japan can take the lead in shaping such a common approach. For example, as the European Commission is planning legislation to secure the EU's supply chains for critical raw materials,⁷¹ it can also reach out to Japan, to plan and finance joint projects.

The EU and Japan share many goals when it comes to transitioning to an economy that is green, sustainable, circular and carbon-neutral. In these areas, there are numerous opportunities for Japan to work with EU member states, which share similar goals but are at different levels of progress, have different strong suits or face different barriers along the way, allowing for mutual support and mutual learning. At the same time, the EU and Japan can improve cooperation in sustainable development aid to other countries, to increase efficiency in the fight against global warming, by reducing emissions and improving resilience.

When it comes to cooperation in aid and development finance, there are numerous avenues to explore, especially now that both the EU and Japan are active in financing overseas infrastructure development. While there have been attempts to work in this area at the level of the G7,⁷² there seems to be relatively little progress. The EU

⁷¹ European Commission (2022) *Critical Raw Materials Act: Securing the New Gas & Oil at the Heart of Our Economy. Blog of Commissioner Thierry Breton*, Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_22_5523 (Accessed 10 September 2022).

⁷² The White House (2021) *FACT SHEET: President Biden and G7 Leaders Launch Build Back Better World (B3W) Partnership*, Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/12/fact-sheet-president-biden-and-g7-leaders-launch-build-back-better-world-b3w-partnership/> (Accessed 10 September 2022). The White House (2022) *FACT SHEET: President Biden and G7 Leaders Formally Launch the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment*, Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/06/26/fact-sheet-president-biden-and-g7-leaders-formally-launch-the-partnership-for-global-infrastructure-and-investment/> (Accessed 10 September 2022).

has launched its own initiative, the Global Gateway, while Japan has a number of individual or collective initiatives, with various results and progress. Most importantly, the EU and Japan already signed a Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure, in 2019.⁷³ Unfortunately, progress in this area has been slow and more attention and energy are warranted. To give just one example of the vast possibilities for cooperation, Prime Minister Kishida recently announced that Japan will provide 30 billion dollars in development aid to African countries in the next three years.⁷⁴ It would make sense to coordinate with the EU in certain cases and projects, in order to increase both efficiency and impact, to better contribute to Africa's development.

While improving trade and investment ties between EU member states and Japan is the first priority, the global environment creates numerous opportunities for EU-Japan economic cooperation, from infrastructure development and provision of aid, to building resilient supply chains and investing in green, sustainable, circular, carbon-neutral economies. In all these areas, bilateral cooperation between Japan and EU member states would be useful, but a common EU approach, in order to achieve efficient EU-Japan cooperation, is vital. The EU and Japan have expressed their interest for cooperation, but they must now dedicate the necessary resources to make it possible. Economic relations and economic cooperation between the EU and Japan, while well developed, still have far more room to grow and the next few years will be key.

Cultural and people-to-people relations

Cultural and people-to-people relations represent one of the strengths of EU-Japan relations. For many EU member states, especially smaller ones, with less prominent political and economic ties to Japan, the area of cultural and people-to-people relations is the most developed. This is primarily thanks to Japan's cultural attractiveness and soft power. Whether it is Japan's traditional culture, like tea ceremony or kabuki, judo or

⁷³ The European External Action Service (EEAS) (2019) *The Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure between the European Union and Japan*, Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/partnership-sustainable-connectivity-and-quality-infrastructure-between-european-union-and_en (Accessed 10 September 2022).

⁷⁴ Reuters (2022) *Japan Pledges \$30 Billion in African Aid at Tunis Summit*, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/japan-pm-kishida-tokyo-will-provide-30-bln-aid-africa-over-three-years-2022-08-27/> (Accessed 10 September 2022).

sumo, Japanese gardens or ikebana, or modern pop culture, like anime, manga, cosplay or video games, Japan is a landmark for many Europeans, especially younger generations. Going hand in hand with this is the popularity of Japanese, in many EU member states being the most popular Asian language in universities. This strong and growing interest for Japan spurs the development of cultural and people-to-people relations.

In the other direction though, interest for European culture in Japan is more limited and largely concentrated toward the largest and most prosperous European countries, which also have the resources to invest in cultural and tourism promotion in Japan, or even to maintain schools in Japan. Demand for the study of European languages in Japan is also rather concentrated, as would be expected, with interest for higher circulation languages, like French, Spanish, German or Italian, but with extremely limited attention for the languages of smaller EU member states.

Academic relations are also well-developed, with European and Japanese universities having numerous agreements and partnerships, allowing their students to go on exchange programs and enhance their language and cultural skills. There is also a vibrant community of European experts and scholars studying Japan, with established European associations of scholars. The Japanese government provides a number of scholarship programs and opportunities, such as the Monbukagakusho Scholarship or the Mirai program. European universities provide a multitude of opportunities for Japanese language studies, though the number of such educational offers varies among member states, with some EU countries hosting only one or a handful of universities where students can learn Japanese. When it comes to Japanese studies more broadly, especially politics, international relations, economics or contemporary society, the picture is different, as in many EU member states there are few or no such study opportunities in local universities. This is also the case when it comes to research and the development of expertise on Japan, as in many EU member states these areas are underfunded and receive little attention, making it difficult for research to flourish.

When it comes to the Japanese diasporas in EU countries, there are vast differences among member states, as the numbers largely correlate with economic size and the intensity of trade or investment connections to Japan. The EU countries with the

largest numbers of Japanese citizens living on their territory are Germany, with 44,765 Japanese nationals, and France, with 40,538 Japanese nationals. This number then decreases to around 15,000 Japanese nationals in Italy, 10,460 in the Netherlands, 6,186 in Spain and 5,896 in Belgium. These are, of course, the countries with the most developed economic relations with Japan. On the other hand, there are only 1,776 Japanese nationals living in Poland, 1,406 in the Czech Republic, 653 in Greece, 455 in Portugal and 289 in Romania, which are the next largest countries in the EU in terms of population.⁷⁵

When it comes to European citizens living in Japan, the disparity between the largest EU economies and other countries isn't as big, though it is still considerable. Thus, there are 13,345 French nationals living in Japan, 7,200 German nationals, 5,000 Italian nationals, 3,232 Spanish nationals, 1,500 Dutch nationals and 1,208 Belgians nationals, while there are also 2,332 Romanian nationals and 1,496 Polish nationals in Japan.⁷⁶ The numbers are usually in the hundreds or in the dozens for the other EU member states.

For most EU countries, the two diasporas are relatively small, especially when compared to Japan's cultural attraction and soft power. It is noteworthy that there are many times more Japanese nationals living in the EU than Europeans living in Japan. There is also a larger disparity among EU member states regarding the numbers of Japanese nationals living on their territory, compared to the numbers of European citizens living in Japan. For example, the Japanese diasporas in Germany and France account for almost 60% of the total Japanese diaspora in the EU. The size of the economy and the strength of economic relations with Japan are the main factors accounting for the number of Japanese nationals living in individual EU member states, but in the other direction, there are countries with weaker economic ties to Japan that still have a considerable diaspora in Japan.

It is clear there is room to improve people-to-people connections and facilitate travel and living for more Europeans and Japanese, which was also a recommendation

⁷⁵ All numbers come from the Cultural and people-to-people section of the chapter dedicated to each country.

⁷⁶ All numbers come from the Cultural and people-to-people section of the chapter dedicated to each country.

that came up often in this book. In the case of students, this can be done through more scholarships or more intense promotion of working holiday visas and of internship opportunities for citizens of the other country. People-to-people ties are important in order to improve mutual knowledge and allow citizens of Japan and of EU countries to better understand and connect with each other. Even though cultural products improve the perception of a foreign country, there still remains a mental distance, which can be reduced through direct contact.

In this sense, one characteristic that came up relatively often in the chapters of this book is that Japan is often perceived through an orientalist and exoticized perspective and the general public has relatively little knowledge and pays relatively little attention to Japan and to events and developments there. This happens both in larger and smaller EU member states, showing that there is more work to be done in order to increase knowledge about Japan among members of the European public.

One explanation for this also lies in the fact that there are relatively few EU member states that benefit from the presence of correspondents or journalists in Japan. This affects both the quantity and quality of news coverage about Japan. In many EU countries, Japan appears in the news only when important or tragic events take place, and media coverage doesn't provide much context or details. Because it is understandable that newspapers or TV channels from smaller EU member states cannot keep a correspondent posted in Japan, this problem can be addressed through a common European initiative, by establishing an EU program to support European journalists to report from Japan. By working with a consortium of European media organizations, such a program would provide funding for a number of European journalists to travel to and report from Japan, with a one-year rotation. This program can thus involve, over time, journalists from all EU member states, who can report on the ground in their language, while also providing news articles in English, which can then be translated by media organizations participating in this program from other EU member states. This way, even though not all EU member states would have journalists in Japan at any given time, readers could still benefit from news delivered by European correspondents, translated in their national language. While many national publications already translate articles about Japan from large international media organizations, especially wire

services, an EU program would allow more European journalists to acquire experience in Japan, which can improve the quality of their reporting even when they are back home and cover Japan from afar.

At the same time, news coverage in EU member states would greatly benefit from more local expertise, developed in academia and the research and think tank community. Ideally, national governments should focus more attention and dedicate more resources to developing Japanese studies and expertise on Japan in their countries. In the absence of such support, there are other avenues for developing national expertise. Japanese embassies can play a role, especially by connecting and helping coordinate private sector financial support from Japanese companies, which have a considerable presence in some EU member states that lack a commensurate community of scholars specialized on Japan. Support from Japanese companies, Japanese foundations or the Japanese government to universities, think tanks or other research institutions can help develop local expertise on Japan, especially in smaller EU member states, where opportunities, resources and government support are more limited. A combination of national government and Japanese support would go a long way toward developing Japanese studies and expertise on Japan in EU member states where these are less developed.

While European and Japanese universities are active in establishing partnerships, the Japanese government can also play a more active role in fostering a larger number of scholarships for European students, both for short and long-term studies, through government agreements, in which the partner country would share part of the associated costs. This would make it easier for students from European universities that lack bilateral partnerships with Japanese ones to still travel and study in Japan. In return, member states and the EU itself should also work to provide more opportunities for Japanese students who want to come to Europe for short or long-term study.

In many EU countries, the current focus, both of Japanese embassies and of local universities, tends to be on language and culture promotion, but that alone is not enough for the healthy and sustainable long-term development of relations. It is important to also support the development of study and research opportunities focusing

on politics, international relations, economics and other aspects, beyond Japanese language and culture. Considering the large number of young Europeans who study Japanese or are attracted by Japanese pop culture, it is clear there is a large pool of potential future experts, who could choose a career in Japanese studies if opportunities would allow. They might later pursue a career in academia, in diplomacy or in government, in journalism, or in the private sector, while still focusing on Japan and utilizing their expertise.

When it comes to promoting Europe, European culture and European tourism in Japan, there are many opportunities for a common EU approach. As in other areas, it is difficult for smaller EU member states to allocate resources for cultural and tourism promotion in Japan. Most Japanese tourists to Europe visit the established tourist destinations, usually in Western Europe, which is understandable. However, there are ways to increase awareness of the tourist attractions and potential of other places, including by promoting tours that group more countries together. Establishing an EU culture and tourism promotion office in Japan, which would include staff from EU member states in rotating positions, would provide a more cost-effective way to promote European attractions among Japanese tourists. This can be combined with the organization of different cultural fairs or events, which can benefit from the support of both national embassies and local diasporas, helping to improve knowledge and interest for more EU member states, including those which can't afford dedicating many resources in this area through their diplomatic presence in Japan.

Finally, one idea worth exploring can be EU support for establishing one or more European schools in Japan, on the model of French and German schools already present there. Such schools can provide a broader outlook on Europe, including language and culture classes, allowing Japanese students to experience a more diverse interaction with Europe. It also provides an opportunity to pool many of the attractive characteristics of diverse EU member states, such as Nordic education models. Such a European school would truly capture the EU motto of *In varietate concordia* – Unity in diversity.

Conclusions

As this book explores in its chapters, while there are considerable differences between EU member states' relations with Japan, there are also similarities, such as good relations based on shared values and a desire to deepen and expand ties. Yet, while there are many developed areas and success stories in cooperation, there are also areas where relations are far below their potential and more work is necessary.

At the EU level, a lot is being done and more will follow in cooperation with Japan. Larger EU member states are in a clear process of deepening their relations with Japan across the board, from defense to economics. Among many smaller EU member states though, because of the physical and mental distance between themselves and Japan, while there is interest for stronger ties, progress has been slower. Japan itself has focused, as expected, on larger and more influential EU member states, though, over the past years, there has been growing engagement with other member states as well.

In order to achieve the full potential of EU-Japan relations and of Japan's relations with individual EU member states, more work needs to be done, but, just as importantly, more efficiency is necessary. The EU and national governments should work together and coordinate in order to ensure the consistent and diversified expansion of EU-Japan relations, across multiple fields and across all EU member states. By pooling resources, whether it is in increasing trade and attracting investments, joint military deployments, cultural and tourism promotion, improving expertise and understanding of Japan, or enabling broader and better news coverage of developments in Japan, the EU and its member states can achieve much more by working together. In the absence of such cooperation, while EU-Japan relations and the relations of the largest EU member states with Japan will bloom over the coming years, progress will be uneven, as many other European countries will be left behind.

Over the next years, it will be important to not lose sight of opportunities and reasons to strengthen relations. As relations between Europe and the People's Republic of China (PRC) will likely continue to deteriorate, the EU and its member states will focus increasingly more attention on Japan. But it is vital for both Europe and Japan to see and value each other primarily based on their own qualities and opportunities for cooperation. EU-Japan relations must be, first and foremost, about their own

development and the benefits this would bring, together with the possibilities to advance global prosperity and solve global problems, not just a geopolitical alliance against perceived threats or risks. While this is often highlighted, one cannot ignore the impression that, in some EU countries, as illustrated in chapters of this book, the growing interest for Japan was not just correlated but caused by the change in political perspectives toward China. In order to build a fruitful long-term relation – and bilateral relations at member states level – the EU and Japan must primarily pursue constructive mutual interests. Japan itself should not view an increased presence in Europe, whether Western Europe or Central and Eastern Europe, as a competition with China – an impression that, again, one sometimes gets. Working together on issues regarding the PRC and Russia is both inevitable and important, but it should not be at the heart of the relationship, in order for this relationship to be sustainable, deep and long-lasting.

After years of work and a convergence of multiple factors and trends, Europe and Japan stand at a pivotal point of their centuries-long relations, facing a window of opportunity to expand, diversify and deepen relations. This should be achieved both at EU level and at member states level, in order to improve results and also share them more broadly. Some EU member states are determined to move closer to Japan, while others still perceive a distance from Japan and have less resources to dedicate to closer engagement. By working together in certain fields, EU member states can achieve more benefits and greater efficiency. On the other hand, Japan too has much to win by focusing on engaging more EU member states and strengthening its relations with them. The EPA and the SPA provide an important foundation for deepening ties, yet they will require planning, coordination, work and dedication to bring the full potential of EU-Japan cooperation to life.

Summing up the general themes of the chapters of this book in a single phrase, Japan's relations with EU member states are already undergoing positive trends and experiencing considerable development, but their full potential still lies ahead and there is much work to be done to reach it and to take advantage of existing and emerging opportunities. The chapters of this book analyze the particular cases of most EU member states, at the same time providing recommendations for the future development of relations. We hope that, individually and taken together, they will help readers better

understand the relations between EU member states and Japan and will contribute to the development of the EU-Japan Strategic Partnership and help EU-Japan cooperation blossom.

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A long-lasting friendship: The case of Austria and Japan

By Lenke-Laura MOLNAR*

Overview

Not long ago, in October 2019, Austria and Japan celebrated the 150th anniversary of bilateral relations: in 1869, the two countries signed a commercial treaty, which marked the beginning of a long-lasting friendship.

Bilateral relations developed in a favorable context, with both parties interested in constructive developments: Austria interested in entering overseas markets, while Japan presenting itself as a modern state, interested in international trade. Political relations were interrupted during the First World War and resumed only in the 1950s. While starting timidly, commercial relations developed positively and gained traction significantly in the pre-pandemic years, in spite of the more than 12,000 kilometers between the two countries. Despite a drastic slowdown during the COVID-19 pandemic years, the outlook for economic relations is promising: according to specialists, after the situation normalizes, positive commercial trends are expected to continue.¹

The positive outlook on commercial relations is also supported by measures taken by the European Union (EU), in order to facilitate EU member states' commerce with Japan, by negotiating international agreements.

Cultural relations and social contacts followed suit, and new manifestations of positive people-to-people developments have occurred. Cooperation exists at the government level, expressed in official declarations, or at lower administrative levels,

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¹ Georg Illichmann (2021) "Interview mit Dr. Ingomar Lochschmidt, Leiter AußenwirtschaftsCenter Tokio der WKO (Interview with Dr. Ingomar Lochschmidt, Director of Foreign Trade Center Tokyo of the WKO)," *Brücke Magazin*, 2/2021, p. 8.

like the cases of sister-city agreements, but also at the level of individuals, traveling as tourists, studying the language and culture, picking up traditional sports, listening to music, enjoying theater, gardens or various other cultural exhibits of the other country.

History of bilateral relations: A partnership rooted in commerce

The journey of the long-lasting friendship between the two countries started around 150 years ago. Curiosity toward the other country existed however even before: the first Austrian had already set foot in Japan in 1625. Christoph Carl Fernberger, an Austrian imperial captain, world traveler and explorer, working as free merchant in Jakarta, traveled extensively to the neighboring lands, including to the Japanese island of Hirado.² Between 1609 and 1639, a trading post of the Dutch East India Company functioned here,³ this also being the company in the service of which he was previously committed.

In 1853, Commodore Matthew Perry of the United States Navy, commanding a squadron of military vessels, forced the Japanese military regime of the Tokugawa shoguns to agree to negotiations for a treaty of trade and tariffs. Various European countries followed in this pursuit, but the Austro-Hungarian Empire was the last country to sign such a commercial treaty.⁴ For Japan, this period was marked by an opening, after 250 years of self-imposed isolation regarding foreign countries.⁵

The beginning of official relations between the two countries was marked by the signing of the “Treaty of Friendship, Trade and Sailing,” in 1869. Austria wished for access to overseas markets and a sizable fleet necessary for this purpose. Shortly after establishing the Austro-Hungarian (Dual) Monarchy, an expedition headed by Rear

² Adalbert-Stifter-Institutes des Landes Oberösterreich (2017) *Christoph Carl Fernberger*, Available at: <https://stifterhaus.at/stichwoerter/christoph-carl-fernberger> (Accessed 30 December 2021).

³ Dutch Trading Post Heritage Network (n.d.) *Dutch trading post in Hirado, Japan*, Available at: <https://www.dtpnh.org/hirado> (Accessed 22 February 2022).

⁴ University of Vienna (n.d.) *150 Years Austro-Japanese Relations. Practical Media Project for Students of Japanese Studies*, Available at: https://www.univie.ac.at/japan-projects/150_Jahre/WP/splash-eng.html#Projekt (Accessed 30 December 2021).

⁵ Ibidem.

Admiral Anton von Petz was sent to the Far East and South America.⁶ The expedition started off with two ships, the frigate *SMS Danube* and the corvette *SMS Archduke Friedrich*.⁷ The delegation of Austria-Hungary arrived in Yokohama, on 2 October 1869, and just two weeks later, on 18 October, participated in the signing ceremony of the first Treaty of Friendship, Trade and Sailing.⁸ The treaty was prepared by the British Embassy in Tokyo, and after signing, its ratification took two years.⁹ However, the treaty established somewhat unequal conditions, more favorable to Austria-Hungary and with fewer advantages to the Japanese side.¹⁰

The arrival of the expedition occasioned one of the most interesting events of that time in Yokohama, an exhibition with the participation of 78 companies.¹¹ Austrian companies put on display samples of what Austria had to offer for sale: machinery, military equipment, clocks, optical products, glass and porcelain ware, different kinds of textiles, furniture, fashion items and jewelry. Hungarian products were also represented (wines, products from the mill industry, etc.) Gifts were also presented from the Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary to the Emperor of Japan, among which, as a token of the special sympathy and friendship, was the Bösendorfer piano. This was the first piano to arrive to Japan,¹² and those present had no way of knowing that, more than a century later, in 2008, the Japanese company Jamaha will acquire the Austrian piano maker company, Bösendorfer Klavierfabrik GmbH.¹³

Signing the Treaty opened the way for commercial relations, relatively timid at

⁶ Memim Encyclopedia (n.d.) *Anton von Petz*, Available at: <https://memim.com/anton-von-petz.html> (Accessed 30 December 2021).

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ Sándor Kiss (2017) *Japán vonzásában - Magyarok, akik szerették Japánt (In Allurement of Japan)*, Budapest: Holnap Kiado Kft., p. 6.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 8.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 9.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 8.

¹² Ibidem, p. 8.

¹³ EU-Japan.com (2007) *Yamaha acquires Bösendorfer Klavierfabrik GmbH*, Available at: <https://eu-japan.com/2007/12/yamaha-boesendorfer-klavierfabrik/> (Accessed 30 December 2021).

the beginning. Japan primarily exported silk, tea and rice,¹⁴ while Austria-Hungary could sell only relatively few products. The goal from the Austrian side was more intensive trade, but the cost of transport proved to be high, in comparison to costs of other European traders. Demand for Japanese products was increasing however in Austria-Hungary. In 1873, Japan participated in the Vienna World Exhibition, the *Weltausstellung*, as part of the Iwakura Mission (1871-1873), a Japanese diplomatic voyage sent by the Meiji government to the United States and Europe.¹⁵ Regular trade started around 1875.¹⁶ As commercial relations developed, the volume of commercial exchange increased: illustrative of the turnover between Japan and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy were the 12-13 steamers that were leaving for Kobe and returning to Fiume every year, in the period around 1890-1910.¹⁷

But, despite the positive start in relations, Alexander Hübner, a senior Austrian diplomat, traveling in Japan in 1871, was of the opinion that Austria had no political and commercial interest in Japan at that time.¹⁸ His opinion was based on the facts he observed regarding commercial exchange, still in its infancy at the time of his arrival, but also regarding the difficulties of opening an official diplomatic representation. Several years were needed to set up the first Austro-Hungarian Legation, in Tsukiji, in Tokyo, in 1875. The house bought for the purpose of the legation burned down, one year later,¹⁹ forcing the legation to make several moves in the following 20 years. The first consulate in Yokohama was established in 1876, and it also served as legation in 1880.²⁰ In 1883, the legation was raised to the rank of embassy, marking the change

¹⁴ Sándor Kiss (2017) *Japán vonzásában - Magyarok, akik szerették Japánt (In Allurement of Japan)*, Budapest: Holnap Kiado Kft., p. 11.

¹⁵ University of Vienna (2018) *The Iwakura Mission*, Available at: https://www.univie.ac.at/japan-projects/150_Jahre/WP/en/2018/10/13/the-iwakura-mission/ (Accessed 30 December 2021).

¹⁶ Sándor Kiss (2017) *Japán vonzásában - Magyarok, akik szerették Japánt (In Allurement of Japan)*, Budapest: Holnap Kiado Kft., p. 11.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

¹⁸ Joseph Alexander graf von Hübner (1874), *A Ramble Round the World, 1871, Japan*. Vol. 2., London: Macmillan, p. 123.

¹⁹ Sándor Kiss (2017) *Japán vonzásában - Magyarok, akik szerették Japánt (In Allurement of Japan)*, Budapest: Holnap Kiado Kft., p. 12.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

from consul general to minister resident to envoy. The two countries assigned ambassadors mutually only in 1907,²¹ after the Russo-Japanese war, after Japan earned the rank of great power.

After the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife on 28 June 1914, the political climate changed. Only one month later, diplomatic and commercial contacts between Austria and Japan were all abruptly broken.²² Diplomatic relations were officially resumed only in 1953, when the Japanese legation in Vienna was also re-established.²³ Between the two World Wars however, various commercial and cultural manifestations took place, like an agreement on mixed court arbitration, in 1921,²⁴ or the founding of the Institute for Japanese Studies at the University of Vienna, in 1937.²⁵ The long period of no real, formal bilateral relations between the two countries could be explained by Austria's unclear political situation. Namely, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was dissolved after the First World War and the remaining two separate state entities were affected by territorial changes. Then, Austria was occupied by Nazi Germany during the Second World War and was under the occupation of Allied Forces from 1945 up to 1955, when the Austrian State Treaty regarding Austria's neutrality was signed by the Soviet Union, the United States, the United Kingdom and France.²⁶ On 26 October 1955, the first day without foreign troops in Austria, the parliament adopted the *Constitutional Law on the Neutrality of Austria*,²⁷ which stipulates Austria's permanent neutrality: namely, that Austria shall never accede to any military alliances nor permit the establishment of military bases of foreign states

²¹ Ibidem, p. 12.

²² Embassy of Japan in Austria (2021) *Japan-Austria Relations*, Available at: https://www.at.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_de/30_bilateral.html (Accessed 30 December 2021).

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ Austrian Embassy in Tokyo (n.d.) *Treaties*, Available at: <https://www.bmeia.gv.at/en/austrian-embassy-tokyo/austria-in-japan/treaties/> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

²⁵ Embassy of Japan in Austria (2021) *Japan-Austria Relations*, Available at: https://www.at.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_de/30_bilateral.html (Accessed 30 December 2021).

²⁶ Helmut Tichy (n.d.) *Austria's Permanent Neutrality*, Available at: <https://www.austrianinformation.org/winter-2015-16/wc55d7qi5qrmyzmxh1qkofcmluxvj> (Accessed 30 December 2021).

²⁷ Ibidem.

on its territory. On 15 November 1955, Japan became the first country to recognize Austria's neutrality.²⁸ Two years later, diplomatic delegations in Tokyo and Vienna were promoted to the rank of embassy²⁹.

In 1990, the “Japanese-Austrian Committee for the 21st Century” was founded, based on the mutual agreement of the foreign ministers of the two countries. This committee aims to intensify exchanges in a number of new areas, to promote mutual understanding and to contribute to the development of a long-term perspective for closer relations between the two countries. Since the first meeting in 1994, the Committee has met 15 times under its original name, and in 2012 it was renamed to its current name, “Japanese-Austrian Committee for Future Issues.”³⁰

In June 1999, Thomas Klestil, Federal President of the Republic of Austria, accompanied by his wife, paid a state visit to Japan, meeting the Emperor and Empress of Japan.³¹ This was the first state visit of an Austrian president to Japan. The Japanese imperial couple, Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, returned the visit in 2002, traveling to Vienna, where they also visited iconic locations of the Austrian capital.³² In 2009, when the anniversary of 140 years of bilateral relations was celebrated, even a dedicated logo was designed, symbolizing the national flags of Japan and Austria, and representing the strong relations between the two countries.³³ A visit of Federal President Heinz Fischer to Japan took place on this occasion,³⁴ returned by Prince

²⁸ University of Vienna (n.d.) *150 Years Austro-Japanese Relations. Practical Media Project for Students of Japanese Studies*, Available at: https://www.univie.ac.at/japan-projects/150_Jahre/WP/splash-eng.html#Projekt (Accessed 30 December 2021).

²⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰ Embassy of Japan in Austria (2021) *Japan-Austria Relations*, Available at: https://www.at.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_de/30_bilateral.html (Accessed 30 December 2021).

³¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (1999) *Visit to Japan of His Excellency Dr. Thomas Klestil, Federal President of the Republic of Austria, and Mrs. Klestil Loeffler*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/event/1999/4/427.html> (Accessed 1 November 2021).

³² Der Standard (2002) *Japanisches Kaiserpaar in Wien (Japanese Royal Couple in Vienna)*, Available at: <https://www.derstandard.at/story/1010144/japanisches-kaiserpaar-in-wien> (Accessed 9 October 2021).

³³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2008) *Japan-Austria Year 2009*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2008/10/1183968_1060.html (Accessed 1 November 2021).

³⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2009) *Visit to Japan of His Excellency Dr. Heinz Fischer, Federal President of the Republic of Austria and Mrs. Margit Fischer*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/event/2009/8/1195108_1164.html (Accessed 1 November 2021).

Akishino and his wife visiting Austria.³⁵

Ten years later, the year 2019 marked the celebration of the 150th anniversary of relations, and a series of visits between high-level officials took place: Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz visited Japan, Princess Kako traveled to Austria, and Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen also visited Japan, on the occasion of the celebrations for the accession of Emperor Naruhito to the throne.³⁶

Political and strategic relations: Upholding a fruitful partnership day by day

Although official visits at the highest level are not very frequent, Austrian and Japanese officials on ministerial level meet rather often, emphasizing their commitment to enhancing the existing good relations. In the last two decades, several meetings have taken place between government officials.

At the end of the millennium, in 1999, the most important visit was that of Federal President Thomas Klestil and his wife to Japan, where they made a state call on the Emperor and Empress of Japan and also met with Prime Minister Keizō Obuchi.³⁷ The Imperial couple hosted a state dinner in honor of their guests. The visit aimed to strengthen friendly relations between the two countries.³⁸ This visit was returned by the Japanese Imperial Couple in 2002, when they visited the Austrian capital, Vienna.³⁹

In 2003, Minister of Foreign Affairs Yoriko Kawaguchi visited several European countries, including Austria. Here, among others, she met Austrian Foreign Minister Benita Ferrero-Waldner, exchanging views on strengthening bilateral relations and the

³⁵ ORF.at (2009) *Japanischer Prinz Akishino in der Hofburg (Japanese Prince Akishino in the Hofburg)*, Available at: <https://wiev1.orf.at/stories/361108> (Accessed 1 November 2021).

³⁶ Embassy of Japan in Austria (2021) *Japan-Austria Relations*, Available at: https://www.at.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_de/30_bilateral.html (Accessed 30 December 2021).

³⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (1999) *Visit to Japan of His Excellency Dr. Thomas Klestil, Federal President of the Republic of Austria, and Mrs. Klestil Loeffler*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/event/1999/4/427.html> (Accessed 1 November 2021).

³⁸ Ibidem.

³⁹ Der Standard (2002) *Japanisches Kaiserpaar in Wien (Japanese Royal Couple in Vienna)*, Available at: <https://www.derstandard.at/story/1010144/japanisches-kaiserpaar-in-wien> (Accessed 1 November 2021).

international situation.⁴⁰

In 2006, Austrian Federal Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel visited Japan on the occasion of the 15th Japan-EU Summit Meeting, held in Tokyo, on 24 April 2006. He was received in an audience by the Emperor and held bilateral talks with Prime Minister Junichirō Koizumi.⁴¹ In the common press statement issued after the official meeting, both sides expressed their commitment for strengthening bilateral relations, also in the light of the forthcoming anniversary year of bilateral relations, emphasized the importance of cultural exchange and people-to-people relations especially among young people, and stressed the importance of economic relations and investments.⁴²

The year 2009 was a noteworthy one due to two major events. Japan declared it the “Japan-Danube Friendship Year 2009,”⁴³ with the goal of strengthening friendly relations with countries on the course of the Danube River, including Austria, thus organizing celebratory events. Apart from this, 2009 also marked the 140th anniversary of the establishment of the diplomatic relations between Japan and Austria, and thus it was declared the “Japan-Austria Year 2009.”⁴⁴ Several commemorative events were organized during this year. The opening was marked by the visit of Michael Spindelegger, Austrian minister of foreign affairs, to Japan, where he also met his Japanese counterpart, Hirofumi Nakasone, exchanging views on bilateral relations and the international situation, with a special focus on the cooperation between the two countries at the United Nations Security Council, where both countries were expecting to serve as non-permanent members for two years.⁴⁵ The same year, in connection to the

⁴⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2003) *Ms. Yoriko Kawaguchi, Minister for Foreign Affairs, to Visit European Countries and Attend the 5th WTO Ministerial Conference*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/event/2003/8/0829.html> (Accessed 1 November 2021).

⁴¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2006) *Japan-Austria Joint Press Statement on the Occasion of the Visit by Federal Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel of the Republic of Austria to Japan*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/austria/joint0604.html> (Accessed 1 November 2021).

⁴² Ibidem.

⁴³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2008) *Japan-Austria Year 2009*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2008/10/1183968_1060.html (Accessed 1 November 2021).

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2009) *Visit to Japan by H.E. Dr. Michael Spindelegger, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Austria*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/event/2009/1/1186468_1150.html (Accessed 1 November 2021).

series of commemorative events, Federal President of the Republic of Austria Heinz Fischer and his wife Margit Fischer paid an official working visit to Japan, meeting the Emperor and Empress of Japan, who welcomed them with due honors, including a Court Luncheon.⁴⁶

On 30 January 2017, the Convention between Japan and the Republic of Austria for the Elimination of Double Taxation with respect to Taxes on Income and the Prevention of Tax Evasion and Avoidance was signed in Vienna, Austria, by Kiyoshi Koinuma, Ambassador of Japan to the Republic of Austria and Hans Jörg Schelling, Austrian minister of finance. This new convention, entering into force in 2018, amends the previous convention from 1963, reducing taxes withheld at source on investment income (dividends, interests and royalties), to further promote the investment and economic exchanges between the two countries. It also introduces the arbitration proceeding to the mutual agreement procedure, to ensure the settlement of disputes and assistance in the collection of taxes.⁴⁷

In 2018, Tarō Kōno, minister of foreign affairs of Japan, visited Vienna, having an official meeting with Karin Kneissl, minister for Europe, integration and foreign affairs of the Republic of Austria. The ministers expressed commitment,⁴⁸ among other things, to collaboration regarding the Western Balkans and support for early entry into force of the Japan-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) and the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA). Minister Kōno also emphasized the need to promote the working holiday program, in order to increase people-to-people exchanges.⁴⁹ That year, during the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), a summit held in Brussels, Prime Minister Shinzō Abe held a meeting with Chancellor Sebastian Kurz. They discussed aspects related to 150th anniversary of bilateral relations, further promoting economic

⁴⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2009) *Visit to Japan of His Excellency Dr. Heinz Fischer, Federal President of the Republic of Austria and Mrs. Margit Fischer*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/event/2009/8/1195108_1164.html (Accessed 1 November 2021).

⁴⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2017) *Signing of the New Tax Convention between Japan and the Republic of Austria*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press3e_000084.html (Accessed 10 December 2021).

⁴⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2018) *Japan-Austria Foreign Ministers' Meeting*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/c_see/at/page4e_000866.html (Accessed 10 December 2021).

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

exchanges, EU-Japan agreements, Brexit, and agreed on the need for denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.⁵⁰ The next discussion between the two took place on 9 September 2020, during a summit telephone conversation. During the ten minutes talk, both sides expressed their gratitude for the good collaboration, and Chancellor Kurz expressed his regrets regarding Prime Minister Abe's resignation, committing to good relations with his successor.⁵¹

In addition to regular official visits, meetings of the "Japan-Austria Committee for Issues of the Future" prompted discussions, occasionally even with ministerial participation. In this Committee – established in 1994, under the name of "Japanese-Austrian Committee for the 21st Century" and renamed in 2012 – members from the business environment, academics and government officials meet to discuss regional issues of mutual interest, trade and investment promotion.⁵²

Apart from this, Japanese high-level officials occasionally visit Vienna as location of international conferences and meetings, allowing them to meet with Austrian officials as well. Destinations of such visits are Vienna-based international institutions like the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).⁵³ Japan also established a Permanent Mission of Japan to the International Organizations in Vienna, which represents Japan's position primarily related to nuclear energy and non-proliferation, nuclear disarmament and nuclear test-ban, export controls, outer space, drugs and crime, and industrial development⁵⁴.

The Japanese Embassy in Vienna is responsible for relations with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). It is also co-accredited to Kosovo. It runs its activity through three departments: the Department of Politics and

⁵⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2018) *Japan-Austria Summit Meeting*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/c_see/at/page4e_000935.html (Accessed 10 December 2021).

⁵¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2020) *Japan-Austria Summit Telephone Talk*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/page1e_000282.html (Accessed 10 December 2021).

⁵² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2014) *Japan-Austria Relations (Overview)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/austria/data.html> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

⁵³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2017) *Foreign Minister Kishida Attends the First Session of the Preparatory Committee of the 2020 NPT Review Conference*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/dns/ac_d/page3e_000676.html (Accessed 10 December 2021).

⁵⁴ Permanent Mission of Japan to the International Organizations in Vienna (2022) *About us*, Available at: https://www.vie-mission.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/aboutus_en.html (Accessed 10 December 2021).

Economics, the Consular Section and the Department of Public Relations and Culture/ Japanese Information and Cultural Center.⁵⁵ In addition, one Japanese Honorary Consulate General functions in Salzburg.⁵⁶

Austria has five official representations in Japan, representing Austrian interests and serving individuals in consular issues: the Austrian Embassy in Tokyo and honorary consulates in Hiroshima, Nagoya, Osaka and Sapporo. The Austrian Cultural Forum Tokyo (ACF Tokyo) also runs its activity as a platform for Austrian art and culture in Japan and hub for scientific exchange. Other noteworthy Austrian institutions are the Commercial Section of the Austrian Embassy in Tokyo and the Austrian National Tourist Office.⁵⁷

On the same note, the friendly relations between the two countries are also supported by the Austria-Japan parliamentary group in the Austrian Parliament. This bilateral parliamentary group functions at this moment (2021) with 12 members.⁵⁸

Good relations manifest themselves below national government level as well, between local authorities. Partnership agreements exist between 30 Austrian and Japanese cities and districts, which formed sister city partnerships (data from 2019).⁵⁹

After signing their first treaty in 1869, the two countries enjoyed a long history of friendly bilateral relations, interrupted only by the First World War and its consequences for Austria-Hungary. In the last century, since 1921, a number of nine diplomatic exchanges of letters took place⁶⁰ between various state representatives of Austria and Japan (Governments, Embassies, Ministries of Foreign Affairs), regarding

⁵⁵ Embassy of Japan in Austria (n.d.) *Die Botschaft (Embassy)*, Available at: https://www.at.emb-japan.go.jp/de/10_aboutus/index.html (Accessed 10 December 2021).

⁵⁶ Ministry for European and International Affairs of Austria (2022) *Japan*, Available at: <https://www.bmeia.gv.at/reise-services/reiseinformation/land/japan/> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

⁵⁷ Austrian Embassy in Tokyo (n.d.) *About us*, Available at: <https://www.bmeia.gv.at/en/austrian-embassy-tokyo/about-us/> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

⁵⁸ Parliament Republic of Austria (n.d.) *Bilaterale Parlamentarische Gruppen (Bilateral Parliamentary Groups)*, Available at: https://www.parlament.gv.at/PERK/PI/BIPARLG/ParlG_I_K.shtml#ParlG_Japan (Accessed 10 December 2021).

⁵⁹ Embassy of Japan in Austria (n.d.) *Bilaterale Beziehungen (Bilateral Relations)*, Available at: https://www.at.emb-japan.go.jp/de/30_aboutjapan/020_bilateral/index.html (Accessed 10 December 2021).

⁶⁰ Austrian Embassy in Tokyo (n.d.) *Treaties*, Available at: <https://www.bmeia.gv.at/en/austrian-embassy-tokyo/austria-in-japan/treaties/> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

various aspects of trade between the two countries. Further on, similar diplomatic agreements referred to Austrian-Japanese mixed court arbitration (in 1921), visas and travel documents (1958), martial law and consequences of war (1966), agreements of aviation (1989 and 1993) or double taxation (2017).⁶¹ Agreements on aviation are particularly interesting to mention, as they led to the establishment, in 1989, of direct flights between Tokyo and Vienna (a joint service between Austrian Airlines and All Nippon Airways), which brought a pragmatic contribution to accelerating bilateral exchanges.⁶²

Large scale international agreements also impacted Austria-Japan relations. After the signing of the Economic Partnership Agreement between the EU and Japan, researchers estimated a positive but rather small effect, of an increase of around 0.01% of GDP for Austria, as result of this agreement, with the highest gains being expected for manufactured goods, particularly in the medium- and high-tech sectors.⁶³ Estimating gains in these sectors was important for Austria, as machinery, electronic equipment and the transport sector make up more than 40% of its exports to and 70% of imports from Japan.⁶⁴

Economic and commercial ties: The Alpha and Omega of Austrian-Japanese relations

After China, Japan was recently Austria's most important Asian economic partner and the third most important overseas export market, after the United States and China.⁶⁵

Commercial relations, especially imports and exports between Austria and Japan, witnessed an increasing trend in recent decades. At the beginning of the

⁶¹ Ibidem.

⁶² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2014) *Japan-Austria Relations (Overview)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/austria/data.html> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

⁶³ Julia Gröbler, Oliver Reiter and Robert Stehrer (2018) "The EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement and its Relevance for the Austrian Economy", *Wiener Institut für Internationale Wirtschaftsvergleiche (WIIW)*, Research Report 434, p. 30-31.

⁶⁴ Ibidem, p. 31.

⁶⁵ Chamber of Commerce in Austria (Wirtschaftskammern Österreichs - WKO), Aussenwirtschaftscenter Tokio, (2021) *Aussen Wirtschaft Wirtschaftsbericht Japan (Foreign Economy - Economic Report on Japan)*, p. 4, Available at: <https://www.wko.at/service/aussenwirtschaft/japan-wirtschaftsbericht.pdf> (Accessed 27 November 2021).

millennium, Japan was the 10th most important import partner (the most important Asian partner) and the 16th most important export partner of Austria.⁶⁶ Although some years later, around the beginning of the 2010s, it was partly overtaken in this ranking by China (which became the most important Asian trade partner for Austria), trends in commercial relations remained positive throughout the pre-pandemic years.

For 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated worldwide economic slowdown, Austrian statistics reveal slight losses in both exports and imports between the two countries. While Austria's imports from Japan were around 2.245 billion euros in 2019, the value decreased to 2.050 billion euros in 2020, a decrease of 8.7%. Similarly, exports from Austria to Japan fell from 1.612 billion euros in 2019, to 1.522 billion euros in 2020, down by 5.6%. Nevertheless, these effects seem to have been diminished in 2021, and even new records might be broken according to some estimations.⁶⁷ In the first few months of 2021, a record-breaking amount of goods, of 1.37 billion euros in value (+12.5%), were imported by Japan from Austria, positioning Austria on a remarkable 10th place of EU suppliers to Japan.⁶⁸

The value of imports and exports between the two countries derives from both sales of products and services. Goods typically exported from Austria to Japan are passenger cars, metallurgical goods and tools, wood and wood products, pharmaceuticals, laboratory equipment. On the other hand, Japan exports to Austria preponderantly cars, large construction vehicles, chemicals, medical instruments.⁶⁹

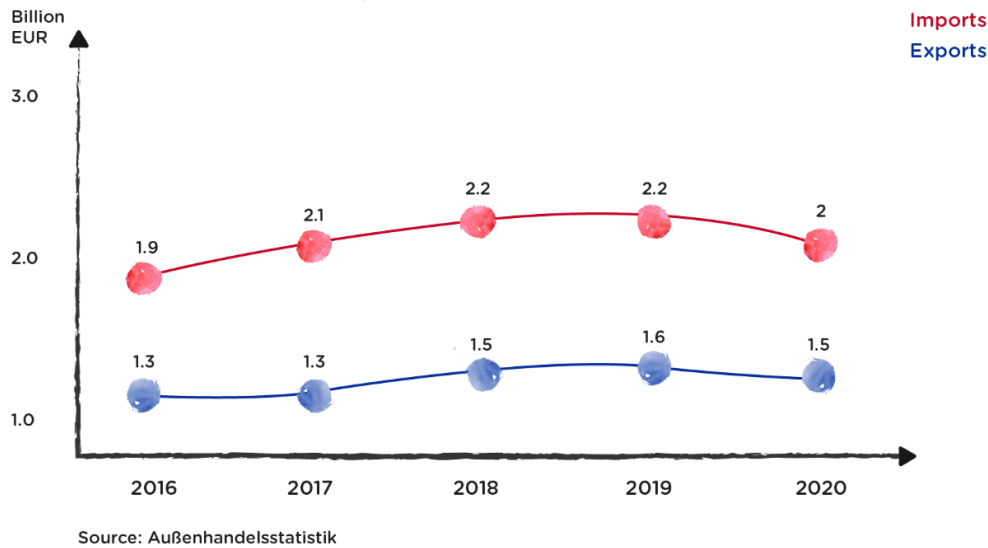
⁶⁶ Chamber of Commerce in Austria (Wirtschaftskammern Österreichs - WKO) (2001) *Österreichs Aussenhandelsergebnisse, Jänner – Dezember 2001 (endgültige Ergebnisse) (Austria's Foreign Trade Results, January – December 2001 (Final Results))*, Available at: https://wko.at/statistik/Extranet/AHstat/AH_12_2001e_Bericht.pdf (Accessed 13 January 2022).

⁶⁷ Chamber of Commerce in Austria (Wirtschaftskammern Österreichs - WKO), Aussenwirtschaftscenter Tokio, (2021) *Aussen Wirtschaft Wirtschaftsbericht Japan (Foreign Economy - Economic Report on Japan)*, p. 10, Available at: <https://www.wko.at/service/aussenwirtschaft/japan-wirtschaftsbericht.pdf>; (Accessed 27 November 2021).

⁶⁸ Ibidem, p. 11.

⁶⁹ Observatory of Economic Complexity (n.d.) *What does Japan export to Austria? (2019)*, Available at: https://oec.world/en/visualize/tree_map/hs92/export/jpn/aut/show/2019/ (Accessed 10 December 2021).

Austria's trade with Japan in billion euros ⁷⁰



In terms of value, exports of passenger cars are the most significant Austrian exports, especially Mercedes G-Class cars, which are very popular in Japan. Austria has a market share of around 5%, thus ranking as the 5th most important supplier of passenger cars to the Japanese market. The automotive industry experienced a relatively modest 9% decline in deliveries to the Japanese market in 2020,⁷¹ and there is optimism that the increasing pre-pandemic trend would continue.⁷²

The Austrian statistics for 2020 show a decline in Austria's imports from Japan by 8.8%, their value standing at 2.05 billion euros.⁷³ Most of this downturn was caused by the slump in car imports in Austria (a 27.3% decline, to 432 million euros),⁷⁴ while the Austrian purchase of machinery and equipment declined by only 8.3% (to 566

⁷⁰ Compiled based on Wirtschaftskammern Österreichs (n.d.) *Außenhandelsstatistik: Importe und Exporte - Jahresbroschüre 2015-2020 (External Trade Statistics: Imports and Exports - Annual Brochures for years 2015-2020)*, Available at: <https://www.wko.at/service/zahlen-daten-fakten/oesterreichs-aussenhandel.html> (Accessed on 18 November 2021).

⁷¹ Chamber of Commerce in Austria (Wirtschaftskammern Österreichs - WKO), Aussenwirtschaftscenter Tokio, (2021) *Aussen Wirtschaft Wirtschaftsbericht Japan (Foreign Economy - Economic Report on Japan)*, p. 10, Available at: <https://www.wko.at/service/aussenwirtschaft/japan-wirtschaftsbericht.pdf> (Accessed 27 November 2021).

⁷² Ibidem, p. 11.

⁷³ Ibidem, p. 9.

⁷⁴ Ibidem, p. 10.

million euros). In the first half of 2021, Austrian companies' imports increased somewhat but remained still slightly below the comparative value of 2019.⁷⁵

A trade in services component is also present in Austrian-Japanese commercial relations, but during the pandemic, this sector was significantly affected. Austria's services balance with Japan declined, as services depend to a large extent on personal contacts and travel movements, hindered directly by measures tackling the pandemic. Austrian exports fell by 54% to 131 million euros, and imports from Japan also fell by 37% to 101 million euros.⁷⁶ A total collapse was however averted, because of the broad structure of the range of services, which include not just tourism but also many licensing and know-how agreements, as well as electronically supplied services, where the necessary personal contacts could be more easily transferred to the cyberspace.⁷⁷

Tourism, on the other hand, has almost completely collapsed: while in 2019, rather similarly to previous years, tourism figures recorded an increase of 5.7%, up to 221,000 arrivals and 457,000 overnight stays (+5.8%), in 2020, Japanese guests in Austria were practically totally missing.⁷⁸

In terms of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), the picture is nuanced. From the Japanese perspective, Austrian transactions are not present among the most noteworthy Japanese foreign transactions. From an Austrian perspective however, FDI is noteworthy and exhibits a slightly increasing trend in the last decade, both in terms of stocks and flows. In terms of value, outward direct investments stocks from Austria to Japan were 318 million euros in 2020, increasing from 306 million euros in the previous year. Similarly, inward direct investment stocks from Japan to Austria increased from 3,276 million euros in 2019, to 3,350 million euros in 2020.⁷⁹

Many of the commercial ties and investments between the two countries are based in medium and high-tech industries. The most recent and noteworthy Japanese

⁷⁵ Ibidem, p. 11.

⁷⁶ Ibidem, p. 6.

⁷⁷ Ibidem, p. 8.

⁷⁸ Ibidem, p. 7.

⁷⁹ Based on data from Oesterreichische Nationalbank (OeNB) (n.d.) *Statistical database: Foreign Direct Investment*, Available at <https://www.oenb.at/en/Statistics/Standardized-Tables/external-sector/foreign-direct-investment.html> (Accessed 18 November 2021).

investments in Austria were Asahi Kasei Medical acquiring Virusure, in 2019, and Daikin acquiring Austrian AHT Cooling systems for 881 million euros, in 2018.⁸⁰

Research and development in the Austrian life sciences sector is in expansion, companies in the fields of biotechnology, pharmaceuticals and medical engineering generating 5.8 percent of the country's GDP.⁸¹ This is attractive also to investors like the Japanese pharmaceutical giant Takeda, which already employs a workforce of 4,500 people in Austria⁸² and plans to build and open a new research facility in Vienna, with activity focusing on biologics, gene therapy and biological product development. Construction is expected to be finished by 2025, costs about 130 million euros and will employ 250 researchers.⁸³

When it comes to national entities that offer various types of support services, on the Austrian side there is the Foreign Trade Center Tokyo (Außenwirtschafts Center Tokio), established by Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (WKO), functioning at the Austrian Embassy in Tokyo.⁸⁴ At the same location operates the bureau of "Advantage Austria Tokyo," which acts as an external trade organization, to open international business opportunities for Austrian companies. It offers consulting on a wide variety of problems, from the stage of preparation to the completion of business.⁸⁵ Further, the Austrian Business Agency (ABA), reporting directly to the Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs, aims to be the first point of contact for foreign companies seeking to establish their own business in Austria, facilitating Japanese investments.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ EU-Japan.com (n.d.) *Japan to Europe M&A register*, Available at: <https://eu-japan.com/investment/japan-to-europe/> (Accessed 27 December 2021).

⁸¹ ABA (n.d.) *Life Sciences Sector in Austria*, Available at: <https://investinaustria.at/en/sectors/life-sciences/> (Accessed 27 December 2021).

⁸² ABA (2021) *Takeda is Building a Research Centre in Vienna*, Available at: <https://investinaustria.at/en/news/2021/12/takeda-builds-new-research-centre-in-vienna.php> (Accessed 27 December 2021).

⁸³ Ibidem.

⁸⁴ Further information available at: AußenwirtschaftsCenter Tokio (n.d.) *AußenwirtschaftsCenter Tokio (Foreign Trade Center Tokyo)*, Available at <https://www.wko.at/service/dienststelle.html?orgid=14623> (Accessed 27 December 2021).

⁸⁵ Further information available at: Advantage Austria Tokyo (n.d.) *Service Center*, Available at: <https://www.advantageaustria.org/jp/servicecenter/Buero-Tokio.en.html> (Accessed 27 December 2021).

⁸⁶ Austrian Business Agency (ABA) (n.d.) *ABA – Invest in Austria: About us*, Available at: <https://investinaustria.at/en/about-aba/> (Accessed 2 December 2021).

Another important facilitating actor is the Austrian Business Council (ABC),⁸⁷ founded in 1996 as an association of Austrian and Japanese corporations and individuals engaged or interested in business between Austria and Japan. ABC is the representative of the Austrian Business Community's interests in Japan. Its objective is promoting the development of trade between the two countries, by supporting the networking of Austrian companies in Japan.

On the Japanese side, the most noteworthy entity is the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO). It aims to facilitate business relations, by offering market information, communication about fairs, events, publications, including specific information for Austrian businesses and about Austria, to enhance Japanese investors' interest.⁸⁸ The Japan Market Expansion Competition (JMEC)⁸⁹ also aims to contribute to market cooperation. It is a professional development program targeting businesses in Japan. JMEC also supports foreign businesses in entering or expanding on the Japanese market (for e.g., by writing business-plans).

Overall, there are around 1,400 Austrian direct exporters to Japan.⁹⁰ Of these exporters, around 80% are from the category of small and medium enterprises (SMEs).⁹¹ Various interventions are meant to enhance the chances of success of such SME on the Japanese market. For example, the partnership concluded in 2019, between the Global Incubator Network Austria (GIN) and the Japanese start-up hub *EdgeOf*, was created to assist start-ups in their efforts of internationalization based on various programs and to facilitate their market entry, by linking the three target groups of start-

⁸⁷ Austrian Business Council (n.d.) *About ABC*, Available at: <https://www.abc-jpn.net/about-abc> (Accessed 2 December 2021).

⁸⁸ Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) (n.d.) *Austria*, Available at: <https://www.jetro.go.jp/austria/> (Accessed 2 December 2021).

⁸⁹ Japan Market Expansion Competition (n.d.) *How the JMEC Program Works*, Available at: <https://jmec.gr.jp/about-jmec/how-it-works> (Accessed 2 December 2021).

⁹⁰ Chamber of Commerce in Austria (Wirtschaftskammern Österreichs - WKO), Aussenwirtschaftscenter Tokio (2021) *Aussen Wirtschaft Wirtschaftsbericht Japan (Foreign Economy - Economic Report on Japan)*, p. 7, Available at: <https://www.wko.at/service/aussenwirtschaft/japan-wirtschaftsbericht.pdf> (Accessed 27 November 2021).

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

ups, incubators and investors.⁹²

Cultural and people-to-people relations: Reason for goodwill and source for growth

After signing the first treaty, cultural relations between the two countries sped up, starting with the 1873 Vienna World Exhibition. Here, an increased interest and demand for luxury goods deemed “exotic” surfaced, resulting in the import of cultural artifacts and ideas. The Japanese delegation also participated, and Japan endeavored to present itself in Europe as a modern state.

During their history of more than 150 years, relations have been deepened by more or less institutionalized manifestations of curiosity, solidarity, respect, collaboration or even admiration. For example, universities collaborate on high-tech research and robotics. The Austrian journalist Robert Jungk documented the voices of the survivors of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, writing the book “Children of the Ashes.” While the Austrian Major Theodor Edler von Lerch introduced alpine skiing – a favorite sport of many in Austria – in Japan in 1911,⁹³ today Austrians also have the possibility to practice the Japanese longbow shooting Kyūdō, “the way of the bow,” organized by the Austrian Kyūdō Association in bigger Austrian cities. Vienna is being marketed in Japan as the “Ongaku no Miyako” (the capital of music), with a high number of mainly female Japanese students enrolled in Viennese music academies.⁹⁴ But those interested in Austrian culture may also visit the Austria Department of the European Institute’s Library at Sophia University in Tokyo to read the over 4,500 works on Austrian literature and culture.⁹⁵ We may draw the conclusion that reciprocal interest in various areas of life is clearly observable.

⁹² ABA (2019) *GIN: Austria Enters into a New Startup Partnership with Japan*, Available at: <https://investinaustria.at/en/news/2019/03/global-incubator-network-japan.php> (Accessed 2 December 2021).

⁹³ Embassy of Japan in Austria (2021) *Chronicle of Austrian-Japanese Relations*, Available at: https://www.at.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_de/30_bilateral.html (Accessed 2 December 2021).

⁹⁴ University of Vienna (n.d.) *150 Years Austro-Japanese Relations. Practical Media Project for Students of Japanese Studies*, Available at: https://www.univie.ac.at/japan-projects/150_Jahre/WP/splash-eng.html#Projekt (Accessed 30 December 2021).

⁹⁵ Austrian Embassy in Tokyo (n.d.) *Visit at the Sophia University Tokyo*, Available at: <https://www.bmeia.gv.at/en/austrian-embassy-tokyo/news/> (Accessed 30 December 2021).

An important figure to remember for Austrian-Japanese cultural relations is Baron Mitsui Takaharu, responsible for the formation of the Japanese-Austrian (German) Community in Tokyo⁹⁶ and founder and financier of the first Japanology Institute in Austria, at the University of Vienna, in the period 1938-39,⁹⁷ which still functions today. This was the point when reciprocal interest reached academia.

In 1999, 60 years after founding the Institute, a Japanese stone garden was laid in the new campus of the University, where the Institute had moved, a garden also visited by the Japanese royal couple, in 2009.⁹⁸ In Vienna, city of many gardens and green areas, this is not the only Japanese garden: one also exists in the park of the Schönbrunn Palace. Apart from these, many Viennese take pleasure in visiting the beautiful Setagaya Park, especially attractive during the cherry blossom period. The park is located in the Döbling district of Vienna, which is twinned with the Setagaya district of Tokyo; the park, designed by landscape gardener Ken Nakajima, was proposed in 1992, as part of the cultural exchanges between the two city suburbs.⁹⁹

According to estimates of the Japanese Embassy, around 2,800 Japanese nationals live, work or study in Austria.¹⁰⁰ Children of such families can attend the Japanese School in Vienna. The Japanische Gesellschaft in Österreich (Japanese Association of Austria), established in 1958, aims at making the life of such Japanese residents in Austria easier and generally deepening friendship between Austrians and Japanese citizens, by organizing meetings or crafting the monthly bulletin “Winds of Vienna” (in Japanese language).¹⁰¹ Somewhat similar is the activity of the *Österreichisch-Japanische Gesellschaft* (The Austrian-Japanese Society – ÖJG), which

⁹⁶ Ibidem.

⁹⁷ Beyondarts Community (n.d.) *Baron Takaharu Mitsui*, Available at: <https://beyondarts.at/guides/en/campus-vienna-uni/japanese-garden/baron-takaharu-mitsui/> (Accessed 30 December 2021).

⁹⁸ Beyondarts Community (n.d.) *Japanese Garden*, Available at: <https://beyondarts.at/guides/en/campus-vienna-uni/japanese-garden/> (Accessed 30 December 2021).

⁹⁹ Vienna Direct (n.d.) *Setagaya Japanese Gardens*, Available at: <https://www.viennadirect.com/sights/setagaya.php> (Accessed 30 December 2021).

¹⁰⁰ Embassy of Japan in Austria (n.d.) *Japan in Österreich*, Available at: https://www.at.emb-japan.go.jp/de/30_aboutjapan/010_inaustria/index.html (Accessed 30 December 2021).

¹⁰¹ Austrian Japanese Association (n.d.) *オーストリア日本人会とは (What is the Austrian Japanese Association?)*, Available at: <http://www.nihonjinkai.at/about.html> (Accessed 30 December 2021).

also publishes a magazine called “Brücke” (“Bridge”, three issues per year, in German), covering social, economic, cultural and sports events of specific interest.¹⁰²

Various academic and scientific exchange programs between the two countries are in place. Austrian students of Japanese Studies or Japanese language or academics were invited (in the pre-pandemic years) to apply for the Monbukagakusho Scholarship of the Japanese Government and benefit from support services of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS). Also, The Japan Foundation, established in 1972, as a special legal body under the auspices of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, offers funding programs in the field of art and culture, Japanese language, research and exchange of people at university level. The Japan Exchange and Teaching Program (JET) is carried out with the aim of promoting mutual understanding between Japan and other countries, with a special focus on language training.¹⁰³ The possibility of participating in the working holidays program in Japan was also established and encouraged.¹⁰⁴ Possibilities for work, scientific or academic exchanges are however part of broader, international programs, not based on well targeted, special agreements between the two countries.

Tourism also plays an important role in people-to-people relations and cultural exchange. In terms of Austrian visitors to Japan, numbers are not highly significant: Japan is not among the five most important tourist destinations for Austrians (all five being European countries), thus not included in the publicly available statistics, neither on the Austrian side¹⁰⁵ nor on the Japanese side.¹⁰⁶ In terms of incoming tourism, in the pre-pandemic years, an increasing trend could be observed in both the number of arrivals of Japanese visitors (in 2018 about 0.2 million, in 2019 about 0.3 million per

¹⁰² Österreichisch-Japanischen Gesellschaft (n.d.) *Brücke Magazin*, Available at: <http://www.oejg.org/magazin.html> (Accessed 30 December 2021).

¹⁰³ Embassy of Japan in Austria (n.d.) *Studium & Austauschprogramme (Study and Exchange Programs)*, Available at: https://www.at.emb-japan.go.jp/de/30_aboutjapan/040_study/index.html (Accessed 30 December 2021).

¹⁰⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2020) *The Working Holiday Programmes in Japan*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/j_info/visit/w_holiday/index.html (Accessed 30 December 2021).

¹⁰⁵ Statistik Austria (n.d.) *Reisegewohnheiten (Travel Habits)*, Available at: https://www.statistik.at/web_de/statistiken/wirtschaft/tourismus/reisegewohnheiten/index.html (Accessed 30 December 2021).

¹⁰⁶ Japan Tourism Agency (2021) *International Visitor Survey*, Available at: <https://www.mlit.go.jp/kankocho/en/siryoutoukei/syouthityousa.html> (Accessed 30 December 2021).

year) and the number of nights they spent in Austria (0.5 million per year in both 2018 and 2019, but increasing from 0.4 million in 2017).¹⁰⁷ Visitors from Japan are preponderantly of middle age (average age 48.5 years) and their visit lasts on average 5 days.¹⁰⁸ In 2018/2019, most of them visited Austria in the summer (61.7%), the most favored three cities being Vienna, Salzburg and Innsbruck, while 38.3% arrived in the winter months and spent most of their time in Vienna, Salzburg and Graz.¹⁰⁹ A large majority (74.4%) checked in 4 or 5 stars hotels, followed by 14.9% in 3 star hotels, only a small minority choosing accommodation below this level of comfort. Most tourists were interested in sightseeing and architecture (54%), followed by those coming for arts and culture (51%).¹¹⁰

Overall, about 1% of holidaymakers in Austria in the tourism year November 2018 – October 2019 came from Japan.¹¹¹ Although a small market share, this covers a highly valuable tourist category, considering the income it brings to the industry, thanks to the important spending of Japanese visitors, a comparatively high sum per person (on average, 350 euros/person/day spent by Japanese visitors, compared to only 204 euros/person/day in case of British tourists,¹¹² 159 euros/person/day spent by Italians¹¹³ or 127 euros/person/day spent by Hungarians,¹¹⁴ on average).

¹⁰⁷ Österreich Werbung (2020) *Japanese Market Profile*, Available at: https://www.austriatourism.com/fileadmin/user_upload/Media_Library/Downloads/OEW_Allgemein/Allgemein/Handbuch_Maerkte/OEW_Markt_Guide_JAPAN.pdf (Accessed 30 December 2021).

¹⁰⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁹ Ibidem.

¹¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹¹ Österreich Werbung (n.d.) *Japanische Urlauber in Österreich (Gesamtjahr 2018/19) (Japanese Holidaymakers in Austria (Entire Year 2018/19))*, Available at: <https://www.austriatourism.com/tourismusforschung/studien-und-berichte/japanische-urlauber-in-oesterreich-gesamtjahr-201819/> (Accessed 30 December 2021).

¹¹² Österreich Werbung (n.d.) *Great Britain Market Profile*, Available at: https://www.austriatourism.com/fileadmin/user_upload/Media_Library/Downloads/OEW_Allgemein/Allgemein/Handbuch_Maerkte/OEW_Markt_Guide_GROSSBRITANNIEN.pdf (Accessed 30 December 2021).

¹¹³ Österreich Werbung (n.d.) *Italy Market Profile*, Available at: https://www.austriatourism.com/fileadmin/user_upload/Media_Library/Downloads/OEW_Allgemein/Allgemein/Handbuch_Maerkte/OEW_Markt_Guide_ITALIEN.pdf (Accessed 30 December 2021).

¹¹⁴ Österreich Werbung (n.d.) *Hungary Market Profile - MÄRKTE GUIDE 2020*, Available at: https://www.austriatourism.com/fileadmin/user_upload/Media_Library/Downloads/OEW_Allgemein/Allgemein/Handbuch_Maerkte/OEW_Markt_Guide_UNGARN.pdf (Accessed 30 December 2021).

The number of Japanese visitors dropped drastically in the pandemic years, and incoming tourism from Japan became almost non-existent: while the number of nights spent by Japanese tourists in Austria increased in 2019 by 12.3%, in comparison to the previous year, it decreased by a staggering 84.5% in 2020.¹¹⁵ Although direct flights between the two capital cities have existed and have also supported tourism since 1989, currently (in 2021), direct flights are not operated, as the decline in international travel made them unprofitable.

Future ahead: Reasons for optimism

With such a long cooperative and friendly relation, the two countries have all the reasons to be optimistic about the future of their bilateral relations. Although situated on different continents, they are stable partners, ties also being strengthened by the position of neutrality Austria usually occupies on the international stage.

Positive developments between the two countries are primarily based on the flourishing economic and commercial relations, which were also the historic starting point of bilateral affairs. Austria welcomes investments in medium- and high-tech, innovative and high added value business sectors, which is an attractive opportunity to Japanese investors, and likely will remain so in the future as well. Although the European Union's Economic Partnership Agreement with Japan is not expected to give an extraordinary boost to commercial relations between the two countries, it definitely creates a more favorable climate to existing commercial ties.

Nevertheless, stronger and stronger people-to-people and cultural connections and the resulting sympathy enhance commercial relations, creating interest in ideas, products and services the other has to offer. Except for the pandemic period, Austrian tourism was able to benefit from welcoming Japanese guests, which proved to be a highly lucrative niche to handle, due to the comparatively high amount of money this tourist category is spending in the country during their stay. Emphasis in terms of country branding of Austria on music and music related history pays off both in terms of

¹¹⁵ WKO (2021) *Tourismus und Freizeitwirtschaft in Zahlen, (Tourism and Leisure Industry in Figures)*, p. 47, Available at: <https://www.wko.at/branchen/tourismus-freizeitwirtschaft/tourismus-freizeitwirtschaft-in-zahlen-2021.pdf> (Accessed 14 February 2022).

attracting tourists but also inviting Japanese students to Viennese music academies. The Vienna Philharmonic's New Year's Concert, transmitted by televisions all around the world, confirms and enhances this reputation every year, and Asian – including Japanese – guests or spectators do not remain indifferent to this attraction. Understanding of each other's culture and traditions will continue to bring the two countries closer also in the future, toward an even more fruitful collaboration.

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The bilateral relations between Belgium and Japan: Where the royal and imperial families meet

By Anke KENNIS*

Overview

The relationship between Belgium and Japan is a multifaceted one that only recently celebrated its 150th anniversary, in 2016, with the royal and imperial families present. Belgium functions as a hub for the distribution of Japanese goods to the rest of Europe, thanks to the ports in Flanders. The main industries that connect both countries are petrochemical, pharmaceutical, and automotive. To combat climate change, Japan and Belgium need to work together with these industries, to find more climate neutral solutions, especially for the automotive and chemical industries. On the education side, recently more universities in Japan and Belgium have started to create joint program for students to enjoy exchange between the two countries.

An important role for this relationship is attributed to the royal and imperial family of Belgium and Japan, respectively. From the start of their diplomatic relations, in 1866, the noble houses have befriended each other, creating a stable and deep relationship for other areas to thrive on. Besides their current common economic victories, the countries also share common challenges for the future, such as an aging society and climate change. Both are areas in which deeper cooperation will create many benefits.

History of relations

Officially, diplomatic relations between Belgium and Japan were established in 1866,

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with the signing of the Treaty of Amity, Commerce and Navigation.¹ However, even before that, there was some level of exchange between the two nations. Books written on medicine and botanical studies by Vesalius, Dodoens and Palfijn had already made their way to Japan before, via European missionaries.² Count Charles Descantons de Montblanc can be considered as the first “Belgian” representative to visit Japan, in the 19th century, mainly as the agent of the Lord of Satsuma. Though he was French by nationality, he was the Baron of Ingelmunster in Belgium.³

Nevertheless, it was the diplomat Auguste t’Kint de Roodenbeke who had succeeded in coming to an agreement with the Shogunate, making Belgium the ninth Western nation to form diplomatic bonds with Japan, in 1866.⁴ That year, the first Belgian diplomatic institution, a legation, was opened in Yokohama and in 1893 this legation was moved to Tokyo and later became an official embassy, in 1921.⁵ Japan established a legation in Belgium in 1898, which, together with the Belgian legation in Japan, was elevated to the rank of embassy in 1921.⁶

The Meiji Restoration involved a modernization of all areas of the Japanese state. While looking for inspiration abroad, Belgium was one of the chosen countries where Japan sent its researchers to, in order to find potential inspiration for modernizing Japanese institutions. One reason why Japan chose to focus on Belgium was to learn how smaller nations can survive and thrive in a sea of larger nations.⁷ This research trip to Belgium was part of the bigger Iwakura Mission across Europe and the US, between

¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan (2019) *Japan-Belgium Relations (Basic Data)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/belgium/data.html> (Accessed 17 May 2021).

² Embassy and Consulates of Belgium in Japan (2017) *Diplomatic Relations*, Available at: <https://japan.diplomatie.belgium.be/en/relationship-belgium-japan/diplomatic-relations>, (Accessed 5 May 2021).

³ Willy Vande Walle (1996) “Count Charles Descantons de Montblanc, Agent for the Lord of Satsuma” in Ian Neary (ed.) *In Leaders and Leadership in Japan*, Tokyo: Japan Library Richmond Surrey, p. 40.

⁴ Willy Vande Walle (2015) *150 Years Japan-Belgium - The History of Belgian-Japanese Relations*, Available at: <https://www.be.emb-japan.go.jp/150jb/en/index.html> (Accessed 7 September 2021).

⁵ Embassy and Consulates of Belgium in Japan (2017) *Diplomatic Relations*, Available at: <https://japan.diplomatie.belgium.be/en/relationship-belgium-japan/diplomatic-relations>, (Accessed 5 May 2021).

⁶ Willy Vande Walle (2015) *150 Years Japan-Belgium - The History of Belgian-Japanese Relations*, Available at: <https://www.be.emb-japan.go.jp/150jb/en/index.html> (Accessed 7 September 2021).

⁷ Author’s interview with Dimitri Vanoverbeke (November 2021), Professor at University of Tokyo.

1871 and 1873, to gather information and learn from different countries. One of the representatives, named Wataru Katō, was sent by Masayoshi Matsukata to investigate and analyze the workings of the Belgian Central Bank.⁸ After three years of research, Katō returned and helped build the Japanese central bank, becoming a head of department at the Bank of Japan.⁹

During the research trip, other aspects the Japanese researchers were interested in were Belgium's glass and steel industry, gunpowder, and flax seed production.¹⁰ The Belgian producers were also interested in Japan as a new export market. The inspiration and exchange, whether it was about trade, industrial practices or know-how, was not only in one direction, because Belgian artists were also inspired by Japan and, as a result, we have the Art Nouveau era, which was famous for its *Japonisme*.¹¹ Belgian writers, such as Georges Rodenbach, Emile Verhaeren and Maurice Maeterlinck, were *en vogue* in Japan as well.¹²

This influence can be seen in the public perception. Despite being a smaller country, Belgium was held in high regard in Japanese public opinion before 1904. The Belgian King's participation in the Belgian army at the front, during the First World War was covered by the Japanese press and he was praised for his bravery.¹³ During the rest of the Meiji and Taishō eras, Belgium and Japan had good relations overall that were also maintained during the first two years of the Shōwa era. But things took a turn for the worse from then on, when not just Belgium but many other European countries were experiencing dwindling relations with an ever more isolated Japan.

⁸ Willy Vande Walle (2015) *150 Years Japan-Belgium - The History of Belgian-Japanese Relations*, Available at: <https://www.be.emb-japan.go.jp/150jb/en/index.html> (Accessed 7 September 2021).

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ *Japonisme* is a term created by art critic Philip Burty to describe the 40-year period after the opening of Japan by the US in 1853 which led to a rediscovery of Japanese art by the West. Almost all art forms in the West during the late 1800s and early 1900s were influenced to a certain degree by Japanese art. For more info see Panorama de L'art (2019) *Le Japonisme*, Available at: <https://www.panoramadelart.com/focus-japonisme#:~:text=Terme%20cr%C3%A9%C3%A9%20par%20le%20critique,art%20japonais%20par%20les%20occidentaux> (Accessed 21 November 2021).

¹² Willy Vande Walle (2015) *150 Years Japan-Belgium - The History of Belgian-Japanese Relations*, Available at: <https://www.be.emb-japan.go.jp/150jb/en/index.html> (Accessed 7 September 2021).

¹³ Ibidem.

In September 1931, the Manchurian Incident took place, leading to even worse diplomatic relations between the West and Japan and ultimately war. In the spring of 1932, Prince Leopold of Belgium was supposed to visit Japan, but the visit was cancelled due to rising tensions between Japan and China. Instead of visiting Japan, the Prince went to French Indochina, thus avoiding China and Japan altogether, because he wished not to pick sides in this conflict.¹⁴ Despite the cancellation of the royal visit, Belgium took a conciliatory stance in the League of Nations' Lytton report, which condemned Japan for attacking Manchuria.¹⁵

The diplomatic coolness continued, as Japan and Belgium found themselves fighting on opposing sides during the Pacific War. Diplomatic ties were completely severed during this period and were only rekindled after the Second World War ended, in August of 1945. Japan quickly recovered after the war and began restoring previously broken diplomatic relations and even developed those relations to a higher level than ever before. Among the countries with which Japan restored and improved its relations was Belgium. Post-war Belgium became the stage for many international organizations, such as early precursory EU institutions and NATO. Belgium's membership of NATO and the European Economic Community and Japan's economic prosperity led to increased trade and diplomatic relations. Thus, Prince Albert, the future King Albert II, headed a Belgian economic mission to Japan in May 1962,¹⁶ when Belgium received one of the first direct Japanese investments, from Honda Motor Corporation, which built a production plant in Aalst, in 1962.¹⁷

One interesting aspect of the Belgium-Japan relationship, setting Belgium apart from other European countries, is the friendship between their respective royal and imperial families. During their 2015 meeting, prime ministers Shinzō Abe and Charles Michel noted that “there is close exchange between the Imperial Family and Royal

¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ Embassy and Consulates of Belgium in Japan (2017) *Diplomatic Relations*, Available at: <https://japan.diplomatie.belgium.be/en/relationship-belgium-japan/diplomatic-relations> (Accessed 5 May 2021).

¹⁷ Honda Motors Belgium (2019) *Establishing Belgium Honda / 1963*, Available at: <https://global.honda/heritage/episodes/1963establishing.html> (Accessed 14 January 2022).

Family.”¹⁸ In 2016, King Philippe and Queen Matilde visited Japan, to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the diplomatic relation between the two countries. The Belgian Ambassador to Japan also underlined this bond recently, as the next economic mission to Japan will be led by Princess Astrid, from November 2022, underlining the strong and trusted royal bond Belgium and Japan have.¹⁹ The relationship between the Belgian Royal Family and the Japanese Imperial Family goes back a long way in history. In 1921, Crown Prince Hirohito visited Belgium, while he was visiting other European countries as well. A second visit to Belgium by him followed in 1971 and marked the first official state visit after being crowned Emperor Shōwa.²⁰ Crown Prince Akihito visited Belgium in his youth. There, he met Crown Prince Boudewijn and the two became friends. This friendship would play an important role in the marriage of Akihito with Michiko. Since Michiko was not on the list of desired marriage partners, Akihito had to find a way to communicate with her outside the official channels. Michiko was staying in a convent in Belgium by coincidence and, allegedly, King Boudewijn acted as a go-between for Crown Prince Akihito to hand her the letters Crown Prince Akihito wrote.²¹ This bond between the King and the Emperor would last till the death of King Boudewijn, in 1993, when, against protocol, Emperor Akihito left Japan to pay his last respects to his royal Belgian friend.²²

Political and strategic relations

As mentioned before, the relationship between the two countries was at a low point immediately after the Second World War and gradually improved until today, when it

¹⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan (2015) *Japan-Belgium Summit Meeting*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/we/be/page4e_000247.html (Accessed 8 June 2021).

¹⁹ Roxane De Bilderling (2021) *Close Cooperation in a Variety of Areas*, p. 7, Available at: https://classified.japantimes.com/nationalday/pdfs/20211116-Belgium_King--s_Day_Special.pdf (Accessed 8 June 2021).

²⁰ Kimikazu Sugawara (2021) *Important Milestones Mark a Long and Friendly Relationship*, p. 7, Available at: https://classified.japantimes.com/nationalday/pdfs/20211116-Belgium_King--s_Day_Special.pdf (Accessed 8 June 2021).

²¹ Author’s interview with Dimitri Vanoverbeke (November 2021), Professor at University of Tokyo.

²² Valentin Dupont (2020) *L’Amitié Entre la Famille Royale Belge et la Famille Impériale Japonaise (The Friendship between the Belgian Royal Family and the Japanese Imperial Family)*, Available at: <https://royalementblog.blogspot.com/search/label/Japon> (Accessed 8 June 2021). Author’s interview with Dimitri Vanoverbeke (November 2021), Professor at University of Tokyo.

has become a thriving and dynamic multi-faceted relationship. The post-war situation was difficult for both Belgium and Japan, as both countries needed time to rebuild. Relations thus resumed only several years after the war, and picked up speed again starting in the 1960s, due to economic development on both sides.

Between 1953 and 1973, many bilateral agreements between Japan and Belgium were signed: the Air Transport Agreement of 1959, the Agreement on the Avoidance of Double Taxation with Respect to Taxes on Income of 1968, the Agreement suppressing the requirement of visa for short term visits of 1972, and the Agreement on Cultural Affairs of 1973.²³ More recently, an important strengthening step of the relationship between the two countries was reached with the Agreement between Japan and the Kingdom of Belgium on Social Security, in February 2005.²⁴ This agreement, which entered into force in January 2007, deals with the mutual recognition of pensions, benefits and other social security measures for Japanese employees dispatched to Belgium and vice versa.²⁵ Thanks to this agreement, the financial burden of companies that operate both in Belgium and Japan is relieved and this makes exchange of employees more efficient.

The current political relations between Belgium and Japan are marked by frequent visits of the countries' leaders. Since Brussels hosts many of the EU's institutions, it is often convenient for the Japanese delegation to briefly visit the Belgian institutions too.²⁶ Thus, the political leaders or high officials of Belgium and Japan tend to meet at least once, sometimes even twice, a year. The royal and imperial families have also visited each other frequently and, though they cannot take political decisions, it is still seen as a sign of goodwill between the countries and forms a strong base to

²³ Embassy and Consulates of Belgium in Japan (2017) *Diplomatic Relations*, Available at: <https://japan.diplomatie.belgium.be/en/relationship-belgium-japan/diplomatic-relations> (Accessed 5 May 2021).

²⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2005) *Agreement Between Japan and The Kingdom of Belgium on Social Security*, p. 1 Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/belgium/agree0502.pdf> (Accessed 22 August 2021).

²⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2005), *Signing of the Japan-Belgium Social Security Agreement*. Available: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/belgium/agree0502.html> (Accessed 22 August 2021).

²⁶ Willy Vande Walle (2015) *150 Years Japan-Belgium - The History of Belgian-Japanese Relations*, Available at: <https://www.be.emb-japan.go.jp/150jb/en/index.html> (Accessed 7 September 2021).

work from.²⁷

Since 2000, there has been an official visit from the prime ministers or government ministers from Belgium and Japan almost every year. Japanese officials have visited Belgium nearly every single year, but some of those visits were to meet with EU officials and not with Belgian officials.²⁸ The only notable year without any diplomatic visits was 2011, due to the Great Tōhoku Earthquake and consequent Fukushima nuclear disaster. While there are many such political contacts, there has been only one visit of a minister of defense in the past two decades, that of Japanese Minister of Defense Fumio Kyūma in 2007, a year in which Prime Minister Shinzō Abe also visited Belgium.²⁹

Prime Minister Shinzō Abe later visited Belgium as one of the last countries on his European tour, in May 2014, when he met with Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo and also had an audience with King Philippe. The two prime ministers spoke about their commitment to peacekeeping and Di Rupo spoke highly of Japan's contribution to stability and peacebuilding. Both countries also encouraged communication between their respective diplomatic and defense authorities.³⁰

After this meeting, in May 2015, Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel visited Japan, for a meeting with his counterpart, Prime Minister Abe. For Prime Minister Michel, this was the first bilateral visit outside of the EU since his appointment as prime minister, which Abe greatly appreciated, as it was seen as a sign of the good relations between Belgium and Japan. During this meeting, Abe also discussed the success of the investment seminar at the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), while Michel affirmed that he wanted to plan the 2016 investment seminar in Brussels and invited Abe to attend. Both prime ministers also reiterated their mutual support for the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) and the Strategic Partnership Agreement

²⁷ Embassy and Consulates of Belgium in Japan (2017) *Diplomatic Relations*, Available at: <https://japan.diplomatie.belgium.be/en/relationship-belgium-japan/diplomatic-relations>, (Accessed 5 May 2021).

²⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2020) *Japan-Belgium Relations (Archives)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/belgium/archives.html> (Accessed 22 August 2021).

²⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019) *Japan-Belgium Relations (Basic Data)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/belgium/data.html> (Accessed 22 August 2021).

³⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2014) *Japan-Belgium Summit Meeting*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/we/be/page22e_000371.html (Accessed 23 August 2021).

(SPA), which were being negotiated at the time. Shinzō Abe was also appreciative that Belgium was committed to the fight against terrorism and piracy, and for peacebuilding.³¹ During this meeting, the two leaders reiterated the importance of the good bond between the royal and imperial families and that this would form a good foundation for the celebration of 150 years of Belgium-Japan relations.

The year 2016 not only brought an important meeting between Shinzō Abe and Charles Michel, but it also marked the 150th anniversary of Belgium-Japan diplomatic relations. This was celebrated in many ways and by many different organizations. Unfortunately, the start of this celebratory year was marred by terrorist attacks in Brussels. Shinzō Abe sent his condolences to Prime Minister Michel and Minister of Foreign Affairs Fumio Kishida signed the book of condolence at the Belgian Embassy in Tokyo.³² Japan and Belgium also held an official joint consultation on terrorism and vowed to cooperate on counterterrorism.³³ Another important development of 2016 was the signing of the Tax Convention between Belgium and Japan, which entered into force in 2018.³⁴

In 2017, Abe visited Belgium twice, as part of a European tour that included Germany, France and Italy and, later that year, again to attend the Japan-EU summit and G20 summit.³⁵ In the same year, State Minister Kentaro Sonoura visited Belgium as

³¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2015) *Japan-Belgium Summit Meeting*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/we/be/page4e_000247.html (Accessed 23 August 2021).

³² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2016) *Messages of Condolence Following the Terror Attacks in Brussels, Belgium*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_001088.html (Accessed 23 August 2021).

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2016) *Signing of the Book of Condolence by Minister Fumio Kishida Following the Terror Attacks in Brussels, Belgium*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_001092.html (Accessed 23 August 2021).

³³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2016) *Japan-Belgium Counter-Terrorism Consultation*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/we/be/page3e_000619.html (Accessed 23 August 2021).

³⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2016) *Signing of Tax Convention with the Kingdom of Belgium*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_001301.html (Accessed 23 August 2021).

³⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2017) *Prime Minister Abe Visits Germany, France, Belgium and Italy*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/c_see/de/page1e_000138.html (Accessed 23 August 2021). Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2017) *Prime Minister Shinzo Abe Visits Europe and Attends G20 Summit 2017 in Hamburg (July 5-10, 2017)*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/ep/page1e_000162.html (Accessed 23 August 2021).

well and, a few months later, Foreign Minister Kishida also visited Belgium,³⁶ making 2017 a busy year for visits from Japan to Belgium.

In 2018, Abe visited Belgium three times: his first visit in April was not a bilateral visit but a visit to the EU, while his second and third visits were meetings with Prime Minister Michel and with King Philippe, respectively.³⁷ During the same year, Foreign Minister Tarō Kōno also visited Belgium, after visiting Canada and Switzerland.

In the area of security, the Belgian and Japanese navies have conducted a multilateral exercise, in cooperation with the US and French armies, in the Gulf of Aden, in March 2021.³⁸ Regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a telephone call on 1 July 2021, between Minister of Foreign Affairs Toshimitsu Motegi and Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs Philippe Goffin. The ministers mainly talked about the COVID-19 pandemic and border control measures.³⁹ The latest official meeting (as of summer 2022) was between Belgium's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Wilmes and Japan's Minister of Foreign Affairs Hayashi, on 7 April 2022, which lasted about 20 minutes. The main topics of this meeting were the reiteration of a close partnership between the two countries on multiple topics, such as the condemnation of Russia's aggression toward Ukraine and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific.⁴⁰

Economic and commercial relations

Japan and Belgium have developed a fruitful commercial relationship over the last decades. The EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) entered into force on 1 February 2019 and has created even more opportunities for bilateral trade between

³⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2020) *Japan-Belgium Relations (Archives)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/belgium/archives.html> (Accessed 25 August 2021).

³⁷ Ibidem.

³⁸ Ministry of Defense of Japan (2021) *Japan-France-Belgium-U.S. multilateral exercise*, Available at: <https://www.mod.go.jp/en/article/2021/03/96a8a8cd27aea8a57922fddefdc80d4a1d99ae3c.html> (Accessed 29 February 2022).

³⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2020) *Japan-Belgium Foreign Ministers' Telephone Talk*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_002853.html (Accessed 11 December 2021).

⁴⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan (2022) *Japan-Belgium Foreign Ministers' Meeting*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/we/be/page4e_001223.html (Accessed 26 August 2021).

Belgium and Japan. The EU-Japan EPA heavily reduces tariff and non-tariff barriers, thereby eradicating most of the red tape and facilitating trade.⁴¹

As of 2020, Japan is Belgium's 19th largest client globally and Belgium's second biggest supplier in Asia (China is Belgium's main Asian importer) and Japan ranked as Belgium's 9th largest supplier.⁴² The latest figures from the first six months of 2021 mark Japan as Belgium's 11th largest client and as the 9th largest supplier.⁴³ This means that, despite the pandemic, Japan maintained a stable rank in its economic relation with Belgium. Over the last 5 years, bilateral trade has been increasing steadily, with a clear jump in 2019, due to the entry into force of the EU-Japan EPA, which eradicated tariff and non-tariff barriers. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic inhibited and even sharply decreased bilateral trade.

Belgium's major export sectors to Japan are chemicals and pharmaceuticals, transport equipment, and machinery and equipment.⁴⁴ Japan's main exports to Belgium are transport equipment, machinery and equipment and chemicals.⁴⁵ Chemical and pharmaceutical products are the bulk of Belgium's exports to Japan. The percentage of these exports is so high that Japan is Belgium's second largest market outside of the EU, only being surpassed by the US.⁴⁶ Regarding pharmaceuticals, all the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccines exported to Japan were produced by the Belgian branch in Puurs.⁴⁷ The petrochemical industry is an important export product from Belgium to Japan and

⁴¹ European Commission (2020) *EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement*, Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/in-focus/eu-japan-economic-partnership-agreement/> (Accessed 13 December 2021).

⁴² OEC (2019) *Belgium*, Available at: [https://oec.world/en/profile/country/bel#:~:text=Imports%20The%20top%20imports%20of,%2C%20and%20Ireland%20\(%2419B\)](https://oec.world/en/profile/country/bel#:~:text=Imports%20The%20top%20imports%20of,%2C%20and%20Ireland%20(%2419B)) (Accessed 26 August 2021). Belgian Foreign Trade Agency (2021) *Belgium and Japan Trade*, Available at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/17XJVN6mdCTNnMroqipqJrXFxTeSSILUp/view> (Accessed 26 August 2021).

⁴³ Ibidem.

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

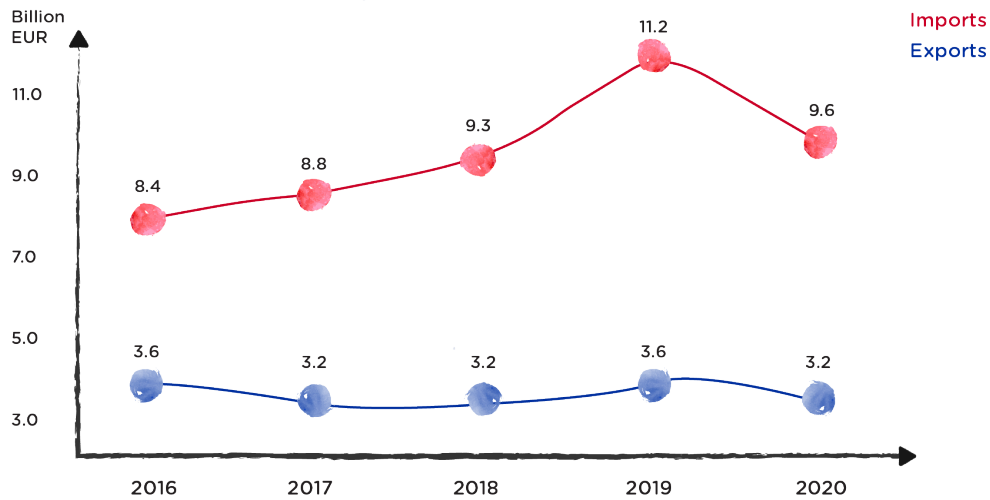
⁴⁵ Ibidem.

⁴⁶ Embassy and Consulates of Belgium in Japan (2017) *Diplomatic Relations*, Available at: <https://japan.diplomatie.belgium.be/en/relationship-belgium-japan/diplomatic-relations> (Accessed 8 June 2021).

⁴⁷ Kimikazu Sugawara (2021) *Important Milestones Mark a Long and Friendly Relationship*, p. 7, Available at: https://classified.japantimes.com/nationalday/pdfs/20211116-Belgium_King--s_Day_Special.pdf (Accessed 8 June 2021).

fosters substantial cooperation projects between the two countries, at both the research and economic level.⁴⁸

Belgium's trade with Japan in billion euros



Source: Belgian Foreign Trade Agency

The bulk of trade is conducted between Flanders (Northern Dutch-speaking region of Belgium) and Japan, due to the location of ports and heavy industry in Flanders. The port of Zeebrugge and the port of Antwerp (the second largest port of Europe) form a hub for Japanese goods (especially cars), to be distributed from Flanders to the rest of Europe.⁴⁹ In 2020, roughly 85% of Belgian exports to Japan originated from Flanders and almost 90% of Japanese imports to Belgium went to Flanders.⁵⁰

When it comes to investment, Belgium ranks high on the Japanese investment list, as the second largest non-EU investor, after the US. Belgium houses roughly 300 subsidiaries of Japanese companies employing about 30,000 people.⁵¹ A fifth of

⁴⁸ Author's interview with Flemish Economic Representative in Japan (March 2022).

⁴⁹ Author's interview with International Trade Officer van Flanders Investment & Trade Tokyo (March 2022). Flanders Investment and Trade (2022) *Japan in cijfers*, Available at: <https://www.flandersinvestmentandtrade.com/export/landen/japan/cijfers> (Accessed 22 November 2021).

⁵⁰ Ibidem.

⁵¹ Ibidem.

Japanese companies are part of the automotive industry.⁵² Belgium also has vested interests in Japan, with 80 subsidiaries located there. Most Belgian companies in Japan are part of the following sectors: chemicals, pharmaceuticals, biotechnologies, ICT, and automotive and materials.⁵³

The good economic relationship between Belgium and Japan has been fostered through regular visits by officials, as well as by the Royal Family. The role of the Belgian Royal Family cannot be underestimated when it comes to developing the economic relationship. In 1962, Prince Albert was the leader of the very first Belgian trade-related mission to Japan. In the last two decades, then-Crown Prince Philippe of Belgium also led two fruitful trade missions to Japan, in 2005 and in 2012.⁵⁴ A new mission in November 2022 will be conducted by Princess Astrid.⁵⁵

In 2018, investment flows from Japan to Belgium totaled 186 billion yen (1.43 billion euros) and from Belgium to Japan 67 billion yen (500 million euros).⁵⁶ In terms of Foreign Direct Investment stock, Japan invested 2.41 trillion yen (18.5 billion euros) in Belgium and Belgium invested 83.2 billion yen (639 million euros) in Japan.⁵⁷

There are a few bilateral and multilateral chambers of commerce connecting corporations and tightening trade relations between the two countries. There is both a Belgian-Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce (BLCCJ)⁵⁸ in Japan and the Belgium-Japan Association Chamber of Commerce (BJA),⁵⁹ located in Brussels. Japan is

⁵² Embassy and Consulates of Belgium in Japan (2017) *Diplomatic Relations*, Available at: <https://japan.diplomatie.belgium.be/en/relationship-belgium-japan/diplomatic-relations> (Accessed 5 May 2021).

⁵³ Ibidem.

⁵⁴ Ibidem.

⁵⁵ Roxane De Bilderling (2021) *Close Cooperation in a Variety of Areas*, p. 7, Available at: https://classified.japantimes.com/nationalday/pdfs/20211116-Belgium_King--s_Day_Special.pdf (Accessed 8 June 2021).

⁵⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019) *Japan-Belgium Relations (Basic Data)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/belgium/data.html> (Accessed 11 December 2021).

⁵⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019) *Japan-Belgium Relations (Basic Data)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/belgium/data.html> (Accessed 11 December 2021).

⁵⁸ Belgian-Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce in Japan (n.d.) *Home Page*, Available at: <https://blccj.or.jp/> (Accessed 11 December 2021).

⁵⁹ Ibidem.

represented in Belgium by JETRO Brussels, which nurtures trade relations between Belgium and Japan.⁶⁰

Cultural and people-to-people relations and perceptions of Japan

Compared to Japan, Belgium is a small country, both in population and size, but the two countries have been able to build a strong relationship regarding cultural exchange and people-to-people relations.

Numbers from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan state that there were 5,896 Japanese nationals living in Belgium.⁶¹ The Belgian Embassy's latest numbers state that there are approximately 1,208 Belgian nationals living in Japan, as of 2021.⁶² The real number might be slightly higher, since it does not include students or Belgians visiting Japan for a short time. This is not a large number, but given the size of Belgium it is not surprising.

Despite the relatively small number of Japanese living in Belgium, the popular interest for Japan is large. One of the biggest cultural events held regarding Japan in Europe was Europalia Japan, in 1989. Europalia is a biennial multidisciplinary event, organized in Belgium, focusing on a different country every time. The costs are shared between Belgium and the country in question.⁶³ The Japan edition was highly ambitious and successful, encompassing a mix of both Japanese traditional and contemporary pop-culture. In the wake of Europalia, Japan and Belgium have experienced continuously growing ties.

Fast forward to more recent times, in 2016, Belgium and Japan celebrated the 150th anniversary of friendship. Many activities were organized to celebrate this event, spread among many different areas, like cultural, political, academic, etc. The final celebration was marked by the royal visit of King Philippe and Queen Matilde to Japan,

⁶⁰ JETRO Belgium (n.d.) *Home Page*, Available at: https://www.jetro.go.jp/belgium/jetro_brussels.html (Accessed 11 December 2021).

⁶¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan (2019) *Japan-Belgium Relations (Basic Data)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/belgium/data.html> (Accessed 17 May 2021)

⁶² Based on the answers received by the author from the Embassy of Belgium in Tokyo (December 2021).

⁶³ Europalia (2019) *Europalia - The Festival*, Available at: <https://europalia.eu/en/about-europalia/the-festival> (Accessed 30 July 2021).

in October 2016.⁶⁴

The celebration was also marked in the academic field, when, in 2016, Waseda University held the Japan-Belgium Academic Roundtable. A total of 36 Japanese and Belgian universities gathered to discuss future cooperation plans between Belgium and Japan. The conclusions and closing speeches were attended by Queen Matilde.⁶⁵

More recently, the Law Faculties of the Catholic University of Leuven (KU Leuven) and Waseda University have agreed on a double degree in Master of Law between the two universities. This new program allows master students to obtain two Master of law degrees and spent two semesters in Leuven and two in Tokyo.⁶⁶

Japan and Belgium also strengthened their ties at the local level, by creating more sister cities, between 1965 to 1994: Himeji-Charlerloi, Kanazawa-Gent, Komatsu-Vilvoorde, Itami-Hasselt, Nagakute-Waterloo and Hanyu-Durbuy. This sisterhood connectivity should go beyond the narrative and be supported by actual links between Japan and Belgium. Sabena (Belgium's now bankrupt national airline) used to service a direct flight between Brussels and Tokyo, until its bankruptcy, in 2001. Then followed a gap of almost 15 years without any direct flights between Belgium and Japan, which changed when All Nippon Airways (ANA) started to service the direct flight between Tokyo-Narita and Brussels Airport in 2015.⁶⁷ This was an important step in the Belgium-Japan relationship and was also a priority for Prime Minister Charles Michel, as on his first visit to Japan, his first meeting was with the chairman, president and top officials of ANA.⁶⁸ The airline was an important link between Europe and Japan, because Brussels is also marketed as the "capital of Europe," with its many EU institutions situated in the city, as well as being well connected by train to other major

⁶⁴ Embassy and Consulates of Belgium in Japan (2017) *Diplomatic Relations*, Available at: <https://japan.diplomatie.belgium.be/en/relationship-belgium-japan/diplomatic-relations>, (Accessed 5 May 2021).

⁶⁵ Waseda University (2016) *Presidents of 36 Universities at Waseda for Japan-Belgium Academic Roundtable*, Available at: <https://www.waseda.jp/top/en/news/45997> (Accessed 30 July 2021).

⁶⁶ KU Leuven - Faculty of Law and Criminology (2022) *Master of Law, Exchange Programme with Double Degree Leuven-Waseda*, Available at: <https://www.law.kuleuven.be/education/prospective/master-of-law-waseda> (Accessed 30 July 2021).

⁶⁷ Embassy of Japan in Brussels (2015) *Love Letter from Brussels: For the First Time Again - No. 17*, Available at: https://www.be.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/lfb_archives.html (Accessed 30 July 2021).

⁶⁸ Embassy of Japan in Brussels (2015) *Love Letter from Brussels: Welcome (YOKOSO) to Japan! (No.19)*, Available at: https://www.be.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/lfb_019.html (Accessed 30 July 2021).

cities, like London, Paris and Amsterdam.

Belgian youth are more connected to Japan through anime and manga. During the 1990s, Pokémon and Dragon Ball Z became a national fad among children. Pokémon cards, games and the anime are still well known today. Currently, more young people have found their way to Japanese manga and anime, as series like Naruto and One Punch Man are popular among teenagers and young adults. To mark this popularity of anime and manga genres, throughout the years, many events took place, such as the Japan Expo, which was held in 2011 in Brussels⁶⁹, or JAPAN CON,⁷⁰ which is a convention on Asian pop culture, featuring manga, anime, cosplay and games, in Brussels. It was held in November 2019 and was again planned in June 2020, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic it had to be cancelled.

If Japan is well known in Belgium for its anime and manga, then Belgium, and in particular Flanders, became famous in Japan thanks to the TV series “Dog of Flanders” (Furandāsu no Inu), which aired from 1975 and was based on a very popular book in Japan, written by an English author, Marie Louise de la Ramée. Dog of Flanders takes place in the district Hoboken, in Antwerp. The story prominently features the Cathedral of Our Lady and a famous painting by Pieter Paul Rubens, which still hangs in the Cathedral. To honor the interest shown by the Japanese in this story, the city of Antwerp built a statue of Nello and Patrasche (the main characters from the “Dog of Flanders”) in front of the Cathedral, with a sign in Japanese.⁷¹

In 2019, about 0.4% of all overnight stays in Belgium were booked by Japanese tourists according to Statbel Tourism.⁷² About 4,074 Belgian tourists visited Japan in

⁶⁹ Brussels Japan Expo (2011) *Actualité: Japan Expo Belgium: le Festival Manga & Anime à Bruxelles (News: Japan Expo Belgium: The Festival of Manga & Anime in Brussels)*, Available at: https://www.japan-expo-paris.com/fr/actu/japan-expo-belgium-le-festival-manga-anime-a-bruxelles_936.htm (Accessed 30 July 2021).

⁷⁰ Japan Con (2018) *Located in the Beautiful Halls of Tour&Taxis in Brussels, Japan Con is Here to Bring All Asian Pop Culture to Brussels!*, Available at: <https://www.japancon.be/> (Accessed 30 July 2021).

⁷¹ Stad Antwerpen (2022) *Nello en Patrasche*, Available at: <https://www.visitantwerpen.be/en/events-exhibitions/winter-in-antwerp-en/nello-patrasche> (Accessed 13 February 2022).

⁷² Statbel (2020) *Toerismecijfers 2019*, Available at: <https://statbel.fgov.be/fr/nouvelles/chiffres-du-tourisme-2019> (Accessed 30 July 2021).

2017, according to provisional data from Japan tourist organization JTB,⁷³ although the Embassy of Japan in Belgium states that, in 2014, about 19,000 Belgians visited Japan.⁷⁴

Conclusions and recommendations

Despite being geographically distant from each other, as well as differing considerably in size and culture, Belgium and Japan have managed to grow strong ties over the last two centuries. The Belgian Royal Family and the Japanese Imperial Family have played a vital part in keeping the relationship growing and stable. From the first Belgium legation to Japan, in 1866, till the 150th Friendship Anniversary, in 2016, Belgium and Japan have had an interesting development of their relationship, with highs and lows. Both countries are democracies and have highly developed economies, facing similar challenges that befall these types of states, such as an aging population and climate change.⁷⁵

One of the most important areas of future potential cooperation is environmental protection. The EU has been especially vocal about climate protection, with its Green Deal, and Japan has also taken this on board, as a pillar in its policy “Society 2.0.” This is an area where Belgium and Japan can work together at the country level.⁷⁶ Environmental protection goes together with the development of smart cities, to optimize urban development, green energy and digitalization. All of these are areas that Belgium and Japan, as highly developed economies, can cooperate on.⁷⁷

Both automotive and petrochemical industries are intensively active in the trade between Japan and Belgium, but they are threatening to become the Achilles heel of this

⁷³ Japan Tourism Marketing Co (2022) *Japan-bound statistics*, Available at: <https://www.tourism.jp/en/tourism-database/stats/inbound/> (Accessed 13 February 2022).

⁷⁴ Embassy of Japan in Brussels (2015) *Love Letter from Brussels: Welcome (YOKOSO) to Japan! (No.19)*, Available at: https://www.be.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/lfb_019.html (Accessed 30 July 2021).

⁷⁵ Author’s interview with International Trade Officer van Flanders Investment &Trade Tokyo (March 2022).

⁷⁶ Author’s interview with Flemish Economic Representative in Japan (March 2022). And Author’s interview with International Trade Officer van Flanders Investment &Trade Tokyo (March 2022).

⁷⁷ Author’s interview with International Trade Officer van Flanders Investment &Trade Tokyo (March 2022).

partnership, due to climate change. The automotive sector has been adjusting and developing hybrid and electric vehicles to respond to the environmental measures. However, the petrochemical industry is still behind in finding greener alternatives for its products.⁷⁸

One more specific area in which cooperation is recommended is language in public procurement bids. This hangs together with the challenges of an aging population, since fewer young workers means less tax income for the government. Governments will thus have to make better and more efficient choices with their decreasing budget and optimizing competition in public procurement is one way to achieve that.⁷⁹ The EPA allows European companies to bid on Japanese proposals of public procurement, but the Japanese proposals contain difficult processes, only available in Japanese. Furthermore, some of these projects require a company with an office in Japan, making it difficult especially for small and medium-sized enterprises to make use of this opportunity.

Today, more and more areas of external action are governed by the EU, putting the member states slightly more in the background when it comes to negotiating bilateral agreements regarding economy and politics. However, Belgium and Japan can still further develop other areas, such as the cultural and academic fields. As globalization is increasing, having experience studying abroad has increasingly become a requirement for many hiring managers. It would therefore be advisable for more Belgian and Japanese universities to create exchange or double degree agreements for their students. Another area where improvement is possible is the tax system. Belgian people living in Japan and vice versa could benefit from clearer rules on when and on what they are taxable, in which country. Further reduction of double taxation and corporate tax could improve both private and corporate spending between Belgium and Japan.

Overall, Belgium and Japan are already working well together and would benefit from closer cooperation on shared issues faced by both, like an aging society and climate change. Luckily, there are many paths open toward cooperation, such as

⁷⁸ Author's interview with Flemish Economic Representative in Japan (March 2022).

⁷⁹ Author's interview with Flemish Economic Representative in Japan (March 2022).

academic and research institutions, industry and even the royal and imperial families' input.

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Bulgaria toward Japan: From incidental enemy to a role model

By Evgeniy KANDILAROV*

Overview

Relations between Bulgaria and Japan have a history of more than a century that can be traced back to the late 19th and early 20th century. It took years before the efforts and dialogue between diplomats of both countries resulted in the establishment of diplomatic relations, in the late 1930s. From then on, relations between Bulgaria and Japan passed through the trials and tribulations of the dynamically changing geopolitical realities. At first allies and then enemies during the Second World War, Bulgaria and Japan broke diplomatic relations at the end of the war, when Bulgaria left the Tripartite Pact and joined the Allied forces. After fifteen years of isolation, on different sides of “the Iron Curtain,” diplomatic relations were reestablished in 1959. Over the next three decades, despite their different socio-political systems, relations between Bulgaria and Japan developed rapidly. With its miraculous postwar recovery, dynamic economic and technological progress and respect for cultural traditions, Japan became a model-example for Bulgaria and, despite the ideological differences, the two countries carried out active friendly exchanges and mutually beneficial cooperation.

After 1989, during Bulgaria’s difficult transition period toward democracy and market economy, Japan became one of the biggest donors of grants and a top net creditor of Bulgaria. Today, bilateral relations are taking on new broader dimensions and strategic importance, in the context of Bulgaria’s membership in Euro-Atlantic structures and Japan’s place and role as a partner of European Union and NATO member states. Based on traditional friendship, mutual trust and understanding built up

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over the course of decades, relations between the two countries have come to epitomize a level-playing partnership and shared common principles and values.

History of relations

The first contacts between Bulgarians and Japanese can be traced back to the second half of the 19th century.¹ Japan's interest in Bulgaria, between the mid 19th century and the end of the First World War, was driven mainly by the ambition of Japan to learn more and follow first-hand the developments of the so-called "Eastern Question," where the interests of the Great Powers clashed.²

In May 1909, at the initiative of the Ambassador of Japan to Austria-Hungary, Yasuya Uchida, congratulations were conveyed to Bulgaria, on the occasion of the recognition of its independence (proclaimed in September 1908) by the Great Powers.³ This year thus marked the beginning of the official contacts between the two countries, as Japan recognized Bulgaria's independence.

Upon the initiative of the Japanese side, on 1 November 1927, by an exchange of notes, Bulgaria and Japan signed a Trade Agreement with the mutual granting of a Most Favored Nation Status.⁴ This first ever agreement between the governments of the two countries created the prerequisites for further developing their economic relations.

But the negotiations for the establishment of diplomatic relations between

¹ Evgeniy Kandilarov (2021) "Bulgarians are the Japanese on the Balkans: Bulgarians Through the Lens of Japanese in Three Different Historical Epochs" in Evgeniy Kandilarov and Martin Dimitrov (eds.), *Japan and The European Southeast. Over a Hundred Years of Political, Economic, Cultural and Academic Interactions*, Sofia: St. Kliment Ohridski University Press, pp. 14-16.

² This conclusion is based on a comprehensive documentary study of Bulgarian and Japanese archival sources related to the relations between Bulgaria and Japan since the second half of 19th century until the end of the Second World War. These sources have been used for the publication of the most detailed study of the relations between Bulgaria and Japan during the 20th and 21st centuries: Vera Stefanova and Evgeniy Kandilarov (2019) *България и Япония. Политика, дипломация, личности и събития (Bulgaria and Japan. Politics, Diplomacy, People and Events)*, Sofia: East-West Publishing House.

³ Japan Center for Asian Historical Records (JACAR) (1908) "Full Set of Documents on the Expression by the Imperial Government in Celebration of the Independence of Bulgaria," *Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, Tokyo, Ref.B03041312900, pp. 1-18.

⁴ Central State Archive of the Republic of Bulgaria (CSARB) (1927) *Trade Agreement Between the Governments of Bulgaria and Japan to Reciprocate the Most-Favored-Nation Clause*, Fund 176K, Inventory 10, archival unit 1208, pp. 1-3. Japan Center for Asian Historical Records (JACAR) (1927) "Documents Relating to Amity and Commerce Treaty Between Japan and Bulgaria," *Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, Tokyo, Ref.B04013579100, pp. 1-3.

Bulgaria and Japan took nearly ten years.⁵ On 12 October 1939, Bulgaria and Japan finally entered into direct diplomatic relations.⁶ Soon after that, on 1 March 1941, Bulgaria joined the Tripartite Pact. Thus, Bulgaria and Japan became military and political allies, which stepped up their overall relations.

The first Bulgarian minister plenipotentiary accredited to Japan arrived, in Tokyo, in August 1942. Important steps in bilateral relations were the Agreement for Friendship and Cultural Cooperation between Bulgaria and Japan, signed on 11 February 1943, and the founding of the Japan-Bulgaria Friendship Society, in Tokyo, which had among its members outstanding political figures and businessmen.⁷

Despite this, the diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and Japan were severed on 6 November 1944,⁸ upon the insistence of the Allies, with whom Bulgaria had signed an armistice, on 28 October 1944. This marked the end of the first period of Bulgarian-Japanese diplomatic relations, which were suspended due to historical vicissitudes.⁹

Bulgaria and Japan later proceeded to reestablish their diplomatic relations, as part of the process of normalization of Japan's relations with the Soviet Union in 1956, and with the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe soon after that. On 12 September 1959, the ambassadors of the two countries to Warsaw exchanged notes and signed a joint communiqué on the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between

⁵ Central State Archive of the Republic of Bulgaria (CSARB) (1938) Fund 176K, Inventory 32, archival unit 18, p. 1.

⁶ Central State Archive of the Republic of Bulgaria (CSARB) (1939) *Documents Related to the Accreditation of the First Diplomatic Representative of Japan in Bulgaria*, Fund 176K, Inventory 14, archival unit 1253, p. 11.

⁷ Japan Center for Asian Historical Records (JACAR) (1943) "Original Script Signed by the Emperor, 1943, Treaty No. 6, Treaty between Japan and Bulgaria regarding Friendship and Cultural Cooperation," *National Archives of Japan*, Tokyo, Ref.A03022888000, pp. 1-3. Japan Center for Asian Historical Records (JACAR) (1943) "Conclusion of Treaty of Japan and Bulgaria on Amicable and Cultural Cooperation," *National Archives of Japan*, Tokyo, Ref.A03033265000, pp. 1-6.

⁸ Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Bulgaria (AMFARB) (1944) *Documents Related to the Breaking of Diplomatic Relations Between Bulgaria and Japan*, Inventory 1, archival unit 138, pp. 46-48.

⁹ A detailed study of the relations between Bulgaria and Japan during the 20th and 21st centuries has been made in: Vera Stefanova and Evgeniy Kandilarov (2019) *България и Япония. Политика, дипломация, личности и събития (Bulgaria and Japan. Politics, Diplomacy, People and Events)*, Sofia: East-West Publishing House.

Bulgaria and Japan.¹⁰ The diplomatic representatives of the two countries were to have the rank of minister plenipotentiary. Bulgaria established its legation in Tokyo in 1960.¹¹ In 1964, the diplomatic representations of the two states were promoted to the rank of embassies and, in 1966, Japan opened its embassy in Sofia.¹²

Relations between Bulgaria and Japan in the period from the early 1960s through the 1980s centered on mutual economic interests. Bulgaria was looking for opportunities to gain access to licenses, technologies and production know-how, with the aim of modernizing its economy – above all, such high-tech branches as electronics and machine engineering.¹³ Cultural exchanges between Bulgaria and Japan also became particularly active as of the end of the 1960s, through the period till the late 1980s.¹⁴

A peak in bilateral relations was marked in the late 1970s, with the exchange, for the first time in history, of official state visits – of the President of the State Council of the People's Republic of Bulgaria Todor Zhivkov to Japan, in 1978, and of Crown Prince Akihito and Crown Princess Michiko to Bulgaria, in 1979. The two visits had a strong impact on strengthening the friendly ties between the two nations and opened up

¹⁰ Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Bulgaria (AMFARB) (1959) *Agreement on the Restoration of Diplomatic Relations Between Bulgaria and Japan*, Inventory 16 p, archival unit 1077, pp. 20–52.

¹¹ Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Bulgaria (AMFARB) (1959) *Agreement on the Restoration of Diplomatic Relations Between Bulgaria and Japan*, Inventory 16 p, archival unit 1077, pp. 20–52.

¹² Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Bulgaria (AMFARB) (1964) *Note verbale of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan on the Elevation of the Diplomatic Representations of the Two Countries in Tokyo and Sofia to the Rank of Embassies*, Inventory 20 a, archival unit 2229, p. 3 and archival unit 2230, pp. 1-7.

¹³ Thanks to its cooperation with Japan in the field of electronic industry, Bulgaria has succeeded in gaining a specialization within the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance in the field of electronic computers and, subsequently, the country became one of the largest manufacturers in this area of production.

¹⁴ The most detailed study of the full scale of political, economic and cultural relations between Bulgaria and Japan during the Cold War period is done in: Evgeniy Kandilarov (2009) *България и Япония. От Студената война към XXI век (Bulgaria and Japan. From The Cold War To the XXI Century)*, Sofia: Damyan Yakov Publishing House.

vistas for more intensive cooperation and exchanges.¹⁵

National parliaments also acted as the driving forces of political contacts between the two countries. A Group for friendship with Japan was formed in the Bulgarian National Assembly in 1972 and, reciprocally, Associations for friendship with Bulgaria in the two Houses of the Parliament of Japan in 1973.¹⁶

When it comes to visits, the first visit by a Japanese foreign minister in Bulgaria was that of Shintaro Abe, former Prime Minister Shinzō Abe's father, in August 1983.¹⁷ In May 1985, President of the State Council Todor Zhivkov visited Japan for the third time, after his second visit, in 1978.

In June 1987, a visit to Bulgaria was paid by a member of the imperial family, Prince Tomohiko Mikasa, younger brother of Emperor Hirohito, and his wife Princess Yoriko. Prince Mikasa combined his official visit with his professional interests in archaeology, as honorary patron of the joint Bulgarian-Japanese archaeological research.¹⁸

But since 1989, political relations between Bulgaria and Japan entered a new stage in their development. The first democratically elected president of Bulgaria, Zhelyu Zhelev, visited Japan, in November 1990, to attend the enthronement ceremony of Emperor Akihito.¹⁹ After that, the high-level dialogue became particularly active in the second part of the 1990s. The state visit to Japan of President Petar Stoyanov, in

¹⁵ Central State Archive of the Republic of Bulgaria (CSARB) (1978) *Documents Related to the Official Visit of the Chairman of the State Council of Bulgaria Todor Zhivkov to Japan (March 13–18, 1978)*, Fund 1-B, Inventory 66, archival unit 1176, p. 25. Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Bulgaria (AMFARB) (1979) *Documents Related to the Official visit of Crown Prince Akihito and Princess Michiko to Bulgaria (10–13 October 1979)*, Inventory 35, archival unit 3707, pp. 13–15.

¹⁶ Vera Stefanova and Evgeniy Kandilarov (2019) *България и Япония. Политика, дипломация, личности и събития (Bulgaria and Japan. Politics, Diplomacy, People and Events)*, Sofia: East-West Publishing House, pp. 300-302.

¹⁷ Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Bulgaria (AMFARB) (1983) *Documents Related to the Official Visit to Bulgaria of the Foreign Minister of Japan Shintaro Abe (August 1983)*, Inventory. 41, archival unit 5456, p. 1.

¹⁸ Vera Stefanova and Evgeniy Kandilarov (2019) *България и Япония. Политика, дипломация, личности и събития (Bulgaria and Japan. Politics, Diplomacy, People and Events)*, Sofia: East-West Publishing House, pp. 322-328.

¹⁹ *Ibidem.* p. 414.

November 1997, gave a strong impetus to bilateral relations.²⁰

During the 1990s, after the end of the Cold War, for a long time, relations between the two countries consisted largely of Japanese disbursements of Official Development Assistance (ODA). The 1990s was a period of steady decline and stagnation in the bilateral relationship.

After Bulgaria joined the EU in January 2007, Bulgaria became part of the EU's common foreign policy area and, from that point onward, Bulgarian-Japanese relations became largely subject to the general trends in EU-Japan relations.

Nowadays, relations between Bulgaria and Japan are stable, but in the economic and political area they remain very much below their optimal potential. The reasons for this can be found both in the lack of political and economic stability in Bulgaria, as well as in the continuing economic stagnation of Japan, over the last 30 years.

Political and strategic relations

The early years of the 21st century saw a dynamic rise in bilateral exchanges, helped by many official visits to Japan, like the one paid by the Bulgarian Foreign Minister Solomon Passy, in March 2003. On this occasion, Minister Passy and Japan's Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi signed a "Joint Statement of New Partnership between the Republic of Bulgaria and Japan," a document which outlined a long-term perspective for bilateral relations in the new realities of the 21st century and in view of Bulgaria's forthcoming accession to NATO and the European Union.²¹

Next year, in December 2004, Bulgaria's Prime Minister Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha paid an official visit to Japan, at the invitation of Prime Minister Junichirō Koizumi. The two prime ministers signed a "Joint Declaration of Partnership between the Republic of Bulgaria and Japan," on 15 December 2004.²²

²⁰ Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Bulgaria (AMFARB) (1997) *Documents Related to the State Visit of the President of the Republic of Bulgaria Petar Stoyanov to Japan (November 16-20, 1997)*, Inventory 54-8, archival unit 217, p. 1.

²¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2003) *Joint Announcement on New Partnership between Japan and the Republic of Bulgaria*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/bulgaria/joint0303.html> (Accessed 30 April 2022).

²² Prime Minister of Japan (2004) *Joint Statement on Partnership between Japan and the Republic of Bulgaria*, Available at: https://japan.kantei.go.jp/koizumispeech/2004/12/15seimei_e.html (Accessed 30 April 2022).

The visit underscored Japan's status as an important strategic partner of Bulgaria, with whom relations would follow a line of enhancing political dialogue, intensifying economic and financial cooperation and enriching cultural and people-to-people exchanges. Japan, on the other hand, saw Bulgaria as a state with an already stabilized democratic rule and a well-functioning market economy, whose forthcoming membership of the European Union promised wider vistas for bilateral relations, also within the context of Japan-EU relations.²³

The official visit to Bulgaria of Foreign Minister Tarō Asō,²⁴ in January 2007, was a political sign of high-level recognition of Bulgaria's new status as an EU member and Japan's commitment to upgrading bilateral relations to a strategic partnership.²⁵ The next step in the political dialogue that year was the visit to Japan of Bulgaria's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivailo Kalfin, in November.²⁶

In 2009, Bulgaria and Japan marked the 50th anniversary of the reestablishment of diplomatic relations, an occasion marked by an exchange of high-level official visits: of Bulgaria's President Georgi Parvanov to Japan, in January 2009, and of Prince Akishino, the Emperor's younger son, and his wife Princess Kiko, to Bulgaria, in May.²⁷

The high-level dialogue aimed at outlining new perspectives in the political and economic relations continued with the visit to Japan of Prime Minister Boyko Borissov, in January 2011.²⁸

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ Embassy of Japan in Bulgaria (2007) *Официално посещение на японския министър на външните работи Таро Асо в България (Official Visit of the Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Tarō Asō to Bulgaria)*, Available at: https://www.bg.emb-japan.go.jp/bg/news/news_2006_2009/2007/2007_01_15.html (Accessed 30 April 2022).

²⁵ Despite the expressed intention at the moment, the two countries have not signed a strategic partnership agreement and no negotiations have been held in this direction.

²⁶ Evgeniy Kandilarov (2009) *България и Япония. От Студената война към XXI век (Bulgaria and Japan. From The Cold War to the XXI Century)*, Sofia: Damyan Yakov Publishing House, pp. 339-340.

²⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2020) *Japan-Bulgaria Relations (Basic Data)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/bulgaria/data.html> (Accessed 30 April 2022).

²⁸ Embassy of Japan in Bulgaria (2011) *Срещна на японския премиер Наото Кан и българския му колега Бойко Борисов в Токио (Meeting of Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan and his Bulgarian Colleague Boyko Borisov in Tokyo)*, Available at: https://www.bg.emb-japan.go.jp/bg/news/news_2011/a-2011_01_24_Kan_Borissov.html (Accessed 30 April 2022).

Today, the relations between Bulgaria and Japan are determined by the overall framework of EU-Japan relations, guided by the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement and Strategic Partnership Agreement, signed in Tokyo, in July 2018.²⁹

The year 2018 was also emblematic for Bulgaria-Japan relations, owing to the first ever visit of a Japanese prime minister to Bulgaria. The January visit of Prime Minister Shinzō Abe to Sofia coincided with Bulgaria's rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Prime Minister Abe's talks in Sofia resulted in the announcement of the Western Balkans Cooperation Initiative and the establishment of a Japan Business Forum in Bulgaria.³⁰

The next year, the triple anniversary of Bulgaria-Japan relations was marked with the official visit to Japan, in March, of Foreign Minister Ekaterina Zaharieva, to attend the Fifth World Assembly for Women, in Tokyo, reciprocated by the official visit to Sofia of Foreign Minister Tarō Kōno, in August. The focus of attention of the two ministers³¹ during both visits was on the bilateral political and economic relations and Japan-EU relations, as well as on topical international issues, among them the Western Balkans Cooperation Initiative.³²

Also in 2019, Bulgarian President Rumen Radev was among the official guests invited to attend the October enthronement of Emperor Naruhito. The Bulgarian head of state held talks in Tokyo with Prime Minister Shinzō Abe and also attended a number of

²⁹ European Commission (n.d.) *EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement*, Disponibil la: <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/in-focus/eu-japan-economic-partnership-agreement/> (Accessed 30 April 2022). Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2022) *Japan-EU Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA)*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/ep/page22e_000707.html (Accessed 30 April 2022).

³⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019) *Meeting between Prime Minister Abe and President of the Republic of Bulgaria Radev*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/c_see/bg/page4e_001146.html (Accessed 30 April 2022). President of the Republic of Bulgaria (2019) *Rumen Radev at a Meeting with Shinzo Abe: Bulgaria is Open for a much more Active Economic and Investment Partnership with Japan*, Available at: <https://www.president.bg/news5205/rumen-radev-at-a-meeting-with-shinzo-abe-bulgaria-is-open-for-a-much-more-active-economic-and-investment-partnership-with-japan.html&lang=en> (Accessed 30 April 2022). Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Western Balkans Cooperation Initiative*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/c_see/page22e_000937.html (Accessed 30 April 2022).

³¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019) *Japan-Bulgaria Foreign Ministers' Meeting*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/c_see/bg/page1e_000278.html (Accessed 30 April 2022).

³² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019) *Japan-Bulgaria-Western Balkans Workshop on Flood Risk Management*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/c_see/bg/page4e_000985.html (Accessed 30 April 2022).

bilateral meetings.³³

Following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, high-level political visits from both sides stopped. However, the political dialogue between Bulgaria and Japan continues to be active, albeit through the diplomatic representatives of the respective countries.

In recent years, there has been another important factor in Bulgarian-Japanese relations – the honorary consular institution. Leading representatives of the Japanese business undertook a mission of goodwill in their capacity as honorary consuls of Bulgaria to various parts of Japan. Nowadays, Bulgaria has three honorary consuls in Japan: one based in Yokohama, with a consular district of western Honshu, one covering the southern part of Japan, with headquarters in Fukuoka, and another one with headquarters in Izumiōtsu, with a consular district covering Osaka, Kyoto and other prefectures in central Japan.

Economic and commercial relations

During Bulgaria's transition to democracy and market economy in the 1990s, Japan was not among Bulgaria's main trading partners. But Bulgaria and Japan still continued to maintain and develop active economic relations.

During the 1989-2007 period, Japan was the biggest individual provider of grants and net credits to Bulgaria.³⁴ The total sum of low-interest yen loans, grants, technical cooperation and other forms of Official Development Assistance (ODA)³⁵, including export credits from Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), amounted to approximately 800 million euros.³⁶ Large-scale projects for upgrading and

³³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019) *Meeting between Prime Minister Abe and President of the Republic of Bulgaria Radev*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/c_see/bg/page4e_001146.html (Accessed 30 April 2022).

³⁴ Embassy of Japan in Bulgaria (2019) *Икономическо сътрудничество на Япония в България (Economic cooperation of Japan in Bulgaria)*, Available at: https://www.bg.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_bg/politika-oda1.html (Accessed 30 April 2022).

³⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2008) *Country Assistance Evaluation of Romania and Bulgaria*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/evaluation/FY2008/text-pdf/romania-bulgaria.pdf> (Accessed 30 April 2022).

³⁶ Embassy of Japan in Bulgaria (2019) *Икономическа помощ (Economic aid)*, Available at: https://www.bg.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_bg/politika-oda2.html (Accessed 30 April 2022).

renovating the economic and social infrastructure of Bulgaria were implemented with financial aid from Japan. Among them were the Port of Burgas expansion project, completed in 2005, and the extension of the Sofia metro project, completed in 2009.³⁷

The Government of Japan extended 16 million euros worth of grants to Bulgaria for the implementation of economic and social projects and 9.62 million euros for projects in the fields of culture, education, sports and the media, at both national and grass-roots level.³⁸

Technical assistance from Japan, worth approximately 80 million euros, was also implemented with the intermediation of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and it covered: training of Bulgarian specialists in Japan, providing Japanese experts and volunteers to Bulgaria, donation of equipment, technical assistance for the implementation of various projects, etc.³⁹

Despite these forms of economic cooperation, since the beginning of the 1990s, there has been a decrease in trade turnover, mainly due to the sharp decline in imports from Japan, which declined from 161 million dollars in 1989 to 16 million dollars in 1995, later partially recovering to 88 million dollars in 2002. Annual turnover fluctuated between 70 and 90 million dollars at the end of the millennium.⁴⁰ Between 2000-2006, bilateral trade was constantly growing, reaching 334 million dollars in 2006. After 2009, trade fluctuated, remaining at levels above 100 million dollars.⁴¹

Regarding the commodity structure of bilateral trade in the 1990s, there was almost no change in imports from Japan. Throughout the transition period, machinery,

³⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria (n.d.) *Япония (Japan)*, Available at: <https://www.mfa.bg/bg/3223> (Accessed 30 April 2022).

³⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2020) *Japan-Bulgaria Relations (Basic Data)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/bulgaria/data.html> (Accessed 30 April 2022). Embassy of Japan in Bulgaria (2019) *Икономическа помощ (Economic aid)*, Available at: https://www.bg.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_bg/politika-oda2.html (Accessed 30 April 2022).

³⁹ The data on aid from Japan in the form technical cooperation are from the Archive of the Directorate “Asia, Australia and Oceania” of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria.

⁴⁰ The data are from the Archive of the Directorate “Asia, Australia and Oceania” of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as from the Archive of the Directorate “Foreign Economic Cooperation” of the Ministry of Economy of Republic of Bulgaria.

⁴¹ Ministry of Economy and Industry of Bulgaria (n.d.) *Япония (Japan)*, Available at: <https://www.mi.government.bg/bg/themes/yaponiya-193-333.html?p=eyJwYWdlIjoxMH0=> (Accessed 30 April 2022).

equipment and vehicles occupied between 60 and 85% of the imports from Japan.⁴² The structure of Bulgarian exports underwent significantly larger changes. While in the early 1990s, metals (mainly aluminum, brass and other non-ferrous alloys) accounted for more than 50%, they were subsequently replaced by food products (wines, yogurt, some seafood) and some other agricultural goods (live animals, unprocessed tobacco).⁴³ After 1996, Japan became one of the main markets for Bulgarian wines. In just three years, wine exports nearly tripled and, in 1998, accounted for 65% of total exports, amounting to about 21 million dollars.⁴⁴

Statistics show that in recent years, the trade turnover between Bulgaria and Japan has been growing slowly but gradually, almost returning to the values before the Great Recession, reached between 2006-2008.⁴⁵

In 2020, Bulgaria exported 51 million euros to Japan.⁴⁶ The main products that Bulgaria exported to Japan were integrated circuits, trunks and cases, and bird feathers and leather. During the last 24 years, the exports of Bulgaria to Japan have increased at an annualized rate of 5.31%. Nowadays, Japan is Bulgaria's 18th biggest trade partner outside the EU.⁴⁷

Traditionally, the structure of Bulgarian exports to Japan has been dominated by products with a relatively low degree of processing, like essential oils, mollusks and

⁴² This includes: cars, equipment for industrial enterprises, power plants, metalworking machines, electronics (computers, TVs, video devices, etc.), spare parts etc. Ministry of Economy and Industry of Bulgaria (n.d.) *Япония (Japan)*, Available at: <https://www.mi.government.bg/bg/themes/yaponiya-193-333.html?p=eyJwYWdlIjoxMH0=> (Accessed 30 April 2022).

⁴³ Ibidem.

⁴⁴ Evgeniy Kandilarov (2009) *България и Япония. От Студената война към XXI век (Bulgaria and Japan. From The Cold War to the XXI Century)*, Sofia: Damyan Yakov Publishing House, pp. 311-316.

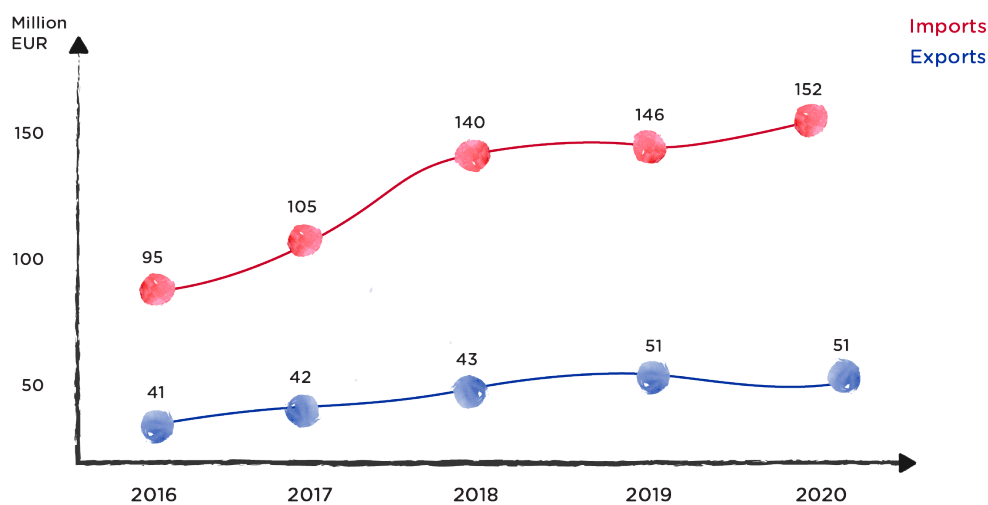
⁴⁵ Bulgarian National Bank (n.d.) *Statistical database*, Available at: <https://bnb.bg/Statistics/StStatisticalBD> (Accessed 1 January 2022).

⁴⁶ Trade Map (n.d.) *Bulgaria-Japan Exports*, Available at: [https://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx?nvpm=1%7c100%7c%7c392%7c%7cTOTAL%7c%7c%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c2%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1](https://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx?nvpm=1%7c100%7c%7c392%7c%7cTOTAL%7c%7c%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c2%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1) (Accessed 30 April 2022).

⁴⁷ Investor (n.d.) *Японско-българска бизнес асоциация ще представлява японския бизнес у нас (A Japanese-Bulgarian Business Association Will Represent Japanese Business in Our Country)*, Available at: <https://www.investor.bg/ikonomika-i-politika/332/a/iaponsko-bylgarska-biznes-asociaciia-shte-predstavliava-iaponskiia-biznes-u-nas-332730/> (Accessed 30 April 2022). Info Business (n.d.) *JEFTA – какво включва споразумението и какво означава то за България (JEFTA - What the Agreement Includes and What it Means for Bulgaria)*, Available at: <https://www.infobusiness.bcci.bg/trade-23-7-18.html> (Accessed 30 April 2022).

crustaceans, wines from fresh grapes.⁴⁸ In the last five years, however, some change has been observed in Bulgarian exports, which are already dominated by products such as integrated circuits and electronic micro-kits, electrical transformers, medical, surgical, dental and veterinary instruments and apparatus and others.⁴⁹ On the other hand, Bulgaria imports mostly passenger cars, electric motors and generators, parts and accessories for vehicles, wires and cables from Japan.⁵⁰

Bulgaria's trade with Japan in million euros



Source: International Trade Center/Trade Map

For the period 1996-2020, a negative inflow of investments from Japan was reported in the amount of 38.6 million euros, which puts the country in last place in terms of the amount of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Bulgaria.⁵¹ In 2020, the stock of Japanese FDI in Bulgaria was 7.9 million euros.⁵² In the 1990s, many Japanese corporations withdrew from the Bulgarian market. Indicative of the attitude of Japanese

⁴⁸ Ministry of Economy and Industry of Bulgaria (n.d.) *Япония (Japan)*, Available at: <https://www.mi.government.bg/bg/themes/yaponiya-193-333.html?p=eyJwYWdlIjoxMH0=> (Accessed 30 April 2022).

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

⁵⁰ Ibidem.

⁵¹ Bulgarian National Bank (n.d.) *FDI Statistics*, Available at: <https://www.bnb.bg/Statistics/StExternalSector/StDirectInvestments/StDIBulgaria/index.htm> (Accessed 14 August 2022).

⁵² Ibidem.

business toward Bulgaria is the closure of the JETRO office in Sofia in 1996.⁵³ Until Bulgaria's accession to the EU, the only Japanese trading company in Bulgaria remained Mitsui Bussan. The reasons for this negative trend could be found mainly in the unstable political and socio-economic situation in Bulgaria during the transition to democracy and market economy.⁵⁴

The amount of Bulgarian investments in Japan is ten times smaller compared with Japanese FDI in Bulgaria – 6.9 million euros for the period 2014-2020.⁵⁵ In this sense, Japan is hardly a key or priority market for Bulgarian investment.

The situation of Japanese investments in Bulgaria slowly improved in the middle of the first decade of the 21st century. In 2006, the upward trend in Japanese investment was expressed in the first large investment projects of Japanese companies: the Tokuda Hospital-Sofia, built by Tokushukai Medical Corporation, with a 75 million dollars investment (the biggest investment in the Bulgarian healthcare system during the last 30 years), and the Kaliakra Wind Power Plant, a joint project of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries and Bulgarian company INOS-1, valued at 92 million dollars.⁵⁶

The third largest Japanese investment in Bulgaria during this period was that of Yazaki Corporation, which in 2007 started the construction of a plant for automotive electrical equipment, in the industrial zone of Yambol. The investment reached 31.6 million euros and created 2,900 jobs by June 2009.⁵⁷ Over the next ten years, Yazaki Corporation extended its investment, building two more plants in Sliven and

⁵³ Evgeniy Kandilarov (2009) *България и Япония. От Студената война към XXI век (Bulgaria and Japan. From The Cold War to the XXI Century)*, Sofia: Damyan Yakov Publishing House, p. 316.

⁵⁴ Yasukuni Ebata (2021) "To the Strategic Partnership and beyond" in Evgeniy Kandilarov and Martin Dimitrov (eds.), *Japan and The European Southeast. Over a Hundred Years of Political, Economic, Cultural and Academic Interactions*, Sofia: St. Kliment Ohridski University Press, p. 180.

⁵⁵ Bulgarian National Bank (n.d.) *Преки инвестиции на България в чужбина (ППБ) (Bulgaria's direct investments abroad)*, Available at: <https://www.bnb.bg/Statistics/StExternalSector/StDirectInvestments/StDIAbroad/index.htm> (Accessed 30 April 2022).

⁵⁶ Investor (n.d.) „Токуда Болница София” получи сертификат за инвеститор първи клас, 18.05.2006 г. (“Tokuda Hospital Sofia” Received a First-Class Investor Certificate 18.05.2006 г.), Available at: <https://www.investor.bg/a/107-imenata-na-biznesa/37336-tokuda-bolnitsa-sofiya-poluchi-sertifikat-za-investitor-parvi-klas> (Accessed 14 August 2022). Kaliakra Wind Power (n.d.) *About the Company*, Available at: <https://www.kwp.bg/en/about-kwp/about-the-company/> (Accessed 30 April 2022).

⁵⁷ Yazaki (n.d.) *About Us*, Available at: <https://www.yazaki-europe.com/about-us/locations/bulgaria> (Accessed 30 April 2022).

Dimitrovgrad, which opened in 2012 and 2017, respectively.⁵⁸ The business activity of the company in Bulgaria is related to production of wire harnesses for the automotive industry, with main clients such as Renault, Ford and Daimler.⁵⁹ With its three plants, Yazaki Bulgaria is one of the biggest employers in Bulgaria, with around 5,500 employees, as of 2017.⁶⁰

Sumitomo Corporation also has made investments in the production of automotive components since 2006, founding its local company SE Bordnetze-Bulgaria EOOD with two plants in Karnobat and Mezdra. Nowadays the company has 2,473 employees in Bulgaria and generates 105.25 million dollars in sales.⁶¹ It sells most of its production to companies within the Volkswagen group: Volkswagen, Audi, Porsche and Skoda.⁶²

In 2017, Sumitomo Corporation Group also bought Moto Pfohe, the official representative of Ford, Volvo, Jaguar and Land Rover in Bulgaria, which has been the most successful automobile company in the country and a constant leader in the car industry for the last 30 years. With the acquisition by Sumitomo Corporation Group, Moto Pfohe became part of one of the most powerful integrated trade and investment corporations worldwide.⁶³

Thus, in the last 10 years, there has been a gradual increase of Japanese companies, starting business in Bulgaria in certain sectors, where Bulgaria has some relative and absolute advantages and can be incorporated in the value creating chain of the Japanese companies looking for new opportunities to expand their business in the EU and the Balkans or to secure a production-supply base and/or an R&D center for their international activities.

⁵⁸ Ibidem.

⁵⁹ Ibidem.

⁶⁰ Ibidem.

⁶¹ Sumitomo Electric Bordnetze (n.d.) *41 Locations in 14 Countries*, Available at <https://www.sebn.bg/index.php/en/> (Accessed 14 August 2022)

⁶² Ibidem.

⁶³ Motopfohe (2017) *Групата Мото-Пфохе с нов собственик, 29 Ноември 2017 (The Moto-Pfohe Group With A New Owner 29 November 2017)*, Available at: <https://www.motopfohe.bg/bg/about-us/news/view/grupata-moto-pfohe-s-nov-sobstvenik> (Accessed 30 April 2022).

Some of the largest investment projects of Japanese companies implemented in Bulgaria recently are Pentax Medical Bulgaria, AN Aqua Network, Japan Agri Products Europe (JAPE) and DTI Sofia.

In 2017, SEGA Europe Ltd. and Creative Assembly have released details of the studio's expansion, with the addition of a sixty-developer strong Bulgaria-based development team, following the acquisition of Crytek Black Sea. The facility is newly-named as Creative Assembly Sofia.⁶⁴ In 2019, SEGA and Creative Assembly have opened a joint new state-of-the-art studio in Bulgaria designed to promote creativity and collaboration in the gaming industry.⁶⁵

Japanese companies are represented in Bulgaria in various economic sectors, such as automotive, information technology, pharmaceuticals, food, tobacco products, among many other areas. The strong presence of leading Japanese corporations has created a need for Japanese business in Bulgaria to have a platform for information exchange and sharing of experience, as well as for joint representation before government, non-governmental and business organizations.

In 2020, the Japan-Bulgaria Business Association (JBBA) was incorporated and officially registered.⁶⁶ Its aim is to support and promote existing Japanese businesses in Bulgaria, to assist and provide information on the investment climate and legislation, as well as to provide practical support for operational issues to potential Japanese investors in the country. Founding members of the Association are Japan Tobacco International Bulgaria, Takeda Bulgaria, Astellas Pharma, SEGA Black Sea and Zen-noh Foods. JBBA is strongly supported by the Embassy of Japan in Bulgaria, which is closely involved in all activities of the Association.⁶⁷

Finally, one of the most emblematic examples of successful economic

⁶⁴ Creative Assembly Sofia (2017) *Welcome to Creative Assembly Sofia, May 29 2017*, Available at: <https://www.creative-assembly.com/blog/welcome-creative-assembly-sofia> (Accessed 14 August 2022).

⁶⁵ Creative Assembly Sofia (2019) *Creative Assembly and Sega Open New State-Of-The-Art Studio In Bulgaria, April 10 2019*, Available at: <https://www.creative-assembly.com/blog/creative-assembly-and-sega-open-new-state-art-studio-bulgaria> (Accessed 14 August 2022).

⁶⁶ Japan-Bulgaria Business Association (2020) *Japan-Bulgaria Business Association (JBBA) was incorporated and officially registered on November 23, 2020*, Available at: <https://jbba.bg/japan-bulgaria-business-association-jbba-was-incorporated-and-officially-registered-on-november-23-2020/> (Accessed 30 April 2022).

⁶⁷ Ibidem.

cooperation between Bulgaria and Japan is the long-term partnership with one of the largest Japanese producers and distributors of dairy products, Meiji Dairies Corporation. The cooperation between Meiji Co. and LB Bulgaricum already has a 50 years history, and Meiji Bulgaria Yogurt is one of the most popular brands in the food industry in Japan.⁶⁸ Three license agreements have been concluded and successfully implemented between LB Bulgaricum and Meiji Co. so far, and a fourth is currently in force.⁶⁹ The production and sales of yogurt with the name “Bulgaria” started in 1973, after the Bulgarian government allowed, in 1972, the corporation “Meiji Dairies” to sell a product called “Bulgarian yogurt Meiji” and a license agreement was concluded between the Japanese company and a Bulgarian state enterprise, the predecessor of LB Bulgaricum. Today, the product lineup of Meiji Bulgaria Yogurt brand contains a variety of more than 26 items and the company is expanding the brand in the promising Asian markets of China, Thailand, Singapore and the ASEAN countries. Meiji Corporation occupies a special place in the overall picture of Bulgarian-Japanese relations, not only because it has been the only licensed producer of Bulgarian yogurt in Japan for the last 50 years but also because of its ongoing activities to promote Bulgaria and increase its popularity, which is an integral part of the company’s corporate strategy.⁷⁰

The most recent developments in Bulgaria-Japan socio-economic relations are related to the cooperation between both sides in the field of Official Development Assistance (ODA) for the countries of the Western Balkans, taking into account the focus of Bulgarian foreign policy on the region and the Japanese Initiative for Cooperation with the Western Balkans. Already three projects in this area have been successfully implemented: a joint seminar on flood risk management in the Western Balkans (February 2019, Sofia), a training course for managers of small and medium

⁶⁸ Meiji (n.d.) Yogurt, Available at: <https://www.meiji.com/global/products/lineup/yogurt/> (Accessed 30 April 2022).

⁶⁹ LB Bulgaricum (n.d.) *Licensing*, Available at: <https://lbulgaricum.bg/en/main-activities/licensing/> (Accessed 30 April 2022). Meiji Bulgaria Yogurt Club (n.d.) *Home Page*, Available at: <https://www.meijibulgariayogurt.com/en/about/yogurtbook.html> (Accessed 30 April 2022).

⁷⁰ A detailed study of the relations between Bulgaria and Meiji Corporation can be read in: Nikolay Padarev (2021) “The Perspectives of the Japanese Bulgarian Economic Relations, in the Context of Meiji Bulgaria Yogurt Brand Success Story” in Evgeniy Kandilarov and Martin Dimitrov (eds.), *Japan and The European Southeast. Over a Hundred Years of Political, Economic, Cultural and Academic Interactions*, Sofia: St. Kliment Ohridski University Press, pp. 164-177.

enterprises at the University of Skopje (2020), as well as a Japan-Bulgaria-Western Balkans Workshop on Seismic Risk Challenges (November 2021, Sofia Veliko Tarnovo).⁷¹

Cultural and people-to-people relations and perceptions of Japan

Cultural exchanges between Bulgaria and Japan have become particularly active since the end of the 1960s, through the period till the late 1980s. In June 1975, in Tokyo, foreign ministers Petar Mladenov and Kiichi Miyazawa exchanged notes regulating cultural, scientific and educational relations between the two countries, a document which was equivalent to intergovernmental agreement and which is still valid.

The area of culture, education, science and sports in the period of Bulgaria's transition to democracy and market economy can be defined as the brightest part of Bulgarian-Japanese relations. The removal of ideological barriers and censorship after the end of the Cold War created a fertile ground for reciprocal cultural exchange.

Since the 1990s, intercultural relations between Bulgaria and Japan have become more active at both government and private-sector levels. Besides inviting students, journalists, teachers, diplomats and others to Japan, Japan has been organizing the "Days of Japanese Culture" in Bulgaria every year since 1990, which include events such as concerts, exhibitions and demonstrations of Japanese traditional and modern art. The public interest in Japanese cultural events, which are held not only in Sofia but also in different cities of the country, is huge. The Days of Japanese Culture are widely covered in the Bulgarian media. The general perception of Japan and Japanese culture is completely positive in the Bulgarian society.

A large variety of Bulgarian cultural events has also been held in Japan every year since the early 1990s. Bulgarian exhibitions, such as Thracian golden treasures, medieval manuscripts, national costumes, contemporary Bulgarian graphic design, works by famous Bulgarian artists and sculptors, are gaining popularity. Bulgaria has also organized the "Bulgarian Cultural Weeks" in Tokyo in 1994 and 1997. The

⁷¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria (n.d.) *Япония (Japan)*, Available at: <https://www.mfa.bg/bg/3223> (Accessed 30 April 2022). Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (n.d.) *Western Balkans Cooperation Initiative*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/c_see/page24e_000328.html (Accessed 14 August 2022).

Children's Choir of the Bulgarian National Radio and the Sofia National Opera have often participated in concerts in Japan.⁷²

Nowadays, the Japanese language is taught at several schools, universities and extra-curricular courses in Bulgaria and the interest in it is significant. The indisputable leader in all aspects of Japanology is the Department of Japanese Studies at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski." In recognition of the overall achievements in the teaching and mastering of the Japanese language in Bulgaria, in 2014, the minister of foreign affairs of Japan awarded a Commendation to the Japanese Studies program of Sofia University.⁷³ Bulgaria was also the first country in Europe to introduce Japanese language teaching in the curricula of secondary schools.⁷⁴ The flourishing of Japanese studies in Bulgaria was to a large extent thanks to the assistance provided by Japan in various forms: providing native speakers to teach, textbooks and other teaching aids to schools and universities, granting scholarships to Bulgarian students by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, as well as by the Japan Foundation, to study or specialize in Japan.⁷⁵ Bulgarian students have been also offered the opportunity to study in Japan under the bilateral agreements of the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science and Sofia University with various Japanese universities like Tokai University, Soka University, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies and others.

⁷² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2020) *Japan-Bulgaria Relations (Basic Data)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/bulgaria/data.html> (Accessed 30 April 2022).

⁷³ For more details related to all achievements of Japanese studies at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski," see the website of the *Japanese Studies Department*, available at: <https://japanology.bg/en/home/> (Accessed 14 August 2022).

⁷⁴ Vera Stefanova and Evgeniy Kandilarov (2019) *България и Япония. Политика, дипломация, личности и събития (Bulgaria and Japan. Politics, Diplomacy, People and Events)*, Sofia: East-West Publishing House, pp. 446-449.

⁷⁵ Over the last 21 years, the Bulgarian International Foundation "Cyril and Methodius" has worked in partnership with the Ministry of Education in Japan and the Japan Foundation in carrying out a very intensive academic exchange, as well as a program which aims to present Japanese culture in Bulgaria. The Japanese Embassy in Sofia and the Cyril and Methodius Foundation jointly select the candidates for the Japanese state Monbusho scholarships for scientific work in Japanese universities and research centers in all scientific fields, and also for Bachelor's degrees at Japanese universities. Up to now, more than 350 Bulgarians have been awarded such scholarships. The Japanese state has invested over 5 million euros for this purpose. In partnership with the Japanese Embassy in Bulgaria, the Cyril and Methodius Foundation has also launched a rhetoric competition and a Japanese language proficiency test, as well as a variety of events presenting key aspects of Japanese culture – tea ceremony, Ikebana, etc. Cyril and Methodius Foundation (n.d.) *Конкурси организирани съвместно от Японско посолство и Международна фондация "Св. Св. Кирил и Методий" (Competitions Organized Jointly by Embassy of Japan and "St. Cyril and St. Methodius International Foundation")* Available at: https://www.cmfnd.org/?page_id=1322 (Accessed 14 August 2022).

In the last 30 years, the friendship societies established in Bulgaria and Japan have become true engines of cultural exchange and friendly relations between people. In 2010, all civil and professional associations in the field of Bulgarian-Japanese relations, which total over 40, were united in the “Club of Friends of Japan in Bulgaria” (*Nihon tomo no kai*).⁷⁶ Since 2011, *Nihon Tomono Kai* has been a major partner of the Embassy of Japan in the organization of the Days of Japanese Culture in Bulgaria.

In 2001, the “Japan-Bulgaria Friendship Association” was established in Japan, uniting all Japanese friendship clubs and NGOs related to Bulgaria. The association is headed by the President of the Tokai University, Professor Tatsuro Matsumae, and plays a significant role in the promotion of Bulgaria, organizing and supporting a great number of Bulgarian events in the field of culture, education, business, tourism and sports.

The development of Bulgarian studies in Japan dates back to the 1960s and 1970s, when Japanese linguists, historians and archaeologists demonstrated interest in the language, history, literature and contemporary development of Bulgaria, then a little-known Eastern European country. Bulgarian language, culture and history have been taught as elective subjects at several universities such as Tokai, Chiba, Soka, the Tokyo Institute of Foreign Languages and Tokyo State University.

A key role in promoting friendship and closer cultural exchanges is also played by the local authorities and the citizens of the two countries themselves. The first such occasion was the proclamation of Plovdiv and Okayama as sister cities, back in 1972.⁷⁷ A mutually shared culture of the rose has also involved Kazanlak and Fukuyama in active cooperation over the past 25 years. Over the years, a number of Bulgarian and Japanese cities have also become sister cities.

Like all over the world, young people in Bulgaria are strongly attracted by Japanese popular culture, mainly by manga and anime. In 2008, the Nakama National

⁷⁶ Vera Stefanova and Evgeniy Kandilarov (2019) *България и Япония. Политика, дипломация, личности и събития (Bulgaria and Japan. Politics, Diplomacy, People and Events)*, Sofia: East-West Publishing House, p. 465. For more information about all the activities of the “Club of Friends of Japan in Bulgaria” through the years, see the Facebook webpage of the organization, available at: <https://bg-bg.facebook.com/NihonTomonoKai/> (Accessed 14 August 2022).

⁷⁷ Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Bulgaria (AMFARB) (1972) *Documents Related to Plovdiv and Okayama Becoming Sister Cities*, Inventory 29, archival unit 3290, pp. 2-20.

Anime and Manga Club was established, which unites passionate fans of Japanese animation and comic book culture and promotes anime and manga in Bulgaria.⁷⁸ Almost every year, a festival called Aniventure Comic Con is organized within the Days of Japanese Culture, gathering thousands of visitors who come to meet with world-famous Japanese cosplayers, actors from popular animated series, animators etc.

Bulgarian-Japanese cultural communication also has its dimensions in sports, where both countries have established traditions from the 1980s. An emblematic figure in Bulgarian-Japanese relations is Kaloyan Mahlyanov (Kotoōshū)⁷⁹, who made his debut in professional sumo at the age of 20 and reached the second-highest level in the sumo hierarchy, the rank “Ozeki,” as the first European to reach this rank. Later, in May 2008, he became the first European in the history of professional sumo to win the Emperor’s Cup. The announcement of Kaloyan Mahlyanov (Kotoōshū) as European Union Goodwill Ambassador to Japan, in April 2006, is the greatest recognition for his role in the traditional Japanese sport of sumo, not only as a Bulgarian but also as a European.⁸⁰ It is also a recognition of the fact that the cultural interaction between Bulgaria and Japan is gaining a wider dimension, as part of the cultural communication between Europe and Japan.

In 2019, about 12,024 Japanese tourists visited Bulgaria (a slight increase compared to 2018). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020, their number was reduced to 1,897 people.⁸¹ The number of Bulgarian tourists in Japan was about 4,819

⁷⁸ For more information about all the activities of the “*Nakama National Anime and Manga Club*” through the years, see the Facebook webpage of the organization, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/nakamabg/> (Accessed 14 August 2022).

⁷⁹ In 2014, Kotoōshū obtained Japanese nationality and legally changed his name to Karoyan Andō, allowing him to remain in sumo as an elder. He acquired the Naruto toshiyori kabu (elder license) in 2015, and began as a coach at Sadogatake stable. In April 2017, Kotoōshū opened his own stable of wrestlers, Naruto stable (Naruto-beya). He is the first European-born sumo wrestler to run his own stable and the third wrestler born outside Japan. His title now is sumo elder Naruto Katsunori (2017) *Kotooshu to Establish Own Stable*, Available at: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/sports/2017/03/02/sumo/kotooshu-establish-stable/> (Accessed 14 August 2022).

⁸⁰ Novinite (2011) *Borisov: Kotooshu Bulgarian, EU Ambassador to Japan*, Available at: <https://www.novinite.com/articles/124538/Borisov%3A+Kotooshu+Bulgarian%2C+EU+Ambassador+to+Japan> (Accessed 30 April 2022).

⁸¹ The data are from the National Statistical Institute of the Republic of Bulgaria (Infostat) (n.d.) *Arrivals of Visitors from Abroad to Bulgaria, Japan, 2019-2020*, Available at: https://infostat.nsi.bg/infostat/pages/module.jsf?x_2=236 (Accessed 30 April 2022).

people in 2019, while for 2020 there are no available data.⁸² The number of Japanese nationals residing in the Republic of Bulgaria is about 161 (October 2019).⁸³ There were 454 Bulgarians living in Japan at the end of June 2020, according to the Japanese official statistics.⁸⁴ They are mostly students, postgraduates and a relatively small number of people working in various fields.

Conclusions and recommendations

Over the last thirty years, Bulgaria and Japan have experienced many difficulties. Bulgaria experienced an extremely difficult transition to political democracy and a market economy, which was associated with a series of socio-economic upheavals. For Japan, this period was also a time of challenges, related to the prolonged economic recession, combined with a severe demographic crisis caused by the declining and aging population, as well as the loss of the leading position in the East Asian region. All these difficulties naturally affected Bulgarian-Japan bilateral relations, which nevertheless, withstood the challenges, and have continued to develop and deepen.

Today, a good starting point for the future development of relations between Bulgaria and Japan is the Strategic Partnership Agreement between the EU and Japan, which entered into force in early 2019.

Specific recommendations regarding the opportunities for the future development of Bulgarian-Japanese relations can be made mainly in the field of investment and trade and economic relations between the two countries.

First of all, important strategic priorities of the Bulgarian economy related to the development of innovations, information technologies and green economy could attract Japanese investors. Secondly, the possibilities for using local raw materials, through Japanese investments in Bulgaria, as well as the potential for waste processing and the

⁸² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria (n.d.) *Япония (Japan)*, Available at: <https://www.mfa.bg/bg/3223> (Accessed 30 April 2022).

⁸³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2020) *Japan-Bulgaria Relations (Basic Data)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/bulgaria/data.html> (Accessed 30 April 2022).

⁸⁴ The data are available at the Japanese government statistics portal site *e-Stat* where Japanese official statistics can be viewed. e-Stat (2020) *Statistics of Foreign Residents (Former Statistics of Registered Foreigners)*, Available at: <https://www.e-stat.go.jp/stat-search/files?page=1&layout=datalist&toukei=00250012&tstat=000001018034&cycle=1&year=20200&month=12040606&tclass1=000001060399> (Accessed 14 August 2022).

circular economy should be identified.

There are numerous promising economic sectors for Japanese investments and joint activities between Bulgarian and Japanese companies. The processing of raw materials with a significant share in the export structure of Bulgaria is one of them. Nearly 35% of the value of exports to Japan is raw materials and it has grown nearly three times in the last 15 years. Opportunities for Japanese investments in Bulgaria are: production of finished products from raw materials for export – skins and other parts of birds, crustaceans and mollusks, essential oils, sunflower seeds, saffron and cotton; processing of raw materials for which Japan acquires sustainable imports from other countries and Bulgaria exports sustainably to third countries, but both countries do not have direct bilateral trade – seaweed, dried vegetables, vegetable juices, extracts, fruit juices, plants and plant parts for perfumes, fruits and nuts. Due to the low level of self-sufficiency of Japan with agricultural products and food, there are opportunities to increase Bulgarian exports to Japan of this type of goods. Appropriate market niches for Bulgarian producers are environmentally friendly and healthy products. Manufacturing of electric motors for bicycles is another example. Bulgaria produces over 1 million bicycles a year, of which over 60-70% are exported to the EU market. Most bicycles are assembled with imported Japanese electric motors.

Finally, there are considerable opportunities in the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector. Over 15,000 companies and over a 100,000 people in Bulgaria work in the sector (including not only Bulgarians but also other nationalities).⁸⁵ In 2021, the ICT industry ranked among the strongest industries in Bulgaria.⁸⁶ Due to its long and rich tradition in the IT and electronics sectors, dating back to the Communist era, Bulgaria is still known as the Silicon Valley of Southeastern Europe. The software business is the best performing sector in the ICT industry and the fastest growing sector in Bulgaria. Its revenue for 2021 reached 2,8 billion euros, which

⁸⁵ TechNews.bg (2021), Очертава се историческа година за ИКТ индустрията у нас (*A Historic Year is Shaping up for the ICT Industry in Our Country*), Available at: <https://technews.bg/article-130267.html> (Accessed 25 August 2022).

⁸⁶ Ibidem.

represents 4.3 % of the Bulgarian GDP.⁸⁷ There are also opportunities for investment in public projects, in the field of energy, transport, ecology and others.

Hopefully, in the near future, Bulgaria and Japan will continue their close cooperation based on shared principles and values of democracy, supremacy of the rule of law, respect for human rights, free and open trade and international relations based on clear rules. All this should lead to much more stable and active multilateral and bilateral cooperation in a wide range of global, regional and bilateral issues.

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⁸⁷ BASSCOM (Bulgarian Association of Software Companies) (2021) *Barometer 2021. Annual Report on the State of the Software Sector in Bulgaria*, Available at: https://www.basscom.org/RapidASPEditor/MyUploadDocs/BASSCOM_Barometer_2021_ENG.pdf (Accessed 25 August 2022).

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Trade Map (n.d.) *Bulgaria-Japan Exports*, Available at: https://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx?nvpm=1%7c100%7c%7c392%7c%7cTOTAL%7c%7c%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c2%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1 (Accessed 30 April 2022).

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Croatia-Japan relations within the European Union framework: Disregarded potential

By Marcela PERIC*

Overview

The diplomatic and economic relations between Japan and Croatia are characterized by a historically firm, friendly relationship. This relationship became deeply institutionalized in the frameworks of the European Union Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), in force from 1 February 2019, and Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), signed on 17 July 2018.

The history of relations shows Japan's friendly relations with former Yugoslavia and later engagement in peacebuilding and reconstruction of Croatia in the early 1990s. Japan provided diplomatic support and aid to facilitate a non-military conflict resolution and peace process in the war-torn region. Diplomatic relations have been strengthened with the opening of embassies and consulates in both countries, followed by a visit of Prince and Princess Akishino, for the 20th anniversary of relations, in 2013 – the same year Croatia became an EU member state.

Economic relations are consolidated in areas of agriculture and industry. More and more Japanese companies are emerging in Croatia, but Croatian companies find it difficult to penetrate the Japanese market, despite an agreement on double taxation avoidance, concluded in 2019. Paradoxically, since 2019, Japanese foreign direct investments in Croatia shows falling tendency,¹ arguably due to reliance on the EU funds and growing influence of China.

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¹ The World Bank (n.d.) *Foreign Direct Investment, Net Inflows (% of GDP) – Croatia*, Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.KLT.DINV.WD.GD.ZS?end=2020&locations=HR&start=1995&view=chart> (Accessed 20 August 2022).

On the other hand, cultural and people-to-people relations continue to flourish. Recent earthquakes in Croatia deepened a solidarity bond between the two countries. Japanese language and haiku are popular in Croatia, as are the traditional Japanese martial arts practiced in numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The Japanese Embassy in Croatia promotes cultural diplomacy with yearly events. During the 2020 Tokyo Olympics Games, Croatian culture and sports have been promoted in the Japanese host town Tōkamachi, which kept its bond with Croatia, becoming a hub of Croatian culture in Japan.

While bilateral relations are fully developed, relations via the EU need to be implemented more concretely through the EPA and SPA. Despite many available areas for cooperation, Croatia-Japan trade and cooperation potential inside the EU is disregarded.

History of relations

During the Cold War period, Japan had friendly relations with the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Yugoslavia), despite being from the opposing ideological bloc. That happened because Japan perceived Yugoslavia as a key factor for stability in the Balkans. This relationship was possible because Yugoslavia had an independent foreign policy and led the Non-Aligned Movement, benefiting from relations with both Western and Eastern powers, while Japan upheld the principle of *seikei bunri*, the separation of politics from economics. In 1968, Tito became the first leader of a communist country to visit Japan.² In 1976, Crown Prince Akihito, the future Emperor of Japan, paid a visit to Dubrovnik, reaffirming friendly relations.³

Unable to reach a consensus regarding political, economic and constitutional reform, Yugoslavia dissolved in 1991.⁴ Croatia and Slovenia proclaimed their independence the same year. With international recognition and the UN membership of Croatia and Slovenia in 1993, the rule of international law was applied on the borders

² Jelena Glišić (2016) “Balancing Among Superpowers: Japan-Yugoslavia Relations During the Cold War,” *Journal of International and Advanced Japanese Studies*, (8), p. 145.

³ *Ibidem*. p. 146.

⁴ Davorin Marijan (2015) *Rađanje Države: Hrvatska 1989–1992 (Birth of the State: Croatia 1989–1992)*, Zagreb: Tisak, pp. 124-126.

between the former Yugoslav republics. Japan perceived the Yugoslavian conflict as a purely ethnic problem with a historical background, where different national interests complicated the process of reaching a peace settlement.⁵

Together with the efforts of the European Community (EC) member states and Japan toward Eastern European countries and Yugoslavia, there was shared multilateral cooperation in the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the G7 and the G24, led by the European Commission. Priority areas for aid were agricultural supplies, debt restructuring, access to markets, investment promotion, vocational training and environmental protection. Conditions for aid were commitment to the rule of law, respect for human rights, the establishment of multiparty systems, the holding of free elections in 1990, and economic liberalization.⁶ Further, Japan participated in the London Conference on the Former Yugoslavia, in August 1992, and in May 1993 donated up to 32 million dollars for humanitarian aid.⁷ Although Japan could not send Self-Defense Forces (SDF) personnel as part of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), two famous Japanese worked on conflict resolution in Yugoslavia: Yasushi Akashi, as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for UNPROFOR,⁸ and Sadako Ogata, as a UN High Commissioner for Refugees.⁹

Japan participated in the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE)'s Yugoslavia long-term mission, by making contributions.¹⁰ Specifically, Japan sent Ministry of Foreign Affairs diplomatic personnel to promote dialogue between

⁵ Marcela Perić (2020) "Japanese Foreign Policy Towards the Republic of Croatia: the Non-Military Practice of post-Cold War Trilateralism and Multilateralism 1989–1993," *Japan Forum*, p. 16.

⁶ Karen E. Smith (2004) *The Making of EU Foreign Policy: The Case of Eastern Europe*, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 66-82.

⁷ Teruhiko Shinada (1993) "Yugosurabia CSCE Chouki Misshon Ni Sankashite (Participation at CSCE's Long-Term Yugoslavia Mission)," *Gaiko Forum*, (35), p. 72.

⁸ Akashi Yasushi (1995) "The Use of Force in a United Nations Peace-Keeping Operation: Lessons Learnt from the Safe Areas Mandate," *Fordham International Law Journal*, 19(2), p. 14.

⁹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR) (2019) *UNHCR Statement on the Death of Former UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata*, Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2019/10/5db7e6954/unhcr-statement-death-former-un-high-commissioner-refugees-sadako-ogata.html> (Accessed 17 February 2022).

¹⁰ Marcela Perić (2020) "Japanese Foreign Policy Towards the Republic of Croatia: the Non-Military Practice of post-Cold War Trilateralism and Multilateralism 1989–1993," *Japan Forum*, p. 16.

minorities and the New Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro), to prevent further hostilities. From October 1990, Japan oversaw conditions regarding human rights and minorities' rights protection with the aim of preventing the conflict spill-over to other regions.¹¹

Japan did not want to risk the future of its market in the region by siding with any nation of former Yugoslavia.¹² For Japan, a further spread of the conflict and a humanitarian crisis were of the utmost concern.¹³ By 1995, Japan provided 12 million dollars in humanitarian aid and economic assistance, as preventive diplomacy for possible spillover of tensions to Macedonia and Albania, and later to Hungary.¹⁴

Because the Yugoslavian crisis was acknowledged by the international community as a global task of building a new international order in post-Cold War Europe, Japan joined in the efforts to resolve the conflict and humanitarian crisis. This way, Japan was able to restart its relations with newly democratized Central and Eastern Europe. Japan pursued a foreign policy of maintaining peaceful cooperation, especially with the UN and the Contact Group. In April 1995, Foreign Minister Yōhei Kōno was the first official to visit Croatia since the war broke out.¹⁵ Foreign Minister Kōno met with Croatian officials in Zagreb and with Serbian and Macedonian officials in Budapest, where he clearly presented the Japanese position that it was not possible to resolve the conflict through the use of military power. Japan's position advocated negotiations in the international arena, supported with humanitarian aid for civilians. The summoning of leading figures from Croatia, Serbia and Macedonia for bilateral

¹¹ Teruhiko Shinada (1993) "Yugoslavia CSCE Chouki Misshon Ni Sankashite (Participation at CSCE's Long-Term Yugoslavia Mission)," *Gaiko Forum*, (35), p. 72.

¹² Author's interview with Nenad Glišić, the Serbian Ambassador to Japan, in 2019.

¹³ Marcela Perić (2019) "Japanese Foreign Policy Towards the Republic of Croatia: Preventive Diplomacy and Post-conflict Reconstruction 1994 – 1997," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of European Studies*, 11(2), p. 21.

¹⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (1995) *MOFA Diplomatic Bluebook*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/1995/index.html> (Accessed 17 February 2022).

¹⁵ Marcela Perić (2019) "Japanese Foreign Policy Towards the Republic of Croatia: Preventive Diplomacy and Post-conflict Reconstruction 1994 – 1997," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of European Studies*, 11(2), pp. 26-27.

talks in Croatia and Hungary renewed expectations of Japan as a peace mediator. Consequently, Japan enacted an active foreign policy, especially in Croatia and Bosnia. While Japan provided extensive aid, there was a problem with its recognition by Croatian, Muslims and Serbian citizens. Therefore, in order to show a visible face of the aid process, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs collaborated with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Croatian government on a project building a refugee shelter in Croatia, in November 1995.¹⁶

Political relations

Friendly relations between Japan and the former Yugoslavia translated into friendly relations with Croatia. Japan recognized the Republic of Slovenia and the Republic of Croatia on 17 March 1992, after the recognition by the European Communities states and a month before their recognition by the US.¹⁷ The year after the recognition, Japan established diplomatic relations with the Republic of Croatia, which remained involved in the war. Since there was no Japanese embassy in Croatia and it was inappropriate to go through Belgrade, relations were established on 5 March 1993, in Vienna, via the Croatian and Japanese Embassies.^{18,19}

The Embassy of the Republic of Croatia in Tokyo was established in September 1993 and Croatia also has an honorary consulate from 2012 in Naha, in Okinawa.²⁰ In December 1996, exchanges of the Japan-Croatia Parliamentary Friendship Association

¹⁶ Ibidem, pp. 26-29.

¹⁷ Marcela Perić (2020) "Japanese Foreign Policy Towards the Republic of Croatia: the Non-Military Practice of post-Cold War Trilateralism and Multilateralism 1989–1993," *Japan Forum*, p. 18.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 20.

¹⁹ The ambassador of Japan to the Republic of Austria, Ryoji Onodera, confirmed the understanding reached between the Government of Japan and the Government of the Republic of Croatia to the ambassador of the Republic of Croatia, Ivan Brnelić, in the hope of further strengthening their friendship and cooperation. Ibidem, p. 20.

²⁰ Veleposlanstvo Republike Hrvatske u Japanu (Embassy of the Republic of Croatia in Japan) (n.d.) *Otvaranje počasnog konzulata u Nahi (Opening of the honorary consulate in Naha)*, Available at: <https://mvep.gov.hr/bilateral-relations-180490/development-of-bilateral-relations-180491/180491> (Accessed 20 August 2022).

started, initiated by the Croatian parliament.²¹ On the other hand, the Embassy of Japan in the Republic of Croatia was established in February 1998,²² and a consulate in Split was opened in January 2016.²³

The first Japanese official to visit independent Croatia was Foreign Minister Yōhei Kōno, in 1995. He initiated a series of peace negotiations in Zagreb and Budapest between warring parties, advocating resolution of conflict through nonmilitary means. Kōno also brought Japanese aid and planned the construction of the refugee center.²⁴

Since then, there have been numerous VIP visits. When it comes to royal visits to Croatia, there were the visit of Princess Sayako in 2002, Princess Tsuguko during her study abroad in Scotland in 2008,²⁵ and Prince and Princess Akishino in 2013, to foster friendly relations and celebrate the 20th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, at the invitation of Croatia.²⁶ Notably, Croatia joined the EU in July 2013. During the same year, Vice-Minister of Foreign Relations Nobuo Kishi paid a visit. Kishi was also a chief secretary of the Japan-Croatia Parliamentary Friendship

²¹ Marcela Perić (2019) “Japanese Foreign Policy Towards the Republic of Croatia: Preventive Diplomacy and Post-conflict Reconstruction 1994 – 1997,” *Australian and New Zealand Journal of European Studies*, 11(2), p. 27.

²² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2020) *Japan-Croatia Relations (Basic Data), Countries & Regions*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/croatia/data.html> (Accessed 6 February 2022).

²³ Embassy of Japan in Croatia (2022) *Bilateralni Odnosi: Japansko-Hrvatski Bilateralni Odnosi (Bilateral relations: Japan-Croatia Bilateral Relations)*, Available at: https://www.hr.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_hr/bilater.html (Accessed 6 February 2022).

²⁴ Marcela Perić (2019) “Japanese Foreign Policy Towards the Republic of Croatia: Preventive Diplomacy and Post-conflict Reconstruction 1994 – 1997,” *Australian and New Zealand Journal of European Studies*, 11(2), pp. 26-27.

²⁵ The Imperial Household Agency (n.d.) *List of Overseas Visits by the Emperor, Empress and Imperial Family (1999 - 2008)*, Available at: <https://www.kunaicho.go.jp/e-about/shinzen/gaikoku/gaikoku-1999-2008.html> (Accessed 11 February 2022).

²⁶ The Imperial Household Agency (n.d.) *List of Overseas Visits by the Emperor, Empress and Imperial Family (2009 - 2018)*, Available at: <https://www.kunaicho.go.jp/e-about/shinzen/gaikoku/gaikoku-2009-2018.html> (Accessed 11 February 2022).

Association and later defense minister.²⁷ Most recently, in 2019, Foreign Minister Tarō Kōno and a parliamentary delegation led by Kazunori Tanaka visited Croatia.²⁸

Since Croatia held the rotating presidency of the Council of the EU in the first half of 2020, Kōno's counterpart, Foreign Minister Gordan Grlić Radman said that Croatia's priority is the integration of Western Balkans in the EU.²⁹ As a follow up, Kōno extended Japanese support through the "Western Balkans Cooperation Initiative." This initiative's aim is the promotion of social and economic reforms in the region, as well as international cooperation which fosters EU integration. Kōno emphasized the importance of cooperation with Croatia as a bridge between the EU and Western Balkans. The two ministers exchanged opinions on regional questions in East Asia and Europe and confirmed coordination regarding relations with North Korea and other questions, such as the issue of Japanese abductees.³⁰

On the other hand, the first Croatian official visit to Japan was made by Foreign Minister Zvonimir Šeparović, in March 1992, to seek political support from Japan before its recognition.³¹ Since the establishment of diplomatic relations, the second Croatian foreign minister's visit to Japan was that of Mate Granić, in 1996. With his counterpart, Foreign Minister Yukihiko Ikeda, Granić exchanged views on the bilateral relations in general and the progress of peace in the former Yugoslav region, which was significant not only for Japan-Croatia relations but also for Japan's contribution to the peace process.³² In the meantime, there were numerous other official visits. In 2008,

²⁷ Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (LDP) (n.d.) *LDP Members: Kishi Nobuo*, Available at: <https://www.jimin.jp/english/profile/members/129636.html> (Accessed 9 February 2022).

²⁸ Embassy of Japan in Croatia (2022) *Arhiva Prošlih Dogadanja (Archive of the Previous Events)*, Available at: <https://www.hr.emb-japan.go.jp/hr/2021/arhiva-2021.html> (Accessed 13 February 2022).

²⁹ Embassy of Japan in Croatia (2019) *Susret i Radna Večera Japanskog i Hrvatskog Ministra (Meeting and Work Dinner of the Japanese and Croatian Minister)*, Available at: <https://www.hr.emb-japan.go.jp/hr/2019/bilater-2019-09-ministar-kono.html> (Accessed 10 February 2022).

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ Marcela Perić (2020) "Japanese Foreign Policy Towards the Republic of Croatia: the Non-Military Practice of post-Cold War Trilateralism and Multilateralism 1989–1993," *Japan Forum*, p. 19.

³² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (1996) *Visit to Japan by Dr. Mate Granic, Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Croatia*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/archive_1/dec13.html (Accessed 10 February 2022).

Japan was visited by the Croatian President Stjepan Mesić.³³

Recently, in 2015, Croatian Prime Minister Zoran Milanović and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe discussed, in Tokyo, topics such as the bilateral relationship, Japan-EU Cooperation and Japan's policy of "Proactive Contribution to Peace."³⁴ In March 2019, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Marija Pejčinović Burić met with her counterpart Tarō Kōno in Tokyo, with whom she discussed the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between the European Union and Japan and participated in The World Assembly for Women (WAW!). She also had a working lunch with the Secretary General of the Japan–Croatia Parliamentary Friendship Association Nobuo Kishi, the leadership of the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) and then upcoming Japanese Ambassador to Croatia, Misako Kaji. The purpose of the visit was deepening the political and economic cooperation with Japanese companies, such as Yazaki, and the Japan Association of Travel Agents (JATA).³⁵ During the same year, in June, the Speaker of the Croatian Parliament Gordan Jandroković visited Tokyo, to meet with Prime Minister Shinzō Abe. Japanese Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako received Gordan Jandroković and his wife Sonja in audience. Interestingly, Jandroković was the second foreign official following US President Donald Trump to be received by Naruhito, after his accession to the throne, upon his father Akihito's abdication. They discussed economic cooperation and tourism in particular, with regard to the growing number of Japanese guests visiting Croatia and Jandroković extended an invitation to the Emperor and the Empress to visit Croatia.³⁶

The Croatian Deputy Speaker of Parliament Željko Reiner was one of the

³³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (n.d.) *Republic of Croatia*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/000214519.pdf> (Accessed 12 February 2022).

³⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2015) *Japan-Croatia Summit Meeting, Joint Press Occasion, and Dinner*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/c_see/hr/page4e_000284.html (Accessed 11 February 2022).

³⁵ Hina (2019) *Croatian Foreign Minister Visits Japan*, *Total Croatia News*, Available at: <https://www.total-croatia-news.com/politics/34894-croatian-foreign-minister> (Accessed 11 February 2022).

³⁶ Croatian Parliament (2019) *Japanese Emperor Naruhito received Croatian Parliament Speaker*, Available at: <https://www.sabor.hr/en/press/news/japanese-emperor-naruhito-received-croatian-parliament-speaker> (Accessed 11 February 2022).

attendees of the ceremony in Tokyo organized by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe in honor of Emperor Naruhito's enthronement. Reiner took advantage of this occasion to briefly meet Abe and to invite him to visit Croatia.³⁷ He also held talks with Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi on Croatia's presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2020 and the future of the EU. They also talked about Japan-EU relations, notably in light of their Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), which Motegi said was already showing results. Reiner also met Defense Minister Tarō Kōno, for talks on Croatia's military industry, and Finance Minister Tarō Asō, with whom he talked about the Japanese-Croatian Friendship House in Tōkamachi. During the talk, Asō linked the reconstruction of Nagasaki to the reconstruction of Croatian towns devastated in the Croatian War of Independence, known in Croatia as the Homeland War.³⁸

Aid and economic relations

After the Homeland War, Japan actively participated in the reconstruction of Croatia. Until 2011, Japan had provided Croatia with 950 million yen (8.7 million euros) of grant aid and 978 million yen (9 million euros) for technical cooperation projects, through Official Development Assistance (ODA).³⁹ The Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) provided 11 million yen (76,008 euros) in aid to Croatian areas impacted by floods in 2014.⁴⁰

On the economic level, Japan is Croatia's 22nd biggest trade partner outside the EU. Croatian exports to Japan in 2021 stood at 38.1 million euros, while imports stood

³⁷ Hina and Office of the Deputy Speaker (2019) *Deputy Parliament Speaker Željko Reiner Attends Ceremony on Occasion of Emperor Naruhito Enthronement, Croatian Parliament*, Available at: <https://www.sabor.hr/en/press/news/deputy-parliament-speaker-zeljko-reiner-attends-ceremony-occasion-emperor-naruhito> (Accessed 11 February 2022).

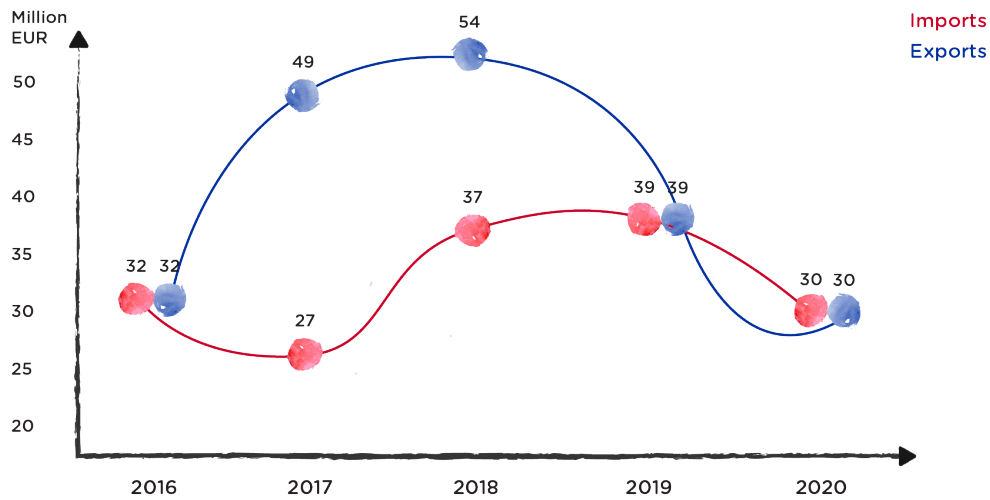
³⁸ Ibidem.

³⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2020c) *Japan's ODA to Croatia*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/croatia/data.html> (Accessed 20 August 2022).

⁴⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2014) *Emergency Assistance to Croatia in Response to the Floods Disaster*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_000297.html (Accessed 24 May 2022).

at 33.9 million euros.⁴¹ There are 100 Croatian companies that export to Japan, of which 83% are small and medium-sized enterprises.

Croatia's trade with Japan in million euros



Source: International Trade Center/Trade Map

Croatia exports local products to Japan, most notably rapid-strength cement, wine and limestone.⁴² According to Japanese statistics, Japan's main exports to Croatia include cars, electrical machinery and steel, with a combined worth of 5.7 billion yen (46.7 million euros) in 2020, while imports from Croatia are worth 11.6 billion yen (95.1 million euros), consisting of tuna, chemical products and clothing.⁴³ Croatian bluefin tuna is one of the most expensive and highest-quality types of foreign tuna available in Japan, served at many prestigious restaurants. And it is no wonder that one of the biggest tuna farming firms, Kali Tuna, is owned by a Japanese company, J-

⁴¹ Trade Map, International Trade Centre (2022) *Bilateral Trade Between Croatia and Japan*, Available at: https://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx?nvpm=1%7c191%7c%7c392%7c%7cTOTAL%7c%7c%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1 (Accessed 24 May 2022).

⁴² European Commission (n.d.) *Croatia: EU-Japan - a Boost for Jobs and Exports in Croatia*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/in-focus/eu-japan-economic-partnership-agreement/eu-japan-in-your-town/croatia_en.htm (Accessed 12 February 2022).

⁴³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2020) *Japan-Croatia Relations (Basic Data), Countries & Regions*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/croatia/data.html> (Accessed 6 February 2022).

Trading.⁴⁴ Considering tuna exports to Japan, the Croatian company “Pelagos net farma” shows promising growth.⁴⁵

Until 2009, there were seven Japanese companies operating in Croatia: Toyota, Olympus, Shimadzu, Yazaki Corporation, Konica-Minolta, Mazda and Iva Shipping, local agency of NYK (Nippon Yusen) Ship Management.⁴⁶ NYK, Shosen Mitsui and K-Line hire several hundred Croatian officers and captains for their ships,⁴⁷ as both Japan and Croatia have a long tradition of sailing. Until 2022, number of Japanese companies in Croatia grew, with Astellas, Exitus, Canon, JT International, Sulimanovic, Daikin, Takeda Pharmaceuticals, Tumlare Corporation, Hitachi Energy, Pink Pig Fast Food, Vemi Connect, Makita, Magyar Suzuki and Yamaguchi as successful examples.⁴⁸ Overall, Croatia provides a favorable investment environment and has geostrategic value, as a fast connecting point with Europe, through the Port Rijeka and modern highways.⁴⁹ However, considering Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) in Croatia in the period from 2005 to 2020, Japan (with a 0.03% share of the total amount) lags behind Republic of Korea (0.26%) and China (0.46%).⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Embassy of Japan in Croatia (2016) *13. Listopada Veleposlanik Takiguchi Prisustvovao na Svečanosti 20. Obljetnice Tvrtke Kali Tuna (Ambassador Takiguchi Participated at Celebration of 20th Anniversary of Kali Tuna on 13 October)*, Available at: <https://www.hr.emb-japan.go.jp/hr/2016/bilater-2016-10-takiguchi-kali-tuna.html> (Accessed 22 May 2022). Ili Saarinen (2021) *Tokyo Meets the World: Croatia, Time Out*, Available at: <https://www.timeout.com/tokyo/things-to-do/tokyo-meets-the-world-croatia> (Accessed 12 February 2022).

⁴⁵ Lauren Simmonds (2021) *Pelagos Net Farma: Ante Gotovina Increases Number of Employees*, Available at: <https://www.total-croatia-news.com/business/55097-pelagos-net-farma> (Accessed 30 April 2022).

⁴⁶ Marko Jurčić (2009) “Croatia - Investment Opportunities for Japanese Companies,” *Trade and Investment Promotion Agency (APIU). Tokyo Investment Seminar*, p. 9, Available at: <https://www.joi.or.jp/modules/seminarreport/index.php?page=article&storyid=43> (Accessed 20 August 2022).

⁴⁷ Keiji Ide (2014) *The Prospect of Japan-Croatian Cooperation*, p. 2, Available at: <https://www.hr.emb-japan.go.jp/documents-JP/prospect-of-japan-croatian-cooperation.pdf> (Accessed 12 February 2022).

⁴⁸ Embassy of Japan in the Republic of Croatia (2022) *Overview of the Croatian Economy*, p. 29, Available at: <https://www.hr.emb-japan.go.jp/documents-JP/croatian-economy-overview-eng-2022-01.pdf> (Accessed 28 May 2022).

⁴⁹ Ibidem, pp. 19-20.

⁵⁰ Ibidem, p. 17.

On 19 October 2018, Croatia and Japan signed the “Agreement between Japan and the Republic of Croatia for the Elimination of Double Taxation with respect to Taxes on Income and the Prevention of Tax Evasion and Avoidance,” fortifying an increasingly close economic relationship.⁵¹ There is consensus between both Japan and Croatia regarding improvement of Japanese investments in Croatia and the economic exchange in general, following the standard structure and principles of the OECD’s Model Tax Convention. This bilateral agreement removes barriers and facilitates economic cooperation.⁵²

Regarding industrial cooperation, there are two notable cases. First, the Japanese group Nipro Corporation has taken over Piramida, in May 2021, a Croatian pharmaceutical packaging producer with a striking business growth of 15-20% per year. Piramida is a leading supplier of primary glass packaging for the pharmaceutical industry, which is especially important now during increased vaccine production, as they also include glass vials for vaccine storage, enabling Nipro to meet specific Central European market needs.⁵³ Second, in May 2021, the Croatian company Končar-Generators and Motors has earned a large contract to design, produce and supervise the installation of three hydropower plant generators in Japan for two different small hydropower plants. This is historically the first time that Japanese investors have chosen a European contractor, which means that Končar is not only representing itself on this market but is a pioneer in opening the market to other European producers.⁵⁴ With the

⁵¹ Ministry of Finance of Japan (2019) *Tax Agreement with Croatia was Signed*, Available at: https://www.mof.go.jp/english/policy/tax_policy/tax_conventions/press_release/20181019hr.htm (Accessed 24 May 2022).

⁵² David Jakovljevic and Silvia Cancedda (2019) *Croatia: Agreement on Double Taxation Avoidance Signed with Japan*, *International Tax Review (ITR)*, Available at: <https://www.internationaltaxreview.com/article/b1f7mxf3j27w88/croatia-agreement-on-double-taxation-avoidance-signed-with-japan> (Accessed 24 May 2022).

⁵³ Nipro (n.d.) *Nipro Successfully Completed the Acquisition of Piramida, Croatia*, Available at: <https://www.nipro-group.com/en/inspire/nipro-successfully-completed-acquisition-piramida-croatia> (Accessed 12 February 2022). Lauren Simmonds (2021) *Nipro Takes Over Croatian Pharmaceutical Packaging Company Piramida*, Available at: <https://www.total-croatia-news.com/business/52669-croatian-pharmaceutical> (Accessed 12 February 2022).

⁵⁴ Končar (n.d.) *First job for Japan Hydropower Market in History Contracted*, Available at: <https://koncar-gim.hr/en/2021/05/20/first-job-for-japan-hydropower-market-in-history-contracted/> (Accessed 12 February 2022).

exception of Delt Papir, which founded the company Tubeless Japan, Croatian companies have difficulty in establishing business in Japan.⁵⁵ However, despite the EPA being in force, many cooperation possibilities still remain disregarded and unexplored in the industrial and trade context.

Dating from the 19th century, tourism is vital for the Croatian economy, every year the country hosting five times more people than its own population. Only 4.4 million Croats host approximately 20 million tourists.⁵⁶ The peak for bilateral tourism was in the summer of 2014, when more than 30,000 Japanese tourists visited Croatia, but, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the numbers decreased to 1-2,000 in 2021 and 2022.⁵⁷ Choosing Croatia as a holiday destination is motivated by the fact that Croatia has a number of UNESCO World Heritage sites, such as Split, Plitvice⁵⁸ and the old city of Dubrovnik, which is very popular with Japanese tourists.⁵⁹

Cultural and people-to-people relations

One of the most important Japanese projects in Croatia was the construction of a refugee center in 1995, as an example of Japan's "visible face of aid." It was a collaboration project between the Japanese and Croatian governments, coordinated by the UNHCR. The construction fee, management fee and all expenses were covered by Japanese donations to UNHCR. Two of the UNHCR members who led the refugee center project were Japanese nationals. They also managed to get support from other

⁵⁵ Lauren Simmonds (2022) *Zagreb Company Delt Papir Makes Brave Move, Opens Company in Japan*, Available at: <https://www.total-croatia-news.com/made-in-croatia/59119-zagreb-company-delt-papir> (Accessed 28 May 2022).

⁵⁶ Ili Saarinen (2021) *Tokyo Meets the World: Croatia*, Available at: <https://www.timeout.com/tokyo/things-to-do/tokyo-meets-the-world-croatia> (Accessed 12 February 2022).

⁵⁷ Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2022) *View Croatia's Croatia Tourist Arrivals: Foreign: Asia: Japan from Nov 1999 to Mar 2022 in the chart*, Available at: <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/croatia/tourist-arrivals-by-country/tourist-arrivals-foreign-asia-japan> (Accessed 22 May 2022).

⁵⁸ Keiji Ide (2014) "The Prospect of Japan-Croatian Cooperation," *Voice of People's Diplomacy*, p. 1, Available at: <https://www.hr.emb-japan.go.jp/documents-JP/prospect-of-japan-croatian-cooperation.pdf> (Accessed 12 February 2022).

⁵⁹ Ili Saarinen (2021) *Tokyo Meets the World: Croatia*, Available at: <https://www.timeout.com/tokyo/things-to-do/tokyo-meets-the-world-croatia> (Accessed 12 February 2022).

Japanese nationals living in Zagreb, who formed an NGO and went to the center to help with origami, knitting, ikebana and choir workshops, to help rehabilitate refugees. The shelter had Croatian, Serbian and Muslim refugees, which made it challenging to run. The purpose of the shelter for Japan was not only to contribute to resolving problems between Yugoslav nations but also fostering a grass-roots level mutual understanding between each nation and Japan. This project was considered as a necessary pillar of international contribution regarding humanitarian aid for refugees, becoming one of the symbols of Japan's humanitarian aid.⁶⁰

According to data from 2020, there were 153 Croatian nationals in Japan.⁶¹ On the other hand, in 2021, there were 166 Japanese nationals in Croatia.⁶² While the numbers vary, they remain around approximately 150 residents in both countries.

Natural disasters such as earthquakes and their tragic consequences led the people of Japan and Croatia to deepen their bond. Many Croats spontaneously expressed public support and sympathy after the March 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, holding candlelit vigils in front of the Embassy of Japan in Zagreb.⁶³ In March and December 2020, two earthquakes, of 5.5 and 6.2 magnitude, respectively, hit the central part of Croatia and Zagreb, resulting in considerable humanitarian and material damage. The people of Japan, Prime Minister Shinzō Abe and Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi sent condolences to the Croatian people and to Croatian officials, expressing readiness to help with exchange of knowledge and reconstruction measures

⁶⁰ Marcela Perić (2019) "Japanese Foreign Policy Towards the Republic of Croatia: Preventive Diplomacy and Post-conflict Reconstruction 1994 – 1997," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of European Studies*, 11(2), p. 27.

⁶¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2020) *Kuroachia Kyōwakoku: Kihon deta (Republic of Croatia: Basic data)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/croatia/data.html#section6> (Accessed 23 May 2022).

⁶² Embassy of Japan in the Republic of Croatia (2022) *Bilateralni Odnosi: Japansko-Hrvatski Bilateralni Odnosi (Bilateral Relations: Japan-Croatia Bilateral Relations)*, Available at: https://www.hr.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_hr/bilater.html (Accessed 6 February 2022).

⁶³ tportal.hr (2011) *Japanci su "Duboko Dirnuti" Suosjećanjem Hrvata (Japanese People are "Deeply Touched" by Empathy of the Croats)*, Available at: <https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/japanci-su-duboko-dirnuti-suosjecanjem-hrvata-20110316> (Accessed 13 February 2022).

regarding earthquakes.⁶⁴

Japanese soft power is evident in the relatively large number of Japanese language and culture students in Croatia, compared to other world languages, most of whom state that their motivation originates from exposure to Japanese culture, mainly anime and manga. Currently, Japanese language in Croatia can be learned at one elementary school (Elementary school Stjepan Radić, in Čaglin), one high school (Upper city gymnasium, in Zagreb), three universities (Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb; Center for foreign languages, University of Zadar; and Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Juraj Dobrila, in Pula), ten schools of foreign languages (located in Zagreb, Split, Rijeka and Varaždin) and one NGO, Makoto Croatia Japan Association.⁶⁵ Besides free Japanese language lessons, Makoto is also active in promoting Japanese culture through social network posts, a book club, origami workshops and cooperation on other projects with NGOs in Croatia that focus on Japanese culture and sports.⁶⁶

There are many active NGOs in Croatia that promote Japanese culture through sports. In 1970, the Croatian Karate Union was founded. It joined the European Karate Federation in May 1992 and the World Karate Federation in November 1992, with 164 clubs and 14 alliances throughout Croatia.⁶⁷ The Croatian Judo Federation has 87 clubs across the country,⁶⁸ while the Croatian Kendo Association, founded in 2004, has 10

⁶⁴ Embassy of Japan in the Republic of Croatia (2021) *Informacija o Donacijama za Hitnu Pomoć i Obnovu Nakon Velikog Potresa Koji je Pogodio Grad Petrinju u Sisačko-Moslavačkoj Županiji (Information Regarding Donations for Emergency Aid and Reconstruction After Big Earthquake Which Hit City of Petrinja in Sisačko-moslavačka County)*, Available at: <https://www.hr.emb-japan.go.jp/documents-HR/Donacije.pdf> (Accessed 13 February 2022).

⁶⁵ Embassy of Japan in the Republic of Croatia (n.d.) *Popis Institucija za Učenje Japanskog Jezika (List of Institutions for Studies of the Japanese Language)*, Available at: <https://www.hr.emb-japan.go.jp/documents-HR/skole-stranih-jezika.pdf> (Accessed 13 February 2022).

⁶⁶ Makoto Hrvatsko Japansko Društvo (n.d.) *O nama (About us)*, Available at: <https://makoto.hr/o-nama/> (Accessed 13 February 2022).

⁶⁷ Hrvatski Karate Savez (n.d.) *Klubovi i Savezi Registrirani u HKS-u (Clubs and Alliances Registered in HKS)*, Available at: <http://karate.hr/web/klubovi.php> (Accessed 13 February 2022).

⁶⁸ Hrvatski Judo Savez (n.d.) *Klubovi (Clubs)*, Available at: <https://judo.hr/clubs> (Accessed 13 February 2022).

clubs.⁶⁹ The Genbukan Mangetsu Dojo is a school for traditional Japanese martial arts (Kobudo) in Croatia, together with branches in Denmark, Norway and Sweden.⁷⁰ The Aikido Society Zagreb was founded in March 1992, organizing together with Slovenian master Aleš Leskovšek the first aikido seminar in Zagreb. The Aikido Society renovated the old building of Paromlin, located in the heart of Zagreb, into the House of Aikido,⁷¹ thereby making a significant social contribution. The Kyudo Society Zagreb was founded in 2006, as an idea inside the Aikido Society, to facilitate the development of Japanese archery in Croatia, which was nonexistent until then.⁷² The Croatian Origami Society, founded in 2012, received the Commendation from the Japanese minister of foreign affairs in June 2021.⁷³ The Croatia-Japan Culture and Economic Society, founded in 2001, promotes various activities and was recognized with rewards from Japan.⁷⁴

The most famous Croatian haiku poet was Vladimir Devidé, a mathematics professor married to a Japanese spouse, who wrote 12 books on Japan, 5 literature works, collections of haiku poetry in Croatian and English, as well as books of haibun in Croatian, English and German.⁷⁵ Devidé was the first to compile a Croatian anthology, *Antologija hrvatskoga haiku pjesništva (Anthology of Croatian Haiku*

⁶⁹ Hrvatski Kendo Savez (2016) *O Savezu (About Alliance)*, Available at: <https://www.kendo.hr/Savez/> (Accessed 13 February 2022).

⁷⁰ Neven Kopčalić (n.d.) *Genbukan Mangetsu Dojo Croatia*, Available at: <https://www.genbukan.hr/site/en/> (Accessed 13 February 2022).

⁷¹ Marijan Kudrna (2014) *Linija... od Osnivača do Aikido Društva Zagreb, Aikido Društvo Zagreb (Line... from the Founders of the Aikido Society Zagreb, Aikido Society Zagreb)*, Available at: <https://aikidozg.com/aikido/sto-je-aikido/linija-od-osnivaca-do-aikido-drustva-zagreb-/1109/#.Ygh06ZaRW3B> (Accessed 13 February 2022).

⁷² Denis Štefok (2022) *Kyudo Društvo Zagreb (Kyudo Society Zagreb)*, Available at: <http://kyudo.hr/kydz/> (Accessed 13 February 2022).

⁷³ Sanja Srblijinović Čuček (2021) *Origami Art Novosti (Origami Art News)*, Available at: <https://sanja-origamiart.blogspot.com/> (Accessed 13 February 2022).

⁷⁴ Croatia Week (2014) *Croatian Physicist to Receive Japanese Order of the Rising Sun*, Available at: <https://www.croatiaweek.com/croatian-physicist-to-receive-japanese-order-of-the-rising-sun/> (Accessed 19 March 2022).

⁷⁵ Iva Lakić Parać (2016) “Hrvatski Japanolog Vladimir Devidé (Croatian Japanologist Vladimir Devidé),” *Proceedings in Honour of the Establishment of Japanese Studies in Pula*, p. 47.

Poetry) in 1996, with haiku by 79 poets. Devidé was awarded a top honor, the “Order of the Sacred Treasure (Zuihō-shō),” from the Japanese government, in 1983, for his work in the promotion and popularization of haiku. Furthermore, in 2004, Devidé received a special recognition by the Japanese Ministry of Culture, for his outstanding contribution to international understanding between Japan and Eastern Europe. In 2010, Drago Štambuk, who was at the time the Croatian Ambassador to Japan, founded the Vladimir Devidé Award. This is a competition open to anyone around the world for haiku written in English. It is held in conjunction with “LibrAsia,” the Asian Conference on Literature and Librarianship, a project of the International Academic Forum (IAFOR) in Japan. Croatian poets were understandably attracted to this competition, and for the first contest, in 2011, the majority of entrants were Croatians.⁷⁶ According to the data from 2016, 700 participants from 60 countries participated in the competition.⁷⁷

Croatia is well-known in Japan for its athletes, such as Davor Šuker and Luka Modrić in football, Marin Čilić in tennis, and Mirko “Cro Cop” Filipović in boxing. The city of Tōkamachi in Niigata Prefecture has cultivated a close relationship with Croatia, through enthusiastic exchanges, since the 2002 FIFA Japan Korea World Cup. Tōkamachi City quickly set up a project team, employing Croatian staff aiming to promote sport, cultural, economic and youth exchange, in the build-up to the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games,⁷⁸ when Tōkamachi served as host town for Croatian athletes.⁷⁹ The Croatian Embassy in Japan promotes various cooperation projects with Tōkamachi

⁷⁶ Haikupedia (2020) *Haiku in Croatia, The Haiku Foundation Encyclopedia of Haiku*, Available at: <https://haikupedia.org/article-haikupedia/haiku-in-croatia/> (Accessed 13 February 2022).

⁷⁷ Iva Lakić Parać (2016) “Hrvatski Japanolog Vladimir Devidé (Croatian Japanologist Vladimir Devidé),” *Proceedings in Honour of the Establishment of Japanese Studies in Pula*, p. 47.

⁷⁸ Tōkamachi City (2021) *Host Town Exchange with the Republic of Croatia*, Available at: <https://www.city.tokamachi.lg.jp/english/introducing/InternationalExchange/1513051875195.html> (Accessed 13 February 2022).

⁷⁹ The Government of Japan (2021) *A Twenty-Year Kizuna: Fortifying Japan and Croatia's Friendship, Kizuna*, Available at: https://www.japan.go.jp/kizuna/2021/05/japan_and_croatias_friendship.html (Accessed 13 February 2022).

as well.⁸⁰ There are three sister cities agreements signed between Croatia and Japan: Kyoto-Zagreb, Kawasaki-Rijeka, and Hekinan-Pula.⁸¹

The Japan Croatia Exchange Association (JCEA), led by popular Croatian personality Jelena Yamasaki, promotes exchange of culture, art, science, sports etc. between both countries. Besides various international cooperation activities, Yamasaki also leads Japanese tourist groups around Croatia and neighboring countries, as well as Croatians around Japan, from her Office “TeNiTaMa” and makes appearances in Japanese TV shows.⁸² Established in 2014, by pianist Tomohiro Adachi, the Japan Croatia Music Society of Tokyo aims to popularize classical Croatian music in Japan and promotes a musical friendship between Japan and Croatia. Since then, they have held regular concerts three times a year.⁸³ From 2021, the Japan Croatia Society, led by Edouard Katayama Tipković, promotes cooperation between Japan and Croatia in various areas from Tokyo. Katayama Tipković organized the first Japan-Croatia film festival in December 2021.⁸⁴

The Japanese Embassy in Zagreb actively promotes cultural diplomacy. Popular events include the Celebration of the Emperor’s Birthday every year, the “Japanese Speech Competition” for all students regardless of age, and Japanese film festivals in various cities across Croatia. There is also a yearly “Japan Day,” which includes promotion of various Japanese arts and crafts (ikebana, calligraphy, tea ceremony,

⁸⁰ Tōkamachi City (2021) *Host Town Exchange with the Republic of Croatia*, Available at: <https://www.city.tokamachi.lg.jp/english/introducing/InternationalExchange/1513051875195.html> (Accessed 13 February 2022).

⁸¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2020) *Japan-Croatia Relations (Basic Data), Countries & Regions*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/croatia/data.html> (Accessed 6 February 2022).

⁸² Jelena Yamasaki (2015) *Japan Croatia Exchange Association*, Available at: <http://www.japancroatia.com/> (Accessed 13 February 2022).

⁸³ Tomohiro Adachi (2015) *Japan Croatia Music Society*, Available at: <https://jcms-tokyo.net/index.html> (Accessed 13 February 2022).

⁸⁴ Edouard Katayama Tipković (2021) *Nihon Kuroachia Kyoukai*, Available at: <https://www.japancroatia.org/#contact> (Accessed 13 February 2022).

origami, dressing of kimono, martial arts) and demonstrations of Japanese cuisine.⁸⁵ Finally, the “Tuna, Sushi & Wine festival in Zadar,” organized by the Embassy of Japan, is getting more popular each year and attracts numerous visitors.⁸⁶

Conclusions and recommendations

After independence, Croatia continued friendly relations with Japan. It is not well known that Japan influenced a peaceful democratization via a non-military, multilateral approach in Croatia during the war years, between 1991-1995.⁸⁷ Japanese officials promoted a peaceful resolution of the conflict and provided humanitarian and reconstruction aid to the former Yugoslav region, with notable involvement until the 2000s. People-to-people relations continued to flourish and Japan supported Croatia during the process of joining NATO and the EU, as a final stabilization step.

Today, as a NATO (2019) and EU (2013) member state, Croatia provides a stable environment for Japanese investments. Since Japan seeks to develop high-quality car parts and other technological products,⁸⁸ Croatian companies such as Končar, Rimac, AD Plastik, Q agency, Genos Glyco, Photomath, Bellabeat, Microblink and Tehnix all have promising potential for export on the Japanese market. However, Croatian agricultural products remain the main focus of Japanese interest. Fish and

⁸⁵ Croatia Week (2021) *Japanese-Croatian Connections Part of Japan Day Story*, Available at: <https://www.croatiaweek.com/japanese-croatian-connections-part-of-japan-day-story/> (Accessed 17 February 2022).

⁸⁶ Embassy of Japan in the Republic of Croatia (2019) *5. Travnja Otpravnik Poslova g. Miyazaki Nazočio je Otvorenju 5. Tuna, Sushi & Wine Festivala u Zadru (April 5 Chargé D’Affaires Mr. Miyazaki Participated at the Opening of the 5th Tuna, Sushi & Wine Festival in Zadar)*, Available at: <https://www.hr.emb-japan.go.jp/hr/2019/kultura-2019-04-tuna-sushi-wine.html> (Accessed 13 February 2022). Embassy of Japan in Croatia (2022) *Arhiva Prošlih Događanja (Archive of the Previous Events)*, Available at: <https://www.hr.emb-japan.go.jp/hr/2021/arhiva-2021.html> (Accessed 13 February 2022).

⁸⁷ Marcela Perić (2020) “Japanese Foreign Policy Towards the Republic of Croatia: the Non-Military Practice of post-Cold War Trilateralism and Multilateralism 1989–1993,” *Japan Forum*, p. 21.

⁸⁸ Satoshi Abe (2018) *Kokkou 25 Shuunen wo Mukaete Nihon Kigyō Misshon ni Shinshitsu wo Yobikake (Kuroachia) (Call for Japanese Business Missions to Enter on Market on the Occasion of the 25th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations (Croatia))*, Available at: <https://www.jetro.go.jp/biz/areareports/2018/ccd68ffa5fd54c1a.html> (Accessed 13 February 2022).

diary trade has been well established, but the area of poultry products needs to be regulated with future bilateral agreements. Trade negotiations depend on Japan's institutional capacities and the complexity of talks between different ministries, resulting in years-long procedures. Since it seems that Japan is doing business as usual, it is difficult to reap the full benefits of the EPA and SPA. Nevertheless, these agreements expanded the potential for Japan-Croatia cooperation. The EPA needs to serve as a facilitator of making bilateral trade simpler.

The year 2023 will mark 30 years of diplomatic relations between Croatia and Japan. The Government of Croatia and the Embassy of the Republic of Croatia in Japan should seize that opportunity to promote quality Croatian products for export on the Japanese market. This anniversary can be supported by the Japanese Ministry of Trade and EU funds to realize all benefits of the EPA vis-à-vis Croatia.

Since 2009, Croatian forces are part of the EU Naval Force – Somalia, Operation ATALANTA, contributing to the deterrence, prevention and repression of acts of piracy and armed robbery off the Somali coast.⁸⁹ Japan has joined this operation in 2021, recognizing the importance of this naval corridor for trade with EU and security of the Indo-Pacific region.⁹⁰ This way, Croatia-Japan relations have potential for further development inside the SPA framework. Future cooperation in other naval security operations should not be disregarded.

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⁸⁹ EUR-Lex (2009) *Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Croatia on the Participation of the Republic of Croatia in the European Union Military Operation to Contribute to the Deterrence, Prevention and Repression of Acts of Piracy and Armed Robbery off the Somali Coast (Operation Atalanta)*, Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/agree_international/2009/597/oj (Accessed 29 May 2022).

⁹⁰ EU Naval Force - Somalia Operation ATALANTA (2021) *EU NAVFOR Somalia Conducts Joint Naval Exercises with Japanese Frigate JPS Yugiri and the Maritime Security Centre of the Sultanate of Oman*, Available at: <https://eunavfor.eu/news/eu-navfor-somalia-conducts-joint-naval-exercises-japanese-frigate-jps-yugiri-and-maritime> (Accessed 29 May 2022).

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- Embassy of Japan in the Republic of Croatia (2021) *Informacija o Donacijama za Hitnu*

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Celebrating 60 years of Cyprus-Japan relations: A great potential to expand cooperation

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Overview

At the core of Cyprus-Japan relations are some fundamental principles shared by both countries, such as democracy, human rights, human dignity, freedom, equality and the rule of law. Although the two countries have very good relations, they do not reflect their full potential expansion.

Even though Japan recognized Cyprus' independence in June 1962, the opening of the Japanese Embassy in Nicosia, in 2018, and the recent conclusion of the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between the European Union and Japan indicate the beginning of a new dynamic era in their bilateral relations.

Compared to Japan's economic relations with other EU countries, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and trade flows between Cyprus and Japan are modest. However, Japan-Cyprus business relations have increased substantially, particularly following the signing of the EU-Japan EPA. Although Japan does not invest in Cyprus's manufacturing sector, it is commercially present in a variety of industries owned and operated by Cypriots. As for the number of Japanese tourists visiting Cyprus, this remains relatively low.

With regard to cultural and people-to-people relations, despite the fact that the relationship between the two nations is still in its early stages, educational exchanges help to promote mutual understanding and close connections between the Japanese and Cypriots. Furthermore, interest in Japanese culture among Cypriots has significantly risen over the last decade. This, however, does not suggest that the goal of cultivating

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mutual understanding has reached a satisfactory level.

History of relations between Cyprus and Japan

Japan and the Republic of Cyprus established diplomatic relations in June 1962, when Japan recognized Cyprus' independence, two years after the establishment of the state, and celebrated 60 years of cooperation between the two countries in 2022. This anniversary marks a significant turning point in the two countries' fast-growing relationship, providing an opportunity to reflect on the evolution of Japan-Cyprus ties and to examine fresh ideas and efforts for enhancing, enriching and deepening their future collaboration.

Despite the fact that Cyprus and Japan established diplomatic relations in 1962, the Japanese Embassy in Cyprus opened only in January 2018 and the Embassy of the Republic of Cyprus opened, in Tokyo, in September 2019. The Japanese Ambassadors to Lebanon were concurrently accredited to the Republic of Cyprus, from 1962 until 1990. After 1990, the Japanese Embassy in Greece was accredited to Cyprus, until 2018, and Cyprus was represented in Japan by the Cyprus Embassy in Beijing, until 2019. The opening of the Japanese Embassy in Nicosia, in 2018, marked a new era in bilateral relations. Cyprus' President Nicos Anastasiades pointed out that “the relationship between the two countries is based on genuine friendship, shared values and interests, mutual respect and understanding and a joint resolve to further deepen our cooperation.”¹

Cyprus became a member of the European Union on 1 May 2004, achieving a political and economic transformation. Cyprus has become a member of the European Single Market, as well as of the EU customs union, resulting in significant changes for the domestic economy and external economic relations.

From Japan's perspective, this political and economic transformation, after the

¹ Press and Information Office (2018) *Address by the President of the Republic, Mr Nicos Anastasiades, on the occasion of the opening of the Embassy of Japan*, Available at: <https://www.pio.gov.cy/en/press-releases-article.html?id=3043#flat> (Accessed 12 March 2022).

accession of Cyprus to the EU, opened new business opportunities in Cyprus.² Growing political stability and progressive economic development have created a favorable environment for Foreign Direct Investments, with the potential to attract Japanese investors as well.³

Political and strategic relations

Despite their geographical distance, Cyprus and Japan share many similarities, the most notable of which are shared interests and values. As a result, Cyprus has made improving relations with Japan one of its top foreign policy priorities. Cyprus, despite its modest size, places great emphasis on creating a strategic partnership with Japan in the near future and strongly supports the expansion of their relations. Cyprus' foreign policy is currently shifting toward a more comprehensive strategy. "Seeds for this shift have been sown before, yet they grew when the economic crisis hit the island and the turmoil plunged the region".⁴ In a speech,⁵ President Anastasiades defined the aims and boundaries of the Republic's revitalized foreign policy,⁶ as he stressed the importance of Cyprus, "a country small in size, just like David, but big in potential", which has significant influence in the region.⁷

² On July 17, 2018, the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement was signed, making it the world's largest bilateral free trade agreement and creating an open trade zone covering roughly one-third of global GDP. See European Commission (2020) *Trade: First year of the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement shows growth in EU exports*, Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_161 (Accessed 12 March 2022).

³ Press and Information Office (2018) *Address by the President of the Republic, Mr Nicos Anastasiades, on the occasion of the opening of the Embassy of Japan*, Available at: <https://www.pio.gov.cy/en/press-releases-article.html?id=3043#flat> (Accessed 12 March 2022).

⁴ Ilias I. Kouskouvelis (2015) "Smart Leadership in a Small State: The Case of Cyprus" in Spyridon N. Litsas and Aristotle Tziampiris (eds.), *The Eastern Mediterranean in Transition*, London: Routledge, p. 153.

⁵ Cyprusmail (2014) *Cyprus: a story of David and Goliath*, Available at: <https://cyprus-mail.com/2014/01/17/cyprus-a-story-of-david-and-goliath/> (Accessed 12 March 2022).

⁶ London School of Economics (2014) *The true story about the geopolitical role of Cyprus: David or Goliath?*, Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UKq_H1qn6M&ab_channel=HellenicObservatory%2CLSE (Accessed 12 March 2022).

⁷ Revecca Pedi and Ilias Kouskouvelis (2019) "Cyprus in the Eastern Mediterranean: A Small State Seeking for Status" in Spyridon N. Litsas and Aristotle Tziampiris (eds.), *The New Eastern Mediterranean*, Cham: Springer, p. 154.

Japan and Cyprus have had close relations for many years. When Japan went through unimaginable suffering, as a result of an earthquake, a tsunami and a nuclear tragedy during the Great East Japan Earthquake, in March 2011, Cyprus offered Japan a donation of 50,000 euros and welcomed 25 disaster-affected children to Cyprus.⁸ The invitation extended by the Government of Cyprus to a group of youngsters from disaster-affected areas gave the children hope, and also strengthened the countries' friendly connection.

Cyprus also took the initiative to begin the EPA negotiations during its Presidency of the Council of the EU, in the second half of 2012.⁹ In 2018, the EU and Japan signed the Economic Partnership Agreement, a treaty significant not only for institutionalizing EU-Japan relations, which Cyprus supported, but also for fostering free trade, in accordance with contemporary international norms.

However, there is still considerable room for improvement in the two nations' relationship. There are informal gatherings, such as the Japan-Cyprus Parliamentary Friendship League, whose president, Tsutomu Kawara, visited Cyprus, in 2002. Averof Neophytou, president of the Cyprus-Japan Friendship Group in the House of Representatives, visited Japan in 2007. However, there are no significant bilateral agreements yet, such as a strategic partnership agreement on economic or political matters.

In the first decades after diplomatic ties were established, several presidents of the Republic of Cyprus made numerous visits to Japan, including the first president of Cyprus, Makarios III, in 1970, and later President Spyros Kiprianou, in 1984. President Georgios Vasiliou visited Japan in 1989 and for a second time in 1990, in order to witness the Emperor's ascension to the throne. However, since the last visit of President Vasiliou, there has been no other presidential visit to Japan. From the Japanese side,

⁸ Japanese Red Cross Society (2013) *Japan: Earthquake and Tsunami*, p. 36, Available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Ops_Update_24monthReport_Final.pdf (Accessed 12 March 2022).

⁹ Statistical Service of Cyprus (2019) *Statistical Abstract 2019*, p.6, Available at: <https://library.cystat.gov.cy/Documents/Publication/ABSTRACT-2019-EN-270521.pdf> (Accessed 12 March 2022).

there was no visit to Cyprus at the level of head of state or head of government.¹⁰

Nonetheless, during the last decade, many ministerial visits from both countries have occurred. From Cyprus, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Nicos Emiliou paid an official visit to Japan in 2010 and Deputy Minister to the President for European Affairs Andreas Mavroyiannis visited Japan in 2012. In 2013, Secretary to the President Constantinos Petrides visited Japan and, in 2015, so did Minister of Foreign Affairs Ioannis Kasoulides. On the occasion of Kasoulides' visit to Japan, Minister of Foreign Affairs Fumio Kishida stated that he would like to work closely with his counterpart from Cyprus on global issues, as partners who share basic values.¹¹ Earlier Japanese ministerial visits to Cyprus included an official House of Representatives research mission on parliamentary systems to Europe in 2013, followed by a visit by Parliamentary Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Takao Makino in 2014, while in 2017, State Minister of Finance Minoru Kihara attended the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) annual meeting.

Relations have particularly accelerated in recent years. Following 60 years of diplomatic relations, the 2018 establishment of a Japanese Embassy in Nicosia illustrates the momentum in the relations between the two nations. The two sides were unable to strengthen their ties in all spheres, until they established autonomous embassies.

Therefore, important visits from both sides were made in a short period of time. Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikos Christodoulides paid an official visit to Japan in 2018 and the main discussions focused on ways to strengthen bilateral relations between Cyprus and Japan. He was also invited by Waseda University in Tokyo (the largest private university in Japan), to deliver a keynote speech at an event titled "A New Era in Cyprus-Japan Relations: The European Perspective from the Mediterranean."¹²

¹⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Japan-Cyprus Relations (Basic Data)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/cyprus/data.html> (Accessed 12 March 2022).

¹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2015) *Japan-Cyprus Foreign Ministers' Meeting and Working Dinner*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_000802.html (Accessed 12 March 2022).

¹² Press and Information Office (2018) *Official visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Nikos Christodoulides, to Japan*, Available at: <https://www.pio.gov.cy/en/press-releases-article.html?id=4334#flat> (Accessed 12 March 2022).

Concluding his official meetings in Japan, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Kazuyuki Nakane emphasized that “Japan and Cyprus share fundamental values and cooperate both bilaterally and internationally. Cyprus is a member of the EU and at the same time is close to the Middle East. Japan attaches great importance to the geopolitical role of Cyprus and for this reason it has decided to establish an Embassy in Nicosia.”¹³

In addition, Deputy Minister of Shipping Natasa Pilides visited Japan in 2019. First Lady of the Republic of Cyprus Andri Anastasiadi attended Emperor Naruhito’s ascension to the throne, in 2019. Kentaro Sonoura, advisor to the prime minister of Japan on national security, visited Cyprus in 2019 and discussed ways to strengthen bilateral relations, following the opening of Japan’s Embassy in Nicosia. He also exchanged views with his counterparts from Cyprus on regional issues that affect Europe, the Middle East and Asia, demonstrating Cyprus’ important geopolitical position.¹⁴

Finally, the current ambassador of Japan to Cyprus, Izumi Seki, has paid courtesy visits to several ministers of the Republic of Cyprus on a regular basis, over the last years, demonstrating the obvious development of the two countries’ relationship.¹⁵

As stated in Japan’s 2017 diplomatic bluebook, “Cyprus is an EU member state, but it is close to the Middle East. Its geopolitical significance has been growing in recent years as the result of such factors as the destabilization of the state of affairs in the Middle East and the flow of refugees into Europe. Moreover, timely information gathering and local response is necessary, since it may serve as a destination for

¹³ Goldnews (2018) *Cyprus – Japan Sign MoU on Assistance and Repatriation of Citizens in Cases of Crises*, Available at: <https://www.goldnews.com.cy/en/energy/cyprus-%E2%80%93-japan-sign-mou-on-assistance-and-repatriation-of-citizens-in-cases-of-crises> (Accessed 12 March 2022).

¹⁴ Embassy of Japan in Cyprus (2019) *Mr. Kentaro Sonoura, Advisor to the Prime Minister of Japan Cyprus*, Available at: <https://www.cy.emb-japan.go.jp/files/advisor-visit.html> (Accessed 12 March 2022).

¹⁵ Embassy of Japan in Cyprus (2020) *Courtesy Visit to the Justice and Public Order Minister*, Available at: https://www.cy.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ja/11_000001_00118.html (Accessed 12 March 2022). Embassy of Japan in Cyprus (2021) *Visit to Ms. Natasa Pilides, the Minister for Energy, Commerce and Industry*, Available at: https://www.cy.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ja/natasa-pilides-visit.html (Accessed 12 March 2022). Embassy of Japan in Cyprus (2021) *Visit to Mr. Demetriades, the Deputy Minister of Shipping*, Available at https://www.cy.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ja/11_000001_00183.html (Accessed 12 March 2022). Embassy of Japan in Cyprus (2021) *Courtesy visit to Dr. Costas Kadis, the Minister of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment*, Available at: https://www.cy.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ja/costas_kadis_visit.html (Accessed 12 March 2022).

evacuation in the case of an emergency in the Middle East or Africa.”¹⁶ Because of Cyprus’ geographic importance, the signing of a Memorandum of Cooperation between Cyprus and Japan on humanitarian issues between Cyprus and Japan on the evacuation of Japanese people through the Republic of Cyprus marks the beginning of their crisis management cooperation.¹⁷

On the international scene, Japan and Cyprus advocate the same ideals of democracy, freedom, human rights and the rule of law, and are both devoted to the principles of the United Nations Charter, international law and the peaceful resolution of disputes. The two countries regard each other as important partners in international organizations and as stakeholders in their respective regions. This illustrates Japan’s position of disapproval and non-recognition of the so-called “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.”¹⁸ Since 1974, when Turkish troops invaded and occupied 37 percent of the island’s territory, the Republic of Cyprus has been divided. According to Ambassador of the Republic of Japan to Cyprus Izumi Seki, as a member of the G7 and the United Nations, Japan will continue to contribute to a peaceful and viable solution in Cyprus, based on related UN resolutions.¹⁹ Furthermore, when UN funds were in short supply, Japan provided regular reserve funds to contribute to the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP).²⁰ In general, Japan has made a significant contribution, as the UN’s third-largest promoter of peacekeeping operations, positively supporting

¹⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2017) *Diplomatic Bluebook 2017*, p. 389, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000290287.pdf> (Accessed 12 March 2022).

¹⁷ Press and Information Office (2018) *Address by the President of the Republic, Mr Nicos Anastasiades, on the occasion of the opening of the Embassy of Japan*, Available at: <https://www.pio.gov.cy/en/press-releases-article.html?id=3043#flat> (Accessed 12 March 2022).

¹⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Basic Data on Cyprus*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/cyprus/data.html#section6> (Accessed 12 March 2022).

¹⁹ Press and Information Office (2020) *The President of the Republic received the credentials of the Ambassador of Japan*, Available at: <https://www.pio.gov.cy/en/press-releases-article.html?id=16120#flat> (Accessed 12 March 2022).

²⁰ Glenn D. Hook, Julie Gilson, Christopher W. Hughes and Hugo Dobson (2011) *Japan’s International Relations. Politics, Economics and Security* (3rd ed.) London: Routledge, p 331.

peacekeeping operations in Cyprus.²¹

Despite the fact that the political relationship between the two countries has not matured sufficiently to allow for more frequent and regular collaboration, their relationship still has considerable room for growth.

Economic and commercial relations

With regards to Japanese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and trade with Cyprus, they are considered well below Japan's economic, investment and trade potential. The bilateral ties between the two countries do not reflect Japan's potential as a global investor and exporter, nor Cyprus' role as a significant host state of Foreign Direct Investment, compared to other EU members.

But Japan-Cyprus business relations have grown steadily, particularly after the signing of the EU-Japan EPA. The EU-Japan economic relationship is projected to help Cyprus' employment market and exports. The majority of Cyprus' imports from Japan over the past years is limited to automobiles, ships and electrical appliances.²² The total value of imports from Japan to Cyprus in 2019 was approximately 95.1 million euros.²³ Saloon cars, motorcycles, buses, lorries, tractors and other vehicles were the principal items imported by Cyprus.²⁴

The total value of Cypriot exports to Japan in 2020 was estimated to be around 1,3 million euros.²⁵ The main exports from Cyprus to Japan are scrap aluminum, white

²¹ "Japan contributed approximately 240 million US dollars to the UN regular budget for 2017, ranking second only to the US Its contribution to peacekeeping operations for 2017 was approximately 660 million US dollars, coming third after the US and China". See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2018) *Diplomatic Bluebook 2018. Chapter 3*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2018/html/chapter3/c030105.html> (Accessed 12 March 2022).

²² Tradingeconomics (2022) *Cyprus Imports from Japan*, Available at: <https://tradingeconomics.com/cyprus/imports/japan> (Accessed 12 March 2022).

²³ Cystat (2021) *Statistical Imports/Arrivals By Commodity And Country*, p. 41, Available at: https://library.cystat.gov.cy/NEW/Cyprus_External_Trade_Statistics-2020_VOLI-130122.pdf (Accessed 12 March 2022).

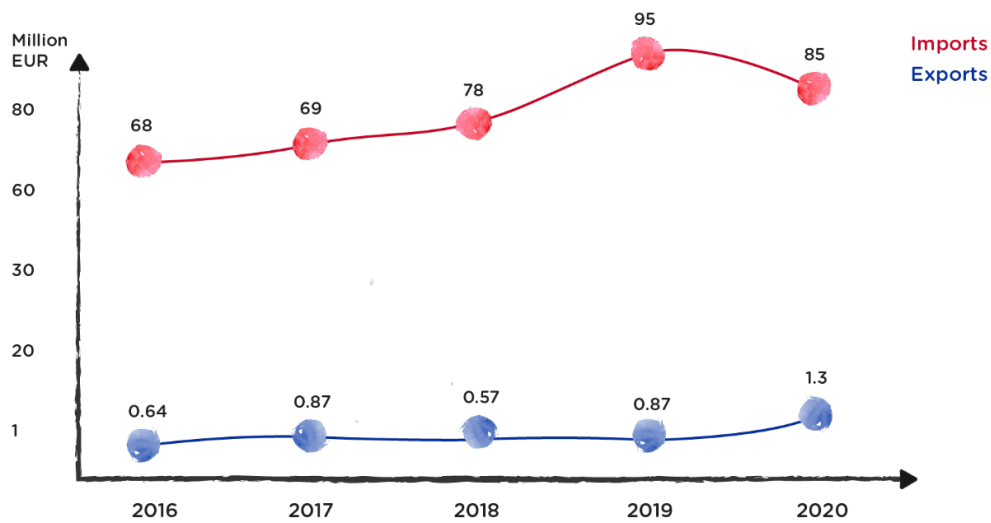
²⁴ Cystat (2020) *Statistical Abstract Total Imports of Motor Vehicles by Country of Origin, 2001-2019*, Available at: [https://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/all/8ccc912ec98c19d3c2258562002d7bb3/\\$file/abstract-2019-en-270521.pdf?openelement](https://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/all/8ccc912ec98c19d3c2258562002d7bb3/$file/abstract-2019-en-270521.pdf?openelement) (Accessed 12 March 2022).

²⁵ Cystat (2021) *Imports/Arrivals by Commodity and Country*, p. 41, Available at: https://library.cystat.gov.cy/NEW/Cyprus_External_Trade_Statistics-2020_VOLI-130122.pdf (Accessed 12 March 2022).

wine, feta cheese, malt extract, grapefruit juice, bulgur wheat, bread, pastry, biscuits, sugar, cotton gloves, mittens and mitts, communion wafers and men’s cotton clothing.²⁶

As for Japan’s aid history, although it did not offer any loans or grants to Cyprus, the two countries have had a technical cooperation, from 1982 to 1998, valued at 903 million yens (approximately 7 million euros).²⁷

Cyprus’ trade with Japan in million euros



Source: Statistical Service of Cyprus

Despite the fact that Japan does not invest in the manufacturing sector of Cyprus, it is commercially present in a variety of industries. In the automobile sector, Toyota and Nissan have representatives in Cyprus. Japanese products, such as Toshiba electric appliances and Kubota or Komatsu agriculture and construction gear, are very popular in Cyprus. These enterprises are owned and operated by Cypriots and they also employ Cypriots.

Cultural and people-to-people relations and perceptions of Japan

Japan and Cyprus have developed a mutual relation of cultural cooperation, mostly

²⁶ Tradingeconomics (2022) *Cyprus Exports from Japan*, Available at: <https://tradingeconomics.com/cyprus/exports/japan> (Accessed 12 March 2022).

²⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Japan-Cyprus Relations (Basic Data)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/cyprus/data.html> (Accessed 12 March 2022).

through academic exchange programs, over the course of their 60-year bilateral relationship. Both countries' cooperation has expanded not only through inter-governmental relations but also through people-to-people interactions. The education sector has helped foster mutual understanding and close friendships between Japanese and Cypriots, despite the fact that their relationship is still in its early stages.

People-to-people exchange has been encouraged by the Japanese Government in a variety of ways, including student exchanges, youth exchanges, and sport exchanges. Japan has established a number of youth exchange programs, including the Monbukagakusho scholarship, the Arts and Cultural Exchange, the Japanese-Language Education Overseas, the Japanese Studies Overseas and Intellectual Exchange, the Mirai program and others.²⁸ Cyprus has been a part of the Mirai program since 2018, with three students from Neapolis University Paphos already having participating in.

Education cooperation is important in the development of friendly relations and the shaping of countries' worldviews.²⁹ Following this trend, Cyprus and Japan signed a Memorandum of Cooperation in Higher Education on 23 March 2017.³⁰ The Memorandum is an important step toward further strengthening the Cyprus-Japan bilateral relationship and exchanges. An important aspect of this memorandum is that participants will encourage institutions in both states to create collaborative study programs, particularly at the Master's and/or Ph.D. levels, within the framework of

²⁸ According to the outline of the student exchange system in Japan, published by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, in 2007, the goals of academic exchanges are as follows: first, to promote mutual understanding and the formation of human networks between Japan and other countries. Second, to cultivate global-minded Japanese students and shape an open and vibrant society. Third, to internationalize Japanese universities and increase their competitiveness, and fourth, to make intellectual contributions to the international community. Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2007) *Outline of the Student Exchange System in Japan*, p. 3, Available at: https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/koutou/ryugaku/07062723/002.pdf (Accessed 12 March 2022).

²⁹ Neapolis University (2016) *His Excellency the Japanese Ambassador, Mr Masuo Nishibayashi delivered a lecture on the subject of "The Japan – Cyprus Relations: Political and Economic Prospects,"* Available at: <https://www.nup.ac.cy/news/his-excellency-the-japanese-ambassador-mr-masuo-nishibayashi-delivered-a-lecture-on-the-subject-of-the-japan-cyprus-relations-political-and-economic-prospects/> (Accessed 12 March 2022).

³⁰ Cyprus Department of Higher Education (2017) Memorandum of Cooperation in the Fields of Higher Education and Research between the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Cyprus and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan, Available at: https://archeia.moec.gov.cy/mc/337/2017_mnimonio_synergias_aae_erevnas_ypp.pdf.

direct institutional arrangements.³¹

Likewise, the Nippon Foundation, one of Japan's most well-known cultural institutions, made four major donations of books to Cyprus through the "Read Japan Project," to improve awareness of Japan in Cyprus.³² One of these donations, that received public attention, was made during a special ceremony attended by the current Japanese ambassador to Cyprus, Ms. Izumi Seki, at Neapolis University Paphos.³³

Overall, thanks to a number of public diplomacy initiatives in Cyprus for cultural and people-to-people interactions over the years, mutual understanding and interest in Japan has increased, paving the way for future collaboration in a variety of fields. For instance, the Cyprus-Japan Friendship Association is the first institution to be established with the goal of connecting Cypriots and Japanese people and encouraging friendship and cultural interactions between them.³⁴ One of the Association's first actions will be to donate *sakura* trees to the Kampos village, in order to create the first *sakura* park in Cyprus.³⁵ Despite the fact that it is a newly founded organization, its active engagement in organizing many events will strengthen bilateral relations by promoting Japanese culture in Cyprus.³⁶ Many Japanese-related groups and associations, such as the Philanthes and Ikebana Club³⁷ and sports associations offering karate, aikido and judo, have also helped to promote Japanese culture in Cyprus.

³¹ Ibidem.

³² Read Japan Project (2021) *Book donation*, Available at: <https://readjapan.org/bookdonation/europe/#cyprus> (Accessed 12 March 2022).

³³ Embassy of Japan in Cyprus (2020) *Book Donation to the Neapolis University*, Available at: https://www.cy.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ja/11_000001_00098.html (Accessed 12 March 2022).

³⁴ This association was firstly established in 1986 by some Cypriot scholarship recipients who studied in Japan, though after some years it remained inactive.

³⁵ Sakura, or Cherry tree, is deeply ingrained in Japanese culture and history. Farmers in ancient Japan utilized the blossoming of Sakura blooms to determine when it was time to plant their rice harvests. The flowers were thought to symbolize spring, hope, beauty, and new life. BBC (2021) *Japan's cherry blossom "earliest peak since 812,"* Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-56574142> (Accessed 12 March 2022).

³⁶ Philenews (2021) *δρομολογείται πάρκο ιαπωνικών κερασιών σε χωριό της κύπρου (A Japanese Cherry-Trees Park is Underway in a Village in Cyprus)*, Available at: <https://www.philenews.com/koinonia/eidiseis/article/1210077/dromologitai-parko-iaponikon-kerasion-se-chorio-tis-kyproy> (Accessed 12 March 2022).

³⁷ Embassy of Japan in Cyprus (2019) *Ambassador Awards Cyprus Ikebana Club*, Available at: https://www.cy.emb-japan.go.jp/itprtop_el/hyosyo-ikebanaclub.eng.html (Accessed 12 March 2022).

In addition, there are some private organizations that host various Japanese festivals and exhibitions, such as trade shows promoting Japanese products, pop culture, festivals about cosplay and others.³⁸ Even anime-themed charity events were planned, in order to benefit the victims of Japan's 2011 earthquake and tsunami.³⁹ Japanese popular culture, including anime, manga and cosplay, is also gaining popularity among young people today in Cyprus. Pop culture can be argued to be a powerful motivator, contributor and mediator of the tourism experience.⁴⁰

Some events were held in both Cyprus and Japan to strengthen the two countries' cooperation. One of the most significant was the "Sound of Kyoto."⁴¹ The Agency for Cultural Affairs of the Government of Japan, the city of Kyoto and the Kyoto Art Center commissioned the Cypriot composer Marios Ioannou Elia to produce a contemporary acoustic portrait of the Japanese city.⁴² The Cypriot composer spent months in Kyoto, investigating the city's soul and discovering its sounds. Autumn was chosen as the filming season, because it is Japan's most colorful season, especially in Kyoto.⁴³

Another important event, this time in Cyprus, named the "Last Samurai," took place from 18 February to 5 March 2016, when numerous historical and valuable pictures of samurai from approximately 150 years ago were on display at Nicosia's Center of Visual Arts and Research. Visitors had the opportunity to learn about Japan's historical, cultural, religious, political and social background, to study Japanese

³⁸ Cypruscomiccon (2019) *Cyprus Comic Con: a Cultural Revolution!*, Available at: <https://cypruscomiccon.org/> (Accessed 12 March 2022).

³⁹ Cyprusevents (2011) *Anime Charity Event*, Available at: <https://www.cyprusevents.net/events/anime-charity-event-nicosia-2011/> (Accessed 12 March 2022).

⁴⁰ Angelina I. Karpovich (2010) "Theoretical Approaches to Film-Motivated Tourism", *Tourism and Hospitality Planning & Development*, 7(1), p. 17.

⁴¹ Marios Elia Ioannou (2020) *Sound of Kyoto City in a Symphony*, Available at: <http://www.soundofkyoto.jp/> (Accessed 12 March 2022).

⁴² Ibidem.

⁴³ Sound of Kyoto (2021) *Sound of Kyoto – 公式予告編 | official trailer*, Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ewyDyjfV34I&ab_channel=SoundofKyoto%2FSoundof%E4%BA%AC%E9%83%BD . Cyprus-mail (2019) *Cypriot composer working to produce the Sound of Kyoto*, Available at: <https://cyprus-mail.com/2019/01/08/cypriot-composer-working-to-produce-the-sound-of-kyoto/> (Accessed 12 March 2022).

traditional costumes, to comprehend the value of visual arts in the study of a historical era in time and to enjoy themselves in the museum.⁴⁴

On the occasion of the designation of Paphos as the European Capital of Culture 2017, the EU-Japan Fest Japan Committee opened a “new window” of cultural interaction. The Japan Foundation funded exhibitions and seminars by Japanese grassroots cultural groups and artists in Cyprus. Nobuyuki Koga, Chairman of the EU-Japan Fest Japan Committee, attended the opening ceremony of the European Capital of Culture, in 2017, in which the famous Japanese group “Wadaiko Yamato” gave a performance to the public.⁴⁵

On 25 October 2019, Ibrahim’s Khan hosted an exhibition in Paphos named “We Are Here, But You Don’t See US,” which included the work of Japanese artist Chiaki Kamikawa. The exhibition featured the artist’s most recent drawings and paintings, which investigate the notion of unseen existences parallel to our everyday reality.⁴⁶

Many Cypriots have recently developed an interest in Japanese culture and are beginning to visit Japan in greater numbers. As of the period from 1999 to 2013, a consistent flow of people visited Japan, but from 2014 onwards, the number of Cypriot tourists has increased by 200 to 400 people per year, peaking in 2019, with 1,974 travelers from Cyprus to Japan. The years 2013-2014 marked an observable beginning of Japan’s recognition as a tourist destination.⁴⁷ Cyprus has also grown in popularity as a tourist destination during the last three decades, attracting more than 2.5 million visitors each year.⁴⁸ According to the Cypriot Statistical Service (CYSTAT), 3.97

⁴⁴ Embassynews (2016) *The “Last Samurai” Exhibition in Cyprus*, Available at: <https://embassynews.net/2016/02/19/the-last-sumurai-exhibition-in-cyprus/> (Accessed 12 March 2022).

⁴⁵ European Capital of Culture (2017) *The Pafos European Capital of Culture 2017 Program*, Available at: <http://www.pafos2017.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/pafos2017-programme-english.pdf> (Accessed 12 March 2022).

⁴⁶ Eleni Philippou (2019) *Exhibition the Result of Cultural Fusion*, Available at: <https://cyprus-mail.com/2019/10/15/exhibition-the-result-of-cultural-fusion/> (Accessed 12 March 2022).

⁴⁷ Cystat (2020) *Statistical Service of Cyprus Tourism Statistics 2017 – 2019, C2*, Available at: https://library.cystat.gov.cy/Documents/Publication/TOURISM-A2017_2019-EN-120820.xls (Accessed 12 March 2022).

⁴⁸ Alexandros Antonaras (2019) “The Cyprus Tourism Sector and the sustainability agenda 2030”, *Cyprus Review*, 30 (2), p. 131.

million tourists visited Cyprus in 2019.⁴⁹ With regards to Japanese travelers to Cyprus, the period from 1999 to 2019 reveals that their number is quite low for a country known for its tourist industry. In 2019, 1,400 Japanese visited Cyprus, which is the highest number in the last 20 years.⁵⁰ The number of Japanese visitors grew from 784 in 2016 and 700 in 2017, to 900 in 2018.⁵¹ When representatives of the Association of Travel Agents of Japan visited the Paphos Offices, in 2016, Akihiko Hosaka stated that while many Japanese tourists visit Greece and Turkey, almost none of them visit Cyprus, expressing his surprise at this incident.⁵²

To summarize, Cypriot people's interest in Japan's culture has been impressive over the last decade. Though, this does not imply that the aim of fostering mutual understanding has been met sufficiently or successfully. Even if there are only 81 Japanese nationals in Cyprus⁵³ and the Japanese Embassy in Cyprus has only been in existence for three years, the Cypriot Government is optimistic that more actions will be taken in the near future, so that relations between the two nations will further develop.

Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter's overall goal was to identify key trends, examine the present state of bilateral relations and analyze the Cyprus-Japan relationship in detail. By including an examination of the most recent trends in bilateral cooperation, the study has added to the extremely limited empirical literature on Cyprus-Japanese investment and trade ties. Japan-Cyprus relations have an interesting story that has only grown stronger over time. Despite the fact that the relationship between the two countries has been through many phases, the initial form of cooperation based on economic and cultural ties remains

⁴⁹ Cystat (2020) *Statistical Service of Cyprus Tourism Statistics 2017 – 2019, A1*, Available at: https://library.cystat.gov.cy/Documents/Publication/TOURISM-A2017_2019-EN-120820.xls (Accessed 12 March 2022).

⁵⁰ CyStat (2020) *Arrivals of Tourists by Country of Usual Residence, 1980-2019*, Available at: https://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/services_71main_en/services_71main_en?OpenForm&sub=1&sel=2 (Accessed 12 March 2022).

⁵¹ Ibidem.

⁵² News in Cyprus (2016) *Paphos 2017 Seeks Japanese Tourism*, Available at: <http://www.newsincyprus.com/news/12223/paphos-2017-seeks-japanese-tourism> (Accessed 12 March 2022).

⁵³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Basic Data on Cyprus*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/cyprus/data.html> (Accessed 12 March 2022).

strong.

The volume of Japanese investment (FDI) in Cyprus and trade between the two countries has the potential to rise. The two respective countries must investigate ways to formalize their partnership through specific agreements in areas of mutual interest, such as tourism, a double taxation treaty, exports of Cyprus' dairy products to the Japanese market, trade, investments, merchant shipping and culture, which are just a few examples to mention. In addition, the European Commission has emphasized the ability of Eastern Mediterranean countries, like Cyprus, to contribute significantly to the EU's energy security and recommended that it is "the recent discoveries of large natural gas fields in Cyprus that have raised the profile of the region as a gas producer and exporter. It is therefore in the EU's interest to assist the countries in the region in better exploiting their energy resources and to develop mutually beneficial commercial cooperation."⁵⁴ The geopolitical role of Cyprus in the East Mediterranean region and cooperation on energy security with Japan has the potential to be a tremendous win-win situation. It is critical that the two countries focus on the energy sector and begin discussions on the conclusion of specific bilateral agreements as soon as possible, in order to institutionalize and strengthen their cooperation in this sector as well.

The attraction of Japanese investors to Cyprus appears to be a major concern for the Cypriot Government. Therefore, the Cyprus Government must examine infrastructure development, research center and technical institution enhancements, and human capital expansion. Furthermore, inexpensive imports of semi-products to the EU from Japan through Cyprus will boost the competitiveness of Japanese enterprises and factories in Europe, allowing them to expand production and sell to other European nations and beyond. Finally, both countries should consider introducing tourist packages and opening a direct flight, which would surely boost tourist traffic.

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⁵⁴ European Commission (2017) *Third Report on the State of the Energy Union, Annex 2*, Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/annex-2-policy-observations-member-state-regional-eu-level_en.pdf (Accessed 12 March 2022).

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- Sound of Kyoto (2021) *Sound of Kyoto – 公式予告編 | official trailer*, Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ewyDyjfV34I&ab_channel=SoundofKyoto%2FSoundof%E4%BA%AC%E9%83%BD (Accessed 12 March 2022).
- Statistical Service of Cyprus (2019) *Statistical Abstract 2019*, Available at: <https://library.cystat.gov.cy/Documents/Publication/ABSTRACT-2019-EN-270521.pdf> (Accessed 12 March 2022).
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The Czech Republic-Japan relations: Stable yet still with unfulfilled potential outside traditional spheres

By David KOZISEK*

Overview

Having celebrated a hundred-year anniversary in 2020, Czech-Japanese diplomatic relations have a long tradition. Nevertheless, due to the geographical distance and the lack of shared interests, for a long time, the bilateral relationship had been rather shallow and remained focused primarily on the cultural sphere.

After the dissolution of the USSR, however, Japan quickly changed its foreign policy toward the countries of the former Eastern Bloc.

In the past three decades, the relationship was transformed, by adding new dimensions and building and strengthening the already existing political ties. Japan and the Czech Republic have thus maintained a long standing, stable and mutually beneficial bilateral relationship in multiple fields. Rather than new patterns or trends, the recent development can be best described as building upon the existing foundations and deepening the previously established connections. Diplomatic relations are advanced on the premise that the two countries are important partners, who share fundamental values, such as freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

The core cooperation can be divided into two main domains or categories: economic and cultural. Since its democratization in 1989, the Czech Republic (as Czechoslovakia until 1993) has successfully presented itself as an investment opportunity and it has drawn the interest of countless Japanese businesses. As the Czech Republic does not

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have specific long-term political interests in East Asia,¹ Japan and other East Asian countries are seen primarily as business partners, not only through bilateral cooperation but also through functioning multilateral frameworks, such as the Visegrad Four (V4) or cooperation on the level of the European Union (EU).

Consequently, the Czech Republic has successfully established itself as a technologically advanced country, with a highly strategic and geographically advantageous location in Central Europe. These two facts have proven crucial for building business connections with Japan, as well as other foreign investors. There are presently around 260 Japanese businesses operating in the Czech Republic, providing approximately 50,000 jobs. The total value of investments has long made Japan the second largest foreign investor in the Czech Republic.²

History of relations: A humble beginning from a diplomatic incident

Ending hundreds of years of relative isolation, after 1868, the newly restored Meiji Japan began turning its attention abroad, with an intention to overcome the perceived gap between itself and Western Powers and to catch up with them. In 1873, Japan, for the first time, took part in the World's Fair, in the Austro-Hungarian capital of Vienna.³ A part of the Japanese delegation went to Bohemia, where they expressed interest in the local brewing industry, fish farming, glassmaking and textile production.⁴

In 1918, the first Czechoslovak president, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, visited Tokyo, where he was interviewed by Asahi Shimbun and also tried to approach the

¹ Rudolf Fürst (2017) "Dálný východ v české zahraniční politice (Far East in Czech Foreign Policy)", in Michal Kořan (ed.), *Česká zahraniční politika v roce 2016: analýza ÚMV (Czech foreign policy in 2016: IMR analysis)*, Prague: Ústav mezinárodních vztahů, p. 258.

² iDNES (2019) *Japonsko je druhý největší investor v ČR, řekl Babiš po schůzce V4 s Abem (Japan is second largest investor in Czech Republic, says Babiš after V4 meeting with Abe)*, Available at: https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/zahranicni/visegradska-ctyrka-v4-japonsko-bratislava-spoluprace.A190425_131839_zahranicni_dtt (Accessed 15 June 2021).

³ Tessa Morris-Suzuki (1994) *The Technological Transformation of Japan*, Cambridge University Press, p. 83.

⁴ Lukáš Novotný (2012) "Diplomatické a politické vztahy Rakousko-Uherska a Japonska v letech 1900-1914 (Diplomatic and political relations of Austria-Hungary and Japan in the years 1900-1914)" *Historický obzor: časopis pro výuku dějepisu a popularizaci historie*, 23 (11–12), pp. 262-263.

Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁵ However, the ministry showed no interest, and he was turned down, as the officials failed to realize the president's importance.⁶

Official diplomatic relations with Japan did not begin until April 1920, when the first Czechoslovak envoy, Karel Pergler, handed over his credentials to Crown Prince Hirohito, in Tokyo.⁷ The first Japanese Embassy in Prague was then opened, in October 1921, with Harukazu Nagaoka serving as the ambassador.⁸ In the interwar period, mutual relations developed mainly around trade. In February 1932, the brother of Emperor Hirohito, Prince Takamatsu and his wife, Princess Kikuko, arrived in Czechoslovakia during an unofficial visit.⁹ The Prince visited a number of landmarks in Prague, Smetana's opera in the National Theater and met with President Masaryk. During this visit, the Prince was awarded the Order of the White Lion First I Class, the highest state order.¹⁰

The post-war change in Czechoslovakia's foreign policy orientation and the subsequent communist coup, in February 1948, rendered Czechoslovak-Japanese relations completely dependent on the state of Japanese-Soviet relations. Czechoslovak diplomatic relations with Japan were to be resumed only in May 1957, following the 1956 *Soviet-Japanese Joint Declaration*, which restored diplomatic relations. Political relations in the period between 1957 and 1989 can generally be described as reserved and less developed, yet without any notable conflicts. The cooperation between Japan and the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic focused primarily on business but also science, research and culture. Nevertheless, the relations did not experience a major quantitative and qualitative shift, until after November 1989. The relationship was invigorated

⁵ Tadayuki Hayashi (1995) "T. G. Masaryk, československé legie a Japonsko (T. G. Masaryk, Czechoslovak Legions and Japan)", in *První světová válka, moderní demokracie a T. G. Masaryk*, Prague: Ústav T. G. Masaryka, p. 91.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 91.

⁷ Zdeňka Vasiljevová (1986) *Dějiny Japonska (History of Japan)*, Prague: Svoboda, p. 358.

⁸ Embassy of the Czech Republic in Tokyo (2005) *Establishing of Diplomatic Relations and Interwar Development*, Available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20120306051646/http://www.mzv.cz/tokyo/en/political_relations/political_relations_history_and_present/establishing_of_diplomatic_relations_and.html (Accessed 5 July 2022).

⁹ Zdeňka Vasiljevová (1986) *Dějiny Japonska (History of Japan)*, Prague: Svoboda, p. 358.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 358.

throughout the 1990s.

After the disintegration of Czechoslovakia, Japan immediately recognized the Czech state on 1 January 1993, and diplomatic relations between the two countries were formally established less than a month later, on 29 January. Thus began a new chapter of history, of promising bilateral relations between Japan and the newly formed independent Czech state, which in many ways continued the tradition of good diplomatic relations established since the beginning of the 20th century.

Political and strategic relations: A pattern of high-level mutual visits

Since the 1990s, Czechia and Japan share a history of ongoing official visits between its representatives. Foreign policy and diplomatic relations between the two states are built around senior-level political dialogue, with the aim to further deepen contacts between high-ranking government officials, most often ministers or deputy ministers.¹¹ Visits on the prime minister-level are typically seen as the most important, but they also occur much less frequently. Although rarely, Prague has welcome members of the Japanese Royal Family in the past, and two Czech presidents have visited Japan on multiple occasions. Overall, the states and their diplomatic channels maintain top-level contacts and long-term cooperation.

In October 1996, Princess Sayako visited the Czech Republic.¹² In July 2002, for the first time ever, Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko came on a four-day visit, which they spent in the capital.¹³ In August 2003, Junichirō Koizumi became the first prime minister of Japan to visit the Czech Republic. Koizumi and the Czech prime minister signed a Joint Statement towards Strategic Partnership between Japan and the Czech Republic, expressing formal support for the economic and cultural dimensions of the relationship, as well as agreeing on the importance of promoting peace, while

¹¹ Author's interview with a Czech MOFA official, June 2021.

¹² Embassy of Japan in the Czech Republic (2021) *Japonsko a Česko (Japan and the Czech Republic)*, Available at: <https://www.cz.emb-japan.go.jp/cz/nihon-czech.html> (Accessed 1 July 2021).

¹³ iDNES (2002) *Japonský císař obdivoval Hrad (Japanese Emperor Admires the Castle)*, Available at: https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/japonsky-cisar-obdivoval-hrad.A020706_103927_domaci_itu (Accessed 5 June 2021).

designating North Korea as a major regional threat.¹⁴ The Czech side thus expressed full support to the Japanese position in the region.

In May 2009, Prague hosted an EU-Japan summit. The country was briefly visited by Prime Minister Tarō Asō. Apart from the already established business agenda, oriented at trade and foreign investments, the Czech government also expressed interest in ecological cooperation and cooperation in science and research.¹⁵

Furthermore, The Japanese Imperial Household Agency also lists visits of Princess Akiko and Princess Tsuguko, during their time studying abroad in Europe, in the early 2000s.¹⁶

The first Czech politician to visit Japan was Václav Havel. In 1992, he already visited Japan as the Czechoslovak president. In December 1995, he visited the country again, this time as the president of the Czech Republic. He and the Emperor attended a conference in Hiroshima. It was reported that the Emperor broke the protocol by personally welcoming Havel in front of the Imperial Palace, in Tokyo.¹⁷

The next Czech president to visit Japan was Václav Klaus, in February 2007, and then again in September 2008. During the first presidential visit, Klaus, who had previously visited Japan in 1996, as the Czech prime minister, was accompanied by Minister of Foreign Affairs Karel Schwarzenberg and representatives of 14 Czech businesses.¹⁸

Since the 2000s, there have been three Czech prime ministerial visits to Japan. In June 2005, Prime Minister Jiří Paroubek, during an official visit, met with the

¹⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2003) *Joint Statement towards Strategic Partnership between Japan and the Czech Republic*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/czech/joint0308.html> (Accessed 8 December 2021).

¹⁵ Government of the Czech Republic (2009) *Tisková konference po setkání českého a japonského premiéra, 3. května 2009 (Press conference after the meeting of the Czech and Japanese prime ministers, May 3, 2009)*, Available at: <https://www.vlada.cz/cz/media-centrum/tiskove-konference/tiskova-konference-po-setkani-ceskeho-a-japonskeho-premiera--3--kvetna-2009-56975/> (Accessed 11 June 2021).

¹⁶ The Imperial Household Agency (n.d.) *List of Overseas Visits by the Emperor, Empress and Imperial Family (1999-2008)*, Available at: <https://www.kunaicho.go.jp/e-about/shinzen/gaikoku/gaikoku-1999-2008.html> (Accessed 3 July 2021).

¹⁷ ČTK (2020) *Česko-japonské vztahy slaví 100 let (Czech-Japanese relations celebrating 100 years)*, Available at: <https://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/cesko-japonske-vztahy-slavi-100-let/1934561> (Accessed 15 June 2021).

¹⁸ ČTK (2007) *Klaus se Schwarzenbergem zahájili návštěvu Japonska (Klaus and Schwarzenberg begin their visit to Japan)* Available at: https://www.tyden.cz/rubriky/zahranici/asi-a-oceanie/klaus-se-schwarzenbergem-zahajili-navstevu-japonska_3259.html (Accessed 15 June 2021).

Emperor and Prime Minister Koizumi, later visiting EXPO 2005, in Aichi. Twelve years later, in June 2017, Bohuslav Sobotka was the next Czech prime minister to visit Japan, where he met with Prime Minister Abe and Crown Prince Naruhito.¹⁹ In 2017, the countries also commemorated the 60th anniversary of the resumption of diplomatic relations. In October 2019, Prime Minister Andrej Babiš visited Tokyo, where he attended Emperor Naruhito's Enthronement Ceremony, in Japan's Imperial Palace, stepping in for the Czech president.²⁰

In the Japanese Diet, there is a 28-member Parliamentary Group of Friends of the Czech Republic, consisting of representatives of both the houses of the Diet. The chairman of the group is Hajime Funada, from the Liberal Democratic Party.²¹ A similar group also exists in the Czech parliament – the Interparliamentary Friendship Group Czech Republic-Japan, which currently has a relatively high number of 22 members.²² For comparison, a similar Czech interparliamentary group for South Korea only has 13 members. This suggests that Japan's image in the Czech political circles is largely positive and maintaining a favorable bilateral relationship is perceived as important.

The Czech state further benefits from Japan's active involvement, not only with Brussels and the EU but also directly with the V4 group. Since 2003, the V4+Japan format has been realized through regular summits, which stress cooperation in the fields of economy, science, technology and innovation but also security issues, in both regional and global dimensions.²³ In April 2019, Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, together with Prime Minister Andrej Babiš, attended the 3rd Summit of the V4+Japan held in Slovakia. On this occasion, there was also a bilateral meeting between the two prime

¹⁹ Government of the Czech Republic (2017) *Premiér Bohuslav Sobotka na návštěvě Japonska (Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka visits Japan)*, Available at: <http://www.vlada.cz/cz/media-centrum/aktualne/premier-bohuslav-sobotka-na-navsteve-japonska-157754/> (Accessed 16 June 2021).

²⁰ Government of the Czech Republic (2019) *Premiér Babiš jednal s předsedou vlády Japonska Šinzó Abem (Prime Minister Babish meets with Japanese Prime Minister Shinz Abe)* Available at: <http://www.vlada.cz/cz/media-centrum/aktualne/premier-babis-jednal-s-predsedou-vlady-japonska-sinzo-abem-177204/> (Accessed 15 June 2021).

²¹ Embassy of the Czech Republic in Tokyo (n.d.) *Parliamentary Group of Friends of the Czech Republic*, Available at: https://www.mzv.cz/tokyo/en/bilateral_relations/parliamentary_group_of_friends_of_the/index.html (Accessed 12 June 2021).

²² Chamber of Deputies (n.d.) *Interparliamentary Friendship Groups: Czech Republic – Japan*, Available at: <https://public.psp.cz/en/sqw/snem.sqw?l=en&id=1423> (Accessed 14 June 2021).

²³ The Visegrad Group (2013) *Visegrad Group Plus Japan Joint Statement*, Available at: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2013/visegrad-group-plus> (Accessed 16 June 2021).

ministers.

Expanding on the 2003 Joint Statement towards Strategic Partnership, in May 2021, the two countries signed a new Action Plan for Cooperation between the Czech Republic and Japan for the period of 2021-2025. The brief document explicitly mentions “promoting defense and security cooperation and exchanges between the respective authorities, including in the area of cybersecurity.”²⁴ Furthermore, the text alludes to the North Korean issue, as well as the importance of the East and South China Seas for global stability and prosperity, essentially supporting the formal position of the Japanese government toward these security issues.

According to the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a total of 14 bilateral agreements, signed between 1957 and 2017, currently exist between the two countries.²⁵ The individual agreements pertain to a range of topics, such as social security, taxes and finance, scientific and technological cooperation or culture and education. The most recent one is the Agreement between the Government of the Czech Republic and the Government of Japan regarding Working Holiday Visas, from 2018.

Aside from the Czech Embassy in Tokyo’s Shibuya-ku, the Czech MOFA operates two honorary consulates across Japan. There are honorary consulates in Sakai (Osaka Prefecture) and in Naha (Okinawa Prefecture). Their mission is primarily to develop cultural, sports, political and economic relations between the countries. Their consular functions are therefore limited. This means that a Japanese national whose intended period of stay in the Czech Republic exceeds a 90-day period (e.g., students) still must apply for their visa directly at the embassy in Tokyo.

The Embassy of the Czech Republic in Tokyo coordinates cooperation with the government agencies CzechInvest, CzechTrade, CzechTourism and the Czech Center, which are all located in the embassy building. The Czech Center in Tokyo targets the Japanese public and media, to present the Czech Republic as a modern and dynamic country. Its main agenda consists of promoting Czech fine arts, architecture, design,

²⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic (2021) *Action Plan for Cooperation between the Czech Republic and Japan for the period of 2021–2025*, Available at: https://www.mzv.cz/file/4282481/_20210506AP_final_ver_CZ.pdf (Accessed 4 December 2021).

²⁵ International Law Department of MOFA (n.d.) *Database of records of international agreements: List of valid international agreements with Japan*, Available at: https://www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/encyklopedie_statu/aside/japonsko/smlouvy/index.html (Accessed 15 June 2021).

fashion, film, music and literature, through events tailored to the specifics and demands of the Japanese audience, while cooperating with cultural institutions throughout Japan.

The Japanese Embassy in Prague operates its own Information and Cultural Center, which functions as a library providing a wide range of materials on Japan, supporting the Japanese government's culture-oriented soft power initiatives such as *Cool Japan*. The facility frequently offers screenings of Japanese films or public lectures on different topics presented by experts on Japan.

Economic and commercial relations: Traditionally strong business partnerships

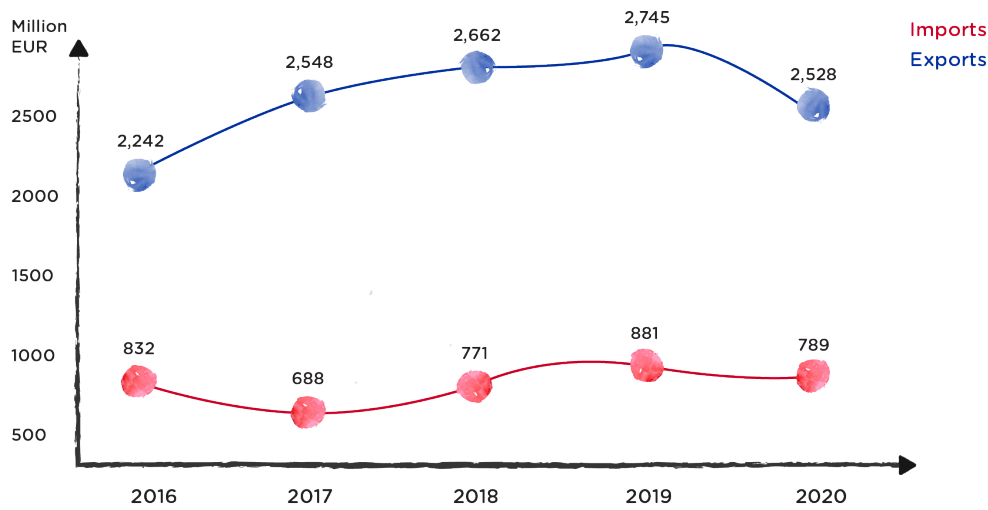
According to the current turnover, Japan is the Czech Republic's 19th most important foreign trade partner. The volume of mutual trade has shown a relatively modest but steady growth. For Japan, the Czech Republic ranks 39th in terms of export volume and 51st in terms of import volume. Outside Europe, Japan is the Czech Republic's fourth most important trading partner and the second most important export market in Asia.

The figure below shows the volume of imports and exports between the two countries. The statistic indicates a steady increase of Czech exports. Between 2016 and 2020, there has been a more than 30% increase. The development of mutual trade undoubtedly benefited from the 2017 EU-Japan Free Trade Agreement. The agreement was fully endorsed by the Czech government and brought expectations of further economic development, more employment opportunities and competitiveness among European and Japanese business ventures in the upcoming years.

The amount of imports from Japan to the Czech Republic has also been increasing, albeit not so rapidly. After peaking in 2018, the total value of imported commodities from Japan started shrinking. The sudden decrease in trade in 2020 can be attributed to the initial shock from the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, according to the numbers provided by the Japanese government, trade was surprisingly revived in 2021,²⁶ indicating record numbers, despite the ongoing global crisis. During the short period between 2016 and 2021, the amount of Czech exports has more than doubled. Still, the relationship has long maintained a continuous negative trade balance.

²⁶ Trade Statistic of Japan (n.d.) 普通貿易統計 (CSV形式の統計表) (*Ordinary trade statistics (CSV format statistical table)*), Available at: <https://www.customs.go.jp/toukei/info/tsdl.htm> (Accessed 3 March 2022).

The Czech Republic's trade with Japan in million euros



Source: International Trade Center/Trade Map

According to JETRO, the three commodities most visibly represented in Czech exports to Japan are metal ore and metal scraps (30.1%), electrical equipment (19.2%) and general machinery (16.8%). The latter two categories also appear significant in Czech imports from Japan, which consists of electrical equipment (36%), general machinery (21.1%) and transportation equipment (11.2%).²⁷ The volume of Czech exports consists of various industrial equipment, machinery and means of transport (pumps, engines, motor vehicle parts and accessories, navigation devices).²⁸

Due to various efforts (see e.g., CzechInvest below), more and more Czech companies have managed to penetrate the Japanese market, particularly in the fields of machinery, advanced technologies, as well as information and communications technology (ICT). In 2017, the Czech consumer security software developer Avast opened its office in Tokyo. There are multiple successful examples from other fields as well, such as jewelry manufacturing (Moshna), glass manufacturing (Preciosa) or nanotechnologies (Elmarco).

Japanese businesses currently represent an important source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) directly benefiting the Czech economy. In 2017, Asahi Group

²⁷ JETRO (n.d.) 概況・基本統計 チェコ (*Overview and Basic Statistics: Czech Republic*), Available at: https://www.jetro.go.jp/world/europe/cz/basic_01.html (Accessed 16 June 2021).

²⁸ CzechTrade (2020) *Japan*, Available from: <https://www.businessinfo.cz/navody/japonsko-souhrnna-teritorialni-informace/> (Accessed 1 July 2021).

Holdings purchased Pilsner Urquell and multiple other Central and Eastern European beer breweries from SABMiller, for 7.3 billion euros.²⁹ In February 2021, the cumulative value of Japanese investments in the country was almost 4 billion dollars, concentrated in fields such as the automotive industry, electronics and engineering.³⁰

Currently, there are more than 260 Japanese companies with investments in the Czech Republic.³¹ They serve as important regional employers in the country – employing over 51,000 people in 2020.³² Toyota, Panasonic, Daikin, Mitsubishi Electric, Hitachi, Olympus, Shimano, as well as other Japanese businesses operate sizable manufacturing plants and research and development (R&D) facilities. This makes the number of Japanese manufacturing companies on the Czech territory the fourth highest in the entire EU.³³ Naturally, the Czech government is interested in further inflow of Japanese manufacturing excellence and R&D knowledge, particularly in high added value fields, such as biotechnologies, nanotechnologies and ICT.³⁴ Japanese manufacturing in the Czech Republic utilizes imported Japanese technologies and components. Finished products (e.g., cars, televisions and electrical appliances) are exported mainly to other European countries but also outside the EU.

Multiple business chambers have been established in both countries. The Czech office of JETRO (Japan External Trade Organization) has functioned since 1993. It assists Czech businesses when entering the Japanese market, by organizing professional seminars, round tables and trade missions, to strengthen mutual scientific and technological cooperation.³⁵ Another organization with similar goals is the Japanese

²⁹ BBC (2017) *Asahi to buy Pilsner Urquell from AB InBev*, Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-38299071> (Accessed 12 December 2021).

³⁰ MOFA Japan (2021) *Japan-Czech Republic Relations*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/czech/data.html> (Accessed 12 December 2021).

³¹ AFI (2021) *Japonsko a Česká republika: Investice a příležitosti (Japan and the Czech Republic: Investments and Opportunities)*, Available at: <https://afi.cz/cs/japonsko-a-ceska-republika-investice-a-prilezitosti> (Accessed 1 July 2021).

³² Ibidem.

³³ Author's interview with a representative from the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the Czech Republic, June 2021.

³⁴ Author's interview with a Ministry of Foreign Affairs official, June 2021.

³⁵ JETRO Czech Republic (n.d.) *O nás (About Us)*, Available at: <https://www.jetro.go.jp/czech/about.html> (Accessed 1 July 2021).

Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the Czech Republic.³⁶ Its 160 members are Japanese companies operating in Czechia. The Chamber is dedicated to multifaceted assistance and support of smooth functioning of the professional activities of these businesses.

In Japan, we can find the Czech Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCIJ), which facilitates networking and fosters dialogue and business connections between Czech and Japanese business ventures. Apart from business related events, CCCIJ also organizes and supports educational activities, seminars and exhibitions or cultural events.³⁷ Their office offers a range of services for Czech companies interested in entering the Japanese market.

The branch office of the Business and Investment Development Agency CzechInvest, under the Czech Ministry of Industry and Trade, has operated in Tokyo since 1998. The agency focuses on Japanese entities or businesspeople considering investment or business development in the Czech Republic and provides them with complex support. During its period of operations, CzechInvest has arranged 130 Japanese investment projects, with a total value of nearly 124 billion Czech korun (more than 4.8 billion euros), which helped create more than 28,000 new jobs.³⁸ CzechInvest also supports and promotes outstanding Czech businesses and their venture into the Japanese market. Its recent emphasis is placed on innovative fields, represented by seven key technological domains: AI, ecotech, healthtech, creative industries, mobility and advanced manufacturing technologies, or aerospace and defense.³⁹ Particularly, the emphasis on the last two categories is a reaction to the demand caused by the shifting geopolitics of the Asia-Pacific. Due to the progressively worsening

³⁶ Kazuki Kato (n.d.) チェコ日本商工会会長ご挨拶 (*Greeting from the President of the Czech Japanese Chamber of Commerce*), Available at: <https://www.nihonshokokai.cz/チェコ日本商工会会長ご挨拶-2/> (Accessed 20 June 2021).

³⁷ Czech Chamber of Commerce in Japan (2014) 在日チェコ商工会議所の定款 (*Articles of Incorporation of Czech Chamber of Commerce in Japan*), Available at: <https://www.cccij.com/inpage/constitution-japanese/> (Accessed 15 July 2021).

³⁸ CzechInvest (n.d.) *CzechInvest in Tokyo*, Available at: <https://www.czechinvest.org/cz/Kontakty/Zahranicni-zastupci/Japonsko> (Accessed 15 June 2021).

³⁹ CzechInvest (2021) *České inovativní firmy představily své technologie japonským investorům (Czech innovative companies presented their technologies to Japanese investors)*, Available at: <https://www.czechinvest.org/cz/Homepage/Novinky/Brezen-2021/Ceske-inovativni-firmy-predstavily-sve-technologie-japonskym-investorum> (Accessed 1 July 2021).

security situation in East Asia, the Japanese government has significantly boosted defense expenditures.⁴⁰ The current situation presents an interesting opportunity for Czech businesses in the fields of defense and aviation.

The Czech Republic offers not only attractive investment incentives but also boasts an educated and qualified, yet affordable workforce. Moreover, it has a highly strategic location in Central Europe, supported by developed infrastructure. The Japanese market, on the other hand, shows increasing demand not only for manufactured goods but also services and innovative technological solutions.

Cultural and people-to-people relations: Mutual cultural appreciation with inevitable limits

Aside from the two embassies and offices directly attached to them, multiple organizations facilitate various cultural connections and friendships in both countries. In Japan, we can find the Japan-Czech Association, established in 1959, and the Japan-Czech Friendship Association, established in 2004. Two other similar organizations exist in Czechia. The Czech-Japanese Association, established in 1990, in Prague, operates with the goal of developing mutual knowledge and introducing Japanese culture to the general public, as well as helping integrate the Japanese community into the Czech environment.⁴¹ In 2011, the Japanese minister of foreign affairs awarded the Association's extraordinary contributions to the development of Japanese-Czech relations. Located in Brno, the Japan Center has similar goals and, interestingly, it is the only place in the country where the JLPT language certification exam is annually organized.

The field of Japanese Studies has a long history and tradition in the Czech Republic. It was established as a standalone study program at Charles University, in Prague, in 1948.⁴² At present, similar programs are also offered by Masaryk University, in Brno, and Palacky University, in Olomouc. There are partnership agreements and

⁴⁰ Nippon.com (2021) *Japan Ranks Ninth in Global Military Spending in 2020*, Available at: <https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-data/h01019/> (Accessed 1 July 2021).

⁴¹ Czech-Japanese Association (n.d.) *About us. Czech-Japanese Association*, Available from: <https://www.japan.cz/en/about-us-2/> (Accessed 5 July 2021).

⁴² Embassy of Japan in the Czech Republic (n.d.) *Japan and Czechia – related organizations*, Available at: https://www.cz.emb-japan.go.jp/cz/nihon-czech_contacts3.html (Accessed 11 December 2021).

student exchange programs with numerous universities in Japan. The students often maintain a close relationship with Japan during their working career and make a strong contribution to the future development of the bilateral relations.

Diverse cooperation in the fields of culture and sports is promoted by both embassies and friendship organizations in Prague and Tokyo, which endorse various frequent cultural events. As a result, Czech names such as Věra Čáslavská, Bedřich Smetana or Alfons Mucha remain relatively well-known in Japan. Similarly, various aspects of Japanese culture, both traditional and modern, attract Czechs of all ages. Eigasai is an annual film festival organized in Prague every winter.⁴³ Since 2008, it has offered Japanese cinematographic pieces of varying genres and age, ranging from popular to more niche titles. The Czech-Japanese Association regularly organizes festivals, such as: *Aki-matsuri* (autumn festival), *Bodaiju-matsuri* (Bodhi tree festival), *Budo-matsuri* (martial arts) or *Katana-matsuri*, as well as multiple other cultural and social events. These events represent an excellent opportunity to build personal contacts between Czechs and Japanese. According to the numbers provided by the Czech Statistical Office, at the end of 2019, there were 1,406 Japanese citizens in the Czech Republic, with a period of stay exceeding 90 days, i.e., residents or students.⁴⁴

The Czech Republic, with its countless historical castles, medieval churches and stunning architecture, spanning hundreds of years of art history, as well as traditional arts and crafts, represents an attractive tourist destination, with an undeniably massive appeal for Japanese, as well as other East Asian tourists. The number of inbound Japanese tourists remains, however, relatively low, when compared to Chinese and South Korean nationals. From the almost 11 million foreign tourists who visited the Czech Republic in 2019, the Japanese did not make it into the top 10.⁴⁵ This can perhaps be attributed to the absence of a direct flight connecting the two countries.

⁴³ Eigasai.cz (2021) *Official website of the Festival of Japanese Culture and Film*, Available at: <http://www.eigasai.cz/2021/index.html> (Accessed 3 December 2021).

⁴⁴ Czech Statistical Office (2019) *Cizinci v ČR podle státního občanství v letech 1994-2019 (Foreigners in the Czech Republic: by citizenship, 1994-2019)*, Available at: https://www.czso.cz/documents/11292/27320905/c01R04_2019.xlsx/3bc309de-78d4-4ac9-8081-6f6866f86788?version=1.0 (Accessed 5 July 2021).

⁴⁵ Czech Statistical Office (2020). *Cestovní ruch - 4. čtvrtletí 2019 (Tourism - 4th quarter 2019)*, Available at: <https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/cri/cestovni-ruch-4-ctvrtleti-2019> (Accessed 6 December 2021).

During their 2017 visit to Japan, representatives of the Czech Ministry of Transport met with their Japanese counterparts, to discuss an Air Service Agreement that is a necessary precondition toward the establishment of a direct flight connection between Prague and Japan.⁴⁶ However, the associated expenses for the airline operators are significant and require planning and thoughtful consideration. Moreover, due to the decline in profitability of commercial air travel, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and associated travel restrictions, as of 2021, the plans to establish a direct connection appear to have been temporarily put on hold (as of 2021). For most Czechs, Japan remains a rather exotic destination.

Unlike China, Japan and its investments and involvement do not represent a polarizing topic in the Czech political discourse. Consequently, this also means that the established bilateral relationship is highly unlikely to be affected by any future domestic political change, which suggests long-term stability and predictability. The perceptions of Japan by the Czech public are favorable, although, regrettably, there is also a certain level of indifference or a general lack of interest and knowledge about Japan and East Asia as a whole. This can be attributed to their vast geographical distance and cultural difference but also the lack of quality media coverage of the region. News coverage focused on Japan is typically limited to *Česká televize*, the national public broadcaster, and the reports most often pertain to natural catastrophes, rather than political or security issues in East Asia. While *Česká televize* has a dedicated correspondent for the East Asian region, occasional mistakes in transcriptions and name usage suggest that much of the information is primarily acquired and translated from English sources.

Due to limited demand, the supply of quality domestic news reporting and analyses by Czech journalists is somewhat lackluster. A general trend of underrepresentation can be observed in Japanese media outlets, as well. Nevertheless, the Czech Republic made a surprising appearance in the headlines of Japanese newspapers, as well as NHK's main evening news broadcast, at the end of August 2020, when President of the Senate Miloš Vystrčil, accompanied by Czech politicians,

⁴⁶ Embassy of the Czech Republic in Japan (2017) *ČR a Japonsko začaly jednat o Dohodě o leteckých službách* (*The Czech Republic and Japan have begun negotiations on an Air Services Agreement*), Available from: https://www.mzv.cz/tokyo/cz/obchod_a_ekonomika/cr_a_japonska_zacali_jednat_o_dohode_o.html (Accessed 1 December 2021).

businessmen and journalists, visited Taiwan. This historical visit, which was vocally reprimanded by Beijing, was picked up by the Japanese media, who lauded the Czechs for their insistence on the values of freedom and democracy.⁴⁷

Conclusions and recommendations

Over the past hundred years, Japan and the Czech Republic have built a strong bilateral relationship with a degree of mutual interest. Not only cultural but also business relations have been successfully accelerated, particularly in the past three decades. Czech foreign policy trends toward Japan are proactive and co-operative and can also be characterized by their relative stability and predictability, which is a direct result of the lack of politicization of Japan in the Czech discourse.

The relationship can furthermore be described as stable and slowly evolving toward more bilateral agreements. Strengthening of the relationship with Japan is favorable for the business sector, due to the increasing volume of Japanese investments and their profitability for the Czech economy. For Japanese investors, the country offers an educated and skilled workforce, capable of advanced manufacturing with high added value, while maintaining a relatively low cost. However, gradual pressure to increase wages, stemming from low unemployment rates, might limit the volume of foreign investment from Japan, as well as other Asian countries, in the future. Even though the economic aspects of the bilateral cooperation can be evaluated as successful in the long term, the Czech government needs to focus on defining and specifying of long-term goals and priorities.

Currently, any security cooperation is closely tied to the Czech private business sector. The Czech government has recognized this field primarily as an economic opportunity and actively supports similar ventures through CzechInvest. On the diplomatic level, these relations are included in the Strategic Partnership, which now explicitly mentions defense and security cooperation. The existence of the newly signed Action Plan clearly demonstrates the emphasis placed on similar issues and provides the possibility to further extend cooperation in this domain. Nevertheless, whether and how

⁴⁷ Asahi Shimbun (2020) チェコ上院議長、台湾を初訪問 背景に中国への反発 (*Czech Senate Chairman visits Taiwan for the first time Opposition to China in the background*), Available at: <https://www.asahi.com/articles/ASN9163DFN80UHBI00D.html> (Accessed 15 July 2021).

this type of cooperation will be realized in more practical terms remains to be seen in the upcoming years. Given the available information, there are currently no military attachés present at either of the two embassies. The bilateral relationship has long been limited to economic and cultural cooperation. If the newly emerging area of security cooperation is to be fully integrated as the third facet of the Czech-Japanese relations, the addition of military experts to the diplomatic missions would be a logical next step, that would allow the transformation of this cooperation from formal declarations, into more tangible results.

Cultural cooperation and exchange between the two countries, supported by the work of both embassies, as well as several governmental organizations and friendship associations, have been functioning well. However, the challenge posed by geographical distance, as well as cultural differences on both sides, is a difficult one to overcome. The general public in the Czech Republic still has a relatively low level of knowledge about Japan and East Asia in general, which mostly results in indifference toward these countries. The situation could theoretically be improved, if the media presented Japan and its current affairs, as well as its culture, to the general audience in a more accessible manner, without unnecessary orientalization and sensationalism. Furthermore, establishing a direct flight between Prague and Tokyo in the future could help build new connections to facilitate more mutual interest and understanding.

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- Asahi Shimbun (2020) チェコ上院議長、台湾を初訪問 背景に中国への反発 (*Czech Senate Chairman visits Taiwan for the first time Opposition to China in the background*), Available at: <https://www.asahi.com/articles/ASN9163DFN80UHBI00D.html> (Accessed 15 July 2021).
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Denmark-Japan relations: Diversifying political and economic ties to East Asia

By Raymond YAMAMOTO*

Overview

Denmark and Japan have a long relationship that goes back to the conclusion of the “Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation between Japan and Denmark,” in 1867. For over 150 years, the two countries have been interacting predominantly in the cultural domain, though recently the relations have begun developing in the economic and political fields as well. Especially after the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between the European Union and Japan entered into force, on 1 February 2019, Denmark was allowed to expand its exports to Japan. The country is in a good position to profit from the EPA, particularly through its leading position in the fields of agriculture, digitalization and sustainable energy systems. For Japan, Denmark could become a very important partner to support its ambitious goal to carry out an extensive digitalization of society and to achieve the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals.

With a growing perception of China as a threat to the liberal world and its rules-based order, democratic values, and human rights, Denmark has been slowly increasing its attention to Japan as a potential anchor of stability in Asia. As a member of the Arctic Council, Denmark represents an important ally for Japan in its endeavors to safeguard the freedom of navigation and develop existing energy resources in the Arctic region.

Despite having many common interests, the relationship is far from having reached its full potential. There is plenty of room to deepen cooperation in existing

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fields and to develop it within new areas, including development cooperation and Peace Keeping Operations (PKO), where both are leading countries. Both being maritime nations, ensuring the free and lawful use of the sea is another domain of interest where cooperation could be intensified. Despite many common interests, cultural and language differences still represent a major hindrance to deepening and extending bilateral relations.

The history of an uneven relationship

Contact between Denmark and Japan can be traced back to the early 17th century and the Japanese Edo Period (1603-1867), when Danes and Japanese interacted occasionally, through the Danish East India Company. Another early documented encounter between people of both countries was through Martin Spangberg, who led the first Russian expedition to Japan, in 1738.¹ The first documented Japanese in Denmark were four sailors, shipwrecked in 1803, on their way back to Japan.² However, such encounters were still relatively rare, as direct communication between the two countries was difficult to establish due to Japan's strict isolationist foreign policy, called *sakoku*, which was in force for almost the entire Edo Period. During this era, Japan only maintained contact with China and the Dutch, through a trading post in Dejima, in Nagasaki.³

But things changed in 1853-1854, when United States Navy Commodore Matthew Perry forced the opening of Japan. Like other European countries, Denmark hoped to quickly establish a profitable trade relationship with the new Japan. Dutch diplomat Didrik de Graeff van Polsbroek played a pivotal role in enabling Denmark, as well as other Scandinavian countries, to establish political and economic relations with Japan, after the end of the *sakoku* policy. Van Polsbroek enabled the conclusion of the "Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation between Japan and Denmark" (*nichidenmāku shūkōtsūshō kōkaijōyaku*) in 1867, forming the official beginning of the

¹ Yōichi Nagashima (2003) *De Dansk-Japanske Kulturelle Forbindelser 1600-1873 (The Danish-Japanese Cultural Relations 1600-1873)*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, pp. 66–72.

² *Ibidem*, pp. 119–134.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 20–22.

two countries' long-lasting relationship. The treaty had primarily commercial value, as it opened the ports for Danish trader ships.⁴ Although Denmark was not the first country to enjoy such privilege, it was the first Scandinavian country to do so.⁵

When it came to diplomatic matters, they were handled through the Dutch mission until 1912.⁶ Denmark's first official diplomat was the aforementioned van Polsbroek, who also represented other Scandinavian countries, including Sweden and Norway.⁷ In 1912, Preben F. Count Ahlefeldt-Laurvig, the Danish Ambassador to Beijing, was accredited as the first Danish national diplomat assigned to Japan, but it was not before 1921 that an actual embassy was established in Japan.⁸ Diplomatic relations between Denmark and Japan continued during the Second World War, although Denmark was occupied by Germany – Japan's closest ally in Europe. However, after the German occupation ended in 1945, Denmark cut its diplomatic ties to Japan, only to reestablish them in 1952, following the conclusion of the San Francisco Peace Treaty.⁹ As one of the 51 founding countries of the United Nations, Denmark supported the admission of Japan to the UN, in 1956, 17 years earlier than the admission of Germany.¹⁰

Looking at the trajectory of Denmark-Japan relations, one can say that Denmark was the party primarily interested in creating a bilateral relationship in the past. But, as a rather small country from the Japanese point of view, Denmark stood in the shadow of

⁴ Ibidem, p. 272-280.

⁵ Nobuhiko Yoshitake (2000) "Nihon Hokuō Seiji Kankei No Shiteki Tenkai — Nihon Kara Mita Hokuō (Historical Development of Japan-Scandinavian Political Relations — A Japanese Perspective on Scandinavia)," *Chiiki Seisaku Kenkyū* 3 (1), pp. 23–24.

⁶ The Embassy of Denmark in Japan (n.d.) *About Us*, Available at: <https://japan.um.dk/en/about-us-en> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

⁷ Yōichi Nagashima (2012) *De Dansk-Japanske Kulturelle Forbindelser 1873-1903 (The Danish-Japanese Cultural Relations 1873-1903)*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, pp. 272–280.

⁸ The Embassy of Denmark in Japan (n.d.) *About Us*, Available at: <https://japan.um.dk/en/about-us-en> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

⁹ Nobuhiko Yoshitake (2000) "Nihon Hokuō Seiji Kankei No Shiteki Tenkai — Nihon Kara Mita Hokuō (Historical Development of Japan-Scandinavian Political Relations — A Japanese Perspective on Scandinavia)," *Chiiki Seisaku Kenkyū* 3 (1), pp. 24–27.

¹⁰ The United Nations (1956) *Admission of Japan to Membership the United Nations*, Available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/667226> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

other larger and more influential European countries, such as Great Britain, France and Germany. There is a remark in the famous Iwakura Mission (1871-1873) that “the capital of Denmark is quiet and empty and not that beautiful, but there are many nice buildings, such as the Royal Palace, St. Nicolai Church, the town hall.”¹¹ This is not to say that the Japanese showed no interest in Denmark at all, demonstrating great curiosity for the Danish educational system since the beginning of the bilateral relations. In that regard, the Iwakura Mission noted: “[e]ven in Europe, there are not so many countries with the same standard.”¹²

Although neither country saw relations with each other as being of central importance until recently, the relationship has arguably been constantly friendly and without any turbulence.

Political relations: Pivoting from China to Japan

Political matters were often dealt with through embassies located in the two capitals. The Embassy of Denmark was located in various places, including Yotsuya, Hibiya and Aoyama, before it was moved to its current place, in the area of Daikanyama (Shibuya), in 1979.¹³ Although no consulates exist outside Tokyo, limited services are provided by the honorary consulates in Fukuoka, Hiroshima, Nagoya, Osaka and Sapporo.¹⁴

The Japanese Embassy is placed in Vesterbro, close to Dybbølsbro Station. Like Denmark, Japan does not have any consulate outside the capital. There is an honorary consul in Aarhus but with much less authority than the Danish counterpart. The honorary consul does not have any authority regarding passport or visa issuance, nor document authentication related to nationality or residence.¹⁵

Since the end of the Second World War, the relationship between Denmark and

¹¹ Li Narangoa (2000) “Japan’s Modernization: The Iwakura Mission to Scandinavia in 1873,” *KONTUR: Culture, History, Politics - Tidsskrift for Kulturstudier* 2, p. 19.

¹² Ibidem, p. 20.

¹³ The Embassy of Denmark in Japan (n.d.) *About Us*, Available at: <https://japan.um.dk/en/about-us-en> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

¹⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark (n.d.) *Danish Honorary Consulates in Japan*, Available at: <https://japan.um.dk/en/about-us-en/danish-honorary-consulates-in-japan>.

¹⁵ The Embassy of Japan in Denmark (2018) *Honorary Consul-General of Japan in Aarhus*, Available at: https://www.dk.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/bilateral-consul.html (Accessed 6 October 2021).

Japan had been less characterized by the political or economic but more by the cultural dimension. It is noteworthy that, when it comes to Asia, the Danish focus had been primarily placed on China until quite recently, as Denmark and China concluded a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2008, to intensify their cooperation.¹⁶ In comparison, a similar agreement with Japan was only concluded six years later, in 2014.¹⁷ In 2012, there were 11 ministerial visits to China.¹⁸ Back then, Denmark made great political efforts to extend and deepen the relationship with China, which could also be observed in the fact that the police suppressed the 2012 Tibet demonstrations in Copenhagen, to avoid disturbances during the visit of former Chinese President Hu Jintao.¹⁹ Moreover, Denmark's uncritical position regarding human rights issues and the strong focus on the economy were greatly valued by China. As a gesture of friendship, President Xi Jinping officially invited Queen Margrethe II of Denmark to China, in 2014.²⁰ Even more, as a symbolic gesture of appreciation, China offered Denmark a pair of pandas during the visit of Queen Margrethe II to Beijing, the first offer ever made to a Scandinavian country.²¹ At the time of this writing, there were only eight other countries in Europe in possession of pandas. Pandas are perceived as an important gesture of China's soft power, which some researchers have labeled "panda

¹⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark (2017) *Denmark's Strategic Partnership with China*, Available at: <https://kina.um.dk/en/about-denmark/denmarks-strategic-partnership-with-china> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

¹⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2014) *Joint Statement on the Establishment of a Strategic Partnership for Growth and Innovation Between the Government of Japan and the Government of the Kingdom of Denmark*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000029492.pdf> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

¹⁸ China Daily (2014) *Royals Who Have Visited China*, Available at: https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2014-04/23/content_17458202.htm (Accessed 6 October 2021).

¹⁹ Reuters (2018) *Denmark to Deepen Investigation into Police Conduct during Chinese State Visits*, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-tibet-denmark-idUSKBN1JA29M> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

²⁰ The Embassy of China in Denmark (2014) *Queen Margrethe II of Denmark to Visit China*, Available at: <http://dk.china-embassy.org/eng/zdgx/t1148105.htm> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

²¹ The State Council (2017) *China, Denmark Signs Agreement for 15-Year Giant Panda Research*, Available at: http://english.www.gov.cn/news/international_exchanges/2017/05/04/content_281475644967182.htm (Accessed 6 October 2021).

diplomacy.”²²

Danish relations with Japan began to improve diametrically opposed to the slow but steady deterioration of the relations with China, following its increasing aggressive diplomatic behavior, that became known as “Wolf Warrior Diplomacy.” The new course of the Danish-Japanese relationship was marked by the “Memorandum on Political Consultations between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark.” Signed in 2012, both countries declared the decision to strengthen and extend their bonds, agreeing to have yearly political consultations at the levels of foreign minister and, alternately, permanent state secretary, state secretary and undersecretary.²³

On the state leader level, there have been three visits on each side, since 2000: those of Danish prime ministers Anders Fogh Rasmussen (2002), Lars Løkke Rasmussen (2009), and Helle Thorning-Schmidt (2014); and those of Japanese prime ministers Junichirō Koizumi (2002), Yukio Hatoyama (2009) and Shinzō Abe (2017).²⁴

The Royal Family in Denmark is also an active promoter of the country’s relations with Japan, especially Crown Prince Frederik and Crown Princess Mary. The popular royal couple, who is extensively represented in the Danish tabloids, is said to have a very close relationship with Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako.²⁵ Traditionally, there has been a close relationship between the Imperial household and the Royal household as well. Already in 1886, Prince Fushiminomiya Sadanaru visited Denmark, and Prince Valdemar was the first to visit Japan on behalf of the Danish Royal household, in 1900. Thereafter, there have been regular mutual visits of the

²² Kathleen Carmel Buckingham, Jonathan Neil William David, and Paul Jepson (2013) “Environmental Reviews and Case Studies: Diplomats and Refugees: Panda Diplomacy, Soft ‘Cuddly’ Power, and the New Trajectory in Panda Conservation,” *Environmental Practice* 15(3), pp. 262–270.

²³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2014) *Joint Statement on the Establishment of a Strategic Partnership for Growth and Innovation Between the Government of Japan and the Government of the Kingdom of Denmark*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000029492.pdf> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

²⁴ The Embassy of Japan in Denmark (2021) *Japan-Denmark Relations*, Available at: https://www.dk.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/bilateral.html (Accessed 6 October 2021).

²⁵ Billed Bladet (2020) *Glædelig Meningsmåling: Så populær er den japanske kejser (Remarkable Poll: So popular is the Japanese Emperor)*, Available at: <https://www.billedbladet.dk/kongelige/japan/glædelig-meningsmaaling-saa-populaer-er-den-japanske-kejser> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

members of the Imperial household and the Royal household. There have been more than 30 visits over the years, which is almost on par with the diplomatic encounters of the higher order.²⁶ Personal visits of the Japanese Emperor and Empress to Denmark took place in 1971 and 1998.²⁷

Another milestone of the Danish-Japanese relationship was set in March 2014, during the meeting of Danish Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt with Prime Minister Shinzō Abe in Japan, as the Strategic Partnership was concluded. In the Strategic Partnership Agreement, both countries affirmed their cooperation on shared values, including freedom, democracy, respect for human rights, and the rule of law. Internationally, both countries agreed to support a multilateral system with the United Nations at its core, to solve global issues. Peace Keeping Operations (PKO) were understood as a central tool to address security issues.²⁸ Despite the large ideological intersections on international issues, it has so far not translated to specific measures in the field of development cooperation or PKOs. In contrast, Denmark already worked on a United Nations operation with China's People's Liberation Army in 2014, to dispose of chemical weapons in Syria.²⁹

Many points emphasized in the Strategic Partnership became the core of what Japan later called the Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision (FOIP). With the conclusion of the Strategic Partnership with Japan, Denmark essentially showed its support for Japan's understanding of FOIP. At the same time, committing itself, at least ideologically, to the above-mentioned universal values symbolized a departure from Denmark's neutral stance toward China. Denmark has since been increasingly openly critical of China's questionable maritime claims, as well as of various domestic human rights violations. In 2020, the Danish Parliament (*Folketing*) officially criticized the

²⁶ The Embassy of Japan in Denmark (2021) *Japan-Denmark Relations*, Available at: https://www.dk.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/bilateral.html (Accessed 6 October 2021).

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2014) *Joint Statement on the Establishment of a Strategic Partnership for Growth and Innovation Between the Government of Japan and the Government of the Kingdom of Denmark*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000029492.pdf> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

²⁹ Thomas Sand (2014) *Tættere dansk-kinesisk forsvarssamarbejde (Closer Danish-Chinese Defense Cooperation)*, Available at: <https://www.berlingske.dk/politik/taetere-dansk-kinesisk-forsvarssamarbejde> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

Chinese government's suppression of the democratic movement in Hong Kong by passing a critical statement.³⁰ Although not as directly, Denmark has begun to demonstrate that it shares Japan's worries regarding China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea. On 12 July 2021, the Danish Embassy in the Philippines officially celebrated the fifth anniversary of the Hague arbitration ruling against China's maritime claim over the South China Sea, on its Twitter account.³¹

In the field of security, Denmark and Japan, as large maritime shipping nations, place a high emphasis on ensuring the free and lawful use of the sea.³² So far, security cooperation in the maritime domain has been exclusively taking place through multilateral organizations. Under the UN Security Council Resolutions 1851 and 2500, both countries have been jointly working on combating piracy near the Horn of Africa.³³ The recent decision of Denmark to scrap its EU opt-out from security and defense policy could extend the multilateral cooperation under the EU umbrella.³⁴ This could be done, for example, through participation in the EU project Enhancing Security Cooperation in and with Asia (ESIWA).³⁵

Although there have been no direct bilateral military cooperation or exchanges so far, Japan has been closely following the developments in the Arctic. The country has been urging Denmark, one of the eight permanent Arctic Council states, to keep the increasingly ice-free Arctic Ocean shipping lanes open for its future commercial

³⁰ Mette Larsen (2020) *China Criticized the Danish Parliament's Criticism of China*, Available at: <https://scandasia.com/china-criticized-the-danish-parliaments-criticism-of-china/> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

³¹ More details available at: <https://twitter.com/DenmarkinPH/status/1414429037200494600> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

³² Jesper Segelcke Thomsen and Camilla T. N. Sørensen (2022) *Indo-Pacific: Betydning for Europa, Danmark og Dansk forsvar (The Indo-Pacific: The Importance for the EU, Denmark and the Danish Defense)*, Available at: https://www.fmn.dk/globalassets/fmn/dokumenter/strategi/rsa/-indopacific_rapport_050522-.pdf (Accessed 11 July 2022).

³³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark (n.d.) *Counter-Piracy*, Available at: <https://um.dk/en/foreign-policy/piracy/> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

³⁴ Eline Schaart (2022) *Denmark votes to scrap EU defense opt-out*, Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/denmark-votes-to-scrap-eu-defense-policy-opt-out/> (Accessed 6 July 2021)

³⁵ Expertise France (2022) *ESIWA - Enhancing the European Union's Security Cooperation In and With Asia*, Available at: <https://www.expertisefrance.fr/en/fiche-projet?id=861449> (Accessed 6 July 2021).

traffic.³⁶ No doubt that the concerns related to the Arctic addressed by the 2014 visit of Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida were directed at China's progressing engagement in the region.³⁷ With additional pressure from the United States, Denmark was central in stopping an agreement in Greenland with a Chinese mining company in 2017, due to security concerns. The agreement would have enabled the company to acquire a former Danish naval base at Gronnedal to build two airports.³⁸ Moreover, Denmark's concerns over China's engagement in the Arctic have only been on the rise since Beijing published its Arctic Policy, in 2018.³⁹ Simultaneously as it is making attempts to limit Chinese influence in the Arctic, Denmark is welcoming Japan's offer to develop resources in Greenland.⁴⁰

The fact that Foreign Minister Jeppe Kofod met Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi during his 2021 state visit indicates that the increasing issues in the Arctic, as well as in the Indo-Pacific, are leading to a growing interest in extending security cooperation.⁴¹

Economic relations and the effects of the Economic Partnership Agreement

Having a population of only 5.9 million people, Denmark has a small economy, compared to that of Japan, with a population of 124.7 million people.⁴² Nevertheless, Denmark is the home of world-leading enterprises in the fields of agriculture, maritime

³⁶ The Headquarters for Ocean Policy (2015) *Japan's Arctic Policy*, Available at: https://www8.cao.go.jp/ocean/english/arctic/pdf/japans_ap_e.pdf (Accessed 6 October 2021).

³⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2014) *Tripartite Meeting Between Japan, the Kingdom of Denmark and Greenland*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/we/dk/page22e_000444.html (Accessed 6 October 2021).

³⁸ Erik Matzen (2017) *Denmark Spurned Chinese Offer for Greenland Base over Security: Sources*, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-denmark-china-greenland-base-idUSKBN1782EE> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

³⁹ The State Council (2018) *China's Arctic Policy*, Available at: http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2018/01/26/content_281476026660336.htm (Accessed 6 October 2021).

⁴⁰ Koya Jibiki (2017) *Japan, Denmark Agree to Cooperate on Arctic Resource Development*, Available at: <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Japan-Denmark-agree-to-cooperate-on-Arctic-resource-development> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

⁴¹ Ministry of Defense Japan (2021) *Defense Minister Kishi Received a Courtesy Call from H.E. Mr. Jeppe Kofod, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Denmark*, Available at: <https://www.mod.go.jp/en/article/2021/11/dce3e39ba6230346d7d9d50ea18733bdc948c8dc.html> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

⁴² CIA (2022) *The World Factbook*, Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/> (Accessed 3 April 2022).

shipping, renewable energy technology and pharmaceuticals. In addition, the county is also famous for its simplistic and functionalistic “Danish design”. Well-known Danish companies that are prominent in Japan as well include Bang & Olufsen, Carlsberg, Danish Crown, Flying Tiger, Lego, Møller-Maersk, Novo Nordisk, Tulip Food Company, and Vestas Wind Systems.

Recent talks between Denmark and Japan have been focusing intensely on the promotion of trade, especially after the conclusion of the European Union-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). For trade nations such as Denmark and Japan, free trade agreements are very important, as they facilitate the flow of goods and services. So far, the role of Denmark is marginal to the Japanese economy. However, Japan ranks 5th among Denmark’s trade partners outside the EU.⁴³ In 2020, Japanese exports to Denmark stood at 362 million euros, while Danish exports to Japan were valued at 1,194 million euros.⁴⁴

Since 1995, exports from Denmark to Japan have increased yearly at an average rate of roughly 0.9%.⁴⁵ The leading sector of Danish exports to Japan in 2020 was the field of pharmaceuticals, which accounted for 41.9% of exports.⁴⁶ Another strong field is the agricultural sector, consisting primarily of meat and dairy products, which make up 18.7% of exports.⁴⁷ Particularly the agricultural sector can profit from the EU-Japan EPA, as it almost eliminates 97% of Japan’s tariffs. For example, the tariffs for cheap

⁴³ The European Commission (2018) *Denmark: EU-Japan in Your Town*, Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/in-focus/eu-japan-economic-partnership-agreement/eu-japan-in-your-town/denmark_en.htm (Accessed 6 October 2021).

⁴⁴ Trade Map (n.d.) *Demark-Japan Imports*, Available at: https://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx?nvpm=1%7c208%7c%7c392%7c%7cTOTAL%7c%7c%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1 (Accessed 11 July 2022). Trade Map (n.d.) *Demark-Japan Exports*, Available at: https://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx?nvpm=1%7c208%7c%7c392%7c%7cTOTAL%7c%7c%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c2%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1 (Accessed 11 July 2022).

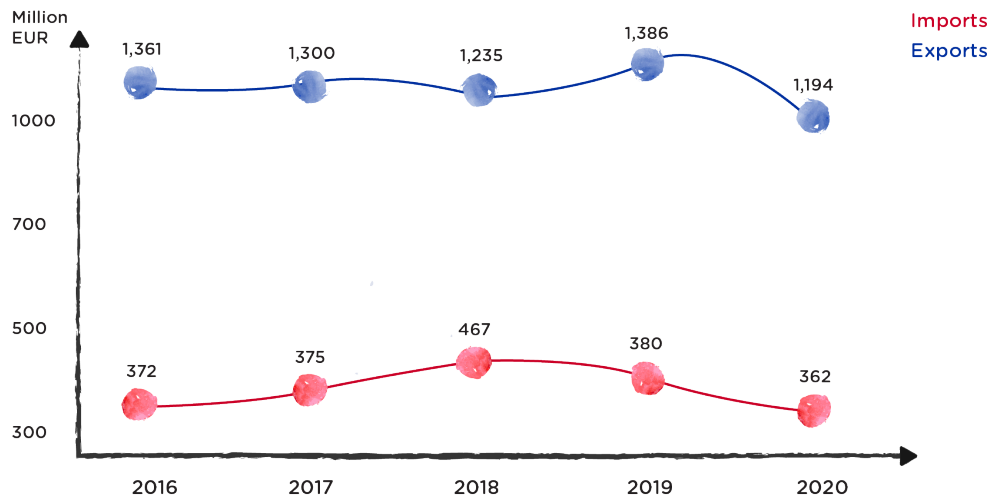
⁴⁵ The Observatory of Economic Complexity (n.d.) *Denmark (DNK) and Japan (JPN) Trade*, Available at: <https://app-ant.oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/dnk/partner/jpn> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

⁴⁶ JETRO (n.d.) *Denmāku Bijinesujōhō to Jetero No Shien Sābisu (Danish Business Information and JETRO Support Services)*, Available at: <https://www.jetro.go.jp/world/europe/dk/> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

⁴⁷ Ibidem.

meat were reduced from 482 yen (3.85 euros) per kg to 50 yen (0.40 euros) per kg.⁴⁸ The 4.3% tariff for higher-priced meat will be gradually phased out 10 years after the EU-Japan EPA entered into force, while the 29.8% tariff on cheese will be gradually removed within 16 years.⁴⁹

Denmark's trade with Japan in million euros



Source: International Trade Center/Trade Map

Despite the strong outlook on agricultural products, the potential for the Danish high-tech sector should not be neglected. One example is Denmark's world-leading pharmaceutical sector, which attracted a 1.6 billion dollars (1.4 billion euros) investment from the Fujifilm conglomerate, the largest investment Denmark ever received from a foreign company.⁵⁰ Other companies in the fields of renewable energy and digitalization also have great potential, as their know-how and technologies are key to Japan's economic modernization. Danish Industry, as well as the Foreign Ministry's Trade Council, is well aware of the opportunities created by the EU-Japan EPA and

⁴⁸ Mainichi Daily News (2017) *Japan Sacrificed Cheese Tariffs to Get EPA Done with EU*, Available at: <https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170707/p2a/00m/0na/012000c> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

⁵⁰ Fujifilm (2022) *Fujifilm to Invest USD 1.6 billion to enhance and expand its global offering of cell culture manufacturing services*, Available at: <https://www.fujifilm.com/dk/en/news/hq/8171> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

have been strongly advocating that Danish companies expand their business to Japan.⁵¹

In contrast, Japanese exports to Denmark have been decreasing at a yearly average rate of roughly 3%, leading to a growing trade surplus for Denmark, amounting to 1.76 billion dollars (1.61 billion euros) in 2020.⁵² However, a slight increase in Japanese exports is observable with the conclusion of the EU-Japan EPA. Japan's largest exports of goods in 2020 were primarily in the field of transportation equipment, accounting for 33.6% of exports. Machinery represented another strong sector for Japanese exports, constituting 18.3% of total exports.⁵³ Since 2010, Japan has been particularly interested in strengthening economic cooperation in three fields: life science, robotic technology and clean green technology.⁵⁴

Looking at the past data, it becomes clear that Denmark has great incentives to further increase its exports to Japan. The conclusion of the Denmark-Japan Strategic Partnership, in 2014, as well as the EU-Japan EPA, in 2019, provides a solid basis to further strengthen economic relations. The global pandemic that disrupted global trade in 2020 made it difficult to see the effects of the EU-Japan EPA. However, recent studies conducted in the EU indicate that there has been a growth of roughly 10% in the areas of export in which Denmark has been among the strongest – namely, meat, dairy, beverages, leather articles and electrical machinery.⁵⁵

Denmark ranks next to Estonia as the most significant partner of Japan in its promotion of a broad societal digital transformation. Thus, Japan has shown a great

⁵¹ Confederation of Danish Industry (2017) *Japan rummer gode muligheder for danske eksportvirksomheder (Japan offers good opportunities for Danish export companies)*, Available at: <https://www.danskindustri.dk/arkiv/analyser/2017/7/japan-rummer-gode-muligheder-for-danske-eksportvirksomheder/> (Accessed 6 October 2021). Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark - The Trade Council (2019) *Store muligheder for øget eksport til Japan (Great opportunities for increased exports to Japan)*, Available at: <https://thetradecouncil.dk/indsigter/frihandel/stort-potentiale-for-oeget-eksport-til-japan> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

⁵² The Observatory of Economic Complexity (n.d.) *Denmark (DNK) and Japan (JPN) Trade*, Available at: <https://app-ant.oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/dnk/partner/jpn> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

⁵³ JETRO (n.d.) *Denmāku Bijinesujōhō to Jetero No Shien Sābisu (Danish Business Information and JETRO Support Services)*, Available at: <https://www.jetro.go.jp/world/europe/dk/> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

⁵⁴ The Embassy of Japan in Denmark (2018) *Economic Relationship between Japan and Denmark*, Available at: https://www.dk.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/bilateral-economy.html (Accessed 6 October 2021).

⁵⁵ The European Commission (2020) *First Year of EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement Shows Growth in EU Exports*, Available at: <https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=2107> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

interest in Denmark, as the country is perceived as one of the leading countries in the field of digital governance, according to the e-governance survey conducted by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. At the same time, Japan ranks number 14.⁵⁶ The memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the digital field, which was signed on 24 November 2021, can provide Danish companies that have longtime experience in the subject lucrative access to the Japanese market.⁵⁷

Mutual cultural appreciation

Until recently, cultural and people-to-people interactions between Denmark and Japan have been the dominant area of their bilateral relations. Since 2008, there has been a yearly *Sakura* (cherry blossom) festival in Langelinie Park, organized by the Japanese Embassy and the Municipality of Copenhagen, to commemorate the friendship of Denmark and Japan. *Sakura* trees were donated in 2005 when Denmark celebrated the 200th anniversary of Hans Christian Andersen's birthday.⁵⁸ During this festival, visitors get to enjoy Japanese food and have the opportunity to see many cultural objects displayed. In 2017, the 150th anniversary of the "Treaty of Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation between Japan and Denmark" attracted great attention and was widely celebrated in Denmark. More than 50 events took place across the country in the same year, focusing on art, architecture, design, and literature among other things.⁵⁹

With the end of the *sakoku* period in 1853-1854, the encounters between Europeans and Japanese began to grow. The interest in the country that was isolated for more than 200 years was enormous, especially in the larger European capitals. While in Paris in 1876-1879, the artist and art collector Karl Madsen encountered a foreign art

⁵⁶ The United Nations (2020) *UN E-Government Survey 2020*, Available at: <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/Reports/UN-E-Government-Survey-2020> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

⁵⁷ NHK (2021) *Makishima Dejitaru-Shō Denmāku Gaishō to Oboegaki "Dejitaru-Ka de Kyōryoku" (Digital Minister Makishima Concluded a Memorandum of Understanding with Danish Foreign Minister on "Digitization Cooperation")*, Available at: <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/html/20211124/k10013360261000.html> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

⁵⁸ Copenhagen Sakura Festival (n.d.) *About Us*, Available at: <https://sakurafestival.dk/about/> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

⁵⁹ The Embassy of Japan in Denmark (2017) *Celebrating the 150th Anniversary of Japan-Denmark Diplomatic Relations in 2017*, Available at: <https://www.dk.emb-japan.go.jp/150/event-calender.html> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

style labeled *Japonisme*. This European art style that adopted Japanese aesthetics quickly became the most influential source of inspiration for Danish arts, crafts and design.⁶⁰ *Japonisme* became the foundation of Danish or Scandinavian design, widely popular today for its pursuit of beauty through the emphasis on simplicity and functionality.⁶¹ It also greatly influenced modern Danish architecture, represented by Carl Petersen, Kay Fisker and Kaare Klint, where the appreciation of Japanese design remains a constant.⁶²

The aesthetic proximity is shown by the fact that numerous landmark buildings in Denmark were designed by Japanese architects, including the renowned Kengo Kuma. Not only was he responsible for the waterfront aquatic center and harbor bath at Copenhagen's Paper Island but was also given the privilege to design the Museum of Hans Christian Andersen, in Odense.⁶³ What is noteworthy is that there is an equally deep appreciation in Japan for Danish design that has its origin in Japan itself. In 2020, famous Danish architect Bjarke Ingels was appointed as the main designer of the prestigious "Toyota Woven City," at the foot of Mount Fuji, the world's first smart city.⁶⁴

Young people in Denmark are primarily attracted by the popular culture of Japan, represented by anime, manga and video games. Japan is also increasingly gaining popularity through the growing numbers of "foodies" – enthusiasts for food and

⁶⁰ Gunhild Borggreen (2013) *Kulturudveksling: Japan og Danmark (Cultural exchange: Japan and Denmark)*, Available at: <http://www.kunsthistoriker.dk/kulturudveksling-japan-og-danmark/> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

⁶¹ Mirjam Gelfer-Jørgensen (2013) *Japanisme på dansk: kunst og design - 1870-2010 (Japonisme in Danish: art and design)*, Copenhagen: Arkitektens Forlag.

⁶² Carmen García Sánchez (2021) "Resonances from Japan in Modern Danish Architecture. New Evidences from Selected Post-War Domestic Buildings," *International Convention of Asian Scholars 2021 ICAS21*, Available at: <https://royaldanishacademy.com/nature/resonances-japan-modern-danish-architecture-new-evidences-selected-post-war-domestic> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

⁶³ Daily Scandinavian (2018) *A Little Piece of Japan in Denmark*, Available at: <https://www.dailyscandinavian.com/a-little-piece-of-japan-in-denmark/> (Accessed 6 October 2021). Odense Municipality (2021), *The New Hans Christian Andersen House Is Now Open*, Available at: <https://www.visitodense.com/tourist/see-do/hans-christian-andersen/new-hans-christian-andersen-house-now-open> (Accessed 7 July 2022).

⁶⁴ Toyota Woven City (n.d.) *Toyota Woven City*, Available at: <https://www.woven-city.global/> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

beverages.⁶⁵ Today, probably every Dane knows or has tasted sushi or ramen at least once. Moreover, due to the continuing strong popularity among the youth, the interest to study Japan remains very high at Danish universities. Japan Studies are offered at two universities, Aarhus University and Copenhagen University.⁶⁶ Copenhagen Business School offers International Business in Asia, which also includes courses related to Japan.⁶⁷ Japan Studies have been the most popular area study subject among Danish students and the number of applicants exceeds the number of offered seats by far every year. It is noteworthy that Japan Studies attract more students than China Studies.

At the same time, in Japan, Danish can be studied at Osaka University, Kansai Gaidai University and Tokai University. Tokai University has an especially close relationship with Denmark and its pedagogical philosophy.⁶⁸ It also has a branch in Denmark, the Tokai University European Center, located north of Copenhagen. Its main goal is to promote academic and cultural exchange between Tokai University and other institutions in Denmark and Europe.⁶⁹

Japanese education institutions and intellectuals have been traditionally demonstrating interest in the liberal education system in Denmark, influenced by Danish pastor and intellectual Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig and his idea to promote life-long learning.⁷⁰ One of the institutions based on this idea is the folk high school (*højskole*). This adult education institution enjoys broad popularity among young

⁶⁵ Kathleen LeBesco and Peter Naccarato (2018) *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Food and Popular Culture*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

⁶⁶ Aarhus University (n.d.) *Bacheloruddannelsen i Japanstudier (The Bachelor's Program in Japanese Studies)*, Available at: <https://bachelor.au.dk/japanstudier/> (Accessed 6 October 2021). University of Copenhagen (n.d.) *Bachelor i Asienstudier (japanstudier) (Bachelor in Asian Studies (Japanese Studies))*, Available at: <https://studier.ku.dk/bachelor/japanstudier/> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

⁶⁷ Copenhagen Business School (n.d.) *BSc in Business, Asian Language and Culture - International Business in Asia*, Available at: <https://www.cbs.dk/en/study/bachelor/bsc-in-business-asian-language-and-culture-international-business-in-asia> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

⁶⁸ Tokai University (n.d.) *Matsumae Shigeyoshi to Kengaku No Seishin (Shigeyoshi Matsumae and the Founding Spirit)*, Available at: <https://www.u-tokai.ac.jp/about/philosophy-history/matsumae-spirit/> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

⁶⁹ Tokai University European Center (n.d.) *About*, Available at: <http://www.u-tokai.dk/about.html> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

⁷⁰ Edward Broadbridge, Uffe Jonas, and Clay Warren (2011) *The School for Life: N.F.S. Grundtvig on Education for the People*, Aarhus: Aarhus University Press.

Japanese adults, who wish to learn new languages, as well as topics beyond the Japanese school curricula. It also provides the opportunity to experience a society that is among the leading in the World Happiness Report Ranking.⁷¹ One of the recent famous students of a Danish *højskole* is Momoko Nojo, a political activist famous for her #DontBeSilent campaign, which contributed to the resignation of Tokyo Olympics Chief Yoshirō Mori in 2021. Nojo explained that her motivation to fight for gender equality in Japan developed during her one-year stay at Brandbjerg Højskole.⁷²

Conclusions and recommendations

Danish-Japan relations have been developing particularly in the field of the economy following the conclusion of the EU-Japan EPA. At the time of this report's writing, the Danish private sector primarily showed substantial ambition to profit from the EPA. Comparatively seen, Japan is still lacking serious efforts to reduce the existing trade imbalance with Denmark.

The increase in Danish exports is primarily expected in the agricultural sector, where many of the tariffs were eliminated. Being one of the world's most efficient, the Danish meat and dairy industry will certainly be the greatest winner of the EPA. Although the Japanese demand for meat and dairy products will probably grow further, Denmark could also strengthen plant-based alternatives in its export portfolio. This should be imperative for Denmark, which is considered to be one of the leading green countries. As much as other industrialized countries, Japan is gradually turning its attention to the Sustainable Development Goals. The introduction of plant-based meat and dairy alternatives is a central contributor to the reduction of carbon emissions to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.⁷³ Denmark could also support Japan in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by sharing its know-how and

⁷¹ Center of Nordic Study Program (n.d.) *Forukehoisukōre Nyūmon (Introduction to Folk High School)*, Available at: <https://folkehojskole.jp/honmon.html#001> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

⁷² Morten Hoyrup (2021) *22-årig startede politisk bevægelse i Danmark. Nu har hun væltet magtfuld OL-boss (The 22-year-old started a political movement in Denmark. Now she has overthrown a powerful Olympic chief)*, Available at: <https://www.berlingske.dk/content/item/1542542> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

⁷³ The Japan Times (2021) *Japan Proposes Meat Alternatives to Reduce Carbon Emissions*, Available at: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2021/06/08/business/economy-business/white-paper-meat-alternatives-co2/> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

technology in the field of renewable energy. Particularly, offshore wind turbines could be an important contribution to Japan's energy transition toward renewables.

The digital sector offers another ground for Denmark to expand relations with Japan. In 2021, Japan established the Digital Agency, with the primary goal to push forward its digital transformation. Being a global digital leader in the field of economy and governance, Denmark could be a central provider of expertise and technologies to Japan.

On the other hand, even if the recent developments provided the Danish private sector with a plethora of opportunities to increase their profit in the Japanese market, cultural and language differences still pose an obstacle for many Danish companies.⁷⁴ Ironically, there has never been a lack of experts in Japanese culture graduating from the various study programs in Denmark. The country already possesses everything necessary to bring bilateral economic relations to the next level, particularly if it directs efforts toward connecting tech, business, and Japan experts. The Danish private sector needs to make use of the existing Japan experts, as knowledge of culture and language remains an important precondition to creating long-lasting and successful business relations with Japanese companies.

While people-to-people relations remain strong, the effect of the strict Japanese border policies that went into force in the spring of 2020, following the COVID-19 pandemic, is not clear yet. Preventing almost any non-resident from entering Japan had a particularly negative effect on students enrolled in Japan Studies programs, who could not visit Japan for over two years. This is a very worrying development, as these students are important promoters of Danish-Japanese relations. While Denmark initially adopted a similar strict immigration policy, at the beginning of the pandemic, it quickly opened its border to foreign students. Similarly, Japan needs to consider the importance of foreign students in its future policies and prevent an isolationist stance if it does not want to diminish the scope of its soft power.

It remains to be seen if the countries can strengthen their cooperation to solve some of the existing global political challenges. As maritime trade nations, Denmark

⁷⁴ Business Insights (2020) *Japan: The Next Big Market for Danish Fintechs?*, Available at: <https://www.businessinsights.dk/copenhagen-fintech-uk/japan-the-next-big-market-for-danish-fintechs/> (Accessed 6 October 2021).

and Japan have a common interest in securing the freedom of navigation and the liberal world order. Nevertheless, in terms of security-related issues, both countries rely heavily on their major partner – the United States. However, with the slow but continuous reduction in the international engagement of the United States, both countries could increase their efforts to intensify political cooperation in addressing international issues. Even if Denmark and Japan expand their cooperation to combat piracy, their partnership should go beyond the traditional security sphere. Joining their expertise in the field of development cooperation, these two countries could make an important contribution to global stability as well as to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

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“Reading the air” between Estonia and Japan: Why digitalization, culture and language matter in mutual relations

By Eva LIIAS*

Overview

Despite the geographical distance between Japan and Estonia, both countries enjoy smooth and stable relations. During the last decades, continuous mutual high-level diplomatic visits built a basis for further enhancing economic and trade, as well as cultural relations.

Estonian companies are keen on learning about the opportunities in the Japanese market, in order to export their products and services to Japan. While much focus has been placed on trade with China in the past, other Asian countries, such as Japan or Korea, have started to become more popular, especially thanks to the new trade agreements between them and the European Union. Nevertheless, certain trade barriers remain with distant regions – geographical distance, differences in language, culture and business mindsets.

With the “Nordic clean nature” image and digital society, Japanese business delegations and tourists are attracted to Estonia. Furthermore, Japanese investments in Estonian start-ups are rising, and together with Finland, Estonia leads in this field among Nordic countries. In terms of tourism, the Estonian geographical location, being close to Finland, with excellent flight connections to Asia, certainly has an impact on the flow of tourists in both directions, who come to discover technology, culture, history, food and nature.

The following chapter serves as an overview on Estonia-Japan relations. Due to

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space limitations, a detailed analysis was not possible in this framework, however, the chapter aims to be a starting point for further discussion in the future.

History of relations

The year 2021 marks an important milestone for relations between Japan and Estonia. Even though Japan recognized the Republic of Estonia *de facto* on 6 March 1919, it was only two years later, in March 1921, when Japan recognized the Republic of Estonia *de iure*. Estonia had declared its independence just three years earlier, in 1918. According to the Japanese historian Hiromi Komori,¹ the Japanese government's decisions to recognize Estonia in 1919 and 1921 were influenced by Great Britain, France and Italy – as the winners of the First World War – since in-depth knowledge of Estonia was still not that much prevalent in Japan at that point of time.

However, it is important to note that contacts and communication between Estonia and Japan existed already, before the *de facto* and *de iure* recognition. Historian Ene Selart notes that the years 1803-1806 could be considered as the birth of Estonian-Japanese relations, as Japan was visited by A.J. van Krusenstern, who led the first Russian circumnavigation of the globe.² As a Baltic German with Estonian roots, he established the meeting between Estonia and Japan.³ Estonian diplomats Ants Piip and Karl Robert Pusta had diplomatic meetings with their Japanese colleagues in Great Britain and France, already in 1918.⁴ Since then, relations between both countries developed smoothly. As Japan showed much interest in Latvia, it already sent a diplomat to Riga in 1923.⁵ An embassy in Latvia was established in 1929, becoming the

¹ Hiromi Komori (2011) “Mälu ja tunnustamine. 2011 kui kahekordne tähtaasta Jaapani ja Eesti suhetes (Memories and Recognitions; 2011 as the Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations Between Japan and Estonia)”, *Tuna*, 4, p. 53.

² Kirill Jurkov, Ene Selart, Eesti suursaatkond Tokios, Eesti Välisministeerium (2021) *Eesti Jaapani suhted 100 (Estonia-Japan Relations 100)*, Available at: <https://tokyo.mfa.ee/et/eesti-ja-jaapani-suhted-100/> (Accessed 8 September 2021).

³ Ibidem.

⁴ Hiromi Komori (2011) “Mälu ja tunnustamine. 2011 kui kahekordne tähtaasta Jaapani ja Eesti suhetes (Memories and Recognitions; 2011 as the Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations Between Japan and Estonia)”, *Tuna*, 4, p. 54.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 54.

only Japanese embassy in the Baltic states.⁶ Even though the Japanese government had plans for opening embassies in Estonia, as well as Lithuania,⁷ the embassy in Riga remained in charge of all three Baltic states before and during the Second World War, and new embassies were not established. However, Japan had an honorary consul, Voldemar Puhk, in Tallinn, between 1935-1937, and Estonia had an honorary consul, Alfred Ruthe, in Dairen (today, the city of Dalian, in China), between 1934-1940, who was in charge of Japan as well.⁸

Estonia was considered an important location by the Japanese diplomat Shojiro Otaka, due to the potential for gathering information on the nearby Soviet Union and Russia.⁹ Even though it is not clear what influence Otaka had on decisions made by the Japanese government, in December 1939, a diplomatic office of Japan was opened in Tallinn.¹⁰ The Japanese embassy in Riga had its representative rights in Estonia and the military attache Makoto Onodera expanded his mission to Estonia. Onodera had a remarkable impact on developing mutual relations, as even though sent for work in Stockholm, close relations between him and Estonia remained. Richard Maasing was considered as his “right hand” and, according to historical research, he provided Onodera with a significant amount of information.¹¹

The Japanese diplomat Shigeru Shimada was sent to the diplomatic office in Tallinn.¹² One of his aims was gathering information and knowledge on the Soviet

⁶ Ibidem, p. 55.

⁷ Ibidem, pp. 55-56.

⁸ Kirill Jurkov, Ene Selart, Eesti suursaatkond Tokios, Eesti Välisministeerium (2021) *Eesti Jaapani suhted 100 (Estonia Japan Relations 100)*, Available at: <https://tokyo.mfa.ee/et/eesti-ja-jaapani-suhted-100/> (Accessed 8 September 2021).

⁹ Hiromi Komori (2011) “Mälu ja tunnustamine. 2011 kui kahekordne tähtaasta Jaapani ja Eesti suhetes (Memories and Recognitions; 2011 as the Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations Between Japan and Estonia)”, *Tuna*, 4, p. 56.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 56.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 57.

¹² Kirill Jurkov, Ene Selart, Eesti suursaatkond Tokios, Eesti Välisministeerium (2021) *Eesti Jaapani suhted 100 (Estonia Japan Relations 100)*, Available at: <https://tokyo.mfa.ee/et/eesti-ja-jaapani-suhted-100/> (Accessed 8 September 2021).

Union and Estonia.¹³ Shimada arrived in 1939, but due to political developments in Europe and beyond, he could actively work for less than a year. Nonetheless, his contribution on information exchange and raising the level of knowledge about Estonia is remarkable. Shimada sent almost daily reports to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Japan, on Estonian relations with its neighbors, on the war and occupation.¹⁴ Japan closed the diplomatic office in Tallinn in 1940, due to the global turbulences and the politically, as well as diplomatically, difficult situation.¹⁵ However, compared to the *de iure* recognition in 1921, this time, the Japanese government had the background knowledge to pursue decisions.¹⁶

Diplomatic relations between Japan and Estonia were restored in 1991, and two years later, in January 1993, a new Japanese Embassy was established in Tallinn. The Estonian Embassy in Tokyo was established in 1996.¹⁷

Political and diplomatic relations

Official diplomatic relations between Estonia and Japan were established in 1921. The relations were restored in 1991 and, in the following years, embassies were established in both countries.¹⁸ During the past two decades, there have been several high-level political and diplomatic visits between Estonia and Japan, which clearly show mutual interest, as well as stability in relations. In a radio interview in 2021, Estonian Ambassador to Japan Väino Reinart stated that, even in the middle of the pandemic, the

¹³ Hiromi Komori (2011) “Mälu ja tunnustamine. 2011 kui kahekordne tähtaasta Jaapani ja Eesti suhetes (Memories and Recognitions; 2011 as the Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations Between Japan and Estonia)”, *Tuna*, 4, p. 57.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 57.

¹⁵ Kirill Jurkov, Ene Selart, Eesti suursaatkond Tokios, Eesti Välisministeerium (2021) *Eesti Jaapani suhted 100 (Estonia Japan Relations 100)*, Available at: <https://tokyo.mfa.ee/et/eesti-ja-jaapani-suhted-100/> (Accessed 8 September 2021).

¹⁶ Hiromi Komori (2011) “Mälu ja tunnustamine. 2011 kui kahekordne tähtaasta Jaapani ja Eesti suhetes (Memories and Recognitions; 2011 as the Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations Between Japan and Estonia)”, *Tuna*, 4, p. 58-59.

¹⁷ Embassy of Estonia Tokyo (n.d.) *Bilateral Relations*, Available at: <https://tokyo.mfa.ee/bilateral-relations/> (Accessed 8 September 2021).

¹⁸ Ibidem.

intensity in relations between Japan and Estonia is rising.¹⁹

Since 1991, as diplomatic relations were resumed and embassies established in both countries,²⁰ three working visits have been made to Japan, by Estonian presidents Lennart Meri, in 1997, Arnold Rüütel, in 2004, and Toomas Hendrik Ilves, in 2014.²¹ Mutual visa free travel between Estonia and Japan was established in 1999.

The timelines of high-level political and diplomatic visits of Estonian delegations to Japan and Japanese delegations to Estonia²² indicate growing interest and awareness between the two countries.

During the past two decades, an increase in official visits can be observed, with visits almost every year, even despite the COVID-19 crisis. Estonian President Kersti Kaljulaid visited Japan for the Olympic Games, in 2021, and attended the Enthronement ceremony, in October 2019.²³ In February 2020, the official visit by Estonian Prime Minister Jüri Ratas, accompanied by the minister of education and research and business delegations, demonstrated Estonian diplomats and business leaders' rising interest in Japan, as a like-minded partner with potential for enhancing mutual relations in political, economic and educational areas. Beside several prime minister delegations or foreign minister visits, the years between 2015 and 2020, in particular, show a range of different Estonian ministers (defense, education, entrepreneurship and information technology, rural affairs) paying official visits to Japan, enhancing diplomatic contacts between the two countries.²⁴

Similarly, high-level visits by Japanese government representatives to Estonia have increased during the past decade. One of the most important visits took place in

¹⁹ Raadio Kuku (2021) *Reisirada 06.06.2021*, Available at: <https://kuku.postimees.ee/podcast/reisirada> (Accessed 6 June 2021).

²⁰ Embassy of Estonia Tokyo (n.d.) *Bilateral Relations*, Available at: <https://tokyo.mfa.ee/bilateral-relations/> (Accessed 8 September 2021).

²¹ Kirill Jurkov, Ene Selart, Eesti suursaatkond Tokios, Eesti Välisministeerium (2021) *Eesti Jaapani suhted 100 (Estonia Japan Relations 100)*, Available at: <https://tokyo.mfa.ee/et/eesti-ja-jaapani-suhted-100/> (Accessed 8 September 2021).

²² Embassy of Estonia Tokyo (2020) *Visits*, Available at: <https://tokyo.mfa.ee/visits/> (Accessed 8 September 2021).

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ Ibidem.

May 2007, when Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko paid an official visit to Estonia. Their Majesties were welcomed by high-level politicians and hosted with a cultural program.²⁵

Estonia offers several aspects which are of high interest for Japan and stable political and diplomatic relations further support developments in other areas too. The timeline of above-ministerial visits shows that, while in the first decade of the 2000s, the number of visits was still lower, we can observe a growing number of Estonian politicians going to Japan during the second decade. Interest on the Japanese side is high as well, and many visits are related to IT, digitalization and security. According to the Estonian Strategy for Business Diplomacy in Japan,²⁶ the year 2018 can be mentioned as an important milestone in Japanese-Estonian relations, as Japanese Prime Minister Abe paid an official visit to Estonia, together with a business delegation. This was the first Japanese prime minister level visit to Estonia²⁷ and had a direct impact on enhancing economic relations between two countries (for example, after the visit, Sumitomo Forestry and Marubeni opened offices in Tallinn). The official visit to Japan of Estonian Prime Minister Jüri Ratas, in 2020, further strengthened the basis for cooperation between two countries.²⁸

The most recent high-level visit took place in 2021. On 1 July 2021, Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi visited Tallinn and was officially hosted by the current Estonian Foreign Minister, Eva-Maria Liimets. He also visited Estonian Prime

²⁵ Kirill Jurkov, Ene Selart, Eesti suursaatkond Tokios, Eesti Välisministeerium (2021) *Eesti Jaapani suhted 100 (Estonia Japan Relations 100)*, Available at: <https://tokyo.mfa.ee/et/eesti-ja-jaapani-suhted-100/> (Accessed 8 September 2021). Embassy of Estonia Tokyo (n.d.) *Bilateral Relations*, Available at: <https://tokyo.mfa.ee/bilateral-relations/> (Accessed 8 September 2021).

²⁶ Estonian Foreign Ministry (2020) *Kokkuvõte: Eesti äridiplomaatia strateegia Jaapanis 2020-2025 (Summary: Estonia Business Diplomacy Strategy in Japan 2020-2025)*, Available at: https://vm.ee/sites/default/files/article-filefield/eesti_aridiplomaatia_strateegia_jaapanis_2020-2025_kokkuvote_august_2020.pdf (Accessed 1 July 2021).

²⁷ Kirill Jurkov, Ene Selart, Eesti suursaatkond Tokios, Eesti Välisministeerium (2021) *Eesti Jaapani suhted 100 (Estonia Japan Relations 100)*, Available at: <https://tokyo.mfa.ee/et/eesti-ja-jaapani-suhted-100/> (Accessed 8 September 2021).

²⁸ Estonian Foreign Ministry (2020) *Kokkuvõte: Eesti äridiplomaatia strateegia Jaapanis 2020-2025 (Summary: Estonia Business Diplomacy Strategy in Japan 2020-2025)*, Available at: https://vm.ee/sites/default/files/article-filefield/eesti_aridiplomaatia_strateegia_jaapanis_2020-2025_kokkuvote_august_2020.pdf (Accessed 1 July 2021).

Minister Kaja Kallas and the E-Estonia Showroom, to explore the state of Estonian digitalization.²⁹ This is the first time a Japanese foreign minister officially visited Estonia and both ministers expressed their expectations regarding Estonia-Japan relations, seeing each other as like-minded partners. According to the press release, the ministers see intensifying collaboration and cooperation between both countries, especially in the fields of economy, cybersecurity, culture and design.³⁰

During the process of writing the article and in several background talks with experts, many experts active in Estonia-Japanese relations pointed out that the high-level political and diplomatic visits, in combination with positive and stable diplomatic relations, open doors for entrepreneurs and companies to intensify their relations and enter the Japanese or Estonian market. In 2020, a new position, that of business and investment officer, was established in the Embassy of Estonia in Japan, with the aim to further intensify business relations between the two countries.

Estonia-Japan economic relations

Economic relations between Estonia and Japan have been improving over the past two decades and positive political relations certainly support the further development of economic and trade relations. Japan is an important partner for the export of goods and services for Estonian businesses – there are 122 Estonian companies exporting to Japan, with 2,336 jobs in Estonia related to these exports.³¹ The EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement, from 2019, is expected to provide new potential for economic and trade relations between Estonia and Japan.³²

²⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia (2021) *Välisminister Liimets: koostöö Eesti ja Jaapani vahel on saanud sisse uue hoo (Foreign Minister Liimets: Co-operation Between Estonia and Japan Has gained New Momentum)*, Available at: <https://vm.ee/et/uudised/valisminister-liimets-koostoo-eesti-ja-jaapani-vahel-saanud-sisse-uee-hoo> (Accessed 20 August 2021).

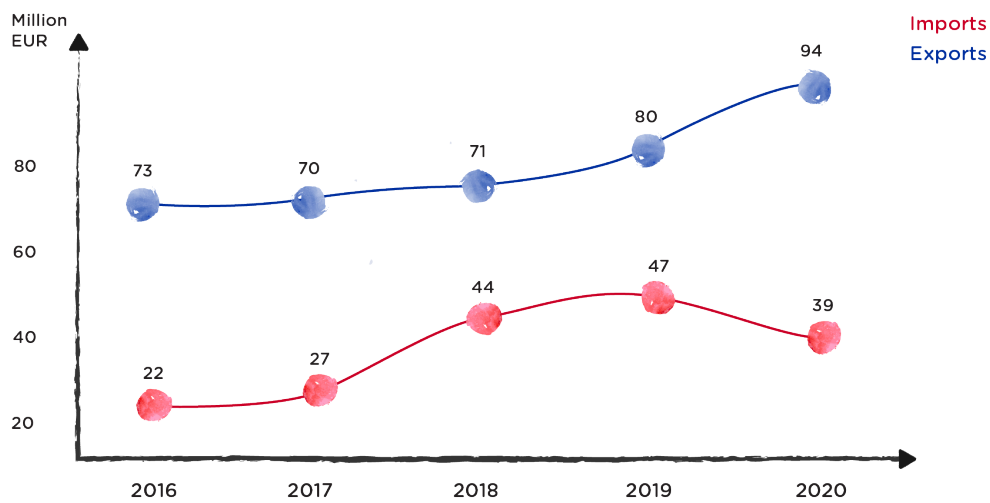
³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ European Commission (2017) *EU-Japan: a Boost for Jobs and Exports in Estonia*, Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/in-focus/eu-japan-economic-partnership-agreement/eu-japan-in-your-town/estonia_en.htm (Accessed 20 August 2021).

³² Estonian Foreign Ministry (2020) *Kokkuvõte: Eesti äridiplomaatia strateegia Jaapanis 2020-2025 (Summary: Estonian Business Diplomacy Strategy in Japan 2020-2025)*, Available at: https://vm.ee/sites/default/files/article-filefield/eesti_aridiplomaatia_strateegia_jaapanis_2020-2025_kokkuvote_august_2020.pdf (Accessed 1 July 2021).

Estonian exports to Japan are rising constantly, according to official statistics by Statistics Estonia and the Bank of Estonia. As of 2020, Japan counts as the 23rd largest export destination for Estonia, and the trade balance was positive in 2020 (55.1 million euros).³³

Estonia's trade with Japan in million euros



Source: Statistic Estonia

The numbers indicate the importance of Japan as a trading partner for Estonia. According to the Business diplomacy report by the Estonian Foreign Ministry, in 2020, good political relations and a keen interest in Estonian e-government solutions, with cooperation and investments in IT-related fields, open new opportunities for trade.³⁴ Imports from Japan to Estonia reached their peak in 2005, at 160 million euros and have been declining since then, while exports, on the other hand, have been rising steadily – from 12.9 million euros in 2004, to 94.2 million euros in 2020.

Over the last decade, the most popular export article from Estonia to Japan has been wood and related articles of wood. Wood was still leading exports in 2020, with a

³³ Statistics Estonia (2021) *Japan*, Available at <https://data.stat.ee/profile/partner/jp?locale=en> (Accessed 1 July 2021).

³⁴ Estonian Foreign Ministry (2020) *Kokkuvõte: Eesti äridiplomaatia strateegia Jaapanis 2020-2025 (Summary: Estonian Business Diplomacy Strategy in Japan 2020-2025)*, Available at: https://vm.ee/sites/default/files/article-filefield/eesti_aridiplomaatia_strateegia_jaapanis_2020-2025_kokkuvote_august_2020.pdf (Accessed 1 July 2021).

share of 41.7%, which is the highest share of export products. Nevertheless, the share of wood and related articles has declined, from 72.2% in 2010, to 49.3% in 2016, with a slight growth to around 58% in 2017 and 2018.³⁵ The figure of 41.7%, in 2020, shows a severe decline in that respect. Conversations with experts, in 2021,³⁶ reveal, however, increasing price levels for wood and forestry, which might be one of the reasons for the declining amount of wood exports, with an increasing amount of income from exports in general.

During the last 5 years, statistics also show a remarkable increase of dairy and fish products, as important export articles to Japan. The category becomes highlighted in export statistics in 2016, with a share of 5.69% of total export. In recent years, exports of Estonian dairy products (especially cheese and curd) have increased and, according to the official statistics, they are becoming a stable export to the Japanese market. This trend is partly strengthened by Marubeni's recent efforts to import Estonian cheese and dairy products to the Japanese market,³⁷ as the author was told during background talks with experts in June 2021. The food sector provides a chance to enhance trade relations, according to experts.³⁸ Estonian organic products, such as honey or chocolates, are already available on the Japanese market and the interest in entering Japan is growing.

The majority of export goods are of Estonian origin and the main exporters are: Stora Enso, Toftan, NPM Silmet, Nason Davis, Combimill Sakala, Aru Grupp, Stoneridge Electronics, Cybernetica and Balti Spoon.³⁹ Even though a constant rise can

³⁵ Statistics Estonia (2021) *Jaapan (Japan)*, Available at: <https://data.stat.ee/profile/partner/jp> (Accessed 1 July 2021). Statistics Estonia (2021) *Japan*, Available at <https://data.stat.ee/profile/partner/jp?locale=en> (Accessed 1 July 2021).

³⁶ Author's conversation with an expert dealing with Japanese exports in Estonia in June 2021 and information gained from a background talk with a business leader in the wood sector in April 2021.

³⁷ Information gained from author's background talks with officials and business executives in June 2021.

³⁸ Postimees (2022) *Eesti toit jõudis esmakordselt Jaapani juhtivale toidumessile (Estonian Food for the First Time on a Leading Japanese Food Convention)*, Available at: <https://majandus.postimees.ee/7472666/eesti-toit-joudis-esmakordselt-jaapani-juhtivale-toidumessile> (Accessed 1 July 2022).

³⁹ Estonian Foreign Ministry (2020) *Kokkuvõte: Eesti äridiplomaatia strateegia Jaapanis 2020-2025 (Summary: Estonian Business Diplomacy Strategy in Japan 2020-2025)*, Available at: https://vm.ee/sites/default/files/article-filefield/eesti_aridiplomaatia_strateegia_jaapanis_2020-2025_kokkuvote_august_2020.pdf (Accessed 1 July 2021).

be observed in official statistics, the numbers are not reflecting the full reality of trade flows between Estonia and Japan. Experts in the field indicate that there is also a significant amount of trade with Japan occurring through other countries.⁴⁰ For example, Finland buys Estonian wood and sells this further to Japan – thus, Estonia sells wood to Japan through Finland, however, the wood export in this case counts as export to Finland and not to Japan directly. However, according to experts, these numbers are difficult to track in global trade flows.

According to the Estonian Embassy in Tokyo, Japanese direct investments to Estonia have risen to 149.6 million euros in 2020, which shows a 10.5% increase compared to the year before. The investments can be observed mostly in areas such as “wholesale and retail business, real estate, financial and insurance-related institutions.”⁴¹

Estonia’s leading position in digitalization, e-governance and IT has made the country attractive for delegations and visitors from around the world. In 2019, 11,500 visitors from various regions explored the E-Estonia Briefing Center, which has the mission to introduce E-Estonia to foreign audiences.⁴² Among others, the center has attracted Japanese delegations, which are looking to learn about new IT solutions and technologies, as Japanese companies are still traditional and face challenges in digitalizing their processes. Therefore, the option of learning about the Estonian story of development makes Japanese companies curious and, thanks to stable political relations between the two countries, Estonia serves as a neutral country for mutual exchange of thoughts and knowledge, especially in sensitive fields such as cybersecurity, IT and technology.⁴³ The author’s current research shows remarkable numbers of delegations

⁴⁰ Author’s conversation with an expert dealing with Japanese exports in Estonia in June 2021.

⁴¹ Estonian Embassy in Tokyo (2021) *Business Relations*, Available at: <https://tokyo.mfa.ee/business-relations/> (Accessed 1 July 2021). Invest in Estonia (2021) *Estonian-founded Skeleton Technologies to Enter Asian Automotive Market: Strategic Cooperation with a Substantial Investment from Marubeni*, Available at: <https://investinestonia.com/estonian-founded-skeleton-technologies-to-enter-asian-automotive-market-strategic-cooperation-with-and-substantial-investment-from-marubeni/> (Accessed 1 July 2021).

⁴² Mari Kursten (2019) *11 500 Visitors to the e-Estonia Briefing Centre in 2019*, Available at: <https://e-estonia.com/11-500-visitors-to-the-e-estonia-briefing-centre-in-2019/> (Accessed 1 July 2021).

⁴³ Oliver Ait (2019) *Jaapan on võimalus (Japan Is a Chance)*, Available at: <https://www.aripaev.ee/arvamus/2019/05/06/oliver-ait-jaapan-on-voimalus> (Accessed 14 July 2021).

and visitors from Japan, who are specifically interested in and attend presentations on digitalization and e-governance. According to the available numbers, there were 18 Japanese delegations with 522 visitors in 2020 and 138 delegations with 1178 visitors in 2019.⁴⁴ The decline of delegations in 2020 is obviously a consequence of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. However, the interest on the Japanese side regarding Estonian digitalization, start-up ecosystem, cybersecurity and IT is strong, which also leads to a high number of Japanese investments to Estonia.

As the Japanese ecosystem for start-ups is relatively underdeveloped, Japanese investors are increasingly looking for tech-related opportunities in Nordic countries, where Estonia and Finland are especially attractive for large-scale investments.⁴⁵ The Innovation Lab Asia report entitled “Japanese Investments – expanding to the Nordics” shows increasing amounts of Japanese investments in Nordic-founded start-ups: investments in at least 36 start-ups since 2013, 28 of these since 2017⁴⁶ (including Estonian start-ups). During the time period of 2013-2018, Japanese investors invested in eight Estonian start-ups (FitsMe, Funderbeam, Jobbatical, Lift99, Lingvist, Planetway, Transferwise, Xolo). A similarly high amount of investments in Estonian start-ups can be observed between 2019-2020 (Bolt, Clanbeat, Cleveron, Realeyes, Starship Technologies, Tera VC, Thorgate Ventures III, Veriff).⁴⁷ The data provided to the author by Enterprise Estonia (EAS) and the respective reports by the Innovation Lab Asia⁴⁸ supports and validates the above-mentioned increase of Japanese investments to Estonian start-ups. However, many of the investments are not disclosed, which makes it rather difficult to be precise with numbers. The most recent is the Marubeni investment

⁴⁴ The author received the numbers directly from E-Estonia Briefing Center in 2021.

⁴⁵ Innovation Lab Asia (2020) *Japanese Investments – Expanding to the Nordics*, Available at: https://innovationlabasia.dk/wp-content/uploads/ILA-Investor-report_JAPAN_Dec_2020.pdf (Accessed 14 July 2021).

⁴⁶ Ibidem.

⁴⁷ Ibidem.

⁴⁸ Ibidem.

in Skeleton Technologies, in 2021.⁴⁹

The increasing flow of diverse Japanese investments in Estonia clearly shows great and growing interest in the Nordic region's start-up ecosystem. According to the Innovation Lab Asia report,⁵⁰ Estonia and Finland are the main countries receiving high Japanese investments, as both countries have established a strong tech-oriented narrative. Finland made a successful start in 2013, when Japanese giant Softbank invested 1 billion dollars in a gaming start-up, and Estonia then followed, with its image of a highly digitalized society. Detailed statistics presented in the Innovation Lab Asia report further support the claim that Estonia and Finland are leading among the Nordic countries in receiving start-up investments.⁵¹

Closely related to issues of digitalization, an International Center for Defense and Security report,⁵² from May 2021, discusses Estonian and Japanese common ground, interests and concerns regarding cybersecurity issues in detail. The report highlights the need for and importance of increasing cooperation in cybersecurity matters in bilateral and multilateral frameworks. Furthermore, it states the necessity for intensifying academic collaboration which enables dialogue between researchers, policymakers and academics to share their expertise and develop a meaningful base for facing cybersecurity challenges together.

Cultural and people-to-people relations

Along with diplomatic and economic relations, cultural exchange and people-to-people relations between Estonia and Japan have also evolved over the last decades.

⁴⁹ Marubeni (2021) *Marubeni Invests in Estonian Next Generation Energy Storage Technology Company, Skeleton Technologies*, Available at: <https://www.marubeni.com/en/news/2021/release/00021.html> (Accessed 14 July 2021). Invest in Estonia (2021) *Estonian-founded Skeleton Technologies to Enter Asian Automotive Market: Strategic Cooperation with a Substantial Investment from Marubeni*, Available at: <https://investinestonia.com/estonian-founded-skeleton-technologies-to-enter-asian-automotive-market-strategic-cooperation-with-and-substantial-investment-from-marubeni/> (Accessed 1 July 2021).

⁵⁰ Innovation Lab Asia (2020) *Japanese Investments – Expanding to the Nordics*, Available at: https://innovationlabasia.dk/wp-content/uploads/ILA-Investor-report_JAPAN_Dec_2020.pdf (Accessed 14 July 2021).

⁵¹ Ibidem.

⁵² Henri Rõigas and Tomas Jermalavicius (ed.) (2021) “So Far, Yet So Close: Japanese and Estonian Cybersecurity Policy Perspectives and Cooperation” *International Centre for Defence and Security*, Available at: https://icds.ee/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/ICDS_Report_So_Far_Yet_So_Close_Roigas_Jermalavicius_May_2021.pdf (Accessed 14 July 2021).

Nonetheless, even though connections to Japan are important in the Estonian culture, education and media landscape, Japan is still not the country with the main focus.

Japan was first mentioned in Estonian newspaper *Perno Postimees* in 1857, by Johann Voldemar Jansen.⁵³ It was mostly Estonian sailors who provided information on the far and exotic country in travel reports. The Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) marked a peak of Japan-related articles in Estonian daily newspapers,⁵⁴ also due to the fact that Estonian soldiers were involved in the war. However, according to conversations by the author,⁵⁵ the main topic in these wartime newspapers were not dealing with war only. Several aspects of the Japanese culture (for example: history, agriculture, traditional games, etc.) were introduced to the Estonian audience at that time.⁵⁶

Similarly, contemporary newspapers do not show a systematic approach toward dealing with Japan.⁵⁷ Japan is often mentioned in case of certain anniversaries or events (for example, the Olympic Games or the Tōhoku Earthquake), short reports can be found in case of political changes or elections in Japan, or Japan is pictured as a travel destination.

Nevertheless, cultural contacts between Estonia and Japan are flourishing. Connections to Estonia can be found through music. Paavo Järvi is the head of the NHK Symphony Orchestra in Japan, which visited Estonia for concerts on its European tour in 2020, prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. Estonian choir music is known in Japan widely among those with interest in music. The famous Estonian choir Ellerhein has visited Japan several times since 1994 and has won awards in choir competitions.⁵⁸ The

⁵³ Kirill Jurkov, Ene Selart, Eesti suursaatkond Tokios, Eesti Välisministeerium (2021) *Eesti Jaapani suhted 100 (Estonia Japan Relations 100)*, Available at: <https://tokyo.mfa.ee/et/eesti-ja-jaapani-suhted-100/> (Accessed 8 September 2021).

⁵⁴ Ibidem.

⁵⁵ Author's background talk with a historian working on Japanese-Estonian relations in August 2021.

⁵⁶ Kirill Jurkov, Ene Selart, Eesti suursaatkond Tokios, Eesti Välisministeerium (2021) *Eesti Jaapani suhted 100 (Estonia Japan Relations 100)*, Available at: <https://tokyo.mfa.ee/et/eesti-ja-jaapani-suhted-100/> (Accessed 8 September 2021).

⁵⁷ Author's conversation with a media researcher in August 2021.

⁵⁸ Kirill Jurkov, Ene Selart, Eesti suursaatkond Tokios, Eesti Välisministeerium (2021) *Eesti Jaapani suhted 100 (Estonia Japan Relations 100)*, Available at: <https://tokyo.mfa.ee/et/eesti-ja-jaapani-suhted-100/> (Accessed 8 September 2021).

conductor of the choir, Tiia-Ester Loitme, has been acknowledged for her role in strengthening mutual ties between Japan and Estonia through choir music.⁵⁹

Estonian-Japanese cultural relations are not only driven by music – to a similar extent, sports have an important role in strengthening mutual relations between the two countries. Estonian athletes attended the Olympic Games in Tokyo in 1964, as well as in 2021. In 2004, Kaido Höövelson became the first Estonian to debut in Japanese Sumo, as Baruto. In 2012, he won the Tokyo tournament (*Hatsu-basho*), as the second European to achieve his feat.⁶⁰ After finishing his Sumo career, he is now active in strengthening relations between both countries, through political, economic and cultural activities.⁶¹

When it comes to migration and tourism, according to recent data by the Japanese government (from 2021), there are currently 201 Japanese nationals living in Estonia, almost identical to the year before. Among these 201 citizens, 188 have a long-term stay permit, while 13 of them are in the status of permanent residents.⁶² Compared to the other Baltic states, Estonia has the highest number of Japanese nationals residing.⁶³

Tourism is flourishing in Estonia. Estonia is a beloved destination for travelers from European countries but also from Asian countries, including Japan. The number of Japanese tourists coming to Estonia during the last decade rose constantly, from 13.253 in 2009, until reaching 106.548 in 2017, according to the statistics of international travel from the Bank of Estonia.⁶⁴ Since 2018, the number of visitors from Japan started to decline slowly, reaching 83.580 in 2019. The statistics from the Bank of Estonia clearly show that, in general, Japanese tourists visit Estonia for one day. Nevertheless, since

⁵⁹ Ibidem.

⁶⁰ Ibidem.

⁶¹ Ibidem.

⁶² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) 海外在留邦人数調査統計 (*Statistics on the number of Japanese residents abroad*), Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/toko/tokei/hojin/index.html> (Accessed 8 September 2021).

⁶³ Ibidem.

⁶⁴ Bank of Estonia (2021) *Statistical Indicators. International Travel Statistics*, Available at: <https://statistika.eestipank.ee/#/en/p/1410/r/2831/2620> (Accessed 8 September 2021).

2012, the overnight visits started to increase and reach their high point in 2017-2018.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a severe impact on tourism. In order to recover and make Estonia more attractive for Japanese tourists, Enterprise Estonia (EAS) is making efforts to develop marketing strategies for Japan specifically.⁶⁵ Furthermore, the tourism sector benefits from the positive Estonian image in Japan as “the most advanced digital society.”⁶⁶ The aspect of digitalization awakes interest in the “Estonian lifestyle” and how this digitalized society is functioning, which, at the same time, increases chances to introduce Estonian culture – including food, music, architecture, arts and design.⁶⁷ The survey results on the image of Estonia in Japan show that it is important to increase knowledge about Estonia among Japanese – a higher visibility of Estonian culture and products in Japan is expected to increase the number of incoming visitors.⁶⁸

While Estonia is enjoying an attractive image as a travel destination, there is a comparable degree of interest in Japanese culture among Estonians. According to numbers presented by Statistics of Japan, in 2020, there were 152 Estonians in Japan.⁶⁹ A brief analysis of the numbers from the official statistics shows a decline of Estonians visiting and living in Japan during the years 2015-2020. Even though a rise of Estonian exchange students and tourists can be observed before COVID-19, the pandemic had a severe impact on both groups, with declining numbers in 2020.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ BNS (2020) *Eesti läheb end 600000 euroga Jaapanisse turundama*, Available at: <https://majandus.postimees.ee/7004853/eesti-laheb-end-600-000-euroga-jaapanisse-turundama> (Accessed 8 September 2021).

⁶⁶ Estonian Foreign Ministry (2020) *Kokkuvõte: Eesti äridiplomaatia strateegia Jaapanis 2020-2025 (Summary: Estonian Business Diplomacy Strategy in Japan 2020-2025)*, Available at: https://vm.ee/sites/default/files/article-filefield/eesti_aridiplomaatia_strateegia_jaapanis_2020-2025_kokkuvote_august_2020.pdf (Accessed 1 September 2021).

⁶⁷ Ibidem.

⁶⁸ Shingo Kuwahara (2022) *Summary for a Survey on Estonian Image in Japan*, Available at: https://vm.ee/sites/default/files/estonia_image_survey_summary_apr2022_compressed.pdf (Accessed 7 July 2022).

⁶⁹ e-Stat (2021) 在留外国人統計 (旧登録外国人統計) (*Statistics of foreigners in Japan*), Available at: <https://www.e-stat.go.jp/stat-search/files?page=1&layout=datalist&toukei=00250012&tstat=000001018034&cycle=1&year=20200&month=24101212&tclass1=000001060399> (Accessed 31 December 2021).

⁷⁰ Immigration Services Agency of Japan (2021) *Statistics*, Available at: https://www.moj.go.jp/isa/policies/statistics/toukei_ichiran_touroku.html (Accessed 31 December 2021).

In the education field, there are intensive ties between Estonian and Japanese universities, with faculty and student exchange and scientific cooperation. The main institutions teaching Japanese language are the Tallinn University and the University of Tartu, which both have long traditions in teaching Japanese. Even though Japanese can be learned in various language courses at both institutions, the field of Japanese studies in Estonia is still relatively young and was established in Tallinn in the late 1980s. Today, at Tallinn University, Japanese studies are offered at the Bachelor and Master levels and, according to Asian studies program coordinators at Tallinn University, Japanese studies are the most popular field among Asian studies in general.⁷¹ A large majority of the applications (around three quarters of Asia-related applications) each year are received for Japanese studies, while Chinese studies and Middle Eastern cultures remain in the background. According to background talks by the author of this article, the popularity of Japanese has even helped to finance the other Asian languages offered at the institution. This finding matches with those from a 2018 MERICS report, which shows that among East Asian studies, the field of Japanese studies is leading, applicants to Korean studies are growing, while the interest in Chinese studies is declining in Germany.⁷² A similar trend can be observed at the University of Tartu – according to the numbers offered by the Language Center,⁷³ Japanese is the most beloved language of study among Asian languages. However, the numbers also show that the popularity of Chinese language and Korean language is also rising among students, but the number of learners never exceeds the Japanese learners.

The public interest and popularity of Japanese language can be explained with Japanese soft power and the spread of Japanese popular culture. According to a lecturer at the university, the popularity of anime and manga has driven the interest of students to choose Japanese studies or Japanese language.⁷⁴ Compared to the study of China,

⁷¹ Author's conversations with respective stakeholders at the university in August 2021.

⁷² Matthias Stepan et al (2018) *China kennen, China können. Ausgangspunkte für den Ausbau der China-Kompetenz in Deutschland (Starting Points for the Development of China Competence in Germany)*, Available at: <https://merics.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/China%20Monitor%20China%20kennen%20China%20koennen.pdf> (Accessed 09 September 2021).

⁷³ Author's communication with staff members at the Language Center at the University of Tartu (September 2021).

⁷⁴ Author's conversation with a lecturer at the university in August 2021.

where students have a keen interest in business relations and trade, cultural and societal aspects are the main focus of students studying Japan.

Besides a strong focus on popular culture, food and travel, Japanese literature is also well-known in Estonia. The year 2021 has been special, due to the large number of literature translations from the Japanese language. One of the classical highlights is “Makura no sōshi” by Sei Shōnagon, which was translated from classical Japanese by Alari Allik.⁷⁵ However, Estonian readers are keen to discover contemporary literature as well – Maret Nukke translated a popular criminal novel by Sōji Shimada,⁷⁶ Margit Juurikas translated “Killing Commendatore” by Haruki Murakami, a recent work from the widely known Japanese author.⁷⁷ A few months earlier, the translation of Haruki Murakami’s autobiography was brought to Estonian readers.⁷⁸ While there are various translations of Japanese authors, the number of translations from Chinese or Korean works is rather rare. However, translations of other East Asian countries are present and popular as well.⁷⁹ All the works are translated directly from original source languages, which indicates that there are translators with a high command of the languages in Estonia.

⁷⁵ Postimees (2021) *Eesti keeles ilmus Jaapani õukonnadaami Sei Shōnagoni kuulus teos «Padjamärkmed» (The Famous Work "The Pillow Book" by the Japanese Court Lady Sei Shōnagon was published in Estonian)*, Available at: <https://kultuur.postimees.ee/7413601/eesti-keeles-ilmus-jaapani-oukonnadaami-sei-shonagoni-kuulus-teos-padjamarkmed> (Accessed 31 December 2021).

⁷⁶ Postimees (2021) *Eesti keeles ilmus popp Jaapani krimiromaan «Tōkyō sodiaagimōrvad» (The Japanese Crime Novel "Tokyo Zodiac Murders" Was Published in Estonian)*, Available at: <https://raamatud.postimees.ee/7414226/eesti-keeles-ilmus-popp-jaapani-krimiromaan-tokyo-sodiaagimorvad> (Accessed 31 December 2021).

⁷⁷ ERR (2021) *Eesti keeles ilmus Haruki Murakami romaan "Komtuuri tapmine" (Haruki Murakami's Novel "The Killing of the Commander" Was Published in Estonian)*, Available at: <https://kultuur.err.ee/1608405602/eesti-keeles-ilmus-haruki-murakami-romaan-komtuuri-tapmine> (Accessed 31 December 2021).

⁷⁸ ERR (2021) *Eesti keeles ilmus Haruki Murakami esseekogumik jooksmisest (Haruki Murakami's Collection of Essays on Running Was Published in Estonian)*, Available at: <https://kultuur.err.ee/1608241110/eesti-keeles-ilmus-haruki-murakami-esseekogumik-jooksmisest> (Accessed 31 December 2021).

⁷⁹ Tõnu Karjaste (2021) *Katja Koort tõlkis hiina õuduslugude kogumiku "Vaimude otsija kirjad" (Katja Koort Translated a Collection of Chinese Horror Stories, "Letters of a Ghost Seeker")*, Available at: <https://kultuur.err.ee/1608439682/katja-koort-tolkis-hiina-ouduslugude-kogumiku-vaimude-otsija-kirjad> (Accessed 31 December 2021).

Conclusions

Despite cultural and geographical differences, relations between Japan and Estonia have been developing smoothly since their official establishment. The rising number of official visits and diplomatic activities during the past two decades shows a stable and constantly improving mutual relationship between the two countries. Even during the times of the pandemic restrictions, high-level visits took place between the two countries. Intensifying diplomatic relations and high-level visits, furthermore, can be considered as door openers for smoother business contacts and economic relations.

Estonian companies are keen on expanding their activities to Asian countries, among them to the Japanese market. Recent large-scale EU trade agreements, such as the Economic Partnership Agreement with Japan, certainly enhance the potential of trade and communication and raise awareness of Japan as a like-minded partner in Asia. However, overcoming geographical, cultural and linguistic barriers is essential in further enhancing mutual relations in the fields of business, trade and people-to-people contacts.

Geographical distance, especially now in times of limited possibilities for travel, makes it more challenging to establish new contacts and maintain old ones. Language proficiency, combined with cultural knowledge, is another key component of smooth relations. This kind of cultural literacy is needed on both sides. Comparing students learning East Asian languages, we observe relatively high numbers of students who choose Japanese language courses in Estonia. While the individual reasons for these choices differ, the popularity of Japanese (pop-) culture and mutual cultural exchanges trigger the interest in language learning. Nevertheless, for smooth communication on the business level, merely beginner or intermediate level is not enough. Universities are key institutions here, to create this culture-specific knowledge needed for stepping to next levels in mutual relations and a stronger commitment in developing Asia-related curricula is preferable.

Estonia has created an image as a digitalized society with clean Nordic nature. This invites large number of business delegations, as well as tourists, to visit Estonia. Due to Japanese digital transformation, the interest in learning about the Estonian experience in digitalization is a good starting point for dialogue and mutual learning.

Nevertheless, more work must still be done to consolidate this image and receive fruits from the seeds planted in these exchanges. The branding of the country is important to further benefit from the new trade agreements.

Several reports, policies and action plans dealing with Asia have been published in Estonia during the last decade,⁸⁰ and there is an Asian strategy draft in preparation.⁸¹ Political relations between Japan and Estonia are stable and, as shown above, the number of high-level diplomatic visits is increasing, which also enables smooth economic relations and cooperation in other fields. Moreover, the recent survey on the image of Estonia in Japan further indicates potential for cooperation and collaboration.⁸² However, despite the solid ground for deepening mutual relations, the question arises how to develop these relations and the partnership further and how to fully use the potential both countries offer.

Therefore, it is essential to have people who are actively engaged in deepening and developing Japanese-Estonian relations and are able to “read the air” and who know the culture in communication between stakeholders. Educating young people on foreign languages and cultures is an essential role for schools and universities, and more efforts should be done to develop Asian studies at schools and universities. According to the numbers presented above, the interest in Japan is there – schools should leverage the curiosity and offer students opportunities for intercultural encounters, as they are the ones who construct and build the bridges for meaningful future cooperation.

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⁸⁰ Tallinna Ülikool (2017) *ELU projekt võtab Aasia strateegiad luubi alla (The ELU Project Examines Asia Strategies)*, Available at: <https://www.tlu.ee/ht/meediavarav/blogid/elu-projekt-votab-aasia-strateegiad-luubi-alla> (Accessed 28 January 2022).

⁸¹ Enn Eesmaa (2020) *Mis sobiks strateegia taktikaks (What Would be Suitable as the Tactics of the Strategy)*, Available at <https://www.err.ee/1138011/enn-eesmaa-mis-sobiks-strateegia-taktikaks> (Accessed 28 January 2022).

⁸² Shingo Kuwahara (2022) *Summary for a Survey on Estonian Image in Japan*, Available at: https://vm.ee/sites/default/files/estonia_image_survey_summary_apr2022_compressed.pdf (Accessed 07 July 2022).

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France-Japan relations: An exceptional partnership – security, trade and culture

By Xavier MELLET*

Overview

In 2018, France and Japan celebrated the 160th anniversary of their diplomatic relations, making France one of oldest partners of modern Japan, although the nature of this relationship varied across time. It reached an excellent dynamic in the last two decades, thanks to a geopolitical context which highlighted shared interests, values and cultural characteristics. France-Japan relations consist nowadays of various positive and simultaneous trends. This chapter will provide the main characteristics of the bilateral relationship on three major dimensions.

First, Japan and France have reinforced bilateral strategic cooperation, in a context of new geopolitical issues, resulting mainly from the rise of China. France and Japan are both acting for a peaceful Indo-Pacific region, agreeing on the creation of an “exceptional partnership” in 2013, which was renewed in 2019, on the basis of common objectives to reach in 2023.

Second, Japan and France have reinforced bilateral economic cooperation, helped in this mutual objective by a dense network of institutions. Trade has both increased and diversified in the last two decades, significantly opening domestic markets to the partner’s goods and companies.

Third, mutual perceptions and people-to-people relations have also improved at the same time, contributing to increasing numbers of residents and tourists, as well as cultural exchanges and collaborations. Public institutions from both countries have

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pushed for organizing large scale events and promoting educational and research cooperation.

The positive trends listed here are grounded in a long legacy of diplomatic and commercial relations. This chapter will start by presenting the core aspects of this legacy, in order to better understand the main recent developments.

History of relations – An old and fluctuating relationship

France and Japan established official diplomatic relations in 1858. However, the first known contact existing between Japanese and French people occurred much earlier, in 1615, when a diplomatic mission sent by Masamune Date in Europe, led by the Christian Tsunenaga Hasekura, was forced by a storm to stay in Saint-Tropez, on the way to Spain.¹ The first visit of a French citizen to Japan occurred four years later, when François Caron landed in Nagasaki, for the United Dutch East India Company.²

The first diplomatic treaty between the two countries was signed on 9 October 1858, four years after the forced opening of Edo Japan by the American black ships of Commodore Matthew Perry. France followed the United States and England, as one of the five countries that Japan found itself committed to opening ports for commercial relations.³ The colonial rivalry among those great powers reflected in the alliances decided during the Boshin War (1868-1869): England supported the western domains; France supported the Edo shogunate, for example, by providing military support when the shogunate tried reasserting itself against the domains, and accompanying its project of structural reforms. France proposed a plan including technical support on a project of a train line between Edo and Kyoto. The French minister Léon Roches visited Japan in 1867-1868, just before the war that ended the Edo period.⁴

¹ Minako Debergh (1981) *Hasekura Tsunenaga in Dictionnaire historique du Japon (Historic Dictionary of Japan)*, volume 7, Tokyo: Kinokuniya, pp. 73-75.

² Emma Gagnon-Lévesque (2020) *François Caron et la permanence des représentations françaises du Japon entre le XVIe et le XVIIIe siècle (François Caron and the Permanency of French Representations of Japan Between the 16th and 19th Centuries)*. Research master thesis: University of Montreal, Available at: https://papyrus.bib.umontreal.ca/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1866/25460/Gagnon_Emma_2020_memoire.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y (Accessed 21 March 2022).

³ William. G. Beasley (1972) *The Meiji Restoration*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 115-116.

⁴ Marius Jansen (2002) *The Making of Modern Japan*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 306-315.

Military and commercial cooperation continued after the fall of the shogunate, as the Japanese authorities collaborated with Western powers, in order to modernize rapidly. This ambition stimulated mutual economic interests. For example, silk trade expanded rapidly after 1865, between Lyon and Yokohama, France importing silk cocoons from Japan.⁵ In 1872, the first silk industrial factory in Tomioka was opened, thanks to the technical support of France. French companies were smoothly accepted in Japan, leading to the creation of a French Chamber of Commerce and Industry (*Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie Française*) in Tokyo, in 1918, thanks to 20 French companies present on Japanese soil, like Air Liquide and the Bank of Indochina.⁶

Diplomatic relations were reinforced simultaneously. The first embassies were opened in Tokyo and Paris in 1906, consolidating the relationship before a First World War fought on the same side. Military cooperation consisted of four military missions sent by France to Japan, to help modernize Japanese land and maritime forces: 1867, 1874, 1884, 1918.⁷ However, France was not the main partner of Japan, which was allied with England, since 1902. Culture and law became important elements of the French reputation in Japan. Gustave Henri Boissonade was, for instance, sent to Japan in 1873, to help modernize Japanese law,⁸ which is commemorated, since 2000, by the Hosei University Boissonade Tower. In 1924, the *Maison Franco-Japonaise* (MFJ) was created, in charge of promoting France in Japan.⁹ This institute still plays a major academic role, for example, by hosting *Ebisu*, one of the two main French journals of Japanese studies, and the Shibusawa-Claudé award, given to Ph.D. dissertations, a reminder of the influence exerted by the ambassador Paul Claudé and the Japanese

⁵ William. G. Beasley (1972) *The Meiji Restoration*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 264-265.

⁶ Christian Kessler and Gérard Siary (2008) *France-Japon: histoire d'une relation inégale (France-Japan: History of an Unequal Relationship)*, Available at : <https://laviedesidees.fr/France-Japon-histoire-d-une-relation-inegale.html> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

⁷ Christian Polak (2001) *Soie et lumières: L'âge d'or des échanges franco-japonais (des origines aux années 1950) (Silk and Lights: the Golden Age of Franco-Japanese Exchanges (from the Origins to the 1950s))*, Tokyo: Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie Française du Japon.

⁸ National Diet Library (n.d.) *Japan's Modernization and France: Politics and Law. Establishment of the Civil Code*, Available at: https://www.ndl.go.jp/france/en/part1/s1_3.html (Accessed 21 March 2022).

⁹ Maison Franco-Japonaise (n.d.) *Histoire de la MFJ (History of MFJ)*, Available at: <https://www.mfjtokyo.or.jp/fr/overview/history.html> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

capitalist Shibusawa Eiichi in the creation of the MFJ.

Colonial expansion prior to the Second World War put an end to this positive cooperation, although in 1932 Japan tried to become closer to France, in the context of a declining Anglo-Japanese alliance, in order to avoid being threatened by Western powers. But France preferred to rally the dominant opinion in the League of Nations, condemning the 1931 Japanese invasion of Manchuria.¹⁰ Since the elaboration of an anti-Nazi France-USSR pact in 1935, allying with France was no longer considered possible by Japanese authorities, which allied with Nazi Germany, in 1936. As a consequence, diplomatic and commercial relations remained very limited until the end of the war. The first military confrontation between the two countries occurred in 1939-1940, when Japan managed to invade Indochina (a French colony at that time), after years of military advances in China, benefiting from the French capitulation against the Nazis, in 1940. This invasion was consolidated on 9 March 1945, when the Japanese army suddenly attacked the remaining French garrisons, killing around 4.200 soldiers, only a few months before the end of the war.¹¹

After the Second World War, France took part in the occupation of Japan by the Supreme Command of Allied Powers (1945-1952), and normalized diplomatic relations through the San Francisco treaty, in 1951. However, Japan's security treaty and exclusive alliance with the United States prevented further bilateral cooperation. For example, Washington's reluctance is considered to have held back Japan from inaugurating bilateral foreign ministerial meetings with France, the United Kingdom, West Germany and Italy, in 1963¹².

The France-Japan relation remained mostly economic during the Cold War period. The rapid growth of Japan and its supposedly strong focus on economic relations contributed to feeding a negative image in France, Prime Minister Ikeda

¹⁰ Takashi Tanaka (1995) "Les relations franco-japonaises de 1931 à 1941 (The Franco-Japanese Relations Between 1931 and 1941)," *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, 178, p. 94.

¹¹ John E. Dreifort (1992) *Myopic Grandeur: The Ambivalence of French Foreign Policy toward the Far East, 1919-1945*, Kent: Kent State University Press, p. 240.

¹² Oliviero Frattolillo (2013) *Diplomacy in Japan-EU Relations: From the Cold War to the Post-Bipolar Era*, London: Routledge, p. 26

Hayato being, for instance, described as a “transistor salesman.”¹³ Trade disputes occurred for the entire duration of this period, reaching a stronger intensity in the 1980s. France participated in the “Japan bashing,” when, in 1982, it launched the “Battle of Poitiers” against the import of Japanese videocassette recorders (VCRs). In 1987, French Prime Minister Edith Cresson intensified the tensions, by comparing Japanese people to ants.¹⁴ More importantly, as one of the G5 countries, France approved the 1985 Plaza Agreement, that led to the depreciation of the yen.¹⁵

The changing context of the 1990s, combining the end of the Cold War and a Japanese economic decline, led to new relations with Europe, France included, represented in the “Joint Declaration on relations between Japan and the European Community” (Declaration of The Hague), adopted on 18 July 1991. France positively welcomed Japan’s ambition to reach a common agreement on the trade balance.¹⁶ In the 1990s, Japan adopted a strategy of developing strong bilateral relations with European Union countries, instead of a strong relationship with the EU itself, aiming at enlarging its diplomatic relations, so as to lower the influence of the partnership with the United States.¹⁷ What has been conceptualized as a “lost decade” was, in fact, a turning point in the France-Japan relationship.

Political, security and military relations – An exceptional partnership

Relations between Japan and France have been consolidated in the last two decades, in a context of a shared ambition to balance China in Asia and Africa, which includes the United States, pivoting toward Asia, since the early 2010s.¹⁸ Following this evolution, France developed a large-scale strategic plan, which relies on a close relationship with

¹³ Ibidem, pp. 2-3.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 48.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 46.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 54.

¹⁷ Watanabe Hiroataka (2016) “Les relations Japon-Europe en Asie, au niveau multilatéral (Europe-Japan Relations in Asia, on a Multilateral Level),” *Relations Internationales*, 168(4), pp. 105-116.

¹⁸ Hillary Clinton (2011) *America’s Pacific Century*, Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/americas-pacific-century/> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

Japan. Both countries advocate for democratic values on the international scene and put a new emphasis on the Indo-Pacific region, from Africa to Korea. France's official objective consists in promoting a multilateral international order, based on the rule of law, an objective shared with Japan, advocating for a "free and open Indo-Pacific."¹⁹

France and Japan agreed on a bilateral strategic partnership in 1995, which was reinforced in 2013, when it became an "exceptional partnership" (*partenariat d'exception*). Both countries determined, at that time, common objectives to promote on the international scene, related to "security, growth, innovation and culture."²⁰ The "exceptional partnership" was renewed in 2019, based on a joint roadmap for the next four years, signed when French President Emmanuel Macron visited Japan.²¹ The document focuses on five large-scale common objectives: 1. Reinforcing cooperation in the Indo-Pacific area; 2. Deepening bilateral cooperation in security and defense; 3. Promoting a global governance based on multilateralism, in order to solve major global issues together; 4. Developing a diversified economic partnership between the two countries; 5. Creating a new dynamic in terms of human exchanges, based on an intensification of cultural, educational, scientific, technological, sportive and touristic links.

The partnership is grounded in a dense network of political institutions. In Japan, the French embassy is located in Tokyo, and there is a consulate general in Kyoto, since 2009 (after being in Osaka), dividing the territory into two zones, and eight honorary consuls (Sapporo, Sendai, Niigata, Nagoya, Hiroshima, Fukuoka, Nagasaki,

¹⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2017) *A New Foreign Policy Strategy: Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy*, Available at: <https://www.asean.emb-japan.go.jp/files/000352880.pdf> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

²⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2013) *Communiqué conjoint entre la France et le Japon. Un « partenariat d'exception » pour promouvoir la sécurité, la croissance, l'innovation et la culture (Joint Statement Between France and Japan. An "Exceptional Partnership" to Promote Security, Growth, Innovation and Culture)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000006209.pdf> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

²¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019) *Feuille de route sur la coopération franco-japonaise. Pour ouvrir de nouveaux horizons entre la France et le Japon dans le cadre du partenariat d'exception (2019-2023) (Roadmap for a Franco-Japanese Cooperation. To Open New Horizons Between France and Japan Within an Exceptional Partnership (2019-2023))*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000492473.pdf> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

Naha).²² In France, the Japanese embassy is in Paris, and there are three consulates general (Strasbourg, Lyon, Marseille), dividing the territory into four zones, and seven honorary consuls (Bordeaux, Le Havre, Lille, Toulouse, Monaco, Papeete, Nouméa).²³ At a local level, an increasing number of town twinning agreements have been reached between French and Japanese cities and prefectures – 107 agreements in 2017 – the first one being signed between Paris and Kyoto in 1958.²⁴

Moreover, the reinforcement of the bilateral partnership can be perceived in the large number of bilateral visits in the 2010 decade. For example, Prime Minister Shinzō Abe and his minister of foreign affairs visited France every year from 2014 to the beginning of COVID-19, while the French minister of foreign affairs visited Japan every year from 2012, except in 2017, a year of presidential and legislative elections.

The exceptional partnership led to many diplomatic visits since 2013, putting a strong emphasis on defense and security cooperation. Japan-France summit meetings have become very frequent, involving ministers most of the time but also heads of executive. In 2019, for example, 12 official meetings took place, including four meetings between French President Macron and Japanese Prime Minister Abe.²⁵ Since 2014, the French and Japanese ministers of foreign affairs and defense have met almost every year to coordinate the bilateral engagement on a 2+2 basis²⁶ and the ministers of foreign affairs met “alone” many times, for example on 1 October 2020, in a time of

²² Embassy of France in Japan (n.d.) *Consulats du Japon en France (Japanese Consulates in France)*, Available at: <https://jp.ambafrance.org/-Presence-francaise-au-Japon-> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

²³ Embassy of France in Japan (n.d.) *Présence de la France au Japon (French Presence in Japan)*, Available at: https://www.fr.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_fr/info-consulats.html (Accessed 21 March 2022).

²⁴ CLAIR Paris. Centre japonais des collectivités locales (n.d.) *Coopération décentralisée (Decentralised Cooperation)*, Available at: <https://www.clairparis.org/fr/collectivites-locales-au-japon/cooperation-decentralisee> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

²⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Japan-France Relations (Archives)*. Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/france/archives.html> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

²⁶ First meeting on 9 January 2014; second meeting on 13 March 2015; third meeting on 7 January 2017; fifth meeting on 11 January 2019. More info available at: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2022) *Japan-France Relations*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/france/index.html> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

pandemic.²⁷ Besides, the Franco-Japanese working group on the Indo-Pacific (first session held in October 2020) focuses on four priorities: security and maritime safety; climate, environment, biodiversity; high-quality infrastructures; health.²⁸ In May 2014, a Japan-France bilateral consultation on cybersecurity²⁹ (the 5th meeting took place on 12 July 2019³⁰) was created. The next year, in March 2015, the two countries signed an agreement on military technology transfer, followed, in July 2018, by an acquisition and cross-servicing agreement, preparing for future cooperation.³¹

Both countries are also improving military interoperability, France being the only EU country with a permanent military presence in the Indo-Pacific region. They started joint military maneuvers on Japanese soil, in May 2021, after engaging in trilateral maneuvers with the US Navy in February.³² Since March 2021, France engaged in monitoring and surveillance activities against illicit maritime activities in Japanese territorial waters, by sending its frigate *Prairial*, after doing this for a first time in 2019.³³ The *Marianne* mission also deployed the nuclear submarine *L’Emeraude*, in 2021, for seven months, so as to prepare for further military cooperation with Japan,

²⁷ Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs (2020) *Japon - Entretien de Jean-Yves Le Drian avec Toshimitsu Motegi, ministre japonais des affaires étrangères (1.10.20) (Japan. Conversation of Jean-Yves Le Drian with Toshimitsu Motegi, Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs (1 October 2020))*, Available at: <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/japon/evenements/article/japon-entretien-de-jean-yves-le-drian-avec-toshimitsu-motegi-ministre-japonais> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

²⁸ Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs (2021) *La stratégie de la France dans l’Indopacifique (The Strategy of France in the Indopacific)*, Available at: <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/asiе-oceanie/l-espace-indopacifique-une-priorite-pour-la-france/> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

²⁹ Ministry of Economy, Finance and Recovery (2018) *La cybersécurité au Japon (Cybersecurity in Japan)*, Available at: <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/Articles/2018/07/23/la-cybersecurite-au-japon> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

³⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019) *The 5th Japan-France Bilateral Consultations on Cybersecurity*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/cp/page22e_000908.html (Accessed 21 March 2022).

³¹ Michiko Tsuruoka (2018) “A New Japan-France Strategic Partnership: A View from Tokyo,” *IFRI*, 75, p. 2, Available at: https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/tsuruoka_japan_france_strategic_partnership_2018.pdf (Accessed 21 March 2022).

³² Ministry of Defense of Japan (2021) *Defense of Japan*, Available at: https://www.mod.go.jp/en/publ/w_paper/wp2021/DOJ2021_Digest_EN.pdf (Accessed 21 March 2022).

³³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Monitoring and Surveillance Activities by France Against Illicit Maritime Activities Including Ship-to-Ship Transfers*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press3e_000171.html (Accessed 21 March 2022).

India and Australia in the Indo-Pacific area.³⁴

France and Japan collaborate in sharing maritime information: the first edition of the Franco-Japanese global maritime dialogue (*dialogue maritime global franco-japonais*) took place in Nouméa, on 29 September 2019. Joint military maneuvers are combined with common projects between the two development agencies, the *Agence Française de Développement* (AFD) and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) – a memorandum of cooperation being adopted by AFD and JICA, in June 2019. The Indo-Pacific strategy relies on mutual collaboration in South-East Asia, in order to prevent natural disasters and provide energy and water, and in Africa, in order to promote local development. For example, JETRO has been active in France, so as to find collaborations with French companies in Africa.³⁵

Economic and commercial relations – Reinforcement and diversification of trade

The common ambition to develop a diversified economic partnership, after decades of trade conflicts, has positively impacted commercial relations, in the last two decades. Prior to the pandemic, the volume of trade significantly increased: French exports to Japan have almost doubled since 1995.³⁶ This part will focus on data from both 2019 and 2020, considering how the pandemic represented an unusual moment, which should not blur the perception of deeper developments. Although economic indicators went down in 2020, 2019 was considered as a great year for the bilateral trade relationship.

The bilateral commercial relation is unequal, considering that France had a trade

³⁴ Ministry of Defense (2021) *La mission Marianne – Une préparation à la hauteur des ambitions (The Marianne Mission – Preparing to Match Ambitions)*, Available at: <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/marine/magazines/passion-marine/sous-marins-nucleaires-d-attaque-se-deployer-loin-et-longtemps/la-mission-marianne-une-preparation-a-la-hauteur-des-ambitions> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

³⁵ Céline Pajon (2020) “La diplomatie économique du Japon en Afrique. Un bilan de l’ère Abe, entre priorités stratégiques et réalités de terrain (*Economic Diplomacy of Japan in Africa. A Review on the Abe Era, Between Strategic Priorities and Ground Realities*),” *IFRI*, Available at: https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/pajon_diplomatie_japon_afrique_2020.pdf (Accessed 21 March 2022).

³⁶ The Observatory of Economic Complexity (n.d.) *France / Japan*, Available at: <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/fra/partner/jpn?depthSelector=HS2Depth&dynamicBilateralTradeSelector=year2019&measureBilateralTradeSelector=vi zValueOption1> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

deficit toward Japan of around 2.8 billion euros in 2020,³⁷ a little bit higher than the 2.6 billion euros in 2019, but lower than the 3.4 billion euros in 2018.³⁸ This trade deficit remained quite stable in the last five years: only three sectors led to significant surplus for France in 2020: food (1.1 billion euros), textile (500 million euros) and pharmaceuticals (170 million euros).³⁹ In 2020, Japan was the 11th largest commercial partner of France, its 13th largest client, its 11th largest supplier, and presented its 8th largest commercial deficit. However, France was only the 18th largest provider for Japan (15th in 2019) and its 21st largest client (22nd in 2019), which is far from the first European partner of Japan, Germany.⁴⁰

Besides, France also invests more money in Japan, than Japan does in France. France was, in 2019, the second country in terms of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Japan, behind the United States, with 21 billion euros of FDI stock and 1.4 billion euros of FDI flows.⁴¹ This makes Japan the 14th largest receiver of French FDI. At the same time, France was the 17th largest receiver of Japanese FDI, with 12.7 billion euros of FDI stock, 0.9 billion euros of FDI flows, and Japan was the 10th largest investor and largest Asian investor in France.⁴² The stock of FDI increased significantly in the last two decades. The stock of French FDI in Japan rose in the 2000s, from less than 10 billion euros on average in the early 2000s, to over 20 billion euros on average since 2010, stabilized since then. A similar increase took place simultaneously for Japanese

³⁷ Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs (2021) *Fiche Pays - Repères économiques, Japon (Country Profile – Economic Benchmarks, Japan)*, Available at: <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

³⁸ Ministry of Economy, Finance and Recovery (2021) *Commerce et investissements France-Japon / Commerce extérieur japonais - retour sur 2019 (Trade and Investments France-Japan / Japanese Trade – a Review on 2019)*, Available at: <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/Pays/JP/commerce-et-investissements-france-japon> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

³⁹ Ministry of Economy, Finance and Recovery (2021) *JAPON. Commerce bilatéral franco-japonais en 2020 (Japan. Franco-Japanese Bilateral Trade in 2020)*, Available at: <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/Pays/JP/commerce-bilatéral-franco-japonais-en-2020> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

⁴¹ CCI France Japon (2020) *Fiche pays Japon (Country Profile Japan)*, Available at: https://aws-a.medias-ccifi.org/fileadmin/cru-1626190142/japon/Documents/SAE/Notes_sectorielles/Fiche_pays_Japon_2021.pdf (Accessed 21 March 2022).

⁴² Ibidem.

FDI in France: from an average at around 6 billion euros, between 2002 and 2009, to around 12 billion euros, since 2012.⁴³

A positive evolution in bilateral trade is observed in both quantities and types of products. Apart from military equipment, the bilateral relation concerns many sectors and tended to diversify in the last two decades.

Japanese exports to France are strongly dependent on the sector of industrial machinery and equipment, although increasing trade led to a diversification, lowering this sector's weight in total exports: from 52.3% in 1995, to 36% in 2019.⁴⁴ This dominant sector includes a large variety of products, such as electric batteries, construction vehicles and engines, gas turbines and air pumps, etc. Besides, vehicles (cars and motorcycles) and their parts represent an important portion (28.7% in 2019), which increased in the last decades (from 14.7% in 1995).⁴⁵ Chemical products and medical instruments are a third significant sector for Japanese exports in France (19.7% in 2019), which evolved in stable proportions all throughout the period. Japanese exports fell by 19.2% in 2020, to 8.4 billion euros, which is less than the value of French exports to Japan. Industrial machinery remained the first sector (43%), in spite of a 21.2% contraction, and vehicles the second (27%).⁴⁶

French exports to Japan have increased and diversified: in 2020, food topped the list (20%), followed by transport materials (18%), mechanical and electronic equipment (14%), perfume and chemical products (13%), textile and clothing (11%), pharmaceuticals (10%), etc.⁴⁷ Food became the first sector in 2020, thanks to a persistent increase in the last few years. Following the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), signed in 2018, exports of wine increased by 12% in 2019, and

⁴³ Ibidem.

⁴⁴ The Observatory of Economic Complexity (n.d.) *France / Japan*, Available at: <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/fra/partner/jpn?depthSelector=HS2Depth&dynamicBilateralTradeSelector=year2019&measureBilateralTradeSelector=viZValueOption1> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

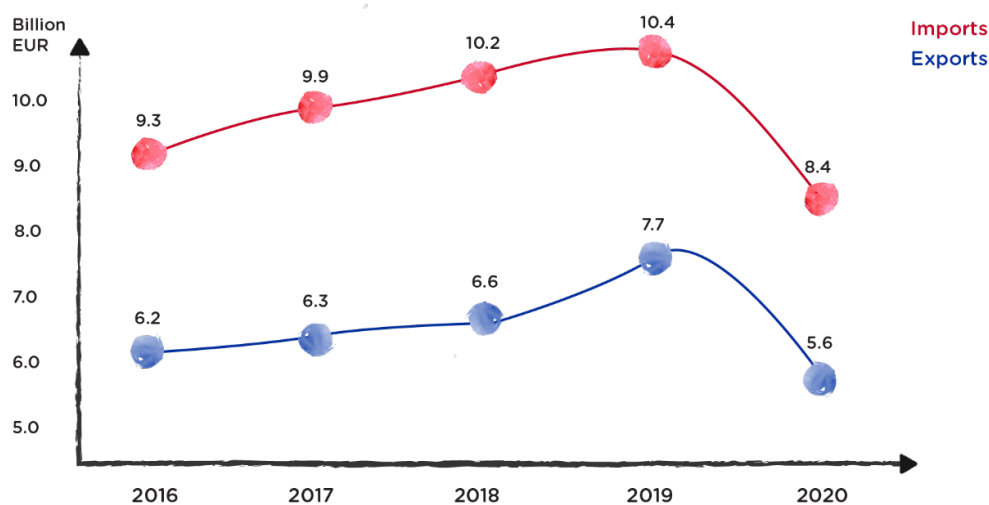
⁴⁵ Ibidem.

⁴⁶ Ministry of Economy, Finance and Recovery (2021) *JAPON. Commerce bilatéral franco-japonais en 2020 (Japan. Franco-Japanese Bilateral Trade in 2020)*, Available at: <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/Pays/JP/commerce-bilatéral-franco-japonais-en-2020> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

⁴⁷ Ibidem.

exports of cheese and other milk-related products by 7.5%, benefiting from the elimination of custom duties.⁴⁸ The sector declined in 2020, by 10%, as high-quality products, a specialty of France, were strongly impacted by the closing down of restaurants and hotels. However, food became the first sector in 2020, thanks to the rise of bakery products (12%), pet food (6%) and the stability of milk-related products.⁴⁹

France's trade with Japan in billion euros



Source: International Trade Center/ Trade Map

French exports to Japan fell by 27% in 2020, to 5.6 billion euros, compared to 7.7 billion euros in 2019, which was considered as an exceptional year, mostly thanks to transport equipment, especially aircraft, in the aftermath of the many contracts signed between Airbus and Japanese airline companies in 2013-2016 for more, than 80 aircraft.⁵⁰ Even if Airbus maintained its delivery flux of aircraft order before the crisis,

⁴⁸ Ministry of Economy, Finance and Recovery (2021) *Commerce et investissements France-Japon / Commerce extérieur japonais - retour sur 2019 (Trade and Investments France-Japan / Japanese Trade – a Review on 2019)*, Available at: <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/Pays/JP/commerce-et-investissements-france-japon> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

⁴⁹ Ministry of Economy, Finance and Recovery (2021) *JAPON. Commerce bilatéral franco-japonais en 2020 (Japan. Franco-Japanese Bilateral Trade in 2020)*, Available at: <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/Pays/JP/commerce-bilatéral-franco-japonais-en-2020> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

⁵⁰ Ministry of Economy, Finance and Recovery (2021) *Commerce et investissements France-Japon / Commerce extérieur japonais - retour sur 2019 (Trade and Investments France-Japan / Japanese Trade – a Review on 2019)*, Available at: <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/Pays/JP/commerce-et-investissements-france-japon> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

the decline is due to the fact that some were built outside of France. In 2020, the transport sector returned to pre-2019 levels, as the second export sector of France to Japan (17.5%), after being the first in 2019 (28%).⁵¹ The crisis also impacted the pharmaceutical sector, as well as textile and clothing, after a great year in 2019 (when it recorded a 15% growth from the 2018 value). Luxury products remained a central asset, pushed by online shopping.⁵²

Like the diplomatic partnership, the France-Japan economic cooperation benefits from a dense network of experienced institutions, which recently developed new initiatives. For example, a working group organized by the Japanese and French ministries of economy has met annually since 2013, to gather companies and economic actors, to promote their innovations and look for new partners.⁵³

The Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) opened an office in Paris in 1963, five years after its creation,⁵⁴ which also hosts a branch of the Nippon Export and Investment Insurance (NEXI), since its creation, in 2001.⁵⁵ Both institutions are active in helping French companies invest in Japan and in supporting Japanese companies in their projects in France. Besides, another of JETRO's objectives is to promote Japanese cuisine, through the export of agricultural goods – food and sake – in France, to all the shops or restaurants labeled as “Japanese Food Supporter,” since 2016. For instance, on 3 February 2020, JETRO organized an event in Paris, presenting Japanese food to French customers and investors, entitled “Professional fair for the discovery of Japanese

⁵¹ Ministry of Economy, Finance and Recovery (2021) *JAPON. Commerce bilatéral franco-japonais en 2020 (Japan. Franco-Japanese Bilateral Trade in 2020)*, Available at: <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/Pays/JP/commerce-bilatéral-franco-japonais-en-2020> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

⁵² Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs (2021) *Fiche Pays - Repères économiques, Japon (Country Profile – Economic Benchmarks, Japan)*, Available at: https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/fichepays_japon_20210504_1411_cle88bd97.pdf (Accessed 21 March 2022).

⁵³ Ministry of Economy, Finance and Recovery (2019) *Coopération industrielle franco-japonaise pour les nouveaux systèmes énergétiques - Rencontre du 21 juin 2019 (Franco-Japanese Industrial Cooperation for New Energy Systems – Meeting on 21 June 2019)*, Available at: <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/Articles/2019/07/04/cooperation-industrielle-franco-japonaise-pour-les-nouveaux-systemes-energetiques-rencontre-du-21-juin-2019> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

⁵⁴ JETRO France (n.d.) *Qui sommes-nous? (Who Are We?)*, Available at: <https://www.jetro.go.jp/france/jetro/paris.html> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

⁵⁵ Nippon Export and Investment Insurance (n.d.) *Brief History*, Available at: <https://www.nexi.go.jp/en/corporate/history.html> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

local products” (*Salon professionnel de découverte des produits du terroir du Japon*).⁵⁶ Aside from JETRO, the Japanese Chamber of Commerce in France has similar objectives, such as reinforcing economic cooperation, helping Japanese companies in France, as well as organizing events, for example, business meetings and touristic visits.⁵⁷ It publishes two monthly magazines in Japanese, only available for members: one on French economic indicators (*furansu keizai shihyō*), one on French legal procedures (*jitsumu-jōhō*).

Its French equivalent, the France-Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (*Chambre de Commerce et d’Industrie France-Japon*), recently became the first European chamber in Japan. Its main objective is to help French companies conduct business in Japan, and thus provide them with contacts, expertise and guidance. In Japan, it publishes a bilingual magazine every trimester, entitled “France Japan Eco,” sharing analyses on the recent Japanese developments. In 2018, to celebrate the 100th year anniversary of its formation in Japan, in 1919, it organized a “100 SMEs in Japan mission” (*mission 100 PME au Japon*), consisting of public events such as a business summit, gathering more than 800 companies.⁵⁸ Apart from the Chamber of commerce, government agencies like Business France (promoting French exports) and Atout France (promoting tourism in France) are helping to better connect economic actors of both countries.

Cultural and people-to-people relations and perceptions of Japan – Surfing on the popularity of Japan

The current excellent relationship was partly made possible by a long-term cultural connection. Since the Meiji period, France acquired in Japan a reputation of being a country of art and culture. According to Hidehiro Tachibana, France was seen as a symbol of individual freedom against economic modernization and thus mostly

⁵⁶ JETRO France (n.d.) *Nos missions (Our Missions)*, Available at: <https://www.jetro.go.jp/france/missions.html> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

⁵⁷ Chambre de Commerce et d’Industrie Japonaise en France (n.d.) *Nouveaux articles (New Articles)*, Available at: <https://www.cci-jf.asso.fr/fr/> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

⁵⁸ Chambre de Commerce et d’Industrie France-Japon (n.d.) *Home Page*, Available at: <https://www.cci-jf.or.jp> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

apprehended through art and esthetics, connoting a specific lifestyle. This specific perception started to evolve in the 1970s, when French literature was smoothly replaced by other goods, such as fashion and food (especially wine and cheese).⁵⁹ The increasing success of the French food sector in Japan is related to the excellent reputation of its cultural goods.

Simultaneously, the reputation of Japan in France has strongly improved since the 1990s, thanks to the introduction of Japanese anime and manga, since the privatization of television channel TF1, in 1987, and the development of the video games market.⁶⁰ The first exhibition on Japanese popular culture, “Japan expo,” was held in 1999. From a tiny gathering of 3,000 visitors, it rapidly became one of the biggest events in contemporary France, receiving around 240,000 visitors every year, since 2013.⁶¹ “Japan expo” has expanded its territory from manga and anime, to traditional culture, food and tourism. Whereas France remains appreciated in Japan thanks to elements of its elitist culture (art, literature, cuisine, etc.), Japan has become very popular in France thanks to its popular culture (manga, anime, video games etc.).

Both countries are willing to use this cultural dimension in order to intensify their bilateral partnership. When Prime Minister Abe visited France, in November 2015, both countries agreed on the organization of “Japonismes 2018,” a large-scale initiative, consisting of 79 (!) cultural events, promoting Japanese culture in France (mostly in Paris), from July 2018 to February 2019, welcoming more than 3 million visitors.⁶² “Japonismes 2018” was supported by many Japanese companies and French institutions and inaugurated by Tarō Kōno, the Japanese minister of foreign affairs.⁶³

⁵⁹ Hidehiro Tachibana (2016) “Le français et la transformation de la société japonaise (French and the transformation of Japanese society),” in Jean-François Graziani and Nishiyama Noriyuki (eds.), *Le Japon, acteur de la francophonie. Enjeux intérieurs, enjeux extérieurs (Japan, Actor of Francophonie. Domestic Issues, External Issues)*, Paris: Editions des archives contemporaines, pp. 5-13.

⁶⁰ Jean-Marie Bouissou (2010) *Manga. Histoire et univers de la bande dessinée japonaise (Manga. History and Universe of Japanese Comics)*, Paris: Picquier.

⁶¹ Japan Expo (n.d.) *Historique de Japan Expo (History of Japan Expo)*, Available at: https://www.japan-expo-paris.com/fr/menu/historique_100541.htm (Accessed 21 March 2022).

⁶² The official program is presented on an official website: <https://japonismes.org/en/officialprograms> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

⁶³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Japan-France Relations*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/france/index.html> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

The number of residents has been increasing smoothly over the last two decades, thanks to solid institutional and cultural grounds, as well as good mutual perceptions and better travel possibilities. There were 13,345 French citizens living in Japan, in June 2020, making the French community in Japan the largest of any European country (apart from the United Kingdom),⁶⁴ with almost twice the German presence (the second EU country). In October 2019, there were 40,538 Japanese citizens living on French territory.⁶⁵ Three companies are nowadays managing daily direct flights between Paris, Osaka and Tokyo (Haneda and Narita airports): Air France, All Nippon Airways (ANA) and Japan Airlines (JAL). They guarantee a regular and convenient connection to an increasing number of passengers. Although direct Paris-Osaka flights are not daily, each company proposes between one and four Paris-Tokyo trips per day, depending on the season. The France-Japan connection originated in the high-growth period, Air France inaugurating its first direct Paris-Tokyo line in November 1952,⁶⁶ while JAL did the same in 1961, thanks to a partnership with Air France.⁶⁷ ANA opened a direct line much later, in 1990.⁶⁸

Considering the distance between the two countries, tourism has depended a lot on travel possibilities at a reasonable cost. There has been a sharp increase in the number of French tourists in Japan in recent years, more than in any other Asian country: it almost doubled in the years prior to the pandemic, from 154,892 in 2013, to 304,896 in 2018.⁶⁹ Visits to Japan mainly consist of individual, rather than group trips (91.6% in 2018), for a long period of a week or more (95%) and for the first time

⁶⁴ Ibidem.

⁶⁵ Ibidem.

⁶⁶ Air France (2017) *Air France célèbre 65 ans de présence au Japon (Air France Celebrates Its 65 Years of Presence in Japan)*, Available at: <https://corporate.airfrance.com/fr/communique-de-presse/air-france-celebre-65-ans-de-presence-au-japon?language=fr> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

⁶⁷ Japan Airlines (n.d.) *JAL's History 1961s*, Available at: https://www.jal.com/en/outline/history/index_1961s.html (Accessed 21 March 2022).

⁶⁸ ANA Group (n.d.) *ANA Group History*, Available at: <https://www.ana.co.jp/group/en/about-us/anapace/> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

⁶⁹ Japan National Tourism Organization (n.d.) *フランスの基礎データ (Basic Data of France)*, Available at: https://www.jnto.go.jp/jpn/inbound_market/market_basic_france.pdf (Accessed 21 March 2022).

(70.9%).⁷⁰ Parallel to this, France has remained stable as the second most popular destination – behind Germany – in Europe, for Japanese tourists: 728,000 travelers in 2001, 659,000 in 2005, 612,259 in 2011, 784,423 in 2014.⁷¹ Whereas the interest of Japanese citizens for visiting France has been strong for decades, Japan has started to become a popular destination in France very recently.

Like diplomacy and the economy, the cultural relationship is relying on close institutional ties. First, France and Japan created official institutions aimed at promoting national language and culture in the partner country. The *Maison de la culture du Japon à Paris*, created in 1997, has become the most important place for welcoming events related to Japan, curious citizens who want to use its library, to take language courses, or other courses on traditional arts.⁷² In Japan, the first Institut Franco-Japonais was created in 1952. However, since 2012, a new umbrella institution, entitled Institut français du Japon, has merged the five existing *instituts français du Japon*, with the embassy cultural service and the villa Kujoyama in Kyoto (a residence for artists), to better coordinate French cultural policy in Japan.⁷³ Besides, among many other institutions, there are four *Alliance française* in Japan, providing citizens with French language courses: in Sapporo, Sendai, Aichi and Tokushima.

Second, there is a large and stable number of schools in both countries. In 1976, a Franco-Japanese high school in Tokyo, following the French curriculum, was recognized by the French ministry of education.⁷⁴ The school smoothly increased in size and changed its name to *Lycée Français International de Tokyo* in 2012, when it moved to a bigger campus, in Itabashi (north of Tokyo). A Kyoto equivalent, the *Lycée*

⁷⁰ Ibidem.

⁷¹ Japan Association of Travel Agents (n.d.) 海外旅行者の旅行先トップ50 (受入国統計) (*Top 50 Travel Destinations for Overseas Travelers (Country Statistics)*), Available at: <https://www.jata-net.or.jp/tokei/004/2007/05.htm> and <https://www.jata-net.or.jp/data/stats/2016/06.html> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

⁷² Maison de la culture du Japon à Paris (n.d.). *Home Page*, Available at: <https://www.mcjp.fr/> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

⁷³ Institut français du Japon (n.d.) *Institut français du Japon (French Institute of Japan)*, Available at: <https://www.institutfrancais.jp/fr/ifjapon/> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

⁷⁴ Lycée français international de Tokyo (n.d.) *Présentation du LFI Tokyo (Presentation of LFI Tokyo)*, Available at: <https://www.lfitokyo.org/index.php/l-etablissement/presentation-du-lfitokyo> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

Français International de Kyoto, has existed since 2017. In spite of being named *Lycée* (high school), curricula start at primary school. In France, since the closure of the *Lycée Seijo* (2005) and *Lycée Konan* (2013), there remains only one Japanese school, called French-Japanese Cultural Institute – Japanese School of Paris and located in the Paris suburbs. More broadly, the Japanese language is taught in 53 French high schools.⁷⁵ The Colibri network, gathering 29 Japanese and 32 French high schools, organizes regular students and teachers exchanges.⁷⁶

Third, a noticeable evolution happened at a higher education level. In the 2000s, French universities experienced a rapid increase in the number of students in departments of Japanese studies, mostly due to the new cultural influence of Japan in France. Among the 10 Japanese studies departments existing in France, most of the 5,000 students are registered in the Paris *Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales* (INALCO), according to the Japanologist Julien Bouvard,⁷⁷ who shares the burden of this higher number with a (still) stable number of colleagues. The Japanese language has reached a high popularity in France, at a time when the French language experiences a relative decline in Japan.

Conclusions and recommendations

The last two decades have seen a deepening of the Japan-France relationship in various simultaneous directions. First, the creation of an “exceptional partnership,” in 2013, led to closer political and military cooperation, operated thanks to more frequent official meetings. Renewed in 2019 for four years, the partnership will most likely continue for a longer time. Second, pushed by bilateral institutional initiatives, trade has increased in volume and diversified since the 2000s, reaching its best year in 2019, just before the pandemic. Third, cultural collaboration experienced a significant evolution, as seen in the rising numbers of yearly visitors, cultural events and popularity of the Japanese

⁷⁵ Embassy of Japan in France (2021) *Education*, Available at: https://www.fr.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_fr/education.html (Accessed 21 March 2022).

⁷⁶ Réseau Colibri (n.d.) *Home page*, Available at: <https://reseaucolibri-francejapon.org/accueil/> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

⁷⁷ Konishi Manga (2020) *Enseignement du japonais à l'université et place du manga et de sa traduction* (1ère partie) (*Teaching Japanese at University and Role of Manga and Its Translation*), Available at: <http://konishimanga.fr/2020/12/16/enseignement-japonais-universite-manga/> (Accessed 21 March 2022).

culture and language in France. Many underlying reasons may explain such – past and probably future – positive trends. A new geopolitical context, consisting in the rise of China as an Indo-Pacific actor, developed mutual interests and strategic synergies: France and Japan harmonized their actions, as well as their message, as defenders of a multilateral order based on the rule of law. A long-term cultural heritage and other macroscopic similarities, such as being nation states with democratic institutions, do also contribute in making Japan and France consistent partners.

However, the mutual desire to further cooperate will need to face some major issues in the future. For example, the economic and political rise of China may lead to tensions, which could force France to adopt a pragmatic distance toward a relatively weaker regional partner, whereas the Japanese alliance with the United States may still prevent further bilateral cooperation. Besides, the study of the French language in Japan is in a slow decline, facing the rising monopoly of English, as the language of international relations. Almost absent from high schools, where, most of the time, students only learn English, French is mostly discovered by Japanese people in university and facing a stronger competition from Chinese, Korean or Spanish.⁷⁸

Two main recommendations can be deduced from this situation. First, it is essential to encourage a better knowledge of each other, beyond stereotypes, so as to continue feeding mutual interest by giving local actors the means to promote their language and culture. In France, this can be done by reinforcing the institutional network in charge of promoting Japanese studies and culture; in Japan, by using more French for internationalization, beyond a strong focus on English and through a larger perspective associating French-speaking countries (*Francophonie*). To do so, it is becoming vital to stimulate mutual curiosity, by encouraging bilateral mobility, as soon as COVID-19 and its variants will no longer be considered a threat. France and Japan must indeed continue leveraging the positive image that each culture does have in the partner country, in order to facilitate communication and mutual understanding, and thus develop a firm foundation for further qualitative cooperation in various fields

⁷⁸ Sachiko Komatsu (2016) “Revaloriser l’enseignement du français au Japon (Revaluating the Teaching of French in Japan),” in Jean-François Graziani and Nishiyama Noriyuki (eds.), *Le Japon, acteur de la francophonie. Enjeux intérieurs, enjeux extérieurs (Japan, Actor of Francophonie. Domestic Issues, External Issues)*, Paris: Editions des archives contemporaines, pp. 41-47.

beyond culture, such as economic partnerships and military maneuvers. The future of security and commercial relations depends significantly on the capacity to increase language and cultural skills, considering that language barriers remain the main weakness of Franco-Japanese relations at the moment. Second, Franco-Japanese relations can be reinforced by pursuing the diversification of bilateral trade and reaching a better trade balance between the two countries. Leveraging the deepening cultural connections, as well as mutual interest and expertise in security and energy policies, provides promising perspectives for the near future.

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Germany-Japan relations: New challenges, new options for a strategic partnership

By Torsten WEBER*

Overview

The year 2021 was a particularly promising moment for analyzing the relations between Germany and Japan. In 2021, both countries celebrated the anniversary of “160 years of German-Japanese friendship,” which commemorated the establishment of official intergovernmental relations between the Kingdom of Prussia and Tokugawa Japan. Although in the course of these 160 years, relations were not always friendly, they can be described as consolidated, close and largely conflict-free. This applies especially to the post-war period, which now covers almost half of these 160 years. The large number of events organized to celebrate the anniversary year – despite the pandemic – also shows how intensive, solid, and institutionally anchored German-Japanese relations have become.

At the political level, the end of Angela Merkel’s chancellorship in December 2021 has already cast some shadows, even if it is still too early to take stock of the new orientation of German foreign policy. However, the signing of the German-Japanese Agreement on the Security of Information in March 2021 and the joint exercises of the Japanese and German navies in November 2021 showed that both countries have started to move away from China and may pursue closer political and security cooperation in the future. Economic relations suffered worldwide under the influence of the pandemic, but Germany was able to consolidate its position as Japan’s most important trading partner in Europe. Japan also remains the largest importer and exporter to Germany

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(and the EU) in Asia, after China. Since 2019, the free trade agreement between Japan and the EU has also contributed to this development.

The cultural and people-to-people exchange between the two countries has been particularly intensive and stable for decades. Despite pandemic-related restrictions and temporary border closures, numerous events and cooperation initiatives took place, partly online. Due to the unbroken mutual interest and the large number of programs, it can be assumed that cultural and civil society exchange will experience a new boom after the end of the pandemic.

In his speech at Waseda University during his visit to Japan in November 2016, German President Joachim Gauck said “at bilateral meetings, one sometimes hears people say that Japanese-German relations are actually 'boring because they are too good.’”¹ The following sections highlight current basic tendencies and nuances of these relations based on the historical, political, military, economic, cultural and civil society relations between people of both countries. They can explain why the relations are indeed very good but by no means boring.

History of relations

In 2021, Germany and Japan celebrated “160 years of German-Japanese friendship.” Despite the pandemic, numerous lectures, exhibitions and other events took place in the spirit of the anniversary, often online. In fact, the designation “160 Years of German-Japanese Friendship” is misleading in several respects. When the Treaty of Friendship, Trade and Navigation was concluded with Japan in January 1861, Prussia was the contracting party, not Germany (which did not yet exist as a nation state). The treaty – signed by the head of the mission, Count Friedrich zu Eulenburg, and three representatives of the Shogunate – regulated relations between the Kingdom of Prussia and the Edo Shogunate.² It belongs to the series of so-called unequal treaties, which were concluded under the threat of military force and unilaterally assured the European

¹ Bundespräsidialamt (2016) *Speech by Federal President Joachim Gauck at Waseda University in Tokyo on 16 November 2016*, Available at: <https://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/EN/JoachimGauck/Reden/2016/161116-Japan-Waseda-Uni.html> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

² On this mission see the excellent online collection Cross Asia (2021) *The Prussian Expedition to Japan 1860/61*, Available at: <https://themen.crossasia.org/expedition-japan/?lang=en> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

and American contracting parties of the opening of the country, extraterritoriality and most-favored-nation clauses. The Shogunate had previously concluded similar treaties with the United States of America and Great Britain (both in 1854) and Russia (1858). The term “friendship” is therefore euphemistic even for the beginnings of interstate relations. Furthermore, the reference to the duration of 160 years is misleading since relations between Germans and Japanese had already existed on non-governmental levels two centuries before the signing of the treaty, among others through the physicians Caspar Schamberger (1623-1706) from Leipzig and Engelbert Kaempfer (1651-1716) from Lemgo, who stayed in Japan in 1650-51 and 1690-92, respectively.³ In the medical world, therefore, “300 years of German-Japanese relations in medicine” were already celebrated in 1992.⁴ In the field of science relations, these contacts are considered the earliest between Japanese and Europeans.

Learning in and from Germany

The first decades of official relations before and after the Meiji Restoration (1868) were marked by Japan’s efforts to become a modern and leading power itself, by selectively acquiring knowledge from Europe and the USA. To this end, a first mission was sent to Europe as early as 1862, which also visited Prussia. Among its members was Yukichi Fukuzawa, founder of Keio University in Tokyo. In 1873, members of the Iwakura Mission (1871-73) also visited Germany⁵, which had, in the meantime, become a unified nation-state. Among the approximately 2,500 *oyatoi* (“contract employees”) foreigners who were to advance Japan’s modernization as experts and who were mostly employed at Japanese universities for several years at a time, until 1899, there were also

³ Wolfgang Michel (2010) “Medizin, Heilmittel und Pflanzenkunde im Eurojapanischen Kulturaustausch des 17. Jahrhunderts (Medicine, Remedies and Herbalism in 17th Century Euro-Japanese Cultural Exchange),” *Hōrin - Vergleichende Studien zur japanischen Kultur*, Düsseldorf: EKO Haus der Japanischen Kultur, p. 24.

⁴ Ernst Kraas, Yoshiki Hiki and Ilse Umhauer (eds) (1992) *300 Jahre Deutsch-Japanische Beziehungen in der Medizin (300 Years of German-Japanese Relations in Medicine)*, Tokyo et al.: Springer.

⁵ Ian Nish (1998) “Introduction” in Ian Nish (ed) *The Iwakura Mission in America and Europe. A New Assessment*, Richmond: Japan Library, p. 4.

more than 200 Germans.⁶ Germany was considered a role model for Japan in the fields of law and medicine but also in the military and natural sciences. Numerous Japanese also studied in Germany from the end of the 19th century. The most famous among them was the medical doctor and writer Ōgai Mori (1862-1922), who studied under Robert Koch in Berlin, from 1884 to 1888, and translated Goethe's *Faust* into Japanese.⁷

After Japan's victories in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) and especially in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), and due to its subsequent territorial expansion, Japan was seen as a threat by European powers and especially by Germany. This geopolitical and strategic threat often expressed itself in racial terms and became widespread as a catchword called the "Yellow Peril." Kaiser Wilhelm II and the German media contributed a great deal to its dissemination.⁸

Enemies at war

This initially rhetorical threat culminated in the First World War, in which both states, as members of opposing alliances, openly confronted each other as enemies. Japanese living in Germany were interned, and German media mocked Japanese as monkeys that belonged in the zoo.⁹ Direct military conflicts took place around the city of Tsingtau (Qingdao) in north-eastern China, which was part of the territory that Germany had leased from China in 1898. As early as November 1914, the German soldiers in the besieged city surrendered to the Japanese. At least 400 Japanese and 200 German soldiers were killed;¹⁰ more German soldiers died as prisoners of war in Japanese camps. In Japan, this part of the First World War is also known as the Japanese-German War (*Nichi-Doku sensō*). About 4,700 Germans were taken to internment camps in

⁶ Kristin Meißner (2018) *Strategische Experten: die Imperialpolitische Rolle von Ausländischen Beratern in Meiji-Japan (1868-1912)* (*Strategic Experts: The Imperial Policy Role of Foreign Consultants in Meiji Japan*), Frankfurt, New York: Campus Verlag, p. 9.

⁷ Rudolf Hartmann (2010) *Themenportal Japans Studierende in Deutschland (1868-1914)*, Available at: <https://themen.crossasia.org/japans-studierende/index/show> (Accessed 19 April 2022).

⁸ Heinz Gollwitzer (1962), *Die Gelbe Gefahr (The Yellow Peril)*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, p. 42.

⁹ For example, Olaf Gulbransson (1915) "Die Gelben Affen (The Yellow Monkeys)", *Simplicissimus*, 19(53), p. 15.

¹⁰ Seiji Saitō (2001) *Nichidoku Chintao Sensō (The Japanese-German War over Qingdao)*, Tokyo: Yumanishobo, p. 8.

Japan from 1915 onwards, some of which were heavily criticized and closed due to the poor living conditions and cruel treatment of the prisoners.¹¹

However, the German-Japanese encounters in the aftermath of the First World War also mark the beginning of new, friendly relations. In the so-called model prisoner-of-war camp of Bandō in Naruto (Tokushima Prefecture), where over 1,000 German prisoners of war were temporarily housed, they were able to lead a relatively free life: they did sports, went on excursions, baked bread, brewed beer, performed plays, published a camp newspaper, and played music. The orchestra together with a choir performed Beethoven's Ninth Symphony for the first time in Japan on 1 June 1918.¹² After the camps were dissolved in 1920, some Germans decided to stay in Japan. The most famous among them was the confectioner Karl Juchheim from Kaub, who opened his own bakery in Yokohama in 1922, from which the Juchheim confectionery company emerged. Today, it is known nationwide in Japan as a manufacturer of Baumkuchen.¹³

Partners in World War Two and beyond

The ambivalent development of relations continued in the 1930s, until the end of the Second World War, when, on the one hand, National Socialist ideology labeled Japanese as second-class human beings.¹⁴ On the other hand, however, Japan became interesting to Germany as an anti-communist ally. Both states withdrew from the League of Nations in 1933 and concluded the Anti-Comintern Pact in 1936, which was expanded into the Tripartite Pact with Italy in 1940. The strategic alliance against the Soviet Union and the Allies brought few military, political and economic successes, partly because the geopolitical and ideological interests were ultimately far apart.

Moreover, the Nazi racial policy was met with little interest in Japan. In 1940, the Japanese diplomat Chiune Sugihara, as vice-consul in Lithuania, helped several

¹¹ Mahon Murphy (2014) "Brücken, Beethoven und Baumkuchen: German and Austro-Hungarian Prisoners of War and the Japanese Home Front," in Joachim Bürgschwentner, Matthias Egger, and Gunda Barth-Scalmani (eds.) *Other Fronts, other Wars? First World War Studies on the Eve of the Centennial*, Leiden: Brill, p. 133.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 141.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 142.

¹⁴ Harumi Shidehara Furuya (1995) "Nazi Racism Toward the Japanese: Ideology vs. Realpolitik", *NOAG*, 157–158, p. 18.

thousand Jews to flee Europe by issuing so-called visas for life.¹⁵

Japan and the Federal Republic of Germany resumed diplomatic relations in 1955; this step was not taken between Japan and the German Democratic Republic until 1973.¹⁶ Post-war relations have focused on trade and cooperation to promote exchange in the fields of business, science, culture and sport. More recently, joint military-strategic interests have also increasingly been added to the bilateral agenda.

Political relations

The political relations of both countries are characterized by long-standing joint membership in multilateral alliances and international organizations. In addition to the United Nations and its sub-organizations, these include the multilateral forums of the G7 and G20 meetings, the Europe-Asia Summits (ASEM), and the OSCE and NATO, with which Japan is affiliated as a cooperation partner.

The importance of relations between the two countries is also reflected in a close network of mutual representations abroad: in addition to its Embassy in Tokyo, the Federal Republic of Germany maintains the Consulate General Osaka-Kobe, as well as honorary consulates in Okinawa, Sapporo, Sendai and Toyohashi. Japan maintains its Embassy in Berlin, four Consulates General in Frankfurt am Main, Düsseldorf, Hamburg and Munich, as well as an honorary consulate in Stuttgart.

In the shadow of China: Strategic and economic partnership

During the term in office of German chancellor Angela Merkel (2005-2021), political relations between Japan and Germany were considered to be of secondary priority. This assessment is mainly due to the relatively few visits Merkel paid to Japan and her strong focus on developing German relations with China. During her tenure, Merkel visited Japan six times: in 2007, the G8 summit in 2008 (Tōyako), in 2015, the G7 summit in 2016 (Shima) and twice in 2019 (including the G20 summit in Osaka). Only three of

¹⁵ More information about Chiune Sugihara and his actions can be found in the chapter dedicated to Lithuania-Japan relations.

¹⁶ Christian Heideck (2014) *Zwischen Ost-West-Handel und Opposition. Die Japanpolitik der DDR 1952–1973 (Between East-West Trade and Opposition. The GDR's Japan Policy 1952-1973)*, München: Iudicium, p. 14.

these visits took place outside multilateral summits. The fact that she visited China a total of twelve times in the same period was perceived in Japan as an expression of her lower regard for Japan. All German presidents visited Japan at least once during this period: Horst Köhler (2005), Christian Wulff (2011), Joachim Gauck (2016) and Frank-Walter Steinmeier (2018, 2019).

Conversely, Japanese prime ministers have visited Germany a total of ten times since 2006: Yasuo Fukuda in 2008, Tarō Asō in 2009, Shinzō Abe in 2007 (twice), 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017 (twice), and Fumio Kishida in 2022.¹⁷ In 2011, the Crown Prince of Japan visited Germany, 18 years after his father had last visited the country, as Emperor (1993).¹⁸

A few days after the formation of Germany's new government in December 2021, the new foreign ministers of both countries met for a first exchange of opinions at the G7 meeting of foreign ministers, in Liverpool. Chancellor Olaf Scholz held a telephone conversation with his counterpart Fumio Kishida, on 14 December 2021, in which both welcomed the strengthening of security and defense cooperation between the two countries.¹⁹ In April 2022, Scholz visited Japan (as his only destination in Asia) and met with Prime Minister Kishida for the first time. They met again in June 2022 at the G7 summit in Elmau (Germany).

The participation of both countries in the summits of the G7/G8 and G20 alone results in regular and relatively frequent meetings of their respective ministers and delegations at ministerial level. In addition, a German-Japanese Parliamentary Group works to deepen political relations between the two countries and parliamentarians in particular. It is represented in the Bundestag²⁰, as well as in the National Diet of Japan.

¹⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (n.d.) 総理大臣の外国訪問一覧 (*List of Foreign Visits by Prime Ministers*), Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/kaidan/page24_000037.html (Accessed 21 December 2021).

¹⁸ Botschaft von Japan in Deutschland (n.d.) *Besuche auf Regierungsebene (Government Level Visits)*, Available at: <https://www.de.emb-japan.go.jp/de-jp/besuche.html> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

¹⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Japan-Germany Summit Telephone Talk*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/c_see/de/page4e_001192.html (Accessed 21 December 2021).

²⁰ Deutscher Bundestag (n.d.) *Parlamentariergruppen (Parliamentarians' Groups)*, Available at: https://www.bundestag.de/europa_internationales/parlamentariergruppen?url=L2Rva3VtZW50ZS90ZXh0YXJjaGl2LzIwMjEva3czNC1pbnRlcnZpZXctaGFydHdpZy04NTUzNTI=&mod=mod442312 (Accessed 21 December 2021).

The secretary of the grouping (Nichi-Doku Yūkō Gi'in Renmei) on the Japanese side is Minoru Kiuchi (Liberal Democratic Party).²¹

Moreover, as liberal and pluralistic democracies, the two countries share similar systems of government and society and, as a result, are confronted with similar challenges. In this context, both sides have in recent years increasingly emphasized “the shared fundamental values of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law [...] as well as international cooperation.”²² The recent expansion of bilateral relations in the areas of security and military relations, in which the foreign and defense ministries of both states are involved, must also be seen against this background. As early as 2000, foreign ministers Yōhei Kōno and Joschka Fischer had agreed on the so-called “7 pillars of cooperation” for the 21st century, which include the promotion of economic and cultural relations.²³

Common future ambitions, diverging views on history

Both Japan and Germany, as the second and third largest donors at the time (now the third and fourth largest donors, behind China), have been pushing for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council since the late 1990s. To coordinate their efforts, they set up the “G4 Nations” group, to push for corresponding reforms, together with Brazil and India.²⁴ So far, these efforts have been unsuccessful. Japan emphasizes it will “continue to engage proactively in the process for realizing UN Security Council reform, in close cooperation with reform-oriented countries.”²⁵

Political relations between Germany and Japan, which are otherwise

²¹ Kiuchi Minoru (2019) 日独友好議員連盟総会 (*General Meeting of the Japan-Germany Parliamentary Friendship Association*), Available at: <https://www.m-kiuchi.com/archives/11536> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

²² Botschaft von Japan in Deutschland (n.d.) *Deutsch-Japanische Beziehungen (German-Japanese Relations)*, Available at: <https://www.de.emb-japan.go.jp/de-jp/index.html> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

²³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2000) *Summary of the Japan-Federal Republic of Germany Regular Foreign Ministerial Consultation*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/germany/meet0010.html> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

²⁴ Federal Foreign Office (2022) *Reform of the United Nations Security Council*, Available at: https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/internationale-organisationen/vereintenationen/reformsr/231604#content_0 (Accessed 21 December 2021).

²⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Diplomatic Bluebook 2021*, p. 261, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2021/pdf/pdfs/2021_all.pdf (Accessed 21 December 2021).

characterized by common ground and cooperation, were also put to the test in 2020. The Japanese government strongly protested against the statue erected following a citizens' initiative in Berlin Mitte, as part of a memorial commemorating the suffering of the so-called comfort women.²⁶ After the memorial had been inaugurated on 28 September 2020, the Japanese foreign minister urged his counterpart to revoke the permission to display the statue.²⁷ As a consequence of protests, signature campaigns and a demonstration, the permission was renewed. However, the Japanese government continues its efforts to have the statue removed. It had previously criticized similar initiatives in the USA, Canada, Australia, China, the Philippines, Hong Kong and Taiwan, calling for the statues' removal. The Japanese government stressed that it considers the dispersal of the statues "extremely regrettable and incompatible with the position of the Government of Japan." To resolve the conflict, it wants to "continue reaching out to various people involved in this issue to explain its position."²⁸

Security and military relations

Security and military relations between Japan and Germany in the post-war period are marked by the restrictions on security and military activities imposed by the German Basic Law and the Japanese constitution. Both states are only allowed to participate in armed conflicts to a very limited extent and within the framework of a UN mandate. During the Gulf War in 1991, a first instance of military cooperation between Japan and Germany materialized, in the form of mine clearance in the Persian Gulf. However, exchanges at the personnel level have preceded this cooperation: since 1984, members of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF) have taken part in training courses at the Bundeswehr Command and Staff College in Hamburg, while members of the

²⁶ Torsten Weber and Anke Scherer (2021) "Geschichte und Geschichtsbewusstsein im Jahr der Jahrestage 2020 (History and Historical Consciousness in the Year of Anniversaries 2020)" in David Chiavacci and Iris Wiczorek (eds.) *Japan 2021. Politik, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, Munich: Iudicium, p. 220.

²⁷ Julia Weiss (2020) *Bezirksverordnete von Mitte Stimmen für Verbleib der Friedensstatue (Mitte District Councillors Vote for the Peace Statue to Remain)*, Available at: <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/kontroverse-um-die-trostfrau-in-berlin-bezirksverordnete-von-mitte-stimmen-fuer-verbleib-der-friedensstatue/26685750.html> (Accessed 28 September 2021).

²⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Diplomatic Bluebook 2021*, p. 39, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2021/pdf/pdfs/2021_all.pdf (Accessed 21 December 2021).

Bundeswehr participate in training courses at the National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS) in Tokyo.²⁹ These courses are intended to prepare the military attachés of both countries, who are assigned to the respective embassies as diplomats, for their employment in their host countries. Since the establishment of the military attaché system in 1957, the Federal Republic of Germany has stationed a military attaché in Tokyo.³⁰ Japan had sent a military attaché to Bonn since 1959 and currently sends two military attachés to Berlin.³¹

New perspectives for Indo-Pacific cooperation

The exchange at the highest diplomatic level has intensified in recent years. This includes the first-ever Japan-Germany 2+2 meeting with the ministers of defense and ministers of foreign affairs of both countries via video teleconference, on 13 April 2021.³² Its aim was to coordinate the security cooperation between both countries. On 22 June 2021, ministers Nobuo Kishi and Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer held a video conference to exchange views on regional security issues in the Indo-Pacific and, on 15 December 2020, both attended the online forum “Indo-Pacific: Japan and Germany's Engagement in the Region,” organized by the National Institute for Defense Studies and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.³³ In 2020, exchanges included video and telephone conferences between Kramp-Karrenbauer and Kishi, respectively Tarō Kōno, on November 10 and April 24, as well as a personal meeting on 15 February, at the Munich Security Conference. All meetings centrally dealt with promoting bilateral cooperation to realize the shared vision of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP). Japan had

²⁹ Personal correspondence with Junichiro Shoji (NIDS) (December 2021).

³⁰ Bundeswehr (n.d.) *Militärattachés - Diplomaten in der Bundeswehr (Military Attachés - Diplomats in the Bundeswehr)*, Available at: <https://www.bundeswehr.de/de/organisation/streitkraeftebasis/aktuelles/militaerattachees-diplomaten-in-der-bundeswehr-162216> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

³¹ Ministry of Defense (2021) *Defense of Japan 2021*, p. 465, Available at: https://www.mod.go.jp/en/publ/w_paper/wp2021/DOJ2021_Digest_EN.pdf (Accessed 21 December 2021).

³² Ministry of Defense (2021) *Japan-Germany Foreign and Defense Ministers' Meeting (“2+2”)*, Available at: <https://www.mod.go.jp/en/article/2021/04/aa9ac5d279ca488488a60a5983f0320dfe9d99cd.html> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

³³ Ministry of Defense (2020) *Japan-Germany Defense Ministers' Forum “Indo-Pacific: Japan and Germany's Engagement in the Region,”* Available at: https://www.mod.go.jp/en/d_act/exc/area/docs/2020/20201215_deu-j_en.html (Accessed 21 December 2021).

formulated this strategy in 2016, to initiate a stronger engagement of democratic and economically liberal states in the region. Alongside the USA, Australia, India, Great Britain, Canada, New Zealand and France, Germany is explicitly named as a partner in this FOIP vision.³⁴

In September 2020, the German government followed suit with its “Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific,”³⁵ which also form the core of the “EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,” adopted by the EU in September 2021.³⁶ An explicit component of these German and European strategies includes security policy and military engagement in the region. The German paper explains that Germany “intends to further expand its security and defense cooperation with partners in the region. In addition to strategic dialogues, talks between military staffs and training cooperation, this in principle also comprises an intensification of bilateral visits and an expansion of defense contacts in the region itself. This includes liaison officers, military attaché’s staffs, port visits and participation in exercises, as well as other forms of maritime presence in the Indo-Pacific region.”³⁷ This commitment also includes “investment in and the maintenance of military capabilities.”³⁸ Similarly, the EU explained that it “will seek to conduct more joint exercises and port calls with Indo-Pacific partners, including multilateral exercises, to fight piracy and protect freedom of navigation in the region.”³⁹

³⁴ Ministry of Defense (2021) *Defense of Japan 2021*, p. 369, Available at: https://www.mod.go.jp/en/publ/w_paper/wp2021/DOJ2021_Digest_EN.pdf (Accessed 21 December 2021).

³⁵ Frederic Grare (2020) *Germany’s New Approach to the Indo-Pacific*, Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/10/15/germany-s-new-approach-to-indo-pacific-pub-82978> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

³⁶ The European External Action Service (EEAS) (2021) *EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*, Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-strategy-cooperation-indo-pacific-0_en (Accessed 21 December 2021).

³⁷ Auswaertiges Amt (2020) *Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific*, pp. 35-36, Available at: <https://rangun.diplo.de/blob/2380824/a27b62057f2d2675ce2bbfc5be01099a/policy-guidelines-summary-data.pdf> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

³⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 35-36.

³⁹ European Commission (2021) *Questions and Answers: EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*, Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/QANDA_21_4709 (Accessed 21 December 2021).

It identified “security and defense” as one of seven priority areas.⁴⁰

Intensified military partnership

The German-Japanese Agreement on the Security of Information and the deployment of the frigate Bayern to Japan are seen as two concrete steps toward implementing the German government’s new strategy. On 22 March 2021, Ambassador Ina Lepel for Germany and Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi for Japan signed the German-Japanese Agreement on the Security of Information in Tokyo,⁴¹ which allows the exchange of confidential information and thereby also enables increased cooperation in security policy and defense technology. The German government stated that Japan and Germany also wanted to cooperate more closely on cybersecurity and space.⁴²

After the chief of staff of the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Forces, Admiral Hiroshi Yamamura, and the Inspector of the German Navy, Vice Admiral Andreas Krause, agreed in November 2020 to further strengthen cooperation between the Maritime SDF and the German Navy in the Indo-Pacific region, the frigate Bayern was deployed to the Indo-Pacific, in August 2021. In November 2021, it docked in Tokyo and Yokosuka. As the first visit to Japan by a German frigate in almost 20 years, it also held a special international significance. In the port of Tokyo, the frigate and its staff were personally welcomed by Japan’s defense minister, Nobuo Kishi. On the German side, the visit was accompanied by the Inspector General of the German Armed Forces, General Eberhard Zorn, and the Inspector of the Navy, Vice Admiral Kay-Achim Schönbach. The frigate participated in the monitoring of the UN embargo against North Korea and, by transiting the South China Sea, it meant to signal that Germany, too, is committed to free navigation and the preservation of the rules-based international order

⁴⁰ European Commission (2021) *Joint Communication: The EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*, p. 5, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_indo_pacific_en.pdf (Accessed 21 December 2021).

⁴¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (n.d) *日独情報保護協定の署名 (Signing of the German-Japanese Data Protection Agreement)*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/release/press4_009014.html (Accessed 21 December 2021).

⁴² Auswärtiges Amt (2021) *Zeichen des Gegenseitigen Vertrauens: Japan und Deutschland Unterzeichnen Geheimschutzabkommen (Sign of Mutual Trust: Japan and Germany Sign Secrecy Agreement)*, Available at: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/aussenpolitik/laender/japan-node/japan-geheimschutzabkommen/2449242> (Accessed 16 September 2021).

in the Indo-Pacific.⁴³ During a press conference in Tokyo, on 9 November 2021, Schönbach announced that Germany was planning to deploy ships to the region every two to three years from now on. The mission of the frigate Bayern was a “teaser” and “appetizer” for Germany’s future and increased engagement of its navy in the Indo-Pacific, he explained.⁴⁴

Economic and commercial relations

Economic relations between Japan and Germany are considered stable, close and largely conflict-free. Both countries are founding members of the World Trade Organization (WTO), in 1995, and were previously long-standing members of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), since 1951 and 1955, respectively. Both joined the International Monetary Fund in August 1952 and the sub-organizations of the World Bank. Both countries are also members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) – Germany since 1961, Japan since 1964 – and the Group of Seven (G7) and its predecessors, since 1973. The economic relations between Japan and Germany are therefore characterized by many decades of regular and close bilateral and multilateral exchanges, as well as numerous forms of cooperation at the political level and in international organizations.

Strong economic ties despite competition

Since 1988, the two sides have held regular discussions through Vice-Minister-Level Regular Consultations, between the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry and the German Ministry of Economic Affairs, to exchange views on the macroeconomic landscape, industrial structures, investment promotion, and other issues. The 19th meeting in this series was held in February 2021, via video conference. Topics discussed included the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy, economic measures taken by the two countries, Japan-Germany cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, WTO reforms, and bilateral cooperation in energy and climate-change

⁴³ Deutsche Botschaft in Japan (2021) *Hafenbesuch der Fregatte “Bayern” in Japan*, Available at: <https://japan.diplo.de/ja-de/aktuelles/-/2494564> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

⁴⁴ JNPC (2021) 独のインド太平洋戦略 (*Germany's Indo-Pacific Strategy*), Video Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=usGIF2WnlBs> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

fields, the auto industry, the *Industrie* 4.0 strategy and Internet of Things.⁴⁵ As both countries are facing very similar challenges, also due to demographic factors, cooperation is planned to be intensified, in particular in the fields of globalization of the economy, the aging of society, structural reforms and the promotion of new industries and renewable energies.

The most important negotiation result of the past years in the field of economics is the free trade agreement between Japan and the EU, the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), which came into effect in February 2019. It aims to emancipate both the EU and Japan from depending on the US and China for trade. The agreement removes most tariffs and numerous regulatory barriers. The Japanese market was opened mainly for EU agricultural products, such as wine, cheese, beef and pork. In exchange, the EU opened its market for the import of Japanese products such as beef, tea, fishery products, sake and automobile parts.

Germany is Japan's largest trading partner within the EU. The total trade volume in 2020 was around 40 billion euros.⁴⁶ This was the lowest amount since 2012, compared to a record 44 billion euros in 2019.⁴⁷ Japan's exports to Germany were valued at 23.9 billion euros in 2019 and fell to 21.4 billion euros in 2020,⁴⁸ ranking Germany on the 8th place in the ranking of main Japanese export destinations.⁴⁹ Germany also ranked 8th as an exporter to Japan, with 17.3 billion euros in 2020.⁵⁰ This

⁴⁵ METI (2021) *The 19th Vice-Minister-Level Regular Consultation Held between METI and BMWi*, Available at: https://www.meti.go.jp/english/press/2021/0219_002.html (Accessed 21 December 2021).

⁴⁶ Data compiled based on International Trade Center/Trade Map (n.d.) *Germany-Japan*, Available at: https://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx?nvpm=1%7c276%7c%7c392%7c%7cTOTAL%7c%7c%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1 (Accessed 10 April 2022).

⁴⁷ Ibidem.

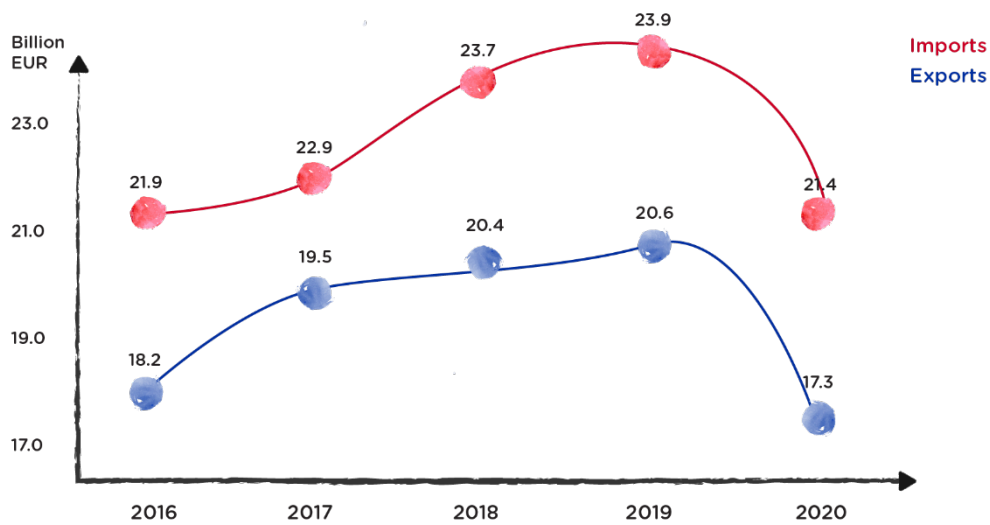
⁴⁸ Ibidem.

⁴⁹ Trade Statistics of Japan (n.d.) 輸出相手国上位10力国の推移 & 輸入相手国上位10力国の推移 (*Trends in the Top 10 Export Partner Countries & Trends in the Top 10 Import Partner Countries*), Available at: https://www.customs.go.jp/toukei/suii/html/time_latest.htm (Accessed 21 December 2021). International Trade Center/Trade Map (n.d.) *Germany-Japan*, Available at: https://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx?nvpm=1%7c276%7c%7c392%7c%7cTOTAL%7c%7c%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1 (Accessed 10 April 2022).

⁵⁰ Ibidem.

figure was also the weakest since 2012 and fell from 20.6 billion euros in 2019.⁵¹ Japan's main exports to Germany in 2020 were electronics (15.2%), machinery (15%), chemical products (14.1%), electrical engineering (13.3%) and automobiles and automobile parts (13%)⁵². For automobiles, Germany is Japan's tenth most important export market worldwide.⁵³

Germany's trade with Japan in billion euros



Source: International Trade Center/ Trade Map

From Germany's perspective, Japan is the second most important trading partner in Asia, after China, and number 15 worldwide; Japan ranks 15th for German imports and 19th for German exports. Germany's export products to Japan are similar to Japan's exports to Germany: chemical products (27.8%), automobiles and parts (22.6%),

⁵¹ International Trade Center/Trade Map (n.d.) *Germany-Japan*, Available at: https://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx?nvpm=1%7c276%7c%7c392%7c%7cTOTAL%7c%7c%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c2%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1 (Accessed 10 April 2022).

⁵² German Trade and Invest, Germany Trade and Investments (2021) *Wirtschaftsdaten Kompakt (November 2021) (Economic Data Compact)*, Available at: <https://www.gtai.de/gtai-de/trade/wirtschaftsumfeld/wirtschaftsdaten-kompakt/japan/wirtschaftsdaten-kompakt-japan-156842> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

⁵³ Trade Statistics of Japan (n.d.) 輸出相手国上位10力国の推移 & 輸入相手国上位10力国の推移 (*Trends in the Top 10 Export Partner Countries & Trends in the Top 10 Import Partner Countries*), Available at: https://www.customs.go.jp/toukei/sui/html/time_latest.htm (Accessed 21 December 2021). International Trade Center/Trade Map (n.d.) *Germany-Japan*, Available at: https://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx?nvpm=1%7c276%7c%7c392%7c%7cTOTAL%7c%7c%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1 (Accessed 10 April 2022).

machinery (17.3%), measurement and control technology (7.3%) and electrical engineering (7.0%).

German direct investment in Japan increased from 13,366 million euros (2017) to 15,654 million euros (2019). Japan's direct investment in Germany was even higher, at 24,831 million euros (2019), up from 20,014 million euros (2017).⁵⁴

Promotion of German-Japanese business relations

Bilateral economic relations are promoted by the two governments, through institutions such as the German Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Japan (AHK), which has been promoting the interests of German businesses in Japan since 1962.⁵⁵ Since 1986, there has also been the Japanese-German Business Association (DJW), which was founded by representatives of leading German companies in Japan, to promote German-Japanese exchange and business relations. At present, the DJW has more than 1,100 members from different industries, companies and institutions, as well as private individuals.⁵⁶ The Association is based in Düsseldorf and established a representation office in Tokyo in 2019. Virtually all major German companies have representative offices in Japan and vice versa, including automobile manufacturers, chemical industry and financial companies.

On the Japanese side, the government-affiliated Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) promotes economic contacts between the two countries and has offices in Berlin, Düsseldorf and Munich.

In addition to bilateral economic contacts at the state level, numerous cooperative ventures for economic exchange have also developed through close contacts at the regional, municipal, and private levels. For example, a memorandum of understanding between North Rhine-Westphalia and Tokyo Prefecture to promote

⁵⁴ German Trade and Invest, Germany Trade and Investments (2021) *Wirtschaftsdaten Kompakt (November 2021) (Economic data compact)*, Available at: <https://www.gtai.de/gtai-de/trade/wirtschaftsumfeld/wirtschaftsdaten-kompakt/japan/wirtschaftsdaten-kompakt-japan-156842> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

⁵⁵ AHK (n.d.) *Über die AHK Japan (About AHK Japan)*, Available at: <https://japan.ahk.de/ueber-uns/ueber-die-ahk-japan> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

⁵⁶ DJW (n.d.) *About Us*, Available at: <https://www.djw.de/de/djw/english-introduction> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

cooperation and support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) was signed in May 2021.⁵⁷

Cultural and people-to-people relations and perceptions of Japan

Cultural and people-to-people relations between Japan and Germany are generally considered to be very pronounced, diverse, and friendly. They have been firmly institutionalized in numerous programs to promote cultural, scientific, sporting and economic exchange, in some cases for decades.

Strong mutual interest among citizens of both countries

In 2020, about 7,200 Germans lived in Japan, of whom about 1,700 had permanent residence permits (*eijuken*).⁵⁸ This put the Germans in 26th place among the largest communities of foreign nationals in Japan and fourth among Europeans in Japan, behind the French, British, and Russians. The number of German tourists in Japan had been increasing annually in the years before the pandemic broke out and most recently stood at 215,000 (2018) and 237,000 (2019)⁵⁹. In 2009, this figure had been less than half, at 110,000. Several direct daily flights between Tokyo and Frankfurt, as well as from Osaka to Frankfurt and from Tokyo to Munich and Düsseldorf, have facilitated the increase in tourist and business travel.

Tourist interest in Germany among Japanese is even greater. 613,000 (2018) and 615,000 (2019) Japanese visited Germany.⁶⁰ These figures are also up over the previous decade, albeit only slightly (538,000 in 2009). There were 44,765 Japanese living in

⁵⁷ Japanisches Generalkonsulat Düsseldorf (2021) *Unterzeichnung einer Absichtserklärung zur KMU-Förderung zwischen NRW und der Präfektur Tokio (Signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on SME Promotion between NRW and Tokyo Prefecture)*, Available at: https://www.dus.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_de/00_000784_00002.html (Accessed 21 December 2021).

⁵⁸ For this and the following data see E-Stat (2020) 国籍・地域別 在留資格（在留目的）別 在留外国人 (*Status of Residence According to Nationality/Region (Purpose of Stay)*), Available at: <https://www.e-stat.go.jp/stat-search/files?page=1&layout=datalist&toukei=00250012&tstat=000001018034&cycle=1&year=20200&month=12040606&tclass1=000001060399> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

⁵⁹ Keizai Koho Center (2021) *Japan and the World 2020/21*, Tokyo: KKC, p. 83.

⁶⁰ JTB (n.d.) *Japanese outbound tourists Statistics*, Available at: <https://www.tourism.jp/en/tourism-database/stats/outbound/> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

Germany in 2019, about 20% more than in 2009 (36,960).⁶¹ Alongside Berlin and Frankfurt, the Japanese community is regionally concentrated around Düsseldorf, where Japanese companies have increasingly settled since the 1970s. Düsseldorf is now considered the city with the third largest Japanese community in Europe, after London and Paris.

Multi-institutional support of German-Japanese relations

In addition to many individual and private activities and initiatives, cultural and personal exchanges between Japan and Germany have also been institutionalized in a variety of programs, for about 50 years. Since 1970, the Japan Foundation has maintained the Japanese Cultural Institute in Cologne, which promotes art and culture, language teaching, Japan research, intellectual exchange and the dissemination of Japan-related information in German-speaking countries. In 1974, the JaDe-Verein (now JaDe Foundation) was also founded in Cologne, to promote scientific and cultural relations between Japan and Germany.⁶² Since 2000, the foundation has awarded the JaDe Prize to Germans and Japanese for outstanding achievements and merits in the field of Japanese-German academic and cultural relations.

The East Asian Society (OAG) in Tokyo is about 100 years older. It was founded in 1873, by German merchants, diplomats and scholars, to research Japan and East Asia.⁶³ Today, it is also a contact point for social meetings of German speakers in Japan. The OAG building in Akasaka (Tokyo) is currently also home to the representations of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the German Research Foundation (DFG), the Goethe Institute, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the Fraunhofer Representative Office, and the German Tourist Board, among others. All these organizations promote the development of relations between Germany and Japan with various focal points and programs.

⁶¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (n.d.) 海外在留邦人数調査統計 (*Survey on the Number of Overseas Residents*), Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/toko/page22_003338.html (Accessed 21 December 2021).

⁶² Jade-Stiftung (n.d.) *Willkommen auf der Homepage der JaDe-Stiftung (Welcome to the Homepage of the JaDe Foundation)*, Available at: <https://www.jadestiftung.org/die-stiftung/willkommen> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

⁶³ OAG (n.d.) *Die OAG (The OAG)*, Available at: <https://oag.jp/about/> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

There are currently twinning agreements between seven federal states and prefectures and 60 cities and municipalities, including Tokyo and Berlin and Frankfurt and Yokohama.⁶⁴ The oldest twinning agreements between Augsburg and Amagasaki (Hyōgo) and Nagahama (Shiga) were concluded as early as 1959. The German-Japanese Societies (DJG) and the Japanese-German Societies in Japan are also active in promoting cultural exchange at municipal and regional level. More than 50 societies with a total of over 7,000 members are registered in the DJG federation.⁶⁵ They originate in a Japanese-German study association founded in Berlin, as early as 1890. The German-Japanese Youth Society (DJJG), founded in 2006 and active nationwide, promotes in particular the exchange of German and Japanese youth. It organized the German-Japanese Youth Summit 2021, which took place for the 14th time.

In Japan, the first Japanese-German Society was founded in 1911. Today, the network, which is represented in almost all prefectures, comprises more than 60 individual societies, that work on a civil society level to promote relations between people of the two countries or act as mediators of German language and culture in Japan.⁶⁶

Fostering mutual interest and understanding among young people

The exchange of young people from both countries is promoted at the state level by the agreement on “working holiday visa,” which has existed since 2000.⁶⁷ In 2019, 882

⁶⁴ For information in this section see Botschaft von Japan in Deutschland (n.d.) *Städtepartnerschaften Zwischen Deutschland und Japan (Town Twinning Between Germany and Japan)*, Available at: <https://www.de.emb-japan.go.jp/de-jp/partnerstaedte.html> (Accessed 21 December 2021). The Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (n.d.) *Sister Cities*, Available at: <http://www.clair.or.jp/e/exchange/shimai/countries/detail/22> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

⁶⁵ VDJG (n.d.) *Der VDJG: Ein Dach Für Die Deutsch-Japanischen Beziehungen (The VDJG: An Umbrella for German-Japanese Relations)*, Available at: <https://www.vdjg.de/ueber-uns/> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

⁶⁶ JDG (n.d.) *Japanisch-Deutsche Gesellschaften in Japan (Japanese-German Societies in Japan)*, Available at: http://www.jdg.or.jp/list/vjdglist_d.html (Accessed 21 December 2021).

⁶⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2020) *ワーキング・ホリデー制度 (The Working Holiday System)*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/toko/visa/working_h.html (Accessed 21 December 2021).

Germans (up from 801 in 2018) were granted such a visa by Japan.⁶⁸ In the same year, the German Embassy in Tokyo received 395 applications for visas within this program.⁶⁹

Since 1989, Germany has participated in the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program (JET), which allows young Germans to work in Japan for up to 5 years as an assistant coordinator of international relations, assistant teacher of German or sports advisor. There are currently 21 such positions.⁷⁰ The German-Japanese Sports Youth Simultaneous Exchange has been taking place since 1974, organized by the German Sports Youth and the Japan Junior Sport Clubs Association. More than 10,000 young people from both countries have taken part in the program.⁷¹ Every year, about 125 young people visit their partner country for 18 days and get to know the people and culture there, including a home stay.

In 1905, the first German School was opened in Yokohama.⁷² Today, after several moves, it is once again located in Yokohama, as the German School Tokyo-Yokohama. Since 1909, there has also been a German School in Kobe.⁷³ They are currently complemented by four Japanese schools in Tokyo and Saitama, in the so-called Pasch program, which has integrated the German language into the Japanese school curriculum.⁷⁴

In 2020, a total of 818 forms of higher education cooperation existed between

⁶⁸ E-Stat (2019) 在留外国人統計(*Statistics on Foreign Residents*), Available at: https://www.e-stat.go.jp/stat-search/files?page=1&layout=dataset&toukei=00250012&stat_infid=000031886381 (Accessed 21 December 2021).

⁶⁹ Personal correspondence with the German Embassy in Tokyo (consular section) (December 2021).

⁷⁰ Botschaft von Japan in Deutschland (n.d.) *JET-Programm – Überblick (JET Program - Overview)*, Available at: https://www.de.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_de/austausch_jet_ueberblick.html (Accessed 21 December 2021).

⁷¹ DSJ (n.d.) *Der Deutsch-Japanische Sportjugend-Simultanaustausch (The German-Japanese Sports Youth Simultaneous Exchange)*, Available at: <https://www.japan-simultanaustausch.de/> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

⁷² DSTY (n.d.) *Grußwort des Schulleiters (Greeting from the Headmaster)*, Available at: <https://www.dsty.ac.jp/de/unsere-schule/grusswort-schulleiter> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

⁷³ DSJ (n.d.) *Our History and Heritage*, Available at: <https://dskobe.org/en/about/history/> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

⁷⁴ Pasch (n.d.) *Weltkarte (World Map)*, Available at: <https://www.pasch-net.de/de/pasch-schulen/weltkarte.html> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

German and Japanese universities, departments and study programs.⁷⁵ A total of 250 German-speaking teaching staff were active in Japan in 2019. The Japan programs of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and the DAAD now have 1,800 and 2,800 alumni, respectively. According to a study by the Federal Foreign Office, in 2020, more than 242,000 people were learning German in Japan, 225,000 of whom were students at universities.⁷⁶ Compared to the last survey in 2015, these numbers have risen slightly.⁷⁷ German is currently taught at 479 universities, including 42 institutes of German studies.⁷⁸ There is also a large number of providers of German courses in non-university adult education, including the Goethe-Institut, with its three locations in Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka.

In Germany, Japanese Studies programs at 14 universities and 39 Japan-related degree programs at German universities have enjoyed great popularity for many years.⁷⁹ Interest in Japanese popular culture in particular continues unabated. The Japanese film festival Nippon Connect, which originated from a student initiative at the University of Frankfurt, takes place annually and welcomed 17,000 spectators in 2019. In 2019, 829 German students studied at Japanese universities (ranked 16th) and 1,930 Japanese students studied in Germany (ranked 35th).⁸⁰ Compared to 2013, both numbers increased by 276 and 272, respectively. The most popular subjects among Japanese students in Germany are art, music and sports science, followed by language, culture and humanities.⁸¹

⁷⁵ DAAD (2020) *DAAD-Ländersachstand Japan (DAAD Country Facts Japan)*, p. 6.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

⁷⁷ Auswärtiges Amt (n.d.) *Deutsch als Fremdsprache: In Afrika und Asien Lernen Immer Mehr Menschen Deutsch (German as a Foreign Language: More and More People Learn German in Africa and Asia)*, Available at: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/deutsch-als-fremdsprache/2346756> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

⁷⁸ DAAD (2020) *DAAD-Ländersachstand Japan (DAAD Country Facts Japan)*, p. 6.

⁷⁹ GFJ (n.d.) *Japanbezogene Forschung & Lehre im Deutschsprachigen Raum (Japan-Related Research & Teaching in German-Speaking Countries)*, Available at: https://www.gjf.de/links_d.htm (Accessed 21 December 2021).

⁸⁰ OECD (n.d.) *Enrolment of International Students by Country of Origin*, Available at: https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=EDU_ENRL_MOBILE (Accessed 21 December 2021).

⁸¹ DAAD (2020) *DAAD-Ländersachstand Japan (DAAD Country Facts Japan)*, p. 21.

Deepening understanding, overcoming stereotypes

The great importance that Japan and Germany attach to each other can also be seen in the founding of the Japanese-German Center Berlin (JDZB), in 1985,⁸² and the German Institute for Japanese Studies in Tokyo (DIJ), in 1988.⁸³ With its activities, the JDZB promotes bilateral dialogue between Japan and Germany, as well as multilateral exchange. The DIJ researches the society, politics, economy and culture of modern and contemporary Japan in a regional and global context. It thus contributes to deepening mutual understanding and academic knowledge. Since 1993, leading German and Japanese personalities from the fields of business, politics, science and the media have met annually in a non-governmental discussion forum. This “German-Japanese Forum” alternates between Berlin and Tokyo and reports to the heads of government of both countries.⁸⁴

At special occasions, such as the 2006 Football World Cup in Germany or the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo (held in 2021), there is close cooperation at civic, association and regional levels. For example, 24 Japanese municipalities in 15 prefectures registered as host towns for the German teams at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games.⁸⁵

Building on these long-standing and close ties, the mutual public perception can be characterized as predominantly positive overall. However, exoticizing and orientalist clichés and stereotypes are sometimes spread – and not only in the mass media. German media coverage of Japan, for example, in the context of the triple disaster at Fukushima in 2011, was often criticized as clichéd and exaggeratedly negative. More recently, the controversy over the so-called comfort women statue in Berlin has led to public disputes between Germans and Japanese not only in politics but also on social media.

⁸² JDZB (n.d.) *About Us*, Available at: <https://jdzb.de/en/about> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

⁸³ DIJ (n.d.) *About Us*, Available at: <https://www.dijtokyo.org/institute/> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

⁸⁴ JCIE (n.d.) *Japanese-German Forum*, Available at: <https://www.jcie.org/programs/japanese-german-forum/> (Accessed 21 December 2021).

⁸⁵ Personal correspondence with German Embassy Tokyo (December 2021).

Conclusions and recommendations

As explained in this chapter, relations between Japan and Germany are intensive and close at all levels. This is remarkable, since relations from the mid-19th century to the Second World War were marked by numerous conflicts, including the armed conflict in the First World War. It is particularly noteworthy that racial prejudice and discrimination did not stand in the way of forging close relations in the post-war period and hardly play a role today. Common economic and political interests, as well as mutual cultural interests, have helped overcome considerable cultural and linguistic hurdles, as well as geographical distance. Today, relations in all areas covered by this chapter, both at state and civil society levels, are so intensive and close that there have hardly been any serious upsets or tensions in the past years and decades. It can be assumed that current and potential future conflicts can also be resolved on the basis of established cooperation and exchange mechanisms.

One notable exception are historical disputes that are increasingly being negotiated in a global context. These put a strain on German-Japanese relations, albeit indirectly, since Germany's coming to terms with its National Socialist past is regarded internationally as exemplary. Japan's handling of the legacy of Japanese imperialism in East Asia, in particular that of the Japanese government, on the other hand, is generally criticized as inadequate and ambivalent. In this context, the current dispute over the so-called Comfort Women Memorial in Berlin can be seen as a test case for dealing with difficult pasts in the globalized memory space. The failure of the Japanese government and of large sections of the Japanese public to grasp the scope of globalized historical disputes beyond national borders could damage Japan's positive image in the short and medium term also among Germans. To overcome this and potential future disputes about related issues, further internationalization of Japanese society and the promotion of employees with solid intercultural experience and backgrounds would be advisable.

On the other hand, German media coverage during the triple disaster of Fukushima, in March 2011, revealed that there are tendencies to apply German standards to the reactions and behavior of people in Japan in certain situations and to judge them accordingly. These tendencies can also be observed in German media coverage of Japan on issues that currently enjoy high priority or are emotionally

charged in Germany, such as climate change, diversity, gender issues, inclusion, human rights, the death penalty, whaling and others. To foster mutual understanding, views held by large sections of Japanese society should not be stereotyped or classified as “backward” solely for being different from the majority view held in Germany. Instead, it would be preferable to explain them to a non-expert German audience with respect and based on in-depth knowledge – even if such views may run counter to dominant trends in political or social discourse in Germany. In this context, German-speaking experts on Japan in the fields of society, history, economy, politics and culture should be encouraged to participate proactively in public discourse via media interviews or other forms of outreach, such as science communication.

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Greco-Japanese diplomacy: An amiable relationship that leaves a lot to be desired

By Giannis DIAMANTAKOS*

Overview

Greece and Japan share a long history of diplomatic support and understanding through their modern history. In November 2019, the 120 years of Greco-Japanese diplomatic relations and mutual respect were celebrated in Athens, with a symbolic Japanese week, at the pivotal year of the emperor succession in Japan and the dawn of the Reiwa period.

Yet, despite the friendly and always supportive nature of their relationship, these two countries have yet to reach a point where their diplomatic initiatives become proactive and genuinely deepen mutual cultural understanding. As it will be evident, Greco-Japanese relations do not lack the potential to become deeper in a social and cultural way. They rather lack the political driving force and a strong economic relationship, which would boost them into the spotlight of each other's diplomatic agenda. Simply being friendly and supportive is clearly not enough for elevating their diplomacy to the next level. The foundations for an active and more robust diplomacy are present, but there are definitely a lot of areas where improvement is mandatory.

History of relations

It was June of 1899, when the newly formed state of the Hellenic Republic, which was declared a free state only 69 years earlier, in 1830, established its first formal diplomatic

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relations with Japan – a country which was then fairly mysterious and ambiguous in the general consensus of the Greek mind.

The constitution of Greece, which was reformed in 1864, re-established Greece's political system to constitutional monarchy and, after the overthrowing of King Otto von Wittelsbach in 1867, the country deemed necessary to gradually expand its global influence and establish relations with other nations.

Thus, in May 1899, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic Athos Romanos and Japanese diplomat Nobuaki Makino, who then served as the ambassador of the Japanese delegation in Rome, signed the first “trade and shipping friendship pact” between the two countries, that was later ratified by the government, in June of the same year.¹

After the First World War and the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, when Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos supported Japan's proposal for racial equality against the Great Powers,² Greece established a consulate in Japan in 1922, but had to be called backed during the Second World War.³

After the San Francisco Treaty, in 1951, when Japan re-established friendly relations with the Allied countries, by extension with Greece, diplomatic relations resumed between the two countries. Japan opened a consulate in Athens and, in May 1956, the Agreement on abolition of visas for non-diplomatic passports was signed.⁴

By 1960, both countries celebrated the opening of an embassy in their respective capitals, as Greece opened an embassy in Tokyo, while Japan upgraded its Athens consulate to an embassy.

The next essential step in the two countries' bilateral relations was the opening of a Greek consulate in Kōbe, in 1973, which was traditionally the epicenter of Western

¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Treaty of Amity, Commence and Navigation*, pp. 1-2, Available at: [https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/treaty/pdfs/A-S38\(1\)-093.pdf](https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/treaty/pdfs/A-S38(1)-093.pdf) (Accessed 15 November 2021).

² Margaret McMillan (2007) *Paris: Six Months that Changed the World*, p. 407, Random House Trade Paperbacks.

³ Embassy of Japan in Greece (2021) *Greek Missions in Japan*, Available at: <https://www.mfa.gr/missionsabroad/en/japan-en/about-us/the-embassy.html> (Accessed 09 December 2021).

⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Greece- Japan Relations (Overview)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/greece/data.html> (Accessed 09 December 2021).

consulates and embassies, since the Meiji restoration (1868). The consulate closed down in 1981⁵ and every jurisdiction was transferred to the Greek embassy in Tokyo.⁶

During the same year of the Greek consulate opening, an aviation agreement was signed between Greece and Japan, followed by an education agreement in 1981.

The last major event was held in 2002, when Greek Prime Minister Konstantinos Simitis and the Japanese Prime Minister Junichirō Koizumi signed the Action plan for the promotion of Greek-Japanese relations.⁷

Even if no major political, economic or cultural agreement has occurred since 2002, Greco-Japanese relations have continued to be friendly and supportive in all fields, while disseminating and preserving their ancient cultures, local products and geopolitical characteristics.

Some aspects of Greco-Japanese relations, mostly culturally, have stagnated considerably in recent years, especially after the economic crisis that Greece endured for over a decade (2009-2019). Japan has also gone through a turbulent economic period during the 1990s, also known as Japan's lost decade, but nevertheless continued to expand its political, diplomatic and cultural influence globally, reinforcing its soft power significantly.

A major figure in the shaping of modern Japanese culture and educational figure for Japan is Yakumo Koizumi, also known by his Greek name, Lafcadio Hearn. Hearn, who was born in Greece, in 1850, in the island of Lefkada, whence he took his name, travelled to Japan from the United States, in 1890, and recorded Japan's folk traditions, stories, impressions on religion and scenery, until his death, in 1904. He married in Japan and took the name Yakumo Koizumi. His writings had such a huge impact in the preserving of folk culture of Meiji era Japan (1868-1912) that they are still studied in Japanese schools and universities. Although he never returned to Greece, from where he left when he was a boy, he was reminiscent of his childhood and also claimed that

⁵ Embassy of Japan in Greece (2021) *Greek Missions in Japan*, Available at: <https://www.mfa.gr/missionsabroad/en/japan-en/about-us/the-embassy.html> (Accessed 09 December 2021).

⁶ IBP, Inc (2017) "Greece Intelligence, Security Activities and Operations Handbook Volume 1 Strategic Information and Regulations," *IBP USA*, p. 163.

⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Japan-Greece Action Plan*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/greece/pmv0203/joint.html> (Accessed 12 December 2021).

ancient traditions and folklore of both countries were alike. In 2021, a small festival was held in Lefkada to honor his legacy, called “Lafcadio Hearn days.”⁸

Lastly, another event that often gets publicity in Greek media is the Tokei Maru immigrants rescue, during the evacuation of Izmir in 1922. Tokei Maru was a Japanese trade ship, which sailed close to Izmir, during a very turbulent era, when Greek and Turkish relations were very tense. Greeks that had to flee coastal Turkey had no means of crossing the Aegean Sea, when allegedly the Tokei Maru altruistically threw its silk cargo into the sea and transported desperate citizens to the islands and mainland Greece. Although the story is heavily debatable in terms of the captain’s true intentions for saving Greek immigrants, there are photographic evidence and newspaper articles of the time that prove the Tokei Maru incident. Thus, it has become a relatively well-known story in Greece, portraying the helping nature and support of the Japanese. Regardless of the truth, this story has definitely helped in the shaping of modern Greco-Japanese relations.⁹

Political and diplomatic relations

Both countries have traditionally enjoyed rather friendly relations, without much historical turbulence obstructing their respective agendas, through the years. That being said, both Greece and Japan do not actually have a very prosperous history of official bilateral visits. More specifically, at the head of government level, only two visits have taken place over the last 20 years.

In January 2001, Prime Minister Yoshirō Mori officially scheduled a visit to Greece.¹⁰ Greek Prime Minister Konstantinos Simitis welcomed his Japanese counterpart in a meeting which arguably set the foundations – at least on paper – for

⁸ Embassy of Japan in Greece (2021) *Events in Honor of Lafcadio Hearn 2021 in the Municipality of Lefkada*, Available at: https://www.gr.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_el/cultural_announcement_lafcadiohearndays_2021.html (Accessed 12 December 2021).

⁹ Mixanitou Xronou (2020) *Οι άπονας που φυγάδευσε με το πλοίο του απαλεισμένους Μικρασιάτες από τη Σύμρνη (The Japanese Who Rescued Desperate Greeks from Izmir in His Ship)*, Available at: <https://www.mixanitouxronou.gr/o-iaponas-kapetaniou-pou-diesose-me-to-karavi-tou-825-apelpismenous-mikrasiates-stin-katastrofi-tis-smyrnis-erikse-sti-thalassa-to-panakrivo-metaksi-gia-na-epivivasei-prosfyges/> (Accessed 13 December 2021).

¹⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2001) *Statement by Prime Minister Yoshino Mori at Joint Press Conference in Athens January 14th 2001*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/africa/pmv0101/pmstate.html> (Accessed 13 December 2021).

future bilateral political relations. During the meeting, some previously avoided subjects were addressed, such as the political instability in the Balkan region, especially after the Kosovo war (1998-1999).¹¹ Naturally, Japan sought to strengthen bilateral relations with all European countries at the time, thus increasing its influence, after exiting the so-called “lost decade” of economic stagnation. Greece, on the other hand, enjoyed a decade of economic prosperity at the time, which lasted until the bubble burst, around 2009.

Stepping on promising political and economic ground, the two countries seemed like they would actually enjoy a prosperous and tight political bond. Tourism and maritime trade, which are quintessential for the Greek economy, were thoroughly discussed as key points for the strengthening of both countries’ relations and strategic agendas.

However, Greco-Japanese relations did not actually prosper all that much through the years, as the initial plan envisioned, especially when compared Japan’s relations with other European Union countries, such as France or Spain.

Prime Minister Konstantinos Simitis paid an official visit to Japan in March 2002, almost a year after Mori’s visit to Greece. By then, Junichirō Koizumi had succeeded Mori in the prime minister’s seat. In March 2002, the “Japan-Greece Action Plan” was signed by the two prime ministers.¹² This action plan was threefold and was based on political, economic and cultural understanding, with emphasis on the cultural aspects that could potentially strengthen the relations even more.¹³ The plan, though ambitious, was never fully integrated in the foreign political agenda of the two countries. The Greek general public opinion still regards Japan as an “exotic” country, filtered through a lot of stereotyping and often Orientalism. Naturally, the two countries have bridged the gap significantly through the years, but in order to reach a deeper

¹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Japan- Greece Leaders’ Meeting*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/africa/pmv0101/g-meet.html> (Accessed 13 December 2021).

¹² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Japan- Greece Action Plan*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/greece/pmv0203/joint.html> (Accessed 12 December 2021).

¹³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021), *Greece- Japan Relations (Overview)* Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/greece/data.html> (Accessed 09 December 2021).

cultural understanding, they need to address cultural dissemination more seriously and thoroughly.

The action plan was constructed in good faith, for a potentially cooperative future, mainly economically and culturally. When it was signed, in 2003, the pact, was admittedly an important step for the diplomatic relationship of the two countries that shared no, or little, common history and cultural exchange until that point. It could have signified a prosperous ground for Greco-Japanese relations, especially culturally-wise, if the guidelines were followed, either by the Greek ministry of education, the ministry of tourism and other political associations and NGO.

Unfortunately, the Japan-Greece Joint Action Plan simply remained a plan through the years and proved useful only as a means of maintaining the friendly relationship between the two countries. Even during Greece's Presidency of the Council of the EU, in 2003, no further actions were taken toward cultural exchange or the potential founding of an official East Asian higher education institution. Also, no student exchanges or language programs were initiated.¹⁴

The next official visit was paid by Prime Minister Koizumi, during the EU-Japan summit, in April 2003.¹⁵ Despite being a prosperous time for Greece and Japan to further tighten their bonds, by attracting investments, trade of local products and reinforcing education as a means of promoting cultural understanding, little progress was made by both sides.

The last official high-level visit to Japan took place in November 2005, when Prime Minister Konstantinos Karamanlis met Koizumi, in Tokyo.¹⁶ That same year, the speaker of the House of Representatives of Japan, Yōhei Kōno, paid a visit to Greece, while the speaker of the Hellenic Parliament, Anna Benaki-Psarouda, visited Japan.¹⁷

¹⁴ Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2021) *Greece in the EU: Past Greek Presidencies*, Available at: <https://www.mfa.gr/en/foreign-policy/greece-in-the-eu/past-greek-presidencies.html> (Accessed 26 December 2021).

¹⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Prime Minister Junichirō Koizumi's Visit to European Countries*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/pmv0304/index.html> (Accessed 26 December 2021).

¹⁶ Prime Minister of Japan (2021) *Japan-Greece Summit Meeting*, Available at: https://japan.kantei.go.jp/koizumiphoto/2005/11/11greece_e.html (Accessed 27 December 2021).

¹⁷ Japan-Balkans Network (2021) *Japan-Balkans Relations*, Available at: <https://www.balkans.jp/japan-balkans-relations> (Accessed 26 December 2021).

Except for a visit by the president of the House of Councilors, in 2017, no other Japanese minister or parliamentary leader visited Greece over the past decade. The same was true for Greek visits, with only the minister of tourism visiting Japan, in 2013, and the minister of education, in 2014,¹⁸ as well as two meetings of foreign affairs ministers with their counterparts, in 2018¹⁹ and 2019.²⁰

The aforementioned meetings only served “maintenance” purposes of the two countries’ friendly relations but nothing more. Both countries have a stagnant policy toward each other, which comfortably sits on the friendly, yet limited, relationship built in the previous decades. Despite the existence of an inter-parliamentary friendship group between Greece and Japan, since 2009,²¹ and a 2021 meeting between current Japanese ambassador, Yasunori Nakayama, and member of the Greece-Japan Parliamentary Friendship Group, Ioannis Paschalidis,²² in terms of political agenda, no political party in the Greek parliament has officially presented any plans concerning Japan in their political programs.

In order for a tighter bond to be made, both Greece and Japan should adjust their foreign policy agenda, which is currently focused mostly on maintaining a friendly relationship with their neighboring countries, prioritizing a more active diplomatic approach. Expanding the influence and presence of Greece in countries like Japan should have been a major goal, which could potentially lead to new investments, military support and prestigious educational exchange programs.

Lastly, though both are seafaring nations, military or security agreements and intelligence sharing were never a major part of the Greco-Japanese diplomatic history.

¹⁸ Greek Travel Pages (2021) *Greece Seeks to Attract More Japanese Tourists*, Available at: <https://news.gtp.gr/2013/03/10/greece-seeks-to-attract-more-japanese-tourists/> (Accessed 27 December 2021).

¹⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Japan-Greece Foreign Ministers’ Meeting*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/c_see/gr/page1e_000196.html (Accessed 27 December 2021).

²⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019) *Japan-Greece Foreign Ministers’ Meeting*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_002504.html (Accessed 27 December 2021).

²¹ Hellenic Parliament (2021) *International Parliamentary Diplomacy and Activities-Friendship Groups*, Available at: <https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/en/Diethneis-Drastiriotes/Diethnes-Perivallon/Omades-Filias-All/> (Accessed 27 December 2021).

²² Embassy of Japan in Greece (2021) *Ambassador Nakayama Met with Member of Parliament Mr. Ioannis Paschalidis – a Member of the Greece – Japan Parliamentary Friendship Group*, Available at: https://www.gr.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_el/amb_nakayama_meeting_pashalidis.html (Accessed 27 December 2021).

It has to be noted here that an important strategic opening had taken place in March 2003, not even a month before the official visit of Prime Minister Koizumi in Greece: the exchanges of Notes concerning the Contribution of Supplies and Services [from Japan] to the Armed Forces or Other Similar Entities of Canada and Greece in accordance with the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law. According to the embassy's announcement, "the supplies and services to these countries will be utilized consistently with the Charter of the United Nations."²³ Although not a radical strategic agreement, it provided an insight in Koizumi's foreign policy agenda, which promoted an active international role for Japan.

Historically, there were never any military attachés in the two embassies either. Greece, despite its strategic position in the Mediterranean, is a small country, which could not contribute much toward Japan's influence in Europe in any potential way. Unlike countries like France, Italy or Germany, that are also members of the G7, Greece could not provide an adequate defense cooperation system or an intelligence sharing network, for Japan's influence, not only in Europe but also in the Indo-Pacific.

Economic and commercial relations

From an economic standpoint, the Greco-Japanese relationship has certainly fluctuated in the last 20 years. From Greece's economic prosperity of the early 2000s, to the bubble bursting and the Greek debt crisis of the 2010s, to Japan's current economic complexity and constant investment vigilance, after its own economic recession of the 1990s, economic ties between the two countries seem to develop a stronger and more stable bond, compared to previous years.²⁴

In 2020, Greece's imports from Japan were valued at 145 million euros.²⁵ The main imports from Japan in 2020, according to the European Commission and Trading

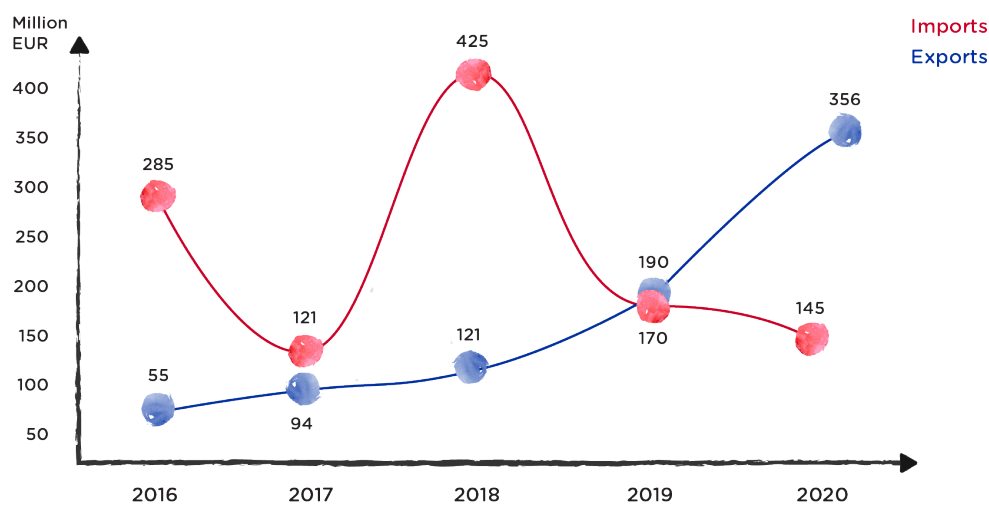
²³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Exchanges of Notes Concerning the Contribution of Supplies and Services to the Armed Forces or Other Similar Entities of Canada and Greece*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2003/3/0328-3.html> (Accessed 27 December 2021).

²⁴ Trading Economics (2022) *Greece Exports to Japan*, Available at: <https://tradingeconomics.com/greece/exports/japan> (Accessed 06 January 2022). Trading Economics (2022) *Japan Exports to Greece*, Available at: <https://tradingeconomics.com/japan/exports/greece> (Accessed 06 January 2022).

²⁵ Trade Map (n.d.) *Greece-Japan Imports*, Available at: https://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx?nvpm=1%7c300%7c%7c392%7c%7cTOTAL%7c%7c%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1 (Accessed 24 May 2022).

Economics, have been: vehicles other than railway (70.13 million dollars), machinery (42.81 million dollars),²⁶optical, photo, technical, medical apparatus (9.18 million dollars), electrical, electronic equipment (7.67 million dollars) and rubbers (6.63 million dollars).²⁷ For 2021, the only significant increase was vehicles other than railway imports, which grew to 87.31 million dollars, and machinery, growing to 46.56 million dollars.²⁸

Greece's trade with Japan in million euros



Source: International Trade Center/Trade Map

When it comes to exports, Greek exports to Japan were valued at 356 million euros in 2020.²⁹ In 2021, exports decreased for the first time since 2016, to 247 million euros.³⁰ Among the main Greek exports to Japan in 2020 we can find: pharmaceutical

²⁶ Trading Economics (2022) *Greece - Imports from Japan of Electrical and Electronic Equipment*, Available at: <https://tradingeconomics.com/greece/imports/japan/electrical-electronic-equipment> (Accessed 24 May 2022).

²⁷ Trading Economics (2022) *Greece - Imports from Japan*, Available at: <https://tradingeconomics.com/greece/imports/japan> (Accessed 07 January 2022).

²⁸ Ibidem.

²⁹ Trade Map (n.d.) *Greece-Japan Exports*, Available at: https://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx?nvpm=1%7c300%7c%7c392%7c%7cTOTAL%7c%7c%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c2%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1 (Accessed 24 May 2022).

³⁰ Ibidem.

products, tobacco and manufactured tobacco substitutes, aluminum, vegetable, fruit, nut food preparations, cotton.³¹

While the export trend for Greece over the past years looks promising, its exports to Japan are still relatively low, seen as a percentage of EU exports to the Japanese market (2.7%).³²

According to the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, about 20 Japanese corporations, including subsidiaries, trading companies and ship-related companies have expanded their business operations into Greece.³³ Some examples of such companies include Toyota Hellas, Sony, Hitachi Home Electronics Hellas, Fujifilm Hellas, ICL and Nippon Kaiji Kyokai, Piraeus Office. On the other hand, several Greek corporations, such as sales industry and trade consultancy, are also doing business in Japan.

According to the National Bank of Greece, the flow of Japanese investments in Greece has been negative every year. since 2013 to 2019, fluctuating between -0.5 million dollars and -4.5 million dollars.³⁴ In the year 2020, no Japanese investments were made and in 2021 another 1 million dollars were withdrawn from the Greek market.³⁵

The stock of the Japanese FDI in Greece seems to be gradually in decline since 2018, when it was 42 million dollars, then slightly lower at 39.4 million dollars in 2019, and further decreasing to 32.03 million dollars in 2020.³⁶

³¹ Trading Economics (2022) *Greece - Exports of Vegetable, Fruit, Nut Food Preparation to Japan*, Available at: <https://tradingeconomics.com/greece/exports/japan/vegetable-fruit-nut-food-preparations> (Accessed 24 May 2022).

³² Eurostat (2022) *Japan-EU International Trade in Goods Statistics*, Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Japan-EU_%E2%80%93international_trade_in_goods_statistics#EU_and_Japan_in_world_trade_in_goods (Accessed 11 January 2022).

³³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Greece- Japan Relations (Overview)* Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/greece/data.html> (Accessed 09 December 2021).

³⁴ Bank of Greece (2022) *Foreign Direct Investment - Flows*, Available at: <https://www.bankofgreece.gr/en/statistics/external-sector/direct-investment/direct-investment---flows> (Accessed 15 January 2022).

³⁵ Bank of Greece (2022) *Foreign Direct Investment - Stocks*, Available at: <https://www.bankofgreece.gr/en/statistics/external-sector/direct-investment/direct-investment---stocks> (Accessed 15 January 2022).

³⁶ OECD (2021) "OECD International Direct Investment Statistics 2020," *OECD Publishing*, p. 118

Naturally the outward FDI flows are almost non-existent. For the record, the outward flows of Greek FDI in Japan were -3.7 million dollars in 2018, 0.5 million dollars in 2019 and zero in 2020.³⁷ According to the OECD, Greece has had no FDI stock in Japan for the past few years.³⁸

An EU funded project, whose contract has been won by a Japanese company, in Greece, is the construction of the Thessaloniki metro, by the railway company Hitachi Rail, the first autonomous metro line in Greece. This is a significant step for the industrial design and manufacturing industries of the country. According to Hitachi Rail, the Greek branch of the company has 16 employees and generates 10.8 million dollars in sales.³⁹ However, this cannot be regarded as a direct Japanese investment. Investments of such caliber have yet to be done in Greece.

A noteworthy improvement in investment policies is Japan Tobacco International (JTI), which has opened a branch in Xanthi, Greece, exporting Greek tobacco products worldwide.⁴⁰

Greek investments in Japan are very limited and mostly revolve around exporting olive oil, wine, pasta, yogurt and dairy products, as well as marble, according to the Greek statistics bureau.⁴¹ Although Greek participation in Japanese food expos is common and Greek cuisine is popular in Japan, these alone cannot be regarded as strong investment factors. Greece does not have the means to invest in manufacturing or any other secondary sector investments. Thus, Greece could shift its focus to cultural and

³⁷ OECD (2022) *Greece-Japan Outward FDI Flows by Partner Country*, Available at: <https://data.oecd.org/fdi/outward-fdi-flows-by-partner-country.htm#indicator-chart> (Accessed 15 January 2022).

³⁸ OECD (2021) “OECD International Direct Investment Statistics 2020,” *OECD Publishing*, p. 116

³⁹ Dun and Bradstreet (2022) *Hitachi Rail STS S.P.A Greek Branch*, Available at: https://www.dnb.com/business-directory/company-profiles.hitachi_rail_sts_spa_greek_branch.713f15a7d6b03d44f436087a82c3ee06.html (Accessed 15 January 2022).

⁴⁰ Japan Tobacco International (2022) *JTI στην Ελλάδα (JTI in Greece)*, Available at: <https://www.jti.com/europe/greece> (Accessed 15 January 2022).

⁴¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece (2022) *Οικονομικό προφίλ Ιαπωνίας 2020 (Economic Profile of Japan 2020)*, p. 1, Available at: <https://agora.mfa.gr/infofiles/%CE%9F%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%BF%CE%BD%CE%BF%CE%BC%CE%B9%CE%BA%CF%8C%20%CE%A0%CF%81%CE%BF%CF%86%CE%AF%CE%BB%20%CE%99%CE%B1%CF%80%CF%89%CE%BD%CE%AF%CE%B1%CF%82%202020%20jp.pdf> (Accessed 10 January 2022).

educational investments and partnerships with other universities, private institutions and host cultural events that could promote both cultures, while minimizing the cost.

Greece does have a national trade and investment promotion agency, called Enterprise Greece. The agency has recently moved under the umbrella of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which could prove financially beneficial or transform the agency into another political mouthpiece. At the moment, Enterprise Greece does endeavor to promote Greek investments abroad, and Japan is one of the targeted markets. Currently, there are no office headquarters in Japan and Enterprise Greece only attends food and other expos in Japan. Through webinars and counseling sessions, its officials thoroughly describe the challenges and opportunities in the Greco-Japanese trade investments.

The Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) has not expanded to Greece yet. If an agency of such caliber eventually expands to Greece, coupled with the bilateral chambers of commerce that exist in both countries, the opportunities for both Japanese and Greek companies to break into each country's market would also increase. The Greek Chamber of Commerce in Japan (GrCCJ) is headquartered in Tokyo, while the Greek-Japanese Chamber of Commerce is headquartered in Athens.

Cultural and people-to-people relations and perceptions of Japan

In order to better understand the importance of cultural and educational exchange or, in the case of Greco-Japanese relations, the lack of, we need to address some numerical factors.

According to the Greek Statistics Bureau (ELSTAT) and the information provided by both the Japanese Embassy in Athens and the Greek Embassy in Tokyo, the number of Greek (or Hellenic Republic) nationals living in Japan, in 2020, was 214.⁴² The number of Japanese nationals living in Greece, in October 2017, was roughly 653.⁴³

⁴² E-Stat Statistics of Japan (2022) *Population Census Table*, Available at: <https://www.e-stat.go.jp/en/dbview?sid=0003445257> (Accessed 17 January 2022).

⁴³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021), *Greece-Japan Relations (Overview)* Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/greece/data.html>, <https://www.statistics.gr/en/statistics/-/publication/SAM07/> (Accessed 09 December 2021).

Another interesting quantitative factor is the number of tourist arrivals in both countries. Given that there is no direct flight from Greece to Japan and the two countries are roughly 9,500 kilometers apart, tourist activity is relatively low. Also, the Greek Tourist Bureau in Tokyo, a major hub for prospective Japanese tourists in Greece, closed down in 2013, hindering even more the accessibility to Greece.⁴⁴ It should be noted here that the years 2010-2017 were among the most difficult and economically austere for Greece, its investment policies, cultural and tourist agenda, due to the economic crisis.

Although fluctuating, the number of Greek visitors in Japan had remained between 2,500 and 3,300 annually, from the early 1990s until 2004, when a slight increase is present (4,300 to 4,800 annually). In 2011, approximately 2,459 Greek tourists visited Japan. In contrast, in 2019, around 9,494 tourists visited Japan, the highest number to this day. Since 2011, the Greek outbound tourism to Japan has increased significantly, only to plummet again during 2020 and 2021, due to the global pandemic

On the other hand, the number of Japanese visitors to Greece increased from around 10,000 in 2010 and 2011, to almost 19,000 in 2014.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, the data from 2016 until 2018 are not available in any statistical bureau. Even if the exact data were not available, the Japanese National Tourism Organization (JNTO) reports an increasing trend of tourism and arrivals in Greece. By 2019, approximately 110,368 Japanese visitors arrived in Greece.⁴⁶

The former Japanese ambassador in Greece, Yasuhiro Shimizu (2017-2020), mentioned in an interview that around 150,000 Japanese were visiting Greece every year, during the 1980s and 1990s.⁴⁷ In comparison, by 2018, tourist arrivals had

⁴⁴ Greek Travel Pages (2021) *Greece Seeks to Attract More Japanese Tourists*, Available at: <https://news.gtp.gr/2017/10/31/greece-japan-look-to-enhance-tourism-cooperation/> (Accessed 27 December 2021).

⁴⁵ Japan Tourism Statistics (2022) *Trends of Japanese Tourists*, Available at: <https://statistics.jnto.go.jp/en/graph/#graph--Japanese--Trends> (Accessed 22 January 2022).

⁴⁶ Japan Tourism Statistics (2022) *Trends of Japanese Visitors by Year*, Available at: <https://statistics.jnto.go.jp/en/graph/#graph--Japanese--Trends> (Accessed 02 July 2022).

⁴⁷ Tornos News (2018) *Ambassador Interview: Greek Tourism Is on the Radar of Japanese Investors*, Available at: <https://www.tornosnews.gr/en/tourism-businesses/markets/30216-ambassador-interview-greek-tourism-is-on-the-radar-of-japanese-investors.html> (Accessed 02 July 2022).

dropped to less than 10,000 annually.⁴⁸ Although the number 150,000 might be a little overestimated, according to official numbers given by the statistic agencies, his point about the intensity of tourism during these decades still stands.

An interesting diplomatic tactic that both Greece and Japan practiced through the years, which positively affects tourism as well, is the twinning of cities and towns that somehow resemble one another or share a similar history, architectural styles or even climate. Some prime examples date back from the 1980s.

In June 1986, Nanto city and Delphi city signed such an agreement. Every year, in Nanto city of the Toyama Prefecture, ancient Greek theater shows are held, with occasional participation of Greek acting troupe (for example the troupe of famous Greek theater director Theodoros Terzopoulos). One year later, in August 1987, Inazawa city signed a partnership with Olympia city. Famous philosophy professor of Nagoya University Keiji Kokubu had close relations with the ancient Greek city of Olympia and wished for his ashes to be scattered there. Thus, the twinning commenced.⁴⁹ By 2021, both of these towns came in the spotlight, as the Olympic flame started from Olympia, the town where the ancient Olympic Games were held, and ended up in Inazawa city, in the Aichi Prefecture, where Greek Ambassador Konstantinos Kakiouis received the flame and symbolically ran through a portion of a marathon route.⁵⁰ Another twinning agreement from the 1980s was that between Shinjuku district (Tokyo) and Lefkada Island, from October 1989. This twinning relied heavily on the influence of Lafcadio Hearn, who was born in Lefkada Island, in Greece, and died in the famous Shinjuku district, in Tokyo. His cultural influence is immense for the diplomatic relations of the two countries.

A different type of agreement comes from June 2017, between the Sanin Kaigan Geopark hiking trail (UNESCO World Heritage Site) and the M1 hiking trail in Kythira

⁴⁸ Ibidem.

⁴⁹ Greece-Japan (2017) 国分敬治: 五輪発祥の地ギリシャ・オリンピック市に眠る日本人 (*Kokubu Keiji: The Japanese Who Rests in the Birthplace of the Olympic Games in Olympia Greece*), Available at: <https://www.greecejapan.com/jp/?p=18347> (Accessed 23 January 2022).

⁵⁰ Greece-Japan (2017) *Ο Έλληνας πρέσβης λαμπαδηδρόμος στην Inazawa, πόλη αδελφοποιημένη με την αρχαία Ολυμπία* (*Greek ambassador torch relaying in Inazawa city, twinned with the city of ancient Olympia*), Available at: <https://www.greecejapan.com/iaponia-o-ellinas-presvis-lampadidromos-stin-inazawa-poli-adelfopoiimeni-me-tin-archaia-olympia/> (Accessed 23 January 2022).

Island. The twinning schemes between hiking trails, called Friendship Trails, is an initiative of the World Trails Network organization, in an attempt to attract more attention to scenic routes and trails of natural beauty and prompt the discovery of more unconventional and undiscovered tourist destinations.

When it comes to the media perception of Japan, in general, not much news from Japan reaches Greece. Even though NHK International broadcasts on Greek television and physical copies of newspapers like the Japan Times, the Yomiuri Shimbun and the Asahi Shimbun are also fairly common in international press shops, they do not get any spotlight.

Japan may be presented as a strong country, an economic giant and a powerful ally for Greece by the media, but in reality, unless there is major international news that revolves around Japan (for example, the Tōhoku earthquake and Fukushima disaster, in 2011) or an entertaining or witty invention that attracts curiosity, Greek media never focuses on the importance of Japanese culture (traditional or contemporary). Anyone interested in Greco-Japanese relations cannot rely on conventional media, social media or the radio. Some articles do exist in Greek newspapers and websites about important historical figures (such as Lafcadio Hearn) or historical events that shaped the relationship of the two countries (such as the Japan-Greece Joint Action Plan or the Tokei Maru immigrants' rescue). Cultural events are also very rarely featured in media reports, let alone in the headlines.

But because younger generations have shifted their focus to the internet, rather than television and physical newspapers, there are major online hubs for Greeks interested in Japan to get informed, share their experiences and interests, search for Japanese language teachers and form a general community on the internet. These hubs are never funded or lead by national media or any of the major private media in Greece. They are usually independent websites, maintained by journalists or other Japanese culture enthusiasts (such as martial arts, ikebana, bonsai, go and manga), who decided to create a website providing a better sense of community. But all-rounded Greco-Japanese focused websites are sparse and generally not well informed or lacking citation and sources. However, there are some websites, such as Greece-Japan, that provide valid media coverage for all Greco-Japanese relations developments, covering

politics, economy, cultural events and educational columns, both in Greek and Japanese.⁵¹ Still, the existence of some websites like this cannot be considered adequate for covering Greco-Japanese relations in depth or providing information, bibliography and guidance on specific and specialized topics. That area must be covered by an, ideally, public academic institute, properly staffed and educated.

Fortunately, Greece does have a plethora of associations and small-scale organizations that somehow fill the gap of the lacking cultural exchange between the two countries. The Greek-Japanese Association and the Japanese Society in Greece, coupled with the library and cultural events held at the Japanese Embassy in Athens, do provide valuable resources, information or entertainment.

An interesting event, that took place in November 2021, was the opening of the first public Japanese garden, in the Pagrati neighborhood of Athens. The creation of the garden was almost entirely sponsored by Japanese Tobacco International (JTI) Hellas, which leaves a lot to be desired from Greece's part of the initiative.⁵² Another significant event was the Japanese week, held in November 2019, in central hubs of Athens.⁵³ Such events, although very promising and helpful for the promotion of Greco-Japanese relations, do not happen frequently enough to put Japan in the spotlight.

In the theater department, both Greece and Japan often draw parallels between ancient Greek tragedies and traditional Japanese Noh and Kabuki theater, in terms of morality, piety, human tragedy and supernatural elements, to name a few. Theater might as well be the only medium where Greco-Japanese relations are in balance and the points and morals of these unique stories are not lost in Orientalist interpretations.

The interest in Japan, despite not having reached its peak, is certainly very high in Greece. This interest mostly revolves around popular culture, such as anime, manga and video games, which are supported by annual events such as the Comicon and Gameathlon expos. The most promising and beneficial fact of this Japanese popular

⁵¹ Greece-Japan (2022) *Home Page*, Available at: <https://www.greecejapan.com/> (Accessed 10 January 2022).

⁵² Greek Travel Pages (2021) *Japanese Garden opens in Athens*, Available at: <https://news.gtp.gr/2021/11/12/japanese-garden-opens-in-athens/> (Accessed 28 December 2021).

⁵³ Greek Travel Pages (2019) *Japanese Week 2019 Event Kicks off in Athens on November 23*, Available at: <https://news.gtp.gr/2019/11/21/japan-week-2019-kicks-off-athens-november-23/> (Accessed 28 December 2021).

culture boom is the dramatic increase in the number of people (mostly in their 20s) that decide to learn the Japanese language, in order to achieve better immersion with their favorite past-time activity. Not all of them progress to higher linguistic levels, but the initiative is important. Such initiative could be further cultivated, if there was a Japanese or East Asian studies department in the Greek higher education system.

Apart from the Monbukagakusho (MEXT), which is the main gateway for prospective academics and researchers with an interest to study in Japanese universities, some Japanese government funded exchange programs, such as the MIRAI program and Ship for the World Youth Alumni Association (Hellenic Alumni Association)⁵⁴, also exist and contribute in the linking of the two cultures.

But Greco-Japanese education and culture promotion lacks a wider range of scholarships, student exchange and study or research agreements between universities. Apart from MEXT and occasionally some private institute's separate scholarship offers, only one Greek university offers the chance to study in Japan. The National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA) and Keio University in Tokyo offered scholarships for an annual exchange program, in the 2019-2020 academic year, but by August 2021 the scholarship was no longer available for Greek students.⁵⁵

Occasionally, some other opportunities may appear for Greek students, such as the Ryoichi Sasakawa Young Leaders Fellowship Fund (SYLFF),⁵⁶ but they are rare and highly dependent on fluctuating factors, such as professors' initiative, Greek universities' annual budget and government or embassies' support, making these scholarship options uncertain and inconsistent for a country that endeavors to build a strong educational and cultural bridge with Japan.

⁵⁴ Ship for World Youth (2021) *Περί...SWY (Speaking of SWY)*, Available at: https://swygreece.gr/?page_id=12 (Accessed 10 November 2021).

⁵⁵ Keio University International Center (2021) *National and Kapodistrian University of Athens Cooperation Program*, Available at: https://www.ic.keio.ac.jp/keio_student/ex_partner/Athen.html (Accessed 10 January 2022).

⁵⁶ National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (2020) *6 Students of the NKUA Have Been Selected to Receive the "Ryoichi Sasakawa Young Leaders Fellowship Fund (SYLFF)" Fellowship for the Academic Year 2019-2020*, Available at: https://en.uoa.gr/el/announcements_and_events/view_event_announcements_and_events/6_students_of_the_nkua_have_been_selected_to_receive_the_ryoichi_sasakawa_young_leaders_fellowship/ (Accessed 10 January 2022).

In conjunction with the lack of consistent funding and infeasible student mobility between Greek and Japanese universities, the main problem of cultural hindrance lies in the lack of an official Japanese language, culture and research institute. There are very few academics who specialize in Japan, or other East Asian cultures, in Greece, because of the absence of an academic institute to support them. Most prospective academics have to immigrate to other countries that support their cause and, if they are lucky, provide them with employment in their field. Thus, Greek experts on Japan are so few that they, unfortunately, cannot make an impact on the evolution of bilateral relations.

Acclaimed Greek Japanologist Stylianos Papalexandropoulos has dedicated many years trying to raise awareness and actively promote Japanese culture, either by lectures, papers⁵⁷ or through social media. But without a research center and Japanese studies university department, that can institutionalize such efforts, little can be accomplished.

Conclusions and recommendations

Greco-Japanese relations have in fact improved in the last five years, until 2021. That being said, prioritizing the economic understanding and cultural aspects of both countries, instead of simply relying on a friendly, yet distantly safe political relationship, could prove a turning point in Greco-Japanese relations.

Whether it is by the broader dissemination of Lafcadio Hearn's heritage and cultural and educational significance (especially for Japan) or by emphasizing important historical events such as the *Tokei Maru* immigrants rescue (even if it was not without profit at the time), the means of building a more concrete diplomatic relationship with Japan are certainly there.

Greek foreign policy and diplomacy are in dire need of expanding in new directions. In their current situation, they are mostly hindered by their own strict limits. Greece should not wait for Japanese investments and general economic initiative, in order to establish an East Asian university department. Only by investing into cultural appreciation, student exchange programs, university collaborations and research funding,

⁵⁷ Stylianos Papalexandropoulos (2015) "Girisha ni Okeru Nihonkenkyū no Kako to Genzai (The Past and Present of Japanese Studies in Greece)," *International Research Centre for Japanese Studies*, 18, p. 55.

will Greco-Japanese relations become stronger and more consistent, attracting progress and cooperation in areas such as shipping, trade and tourism.

When it comes to economic growth and investment policies, a few improvements could be implemented. For example, Greek branding and marketing is relatively unknown and absent from international trade, hindering the Japanese market from focusing on Greek products and identifying them as unique products of high quality. Examples of such products are Greek food and alcoholic beverages, tobacco products and sub products, personal care products, even construction materials. Establishing a strong relation between specific products, unique to Greece, and quality is essential for keeping up with such a strong competition in the international market. With a stronger branding and deeper understanding of the Japanese market, Greek exports and FDI flows could improve exponentially.

In addition, Greece should dedicate a substantially higher amount of resources, whether monetary or educational, to help Greek industries establish a friendlier environment with the Japanese market. Educational seminars about the Japanese market, Japanese laws and regulations should be top priority before attempting any investment. Briefing about fiscal policies, arrangements and refunds in case of a failed business plan should be also prioritized. The same could be applied to Japanese business plans aspiring to break through the Greek market more easily. Such improvements and deeper understanding will also improve target groups of companies and become more competitive in a macroeconomic way, helping businesses avoid potential investment failures. By doing so, FDI inflows will considerably increase, thus opening the way to even more investments.

The foundations for a healthy and prosperous relationship between the two countries are set. However, political instability, underdeveloped international trade, lack of funding for cultural promotion and the absence of a proper academic institute often result in lack of communication and the exploitation of an Orientalist approach when promoting Japanese culture in Greece. Similarly, in Japan, especially after the Greek economic crisis, a general atmosphere of distrust and ambiguity seems to hinder the investment of capital and human resources, as well as the stagnation of educational cooperation between universities.

By building a stronger cultural and economic foundation, the two countries will progressively become more aware of each other and be able to set more realistic and honest goals in the future. And what better way to start than the reinforcement of both Japanese culture in Greece, via higher education and Japanese language programs, and Greek culture in Japan, via student exchanges, Greek language programs and emphasis on contemporary Greek society, along with classical studies. The same goals need to be set in the economic field. Better preparation and deeper understanding can lead to successful trade and economic flourishing.

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From mutual fascination to strategic cooperation: Italy and Japan in the face of the 21st century's global transformations

By Marco ZAPPA*

Overview

As members of the G7 group, Italy and Japan are today among the world's largest economies and most industrialized countries. Aware of their long history of interactions, dating well before the two countries emerged as modern nation-states in the late 19th century, they share several commonalities with regards to their respective postwar institutional and economic development.

First, both have been key US allies in their respective regions, hosting, for instance, US military bases on their national territories. Second, both countries still uphold their postwar constitutional arrangements (and will do so probably for a few more years, despite reinterpretations and revisionist legislation) that nominally bar governments from military resurgence. Third, after exhibiting extraordinary economic growth rates for two decades, from the 1960s to the 1980s, they have established themselves as economic powerhouses and export giants. Fourth, despite frequent leadership reshuffles, both countries have long been ruled by conservative parties (the Christian democrats in Italy until the early 1990s, and the Liberal democrats in Japan, until 2009 and then from 2012 to the present day), which have pursued long-term strategies and contributed to laying the foundation of political and business relations since the early 1950s. Despite rarely producing any relevant benefit for the two national

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economies or, by and large, for third countries' development initiatives,¹ this effort has nevertheless resulted in a strong fascination for the other country's culture, resulting in the popularity of the study of Japanese and Italian and in a thriving cultural exchange. Finally, as important powers, they are in search of new diplomatic arrangements, particularly concerning trade, comprehensive security and transcontinental connectivity.

Against this backdrop, in this chapter, transformations of Italy-Japan relations will be put in the context of an evolving international situation, with particular attention to the developments recorded in the last three decades. The crisis of American unipolarity and current climate emergency have, in fact, created new opportunities for multilateral cooperation, though the current pandemic seems to have put several possibilities on hold.

History of relations

Despite the existence of five century-old cultural exchanges, official state-to-state relations between Italy and Japan were established only in 1866, with the conclusion of the Treaty of Friendship and Trade between the Kingdom of Italy and the Empire of Japan. The following year, the first Italian minister plenipotentiary, Vittorio Sallier de La Tour, installed the Italian legation in the open port of Yokohama.² Against this backdrop, dozens of Italian entrepreneurs had started traveling to Japan to purchase silkworm eggs, in the face of a deadly silkworm epidemic between the 1840s and 1870s, which severely hit the European sericulture industry.³

Italy came to be perceived rather positively by the new Japanese ruling class, which emerged after the demise of the Tokugawa shogunate. A year after the Imperial Restoration, Sallier de La Tour was received at the Imperial palace. In 1881, the new emperor visited Prince Tommaso of Savoy, on board the Italian frigate Vettor Pisani,

¹ Recent Japanese investments in strategic industries and leading manufacturers in the railways and automotive sectors, such as Ansaldo STS and Magneti Marelli, are nonetheless worth mentioning.

² See for further details Laura Monaco (1965) "Relazioni Di Sallier de La Tour, Primo Inviato Italiano in Giappone (9 Giugno 1867 - 15 Gennaio 1869) (First Italian Envoy to Japan Sallier de La Tour's Reports)", *Il Giappone*, 5.

³ Claudio Zanier (2008) *I Setaioli Italiani in Asia. Imprenditori Della Seta in Asia Centrale (1859-1871) (The Italian "Setaioli" in Asia. Silk Entrepreneurs in Central Asia (1859-1871))*, Padova: CLEUP. Tessa Morris-Suzuki (1992) "Sericulture and the Origins of Japanese Industrialization," *Technology and Culture*, 33(1).

anchored in Yokohama.⁴ Meanwhile, in 1873, the first Japanese embassy to the US and Europe, led by viscount Tomomi Iwakura and aimed at revising the unequal treaties, traveled to Italy, laying the foundations for future diplomatic and cultural cooperation. That year, a Japanese consulate opened in Venice and, in November, the city's Scuola Superiore di Commercio (Business school), which later became Ca' Foscari University, inaugurated its first Japanese language course, with Yōsaku Yoshida, former interpreter to Alessandro Fé D'Ostiani, Italian plenipotentiary to Japan, as lecturer.⁵ The image of Italy conveyed by some of the Iwakura Mission's records is that of a relatively underdeveloped country, if compared to other continental European nations, particularly with regards to literacy, and its people's lack of "industriousness." Nevertheless, the mission's envoys were impressed by the beauty of Italian art, architecture, cultural heritage and crafts, as they visited, among others, Venice, Florence, Rome and Naples.⁶

In the early 20th century, however, Italian shipyards and assembly plants would become a key supplier of naval and military technology to Japan. Clearer strategic convergences emerged in the 1930s, after the Japanese occupation of northeastern China and the Mussolini government's (1922-1943) backing of the Japanese proposal to equalize naval armaments limitations with the other European powers, at the Second London Naval Disarmament Conference, in 1935-36.⁷ Tokyo would then declare its neutrality toward Italy's move into Ethiopia. Against this backdrop, following the intensification of military operations in China and in the Pacific, the Japanese government commissioned from Fiat, Italy's largest vehicle and aircraft manufacturer,

⁴ Marisa Di Russo (2003) "Un Principe Di Casa Savoia e Un Diplomatico Del Regno d'Italia Conquistano La Corte Meiji (Meiji Court Fascination with a Savoy Prince and a Kingdom of Italy's Diplomat)," in Alberizzi et al. (ed.), *Atti Del XXVI Convegno Di Studi Sul Giappone (Aistugia, Torino 26-28 Settembre 2002)*, Venice: Cartotecnica Veneziana Editrice. Carlo Edoardo Pozzi (2020) "Chū Itaria Nihon tokumei zenken kōshi Nabeshima Naohiro to nich-i kankei shi ni okeru sono yakuwari (1880-1882) (Japan's Plenipotentiary to Italy Nabeshima Naohiro and His Role in the History of Italy-Japan Relations (1880-1882))," *Studi Italici* 70.

⁵ Adriana Boscaro (2008) "Docenti Giapponesi in Laguna (Japanese Teachers in the Venice Lagoon)," in Rosa Caroli (ed.), *1868: Italia Giappone: Intrecci Culturali (1868: Italy Japan: Cultural Entanglements)*, Venezia: Cafoscarina, pp. 28-30.

⁶ F. G. Notehelfer, Igor R. Saveliev, and W. F. Vande Walle (2004) "An Extraordinary Odyssey: The Iwakura Embassy Translated," *Monumenta Nipponica* 59(1), p. 109.

⁷ Mario Scalise (2003) "Le Relazioni Politiche, Economiche e Culturali Tra l'Italia e Il Giappone Nella Prima Metà Del Novecento (Political, Economic and Cultural Relations between Italy and Japan in the First Half of the Twentieth Century)," in Adolfo Tamburello (ed.), *Italia-Giappone: 450 Anni*, Roma: Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, p. 142.

72 bombers and a thousand trucks, purchased by the government of Manchukuo, the puppet government installed by the Japanese military in northeastern China, in 1932.⁸

Since the 1920s, spectacular propaganda acts, such as the Rome-Tokyo air race (Raid Roma-Tokyo), completed in 1920 and supported by nationalist activists and right-wing intellectuals, had contributed to the establishment of a positive image of Japan in Italy.⁹ In the intellectual climate under fascism, this trend was consolidated. One fascist newsreel, dated from 1940, defined the Japanese as the “Romans of the Far East” and praised their attempt to bring a “New Order” to Asia, in sharp contrast with chaotic and disorderly China, whose leader, Chiang Kai-shek, was backed by “formidable English, American and French interests.”¹⁰

In 1937, Italy joined Japan and Germany in signing the Anti-Comintern Pact, to strengthen their cooperation against the Soviet Union. Finally, with the conclusion of the 1940 Tripartite Pact, the wartime alliance between Rome, Berlin and Tokyo emerged, to last until September 1943, when Italy signed an armistice with the Allied Powers and declared war on Japan, marking the end of its alliance with the Axis.

Despite sharing a similar postwar trajectory under US partial (Italy) or total (Japan) military occupation, official relations between Rome and Tokyo were restored in 1951, with the entry into force of the San Francisco Treaty. In 1954, Italy and Japan signed a cultural cooperation agreement, aimed at promoting mutual knowledge and understanding, pledging to promote cultural exchanges through the translation of literary works, exchanges and research cooperation between universities and through the establishment of cultural institutions (the Italian Institute of Culture and the Japanese Institute of Culture, which opened in 1959 and 1962, respectively, in Tokyo and Rome).¹¹ Ministry-level exchanges followed suit. In 1955, Foreign Minister

⁸ Scalise (2003), “Le Relazioni”, p. 143.

⁹ Hiromi Fujioka (2011) “Shimoi Harukichi to Itaria-Fashizumu: Danunzio, Mussorīni, Nihon (Shimoi Harukichi and Italian Fascism: On His Relation with D’Annunzio, Mussolini and Japanese Society),” *Fukuoka Kokusai Daigaku Kiyō*, 25, pp. 57-58.

¹⁰ Istituto Luce Cinecittà (2018) *Il Giappone Alla Guida Dell’Asia Tra Tradizione e Modernità (Japan at the Helm of Asia, between Tradition and Modernity)*, Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vy4-9NobyO4> (Accessed 11 August 2022).

¹¹ Nello Puorto (2003) “Diario Diplomatico Italia-Giappone 1954-2000 (Italy-Japan Diplomatic Diary 1954-2000),” in Adolfo Tamburello (ed.), *Italia-Giappone: 450 Anni (Italy-Japan: 450 Years)*, Roma: Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente, pp. 178-179.

Gaetano Martino led the first ever diplomatic mission in Italy's diplomatic history to East Asia, visiting, among the others, Thailand, Hong Kong and Japan.¹² Japanese Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda would become the first Japanese postwar leader to visit Italy and the Vatican, in 1962, two years before the opening of the first Tokyo Olympic Games, in 1964.¹³

At the diplomatic level, relations remained cordial, despite chronic trade tensions between Japan and the European Economic Community (EEC), in an era characterized by the boom of cheap Japanese tech, vehicles and naval exports to Europe. The first Italian prime minister to visit Japan was Giulio Andreotti, in 1973, against the backdrop of US-EEC-Japan negotiations on enhanced cooperation in international cooperation, trade, manufacturing and technology in the wake of global energy and political crises.¹⁴ In March 1982, Sandro Pertini became the first Italian head of state to set foot in Japan after the Second World War. A hugely popular former anti-fascist combatant, Pertini met with Emperor Hirohito, praising Japan for its technological advances and postwar reconstruction.¹⁵

Political relations

Postwar diplomatic exchanges between Italy and Japan have centered on the promotion of cultural exchanges, trade and bilateral investments. Parliamentary exchanges have been regular, particularly since the mid-1990s, and promoted by “Friends of Japan” and “Friends of Italy” members of parliament associations on both ends who have been active, among others, in organizing fund-raising and solidarity events, when natural

¹² Incom (1955) “Viaggio in Giappone di S.E. Gaetano Martino, Ministro degli Affari Esteri (Official Visit to Japan by H.E. Gaetano Martino, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy),” *Archivio Storico Luce*, Available at: <https://patrimonio.archivioluca.com/luce-web/detail/IL3000087056/1/viaggio-giappone-s-e-gaetano-martino-ministro-degli-affari-esteri.html> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

¹³ See Il Giappone (1962) “Notiziario Giappone-Italia (News: Italy-Japan),” *Il Giappone* 2 (4).

¹⁴ Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale (ISPI) (1973) *Annuario Di Politica Internazionale (International Politics Yearbook 1973)*, Bari: Edizioni Dedalo, p. 25.

¹⁵ Nello Puorto (2003) “Diario Diplomatico Italia-Giappone 1954-2000 (Italy-Japan Diplomatic Diary 1954-2000),” in Adolfo Tamburello (ed.), *Italia-Giappone: 450 Anni (Italy-Japan: 450 Years)*, Roma: Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente, p. 180-181.

disasters hit the countries in the last decade, and promoting business forums.¹⁶ Despite such friendly ties and enhanced cooperation on a limited range of issues, strategically, however, policymakers on both ends do not seem to perceive the other country as an “essential” ally, given the regional focus of the respective foreign policies. However, emerging multipolar arrangements have favored strengthening ties, for example in the security sector.¹⁷

After Rome’s accession to the G7 financial group in 1986, however, bilateral exchanges have increased, resulting in high-level visits for preliminary meetings.¹⁸ Yet Italian prime ministers’ visits have, on the contrary, been rather sporadic. Prime Minister Romano Prodi’s 1997 visit was the first in almost a decade after those of Amintore Fanfani (1987) and Ciriaco De Mita (1989).¹⁹ In this phase, the Japan-backed UN Security Council reform issue emerged as a divisive topic in the bilateral relations, with Tokyo seeking multilateral support on its accession as a permanent member, along with Germany, and Italy defending a more moderate position that opted for a more democratic and inclusive solution.²⁰ An important political moment came in early 2000, when the Massimo D’Alema’s government, in a move that was unenthusiastically received in Tokyo, announced the normalization of diplomatic relations with North Korea, a country with a long-standing dispute with Japan over the abduction of

¹⁶ Chamber of Deputies of Italy (2013) *Incontro Con Una Delegazione Della Dieta Giapponese (Meeting with a Japanese Diet Delegation)*, Available at: http://documenti.camera.it/leg17/dossier/Testi/ES0091.htm#_Toc369190275 (Accessed 11 August 2022). Città di Venezia (2019) “Japan Week in Venice: tavola rotonda a Ca’ Farsetti tra sindaco Brugnaro, ambasciatori e l’Associazione Parlamentari Amici del Giappone (Japan Week in Venice: Rondtable at the City Hall between Mayor Brugnaro, Ambassadors and the Friends of Japan Parliamentary Association),” *Citta di Venezia Live*. Available at: <https://live.comune.venezia.it/it/tavola-rotonda-italia-giappone-venezia-4-settembre-2019> (Accessed 11 August 2022).

¹⁷ Author’s interview with an Italian diplomat, 3 August 2021.

¹⁸ Prime ministers Tsutomu Hata, Keizō Obuchi and Yoshirō Mori visited Italy in 1994, 1999 and 2000, respectively. More details at MOFA (2000) “Summary of Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori’s Visit to G8 Countries”, May 10, 2000. Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/economy/summit/2000/pmv/summary.html> (Accessed 11 August 2022).

¹⁹ Nello Puorto (2003) “Diario Diplomatico Italia-Giappone 1954-2000 (Italy-Japan Diplomatic Diary 1954-2000),” in Adolfo Tamburello (ed.), *Italia-Giappone: 450 Anni (Italy-Japan: 450 Years)*, Roma: Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente, p. 190.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 190.

Japanese nationals in the 1970s and 1980s (*rachi mondai*).²¹ Concomitantly, tensions emerged over Japanese authorities' reticence regarding Rome's request for extradition of Delfo Zorzi, an entrepreneur and former neo-fascist activist with Japanese citizenship, convicted of terrorism and manslaughter for a 1969 bomb attack in Milan, in 2001 (cleared in 2014).²²

Later, in 2001, a new US value-based involvement in Central Asia and the Middle East provided the background for Italy-Japan diplomatic relations to enter a new stage. In the aftermath of the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York, in September 2001, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, who in July had presided the infamous G8 summit in Genoa, and Prime Minister Junichirō Koizumi pledged to cooperate with Washington on the fight against global terror.²³ However, it was only in 2012, with the return to power of the LDP and Shinzō Abe, that bilateral relations gained strength. Certainly, in his second stint as Japan's prime minister, Abe managed an activist turn to his country's foreign policy.

In 2014, Abe visited Italy twice, in June and October. He met with Prime Minister Matteo Renzi and discussed various issues, ranging from bilateral trade, to the international situation in the Asia-Pacific region. On this issue, specifically, Abe sought Rome's support in Japan's standing territorial dispute with the People's Republic of China, over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands.²⁴ He then traveled again to Milan, host city of the 10th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). The two meetings were crucial to preparing the Milan Expo 2015, laying the foundations of the 150th anniversary of Italy-Japan

²¹ Stratfor Global Intelligence Unit (2000) *Italy Brings North Korea out of Isolation*, Retrieved from: <https://web.archive.org/web/20000925074103/http://atimes.com/koreas/BA07Dg01.html> (Accessed 12 August 2022). Nello Puorto (2003) "Diario Diplomatico Italia-Giappone 1954-2000 (Italy-Japan Diplomatic Diary 1954-2000)," in Adolfo Tamburello (ed.), *Italia-Giappone: 450 Anni (Italy-Japan: 450 Years)*, Roma: Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, p. 192.

²² Paolo Foschini (2001) "Zorzi in Giappone Dal '70: Ora Rischia l'extradizione (Zorzi in Japan since 1970: Now He Could Be Extradited)," *Corriere Della Sera*, p. 6. Retrieved from: <https://archivio.corriere.it> (Accessed 12 August 2022).

²³ Asahi Shimbun (2001) "Koizumi Shushō 'Tsuyoi Ikidoori' Nichi-i Denwa Kaidan de Berurusukōni-Shi Ni Setsume (Prime Minister Koizumi Expresses 'Strong Indignation' and Explains Japan's Position During Talk with Berlusconi)," *Asahi Shimbun*, p. 4. Retrieved from <https://database.asahi.com/> (Accessed 12 August 2022).

²⁴ On the dispute, Sino-Japanese competition and the role of Europe in the two countries' geoeconomic strategies, see Giulio Pugliese and Aurelio Insisa (2017) *Sino-Japanese Power Politics: Might, Money and Minds*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 84-88.

relations, in 2016. Media reports described the friendly atmosphere of the bilateral meetings between the two leaders, who reportedly joked on the topics of cars (Renzi mentioned that he used a Toyota when he served as mayor of Florence) and food (the Italian prime minister promised Abe a Milan-style beef cutlet).²⁵ Renzi then reciprocated the visit in August 2015, to promote bilateral relations, citing the positive image Italy enjoys with the Japanese public and the conspicuous trade volume between the two countries, and defend his cabinet's reforms.²⁶ He visited Japan one last time before stepping down, in May 2016, to attend the Ise-Shima G7 summit.

Furthermore, in 2016, the two countries celebrated the 150th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. On this occasion, Italy's major newspaper, *Corriere della Sera*, hosted the letters of the countries' foreign ministers, Paolo Gentiloni and Fumio Kishida. Besides reminding of the numerous political and cultural events scheduled in both countries that year, the letters cite common experiences and opportunities to be faced in coming years, particularly with regard to fighting terrorism and contributing to global peace and stability.²⁷ Kishida, particularly, welcomed the entry into force of an agreement on the security of information, signed by the two countries in 2015.²⁸ Kishida further stressed the enormous potential of bilateral

²⁵ Giulia Pompili (2014) *Vertice Asem, basta che all'Italia non resti solo il gelato (Asem Summit, Italy Should Not Be Left With Gelato, Only)*, Available at: <https://www.ilfoglio.it/articoli/2014/10/16/news/vertice-aseam-basta-che-allitalia-non-resti-solo-il-gelato-77583/> (Accessed 11 August 2022). Paolo Salom (2014) "Abe Arriva a Roma per Cercare Alleati Anti-Cina (Abe Arrives in Rome to Find Allies Against China)," *Corriere Della Sera*, p. 16. Retrieved from: <https://archivio.corriere.it> (Accessed 12 August 2022).

²⁶ ANSA (2015) *Renzi in Giappone, voler bene a Italia significa non spararle (Renzi in Japan, 'To Love Italy Does Not Mean To Blast It)*, Available at: http://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/politica/2015/08/02/renzi-arrivato-in-giapponedomani-incontra-imperatore-e-abe_fc2d7ede-7af5-493c-8f4d-a928fb225d74.html (Accessed 5 March 2022).

²⁷ Paolo Gentiloni (2016) "Sfide Economiche Che Ci Accomunano (Our Common Economic Challenges)," *Corriere Della Sera*, sec. Letters and comments, p. 38. Retrieved from: <https://archivio.corriere.it> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

²⁸ The document establishes standards and procedures for the protection of classified information between the two governments, in an attempt to boost security and intelligence ties with European countries. More details at MOFA (2015) "Agreement between the Government of Japan and the Government of Italy on the Security of Information," Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000140793.pdf> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

collaboration in critical sectors, such as military technology and equipment transfer.²⁹

The March 2018 general elections in Italy brought the populist and anti-establishment Five Star Movement and Northern League to power and led to the formation of a new coalition government. With the aim to “take back control” over national sovereignty, the new cabinet adopted an adversarial approach to multilateral frameworks and traditional alliances, promoting ties with Russia and, more importantly, with China.³⁰ In March 2019, the Italian government signed a Memorandum of Understanding with China on the Belt and Road Initiative, as the first G7 nation to endorse the BRI³¹. Clearly, this startled Japanese authorities and required Italian envoys to highlight the agreement’s importance for Eurasian connectivity and Italy’s economic growth, non-binding and non-contradictory nature, and compliance with EU guidelines on sustainability and market access.³²

Nevertheless, since 2018, strategic convergences between Japan and Italy on the Mediterranean, North Africa and the Horn of Africa, on the one hand, and in the Asia-Pacific region, on the other, could be observed.³³ Particularly, upon Mario Draghi’s appointment as leader of a “national unity” executive, in February 2021, Rome has reoriented its foreign policy again toward Europeanism and Atlanticism.³⁴ Consequently, the EU’s adoption of a “Strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,” in April 2021, has pushed Italy into embracing a new strategic view of the Asia-Pacific

²⁹ Fumio Kishida (2016) “Collaborare Alla Pace e Alla Stabilità (Let Us Cooperate For Peace and Stability),” *Corriere Della Sera*, sec. Letters and comments, p. 39. Retrieved from: <https://archivio.corriere.it> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

³⁰ Fabrizio Coticchia (2021) “A Sovereignist Revolution? Italy’s Foreign Policy under the ‘Yellow-Green’ Government,” *Comparative European Politics* 19 (6), p. 752.

³¹ Simone Dossi (2020) “Italy-China Relations and the Belt and Road Initiative. The Need for a Long-Term Vision,” *Italian Political Science* 15 (1), p. 68.

³² Author’s interview with an Italian diplomat, August 2021.

³³ See for instance Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale (ISPI) (2018) *Med2018 - Special Dialogue with Taro Kono*, Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eL5_9KT4Hu0 (Accessed 11 August 2022). See also Embassy of Italy in Tokyo (2021) *Indo-Pacifico e nuovi scenari geopolitici: Italia, India e Giappone (The Indo-Pacific and New Geopolitical Scenarios: Italy, India and Japan)*, Available at: https://ambtokyo.esteri.it/ambasciata_tokyo/it/chi-siamo/dall-ambasciata/l-indo-pacifico-e-i-nuovi-scenari.html (Accessed 5 March 2022).

³⁴ Teresa Coratella and Varvelli Arturo (2021) *Rome’s Moment: Draghi, Multilateralism, and Italy’s New Strategy*, Available at: <https://ecfr.eu/publication/romes-moment-draghi-multilateralism-and-italys-new-strategy/> (Accessed 11 August 2022).

region, consistent with the interests in this region of the US, Japan and other EU member states, such as France, Germany and the Netherlands. Finally, in January 2022, the Italian government published a specific document titled “The Italian Contribution to the EU Strategy for the Indo-Pacific,” pledging to step up efforts in trade, connectivity, environmental protection, digital and human security and defense.³⁵ Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in late February 2022 has presented both Italy and Japan with new challenges whereby they could enhance their cooperation. During a May 2022 official visit to Italy, Japanese Prime Minister Kishida, elected in October 2021, and Draghi pledged unity against Russia’s aggression against Ukraine and vowed to maintain a “rule-based international order” in the Indo-Pacific. Recognizing the “excellent” state of Japan-Italy bilateral relations, Draghi also thanked Japan for its readiness to redirect its liquefied natural gas (LNG) shipments to Europe in the wake of Russia’s retaliations against EU sanctions. The two leaders also denounced North Korea’s most recent ballistic tests.³⁶

Security and military relations

National Constitutions on both sides bar, in principle, the two countries from re-establishing themselves as military powers with capabilities to intervene in armed conflicts abroad.³⁷ However, in practice, as major US allies in their respective regions, since the early 2000s, both Rome and Tokyo have supported the US-led multinational military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Italy has actively contributed to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan and the Ancient Babylon missions in Iraq, providing more than 32,250 soldiers in total on both fronts, and to the “coalition of the willing” against the Islamic State, in 2014, with approximately 1,500

³⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy (2022) *The Italian Contribution to the EU Strategy for the Indo-Pacific*, Available at: https://www.esteri.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/THE_ITALIAN_CONTRIBUTION_TO_THE_EU_STRATEGY_FOR_THE_INDO_PACIFIC.pdf. (Accessed 11 August 2022).

³⁶ ANSA (2022) *Ucraina, Draghi: “Giappone e Italia impegnate per la tregua” - Politica (Ukraine, Draghi: “Japan and Italy at Work for a Ceasefire” – Politics*, Available at: http://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/politica/2022/05/03/draghi-incontra-primo-ministro-giappone-kishida_af2cbe97-1cb9-4849-a706-43d4f544a10a.html (Accessed 11 August 2022).

³⁷ Article 11 of the Constitution of the Italian Republic (1948) and Article 9 of the Constitution of the State of Japan (1947).

soldiers.³⁸

Despite the passage of special legislation allowing the dispatch of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) in non-combat roles in Afghanistan and Iraq, in 2001, Japan has acted indirectly in support of its ally in the Middle East and Central Asia.³⁹

Despite having appointed defense attachés to their respective embassies for decades,⁴⁰ high-level talks between Rome and Tokyo on a wide range of security issues, including North Korea, were inaugurated only in May 2007, after the Japanese Parliament approved the upgrade of the Japan's Defense Agency into a ministry earlier that year.⁴¹ Given its EU membership, since 2019, Italy has participated in the EU-Japan Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), aimed at boosting connectivity and security ties between Tokyo and Brussels across Eurasia, Africa and the Indo-Pacific region.⁴² Such multilateral agreements came after a number of Italy-Japan bilateral security and intelligence agreements were signed (see also above).

In 2012, during a diplomatic visit to Japan, Italy's Ministry of Defense, Gen. Giampaolo Di Paola, meeting with his counterpart Satoshi Morimoto, signed a "Statement of Intent," pledging to enhance bilateral cooperation between Italy and

³⁸ Data on Italy's military deployment in the Middle East and Afghanistan are available at Italian Army (n.d.) *ISAF: Contributo Nazionale (ISAF: Italy's contribution)*, Available at: http://www.esercito.difesa.it/operazioni/operazioni_oltremare/Pagine/ISAF-Contributo-Nazionale.aspx (Accessed 5 March 2022). Italian Army (n.d.) *Iraq - Antica Babilonia (Iraq – Operation Ancient Babylon)*, Available at: http://www.esercito.difesa.it/operazioni/operazioni_oltremare/Pagine/Iraq-Antica-Babilonia.aspx (Accessed 5 March 2022). After a NATO Defense Ministry meeting in February 2021, Italy was assigned the lead of the NATO Mission in Iraq (NMI) from February 2022. See Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) (2021) "L'Italia nella missione Nato in Iraq (Italy in the NATO Mission in Iraq)," *IAI.it*, Available at: <https://www.iai.it/it/news/litalia-nella-missione-nato-iraq> (Accessed 5 March 2022) and Ministry of Defense of Italy (2015) *National Contribute Operation Prima Parthica*, Available at: https://www.difesa.it/EN/Operations/InternationalOperations/Prima_Parthica/Pagine/National_contribute.aspx (Accessed 15 September 2021).

³⁹ See John P. Tuman, Jonathan R. Strand, and Majid Shirali (2017) "Foreign Policy Alignment with The War on Terror: The Case of Japan's Foreign Aid Program," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 17(3).

⁴⁰ Ministry of Defense of Japan (2021) *Bōei Chūzaikan No Haken Jōkyō (Current Situation of the Defense Officials Posted Abroad)*, Available at: https://www.mod.go.jp/j/publication/shiritai/chuuzaiakan/pdf/haken_jyoukyou.pdf (Accessed 11 August 2022). Embassy of Italy in Tokyo (2021) *Gli Uffici (Our Offices)*, Available at: https://ambtokyo.esteri.it/ambasciata_tokyo/it/chi-siamo/gli-uffici.html (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁴¹ Ministry of Defense of Japan (2007) *Kyūma bōei daijin no itaria hōmon (Defense Minister Kyūma's Visit to Italy)*, Available at: https://warf.da.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/11591426/www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/exchange/area/2007/20070503_ita-j.html (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁴² Axel Berkofsky (2021) "The EU-Japan Strategic Partnership Agreement: Getting Down to Work, Finally?," *ISPI Online*, Available at: <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publicazione/eu-japan-strategic-partnership-agreement-getting-down-work-finally-29509> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

Japan in the field of international security, particularly concerning anti-piracy operations and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.⁴³ This event reflected changes observed in Japan's security posture since the release of the 2010 National Defense Program Guidelines⁴⁴ and Japan's SDF proactive engagement in peacekeeping and anti-piracy operations in the Horn of Africa.⁴⁵

As a follow-up to the 2012 agreement, in July 2014, against the backdrop of Prime Minister Abe's reforms in the security sector, Italy's Chief of the Defense Staff Admiral Luigi Binelli Mantelli visited Japan, laying the foundation of actual bilateral cooperation in cybersecurity, space and missile defense, and training and exchanges between special military units.⁴⁶ Particularly, Tokyo appeared keen to acquire strategic knowledge from Rome on the Middle East and North Africa, a year after the In Amenas hostage crisis (Algeria), which had resulted in the killing of 10 Japanese nationals.⁴⁷ That year, Tokyo also committed to supporting NATO/EU counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, off the coast of Somalia. Between late 2014 and early 2015, a series of drills and exchanges involving the Italian Navy destroyer Andrea Doria and the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Forces (JMSDF) 6th patrol unit command took place off the Gulf

⁴³ Ministry of Defense of Italy (2012) *Visita del Ministro Di Paola in Giappone (Defense Minister Di Paola's visit to Japan)*, Available at: https://www.difesa.it/Il_Ministro/Eventi/Pagine/VisitadelMinistroDiPaolainGiappone.aspx (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁴⁴ Ken Jimbo (2012) "Japan's National Defense Planning for the New Security Environment: The 2010 National Defense Program Guidelines," *DTP Policy Briefs*, Policy Brief 3, pp. 3-5.

⁴⁵ In 2011, the Japan Self-Defense Forces had opened their first base abroad since the end of the Second World War, in Djibouti. With the launch of the UN peacekeeping mission to South Sudan (UNMISS), the scope of Japanese military operation in the area was further expanded. Neil Melvin (2019) "The Foreign Military Presence in the Horn of Africa Region," *SIPRI Background Paper*, pp. 10-11.

⁴⁶ Stefano Carrer (2014) "Il Capo di Stato Maggiore Difesa: "Più cooperazione Italia-Giappone per la sicurezza di tutti (More Cooperation Between Italy and Japan for Everyone's Security)", *Il Sole 24 Ore*, Available at: <http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/notizie/2014-07-18/il-capo-stato-maggiore-difesa-piu-cooperazione-italia-giappone-la-sicurezza-tutti-111135.shtml?uuiid=ABGGp7bB> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁴⁷ The Japan Times (2013) *Japan's Toll Highest in Hostage Crisis*, Available at: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/01/25/national/japans-toll-highest-in-hostage-crisis/> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

of Aden.⁴⁸ The aim of this operation, a historical first for the JMSDF,⁴⁹ was to promote cooperation and capacity building within the framework of the EU's Operation Atalanta (EUNAVFOR), aimed at countering piracy in a key area for global trade networks.⁵⁰

Japan's new security legislation, passed in 2015, enhanced actual security cooperation with the US and allies in multinational peacekeeping efforts.⁵¹ Against this backdrop, during a ministry-level meeting in Japan, in May 2017, Tokyo and Rome signed an agreement on the transfer of defense equipment and technology, finally ratified by the Italian Parliament in January 2019.⁵² As a follow-up to the agreement, in April 2022, Minister of Defense Lorenzo Guerini visited Japan to oversee the signing of a Technical Arrangement between the Italian Air Force (ITAF) and the Japanese Aerial Self-Defense Forces (ASDF), which will provide ASDF pilots training opportunities at the International Flight Training School in Lecce-Galatina, southeastern Italy.⁵³ This agreement can be interpreted as additional evidence of Italy's aforementioned proactive engagement in the Asia-Pacific region under Draghi's leadership, which, along its discursive emphasis on freedom, democracy, rule-based order and governance of the commons, seems to have a distinctive "neo-mercantilist" rationale, in light of growing

⁴⁸ Italian Navy (2014) *EU Naval Force Flagship Andrea Doria Conducts Counter-Piracy Exercise with Japanese Warship JS Takanami in the Gulf of Aden*, Available at: <https://www.marina.difesa.it/EN/Conosciamoci/notizie/Pagine/doriaeunavfor.aspx>. (Accessed 12 August 2022).

⁴⁹ MOFA (2014) *Nichi-EU kaizoku taishō kyōdō kunren (Japan-EU Anti-Piracy Joint Naval Drills)*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/release/press4_001341.html (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁵⁰ Italian Navy (2015) *ITS Doria in the Gulf of Aden in Cooperation With the Chinese, Japanese and Korean Navies to Guarantee Safety at Sea*, Available at: <https://www.marina.difesa.it/EN/Conosciamoci/notizie/Pagine/doriacooperation.aspx> (Accessed 5 March 2022). After the conclusion of the EU-Japan Strategic Partnership Agreement, in 2019, such instances of EU-Japan naval cooperation have been regularized. A case in point is the joint EU-Japan naval exercise in the Gulf of Aden, organized in October 2020, with the participation of JMSDF destroyer Ōnami. See European External Action Service (EEAS) (2020) *EU-Japan Joint Naval Exercise*, Available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/japan/86483/eu-japan-joint-naval-exercise_en (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁵¹ Andrew L. Oros (2017) *Japan's Security Renaissance: New Policies and Politics for the Twenty-First Century*, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 76-78.

⁵² Ministry of Defense of Italy (2017) *Italy-Japan: Stronger Cooperation in the Defence Sector*, Available at: https://www.difesa.it/EN/Primo_Piano/Pagine/jp.aspx (Accessed 5 March 2022). Chamber of Deputies of Italy (2018) *Accordo Con Il Governo Del Giappone Concernente Il Trasferimento Di Equipaggiamenti e Di Tecnologia Di Difesa (Agreement with the Government of Japan on Defense Equipment and Technology Transfers)*, Available at: http://documenti.camera.it/leg18/dossier/pdf/VQ1391.pdf?_1631457722493 (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁵³ Minister of Defense of Italy (2022) *Il Ministro Guerini in Giappone Incontra Il Ministro Kishi (Minister Guerini in Japan Meets Minister Kishi)*, Available at: http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:https://www.difesa.it/Primo_Piano/Pagine/Giappone.aspx. (Accessed 11 August 2022).

demand for military procurement and capacity building in the Asia-Pacific.⁵⁴

Contemporary economic relations

As members of the G7 group and organizations such as the OECD, Italy and Japan are among the world's largest economies and most industrialized countries. Despite having received generous economic aid from the US in the aftermath of the Second World War, neither of them has received official aid from the other. However, Japan has offered economic aid to Italy and Europe after natural disasters or, more recently, war. For instance, in 2009, Tokyo donated 64 million euros to build a new earthquake-proof gymnasium and shelter and a concert hall in L'Aquila, in the aftermath of a devastating earthquake that hit the Italian city.⁵⁵ More recently, in response to a request by US President Joe Biden amidst rising tensions between Russia and Ukraine in early February 2022, the Japanese government announced the diversion of cargoes with hundreds of thousands of tons of LNG to Europe, in an attempt to hedge against potential cutoffs of the gas supply from Russia.⁵⁶ Ever since, Italy, once dependent on Russian LNG for 40% of its total demand, has cut its reliance on Russian gas imports by 15%. During Kishida's May 2022 visit to Italy, Prime Minister Mario Draghi officially recognized Japan's role in assisting Italy and the EU during the first weeks of the conflict in Ukraine.⁵⁷

Both being manufacturing and export-oriented economies, Japan and Italy share several similarities in their trade behavior. Italy is the world's 10th largest exporter and

⁵⁴ Giulio Pugliese (2022) "The European Union's Security Intervention in the Indo-Pacific: Between Multilateralism and Mercantile Interests," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*.

⁵⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Itaria kiso dēta (Italy: Basic Data)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/italy/data.html> (Accessed 12 August 2022).

⁵⁶ It might be worth noting that until early 2022 Europe depended for almost 40% of its total gas supply on imports from Russia. Japan, the world's second largest LNG consumer, relies on imports of LNG from Russia only for 8% of its total. See Yuka Obayashi and Marwa Rashad (2022) *Japan to Divert LNG to Europe amid Russia-Ukraine Tension*, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/japan-diverting-lng-europe-some-already-route-industry-minister-2022-02-09/> (Accessed 12 August 2022). Juntaro Arai (2022) *EU Seeks Extra LNG from Japan, Hedging against Russia Cutoff*, Available at: <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Ukraine-war/EU-seeks-extra-LNG-from-Japan-hedging-against-Russia-cutoff> (Accessed 12 August 2022).

⁵⁷ Reuters (2022) *Italy's Draghi Thanks Japan for Redirecting Gas Cargoes to Europe*, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/italys-draghi-thanks-japan-redirecting-gas-cargoes-europe-2022-05-04/> (Accessed 12 August 2022).

depends on world markets for 60% of its GDP.⁵⁸ Japan, instead, is the world's 4th largest exporter, but its economy is relatively less dependent on exports (38%). Manufactured goods constitute the majority of the two countries' overseas sales, though, since 2015, Japan has increased its service export quotas. Excluding China, both countries' trade patterns are regionally oriented. In addition to being Japan's largest supplier of imports and second largest market, China has in fact emerged as Italy's third largest supplier, after Germany and France.⁵⁹

Traditionally, Japan has adopted protectionist trade policies on a series of items which are key to Italian exports, such as foodstuff, alcoholic beverages and leather goods.⁶⁰ This notwithstanding, Italy has been benefiting from a trade surplus with Japan over the last decade. Trade relations have been favored by both public and private activism since the 1980s, as detailed below.

The Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) operates in Italy from its national headquarters in Milan, in coordination with the major general trading companies (*sōgō shōsha*), such as Mitsubishi Corp., and Italian and Japanese institutions in the country. On the Japanese end, the Italian Chamber of Commerce in Japan, the Italy-Japan Foundation, the Embassy of Italy, through the Institute Trade Agency (ITA-ICE), are the main actors supporting Italian entrepreneurs seeking business opportunities in Japan.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit the global economy in 2020 and 2021, a positive trend had been particularly encouraged by the conclusion and entry into force of the Japan-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), resulting in the immediate or gradual lift of several trade tariffs on nearly all EU exports to Japan. Italian exports to

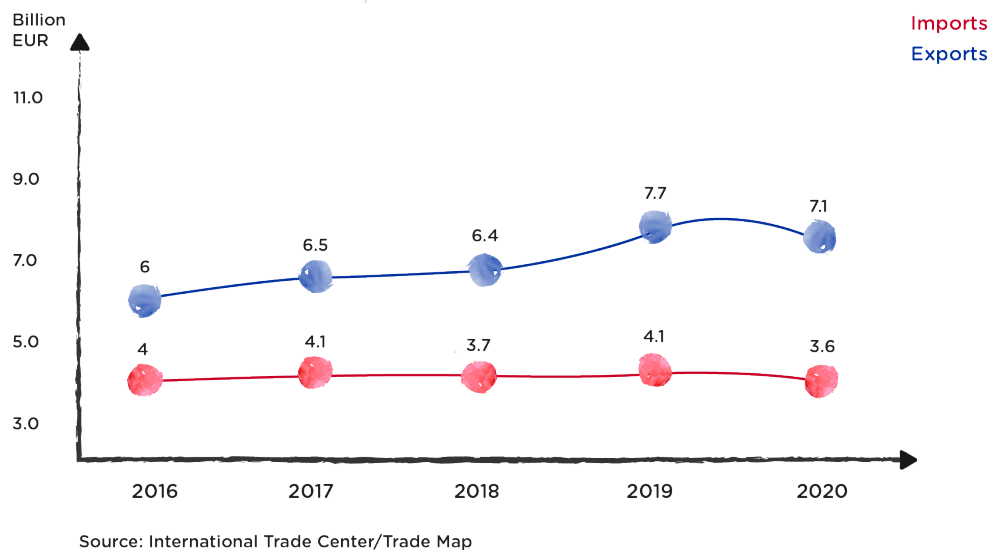
⁵⁸ Santander Trade (2021) *Italian Foreign Trade in Figures*, Available at: https://santandertrade.com/en/portal/analyse-markets/italy/foreign-trade-in-figures#classification_by_country (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁵⁹ Santander Trade (2021) *Japanese Foreign Trade in Figures*, Available at: <https://santandertrade.com/en/portal/analyse-markets/japan/foreign-trade-in-figures> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁶⁰ Embassy of Italy in Japan and Directorate General for Country Promotion (2022) *Info Mercati Esteri: Giappone (Foreign Markets Updates: Japan)*, p. 23, Available at: https://www.infomercatiesteri.it/public/ime/schede-sintesi/r_126_giappone.pdf (Accessed 12 August 2022).

Japan in 2019 rose to a total of 7.7 billion euros, up by 19% from the previous year.⁶¹ Instead, imports from Japan have remained stable, except for 2019, when they recorded a three-year high, at 4.1 billion euros. Major export items from Italy are tobacco derivatives and substitutes (ex. electronic cigarettes), pharmaceutical products, clothing and leather goods, vehicles, food and industrial machinery. Conversely, major Japanese export items to Italy are concentrated in the machinery and vehicles sectors.⁶²

Italy's trade with Japan in billion euros



Despite being perceived as a risk-prone investment destination for a number of “locational disadvantages,” including the poor state of its infrastructure, conflictual labor relations and an uncertain political and economic environment, Italy has attracted the interest of Japanese investors since the early 1960s.⁶³ Large manufacturers in the food, apparel and motor vehicle sectors, such as Ajinomoto, YKK and Honda have been pioneers of the Italian market, establishing joint ventures and subsidiaries throughout

⁶¹ Trade Map (n.d) *Italy-Japan Exports*, Available at: https://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx?nvpm=1%7c381%7c%7c392%7c%7cTOTAL%7c%7c%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c2%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1 (Accessed 12 August 2022).

⁶² Trade Map (n.d) *Italy-Japan Imports*, Available at: https://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx?nvpm=1%7c381%7c%7c392%7c%7cTOTAL%7c%7c%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c2%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1 (Accessed 12 August 2022).

⁶³ Corrado Molteni (1996) “Japanese Manufacturing Investment in Italy” in James Darby (ed.) *Japan and the European Periphery*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 146.

the 1960s and the 1980s. Their relative success, though, has not been enough to cause a major change in the perception of Italy in the Japanese business world. Amidst a massive growth of Japanese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the mid-1980s, Japan's most competitive industries of the time (electronics and motor vehicles) have *de facto* neglected Italy. Thus, Japanese investments to Italy have concentrated in "traditional" sectors, such as machinery, chemicals and household electric appliances.⁶⁴ Recent developments point however to a gradual change. Since the early 2000s, Japanese operators such as Denso (car parts), Sumitomo Electric (automotive, industrial tools), Kagome (food), NTT Data (ICT), Muji (retail), Mitsubishi (food), Hitachi (railway systems and car batteries) and Calsonic Kansei (automotive, exhaust systems) have invested in Italy through direct investments, joint-ventures and mergers and acquisitions. An increase in Japanese FDI has been observed since 2015, after the acquisition of the majority share in Ansaldo STS, a railway system company, part of the Italian state-owned Finmeccanica/Leonardo group, and subsequent acquisitions of stakes in companies in the railways and car making sectors.⁶⁵ The acquisition of Magneti Marelli, a former Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA) group company, by Calsonic Kansei, completed in 2019, for 6.2 billion euros, represents one of the largest capital investments by a Japanese company in Italy. According to the Japanese government's estimates, Japanese total investments in Italy amount to 585 billion yen (4.5 billion euros), versus a mere 1 billion euros invested, as of 2019, in Japan by Italian companies, mostly in the manufacturing (food, beverages and tobacco, and machinery) and services (wholesale and retail, car repair) sectors.⁶⁶

A promising sector in bilateral economic exchanges is that of defense equipment and technologies. In the context of an increase in Italy's military equipment sales, in the

⁶⁴ Ibidem, pp. 138–39.

⁶⁵ Fabio Savelli (2016) "Hitachi Con Fiamm: Intesa Italia-Giappone Nelle Batterie Auto (Hitachi and Fiamm: Italy-Japan Agreement on Car Batteries)," *Corriere Della Sera*, p. 36. Retrieved from: <https://archivio.corriere.it> (Accessed 12 August 2022).

⁶⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Itaria kiso dēta (Italy: Basic Data)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/italy/data.html> (Accessed 5 March 2022). Due to discontinued reporting, data on Italian FDI to Japan have been retrieved in *Ambasciata d'Italia in Giappone and Direzione Generale per la Promozione del Sistema Paese (2015) Info Mercati Esteri: Giappone (Foreign Markets Updates: Japan)*, Available at: https://consosaka.esteri.it/consolato_osaka/resource/doc/2015/08/info_mercati_esteri_-_giappone.pdf (Accessed 12 August 2022).

2015-2016 period,⁶⁷ authorized transfers of military equipment from Italy to Japan amounted to 300.8 million euros in 2015 only, more than twenty times the total value of transfers to Italy's Asian major client, South Korea.⁶⁸ Japan is Italy's third largest client of defense equipment (particularly 12,7-mm-and-above caliber weapons and ammunition, bombs and missiles, aircraft, and software) in Asia, after South Korea and Indonesia. During the above-mentioned high-level meetings in April and May 2022, the need for Italy-Japan cooperation in the defense sector has been stressed. In particular, Rome, a partner in the Tempest program along with the UK and Sweden,⁶⁹ has expressed interest in the possibility of joining the development of Japan's next-generation F-X fighter jet, through its state-controlled aerospace and defense company Leonardo.⁷⁰

However, these exchanges remain relatively marginal in both countries' total trade accounts. In its historical data on Italian foreign trade, the Italian Institute of Statistics further stresses the fact that Japan absorbs only 1.3-1.6% of the total volume of Italian exports, versus Germany's 12%, France's 10.5% and the US' 9.6%. In Asia, China is the largest importer of Italian goods, accounting for 3% of Italian exports.⁷¹

In addition to trade, tourism is certainly one of the major sources of capital inflow to Italy from Japan. Japanese tourism to Italy grew to an unprecedented rate

⁶⁷ Chamber of Deputies of Italy (2021) *Relazione Sulle Operazioni Autorizzate e Svolte per Il Controllo Dell'esportazione, Importazione e Transito Dei Materiali Di Armamento, Riferita All'anno 2020 (Report on the Authorized Operations Carried Out on the Export, Import and Transit Control of Arms, As Per 2020)*, p. 2, Available at: <http://documenti.camera.it/leg18/dossier/pdf/DI0370.pdf> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁶⁸ Ibidem, p. 4.

⁶⁹ Tom Kington (2022) *Tempest Program, Russian Invasion Drive Growth in Italy's Defense Budget*, Available at: <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2022/07/26/tempest-program-russian-invasion-drives-growth-in-italys-defense-budget/> (Accessed 12 August 2022)

⁷⁰ Marco Battaglia (2022) *Tempest globale. Roma, Londra e Tokyo progettano il caccia del futuro (Global Tempest: Rome, London and Tokyo Design Tomorrow's Fighter Jet)*, Available at: <https://formiche.net/2022/07/tempest-globale-roma-londra-e-tokyo-progettano-il-caccia-del-futuro/> (Accessed 12 August 2022)

⁷¹ MAECI (2022) *Info Mercati Esteri, Tabella 5A: Principali Paesi Destinatarie Delle Esportazioni Esportazioni (Foreign Markets Update: Table 5A: Major Export Partners)*, Available at: https://www.infomercatiesteri.it/public/osservatorio/interscambio-commerciale-mondo/Tabella%205A%20-%20Principali%20Paesi%20destinatari%20delle%20esportazioni_1639733643.pdf (Accessed 11 August 2022).

throughout the 1980s and reached its peak in 1997, at 2.17 million tourists.⁷² Despite restaurant scams exposed by the Japanese press in recent years,⁷³ Italy remains a popular destination for Japanese nationals traveling to Europe. According to statistics published by the Italian Tourism Agency, in 2019, with a total number of Japanese tourists amounting to 1.13 million, the total expense for accommodation and goods and services was 913 million euros, slightly decreasing from the previous year (949 million euros).⁷⁴ On average, Japanese tourists (a third of which is composed of senior couples aged 60 and above) spend around 6 days in Italy, mostly between art and cultural-historical centers like Rome, Florence and Venice, and Italy's economic and trade hub of Milan.⁷⁵ In addition to Japanese tour operators, essential guides to Italy with useful information for Japanese travelers are prepared by the Italian Embassy in Tokyo, the Italian Consulate in Osaka and the Italian Chamber of Commerce in Japan and available online.⁷⁶ On the other hand, a record 162,769 Italian tourists visited Japan in 2019, up by almost 3 times the number recorded a decade earlier, and up by more than 4.5 times the number in 2003, of 35,900 tourists,⁷⁷ signaling a growing interest toward the country. Travel restrictions enacted due to the COVID-19 pandemic have inevitably caused a dramatic reduction of the number of Japanese tourists entering Italy in 2020 and 2021 and, consequently, their total contribution to the Italian economy has

⁷² Justin McCurry (2009) *Japanese Tourist Turns down Free Holiday Offered by Italy as Apology*, Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jul/31/japanese-tourists-italy> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁷³ Ibidem.

⁷⁴ Embassy of Italy in Japan and Directorate General for Country Promotion (2022) *Info Mercati Esteri: Giappone, Scheda Turismo (Foreign Markets Update: Japan: Tourism)*, Available at: https://www.infomercatiesteri.it/public/ime/schede-turismo/r_126_giappone_turismo.pdf (Accessed 12 August 2022).

⁷⁵ Ibidem.

⁷⁶ Italian Chamber of Commerce in Japan (2021) *A Useful Guide for Traveling to Italy from Japan*, Available at: <https://iccj.or.jp/a-useful-guide-for-traveling-to-italy-from-japan%e3%80%90updates-by-29th-january-2021%e3%80%91/> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁷⁷ JNTO (2021) *2021 nen Hōnichi Gaikyakusū (Sōsū) (Foreign Tourists Visiting Japan in 2021 (Total))*, Available at: https://www.jnto.go.jp/jpn/statistics/since2003_visitor_arrivals.pdf (Accessed 5 March 2022).

decreased by nearly 90%.⁷⁸

Cultural and people-to-people relations

Records of cultural relations between Italy and Japan go back seven centuries, well before the two countries' emergence as modern nation-states.⁷⁹ The first person in Italy to hear of a land called "Zipangu" (probably from the Chinese for Japan, *ribenguo*), was a prison inmate and writer known as Rustichello, a native of Pisa, Tuscany, in the mid-1290s. Taken prisoner, he ended up sharing his cell with a Venetian merchant, who went by the name of Marco Polo, who recounted of having heard of an "island to the East" of China, which was rich in "gold" and "red pearls," at the court of Yuan ruler Kublai.⁸⁰ The manuscripts of Marco Polo's *Travels* rose to immense popularity across medieval Europe and informed the continent's elites' imagined geography of Asia. Nearly two centuries after the first manuscript of the *Travels* saw the light, explorer Christopher Columbus, a native of Genoa, infamously believed he had reached "Zipangu" after setting foot on the island of the Caribbean which would then become known as Hispaniola/Cuba.⁸¹ In later centuries, Italian Jesuit missionaries Organtino Gnechi Soldo and Alessandro Valignano enriched their contemporaries' knowledge of distant Japan.⁸² The latter is credited with organizing the first of two embassies of Japan's warrior aristocracy to Europe, between 1584 and 1590. The second such mission, the 1613 Keichō Embassy, led by Tsunenaga Hasekura, is commemorated in a

⁷⁸ Embassy of Italy in Japan and Directorate General for Country Promotion (2022) *Info Mercati Esteri: Giappone, Scheda Turismo (Foreign Markets Update: Japan: Tourism)*, Available at: https://www.infomercatiesteri.it/public/ime/schede-turismo/r_126_giappone_turismo.pdf. (Accessed 12 August 2022).

⁷⁹ For a discussion of Italy's path toward becoming a modern nation-state, see John Agnew (2017) "Working the Margins: The Geopolitical Marking of Italian National Identity," *Carte Italiane*, 2 (11).

⁸⁰ Marco Polo (1982) *Il Milione (The Travels of Marco Polo)*, Rome: L'Unità - Editori Riuniti, ch. 155, Available at: <https://it.wikisource.org/wiki/Milione/155> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁸¹ For a detailed analysis, please see Adolfo Tamburello (2003) "La leggendarietà del Giappone (The Myths Around Japan)" in Adolfo Tamburello (ed.) *Italia-Giappone: 450 anni (Italy-Japan: 450 Years)*, vol. 1, Roma: Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, pp. 13–15.

⁸² See M. Antoni J. Üçerler (2003) "Alessandro Valignano: Man, Missionary, and Writer," *Renaissance Studies*, 17 (3) and Satoru Obara (2003) "Gli Insegnamenti e Le Opere Del Valignano (Valignano's Teachings and Works)," in Piero Corradini (ed.), *2001 Italia in Giappone: Atti Del Convegno Internazionale "Cinquecento Anni Di Rapporti Culturali Tra Italia e Giappone" (2001 Italy and Japan: Proceedings of the International Symposium "Five Hundred Years of Cultural Relations between Italy and Japan)* Roma: Dimensione Stampa.

fresco in the Sala of the Corazzieri, in the *Quirinale*, the official residence of the president of the Italian Republic.⁸³

As a result of these century-long exchanges, today there is a “consistent capital of mutual sympathy” and fascination between the two countries.⁸⁴ As of 2019, nearly 15,000 Japanese nationals reside in Italy, as opposed to barely 5,000 Italians in Japan.⁸⁵ Direct flights between the two countries, operated by Japan Airlines (JAL), All Nippon (ANA) and Alitalia, were regular during the weeks before the COVID-19 epidemic, with departures from Italy’s major hubs of Milan Malpensa, Rome Fiumicino and Venice Marco Polo and arrivals at the major hubs of the archipelago, namely Tokyo Haneda, Tokyo Narita and Kansai International. After peaking in the late 1990s, Japanese tourism to Italy has remained rather stable in the last two decades, at 1 million tourists, reflecting major economic and demographic trends of contemporary Japan.⁸⁶ Contrastingly, particularly because of a slight depreciation of the yen begun in 2013 and the success of the Japanese pavilion at the Milan Expo in 2015, Japan rose to be one of the most popular tourist destinations for Italy, with 163,000 Italians visiting in 2019.⁸⁷

As previously illustrated, cultural exchanges between Italy and Japan have been constant throughout the 20th century, constituting the cornerstone of post-war cooperation in many diverse fields, ranging from art and architecture, to science and

⁸³ It is worth noting that the two embassies took place in an era of mounting pressure against Christian communities and, particularly, on Christian *daimyō* (warlords) in the archipelago. According to some, the bans and ensuing persecutions of Christians were justified not only by Japanese rulers’ fears of Spanish and Portuguese conquest but also by evidence that the activities of Christian missionaries were often associated with that of Southern European traders, who purchased Japanese slaves in the archipelago and then sold them across Asia. Coincidentally, trading in slaves was also the activity of Florence-born merchants, Antonio and Francesco Carletti, who visited Japan in the 1590s. See on this Thomas Nelson (2004) “Slavery in Medieval Japan,” *Monumenta Nipponica*, 59(4). Giuseppe Tucci (1951) “Japanese Ambassadors as Roman Patricians,” *East and West*, 2(2), pp. 65–71. Fosco Maraini (2003) “La Scoperta Del Giappone in Italia (Italy’s Discovery of Japan),” in Adolfo Tamburello (ed.), *Italia-Giappone: 450 anni (Italy-Japan: 450 years)*, vol. 1, Roma: Istituto italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente.

⁸⁴ Author’s interview with an Italian diplomat, August 2021.

⁸⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Itaria kiso dēta (Italy: Basic Data)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/italy/data.html> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁸⁶ The last available figure in 2019 is of 1.3 million. Embassy of Italy in Japan and Directorate General for Country Promotion (2022), “*Info Mercati Esteri: Giappone, Scheda Turismo*” (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Italy, July 29, 2022*), https://www.infomercatiesteri.it/public/ime/schede-turismo/r_126_giappone_turismo.pdf. (Accessed 12 August 2022).

⁸⁷ JNTO (2020) *Itaria No Kiso Dēta (Italy: Basic Data)*, Available at: https://www.jnto.go.jp/jpn/inbound_market/market_basic_italy.pdf (Accessed 5 March 2022).

technology.⁸⁸ Today, Japanese cuisine and youth culture (particularly anime and manga) enjoy considerable popularity in Italy.⁸⁹ A recent Dentsū survey showed that Italy ranked number 10 in the list of the most Japan-friendly countries in the world (first among the Europeans).⁹⁰ On top of this, the Japan Foundation promotes the study of Japanese language and culture, while Japanese studies curricula, encompassing the study of Japanese linguistics and philology, translation, literature, arts, philosophy, history and society, economy and international relations, is available in 16 public and private universities, with Ca' Foscari University Venice, University of Napoli "L'Orientale" and University of Rome "La Sapienza" as the country's major research centers in the field.⁹¹ Furthermore, since the early 1970s, an Italian Association for Japanese studies has been active in the field of the promotion of academic exchange with Japan and expert knowledge production and dissemination through annual conferences and publications.⁹²

Jointly organized large-scale events, such as the 1995-96 "Japan in Italy," organized in the aftermath of Emperor Akihito's visit to Italy, in September 1993, and "2001. Italy in Japan" served the two country's aim to foster mutual understanding and

⁸⁸ Since 1954, the two countries have sponsored bilateral cultural exchanges engaging actors in both the public and the private sectors. Historical and cultural heritage in Italy and the Vatican have been at the center of Japanese interest for Italy. In the early 1990s, Japanese broadcaster Nippon TV invested 4.2 million dollars in the restoration of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. In 1988, research cooperation schemes in cutting-hedge fields, such as advanced medicine, cancer treatment, space science and renewable energies, was initiated. See The New York Times (1990) *Nippon TV and Vatican*, Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/03/29/arts/nippon-tv-and-vatican.html> (Accessed 5 March 2022). MAECI (2021) *Executive Programme of Cooperation in the Field of Science and Technology between the Government of Italy and the Government of Japan for the Years 2021-2023*, Available at: https://www.esteri.it/mae/resource/doc/2021/01/pe_signed_italy_japan_s_38_t_protocol_2021_2023.pdf (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁸⁹ Clarida Salvadori (2009) "Il Sol Levante Lungo Il Tevere (The Rising Sun on the Tevere)," *Corriere Della Sera*, Roma edition, p. 16, Retrieved from: <https://archivio.corriere.it> (Accessed 5 March 2022). Valerio Brera (2021) *Per la prima volta in Italia il libro più venduto è un manga. L'editrice Bovini: «Ora non si torna indietro» - L'intervista (Interview: For the First Time in Italy, The Top Selling Book is a Manga. Bovini (Publisher): "There Is No Way Back Now")*, Available at: <https://www.open.online/2021/09/06/fumetti-manga-one-piece-libro-piu-venduto-italia-intervista-a-claudia-bovini-star-comics/> (Accessed 12 August 2022).

⁹⁰ Kei Nakasato (2019) *Nihon No Koto Ga Suki Na Kuni Wa Fuete Iru? 'Nihon Fan' o Saguru (Have Japan-Loving Countries Increased? Researching 'Japan Fans')*, Available at: <https://dentsu-ho.com/articles/6770> (Accessed 12 August 2022).

⁹¹ Istituto Giapponese di Cultura in Roma (2021) *Università e Istituti Di Ricerca per Gli Studi Giapponesi (Universities and Research Institutes for Japanese Studies)*, Available at: <https://jfroma.it/biblioteca/universita-italiane/> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁹² AISTUGIA (n.d.) *Associazione e Organi (The Association and Members)*, Available at: <https://www.aistugia.it/index.php/associazione/associazione-organi> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

knowledge.⁹³ This latter event particularly, a 15-month long cultural exhibition centered on the display of Italian art, fashion, design and classical music in 120 locations across the archipelago, required, according to media reports of the time, a joint public-private 40 billion lira (today's 20 million euros) worth investment, aimed at "a Renaissance in Japan-Italy relations."⁹⁴ However successful, the event attracted criticism from Italian art historians and curators, who lamented the "ransack" of national museums.⁹⁵

The 2005 Aichi Expo was another key event consolidating Italy's reputation in Japan. With its 3,500,000 visitors, the Italian pavilion emerged as the most popular of the whole expo.⁹⁶ In fact, a recent NHK survey ranked Italy as the 7th most popular foreign country among the Japanese, following Canada but ahead of Germany,⁹⁷ seemingly contributing to the popularity of the Italian language. A key role in this is being played by the Institute of Italian Culture (IIC) in Tokyo, teaching Italian language to an average of 7,000 students, who are attending courses on a yearly basis.⁹⁸ Moreover, the Institute, which is one of the most "liked" foreign institutions on Facebook in Japan, with nearly 70,000 followers, has acted as a catalyst for Japanese students looking for study opportunities in Italy, organizing events in collaboration with

⁹³ Fondazione Italia Giappone (n.d.) Giappone in Italia 95/96 (Japan in Italy 95/96), Available at: <https://www.italiagiappone.it/1995.html> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁹⁴ This effort was coordinated by a newly established Foundation, the Italy-Japan Foundation (Inichizaidan) and a special committee created within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy, after the conclusion of a memorandum of understanding between the Italian and Japanese governments, in 1999, strongly supported by Ambassador Umberto Vattani, then secretary general of the foreign ministry. See Raffaella Polato (2001) "Cultura e Affari, Il 'Sistema Italia' Sbarca a Tokio (Culture and Business, The 'Italy System' Lands in Tokyo)," *Corriere Della Sera*, p. 9. Fondazione Italia Giappone (n.d.) *Umberto Vattani*, Available at: <https://www.italiagiappone.it/vattani.html> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁹⁵ Pierluigi Panza (2001) "L'Italia è Troppo Generosa Con i Suoi Capolavori (Italy is Too Generous With Its Masterpieces)," *Corriere Della Sera*, sec. Lettere e Commenti, p. 37.

⁹⁶ Fondazione Italia Giappone (n.d.) *Expo 2005 Di Aichi (The 2005 Aichi Expo)*, Available at: <https://www.italiagiappone.it/expo2005.html> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁹⁷ NHK (2018) "*Nihonjin No Ishiki*" *Chōsa (2018) Kekka No Gaiyō (Outline of the Results of the 2018 Opinion Survey: "What the Japanese Think")*, p. 20, Available at: https://www.nhk.or.jp/bunken/research/yonon/pdf/20190107_1.pdf (Accessed 12 August 2022).

⁹⁸ Dario Fertilio (2009) "Giappone, Scelta per 500 Mila (Japan, Top Choice for 500 Thousand Students)," *Corriere Della Sera*, p. 11. Retrieved from: <https://archivio.corriere.it> (Accessed 12 August 2022).

Italian universities and sponsoring a dedicated website.⁹⁹

Despite some positive developments, however, media coverage of Japan in Italy and vice versa seems circumscribed to international political or sports events, and natural disasters. Often, it seems to reinforce stereotypes (though relatively positive) and, particularly with regards to the Italian coverage of Japan, exoticism. Major news outlets such as national broadcaster Rai, or newspapers such as *Il Corriere della Sera* and *La Repubblica*, have Beijing-based correspondents who occasionally cover Japan. Other minor newspapers such as *Il manifesto* and *Il Foglio* offer regular in-depth analysis, though they do not have correspondents in Japan. Oppositely, the *Yomiuri* is the only Japanese newspaper maintaining a correspondence office in Rome.

Conclusion and recommendations

This chapter has attempted to shed light on the nature and extent of bilateral ties between Italy and Japan since the 1950s, with special attention to their evolution in the 21st century. It has tried to do so by providing an in-depth analysis of the cultural, economic, political and military relations against the backdrop of a 7-century long history of interactions. The results might be summarized as follows.

First, political ties between Tokyo and Rome are stable and friendly and strengthened by the widespread popularity of several aspects of Japanese culture in Italy and of an overall positive image enjoyed by Italy among the Japanese public. This, especially since the early 2010s, has likely contributed to enhancing economic ties along the lines of a mutually beneficial partnership. Particularly, massive Japanese investment in key sectors of the Italian economy, such as railway technology development and car parts manufacturing, demonstrated that Italy is not perceived as it was in the 1980s, as a risky investment destination. Instead, it is recognized that some of its companies possess skills and know-how that can contribute to maintaining Japanese multinational operators', such as Hitachi's, technological hedge in key sectors of the world economy, like infrastructure and logistics, against emerging competitors in

⁹⁹ It has been noted that, in addition to traditional sectors such as music and art, in recent years, "non-traditional" sectors, such as engineering and medicine, particularly in universities offering degrees in English, have been attractive to Japanese students. Author's interview with Paolo Calvetti, former director of the IIC, July 2021.

Asia and the world, while maintaining jobs in Italy or supporting their creation. Furthermore, since the entry into force of the Japan-EU EPA, in 2019, Italian food, beverage, apparel and tobacco products exporters' quota has been on the rise, benefiting Italy's manufacturing sector, before the nationwide COVID-19 related lockdowns and industrial production halts. There are however, structural limitations to further development of economic ties, including the decrease of Japanese demand for foreign goods and decline in capital outflows in the aftermath of the current global pandemic crisis.¹⁰⁰

Second, bilateral diplomacy is likely to revolve more distinctively, in the next few years, around security issues. Since late February 2022, an EU-Japan strategic alignment and coordination in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Moscow's economic retaliatory measures against the EU have been observed. In addition, as one of the major actors in the Mediterranean basin, Italy possesses key strategic insights and resources regarding North Africa and the Middle East, increasingly important regions for Japan's diplomacy, particularly after the 2013 and 2015 hostage crises. Considering these facts, the 2015 and 2017 agreements on the security of information and military technology, combined with domestic transformations pushed forward by the second Abe administration, point in the direction of enhanced military and security cooperation in international theaters. One model area for this cooperation is currently the Horn of Africa, where Japan already supports the EU's joint anti-piracy operation and UN-led peacekeeping activities, based on the 2019 Japan-EU Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA). Consequently, broader military exchanges between European countries and Japan, combined with growing military tensions in the Asia-Pacific, will possibly continue to have an impact on EU member states' industrial strategies and be a driver for Italian private and public firms operating in the security and military sectors. In this sense, Leonardo's existing cooperative agreements with Mitsubishi Heavy Industries on the Tempest program and possible collaboration in the Japanese FX-fighter program deserve attention.

In light of the above, some recommendations are presented hereafter. As shown

¹⁰⁰ The Japan Times (2021) *Japan's Capital Spending Extends Declines as Firms Tighten Purse Strings*, Available at: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2021/06/01/business/economy-business/capital-expenditure-first-quarter/> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

above, since the mid-1990s, a series of cultural events organized on a frequent basis in both Italy and Japan have helped to promote and publicize mutual knowledge. Meanwhile, there has been an increase in Japan-related research output and academic knowledge production. Despite all this, Japan scholars have been involved only marginally in the public debate and in policy counseling. Given Rome's recent, EU-driven, emphasis on the Asia-Pacific region and growing cooperation with Tokyo on a series of key issues as illustrated above, the creation of specific fora aimed at enhancing dialogues between scholars and policymakers on relevant issues related to Italy-Japan and, more broadly, Italy's future role in the Asia-Pacific, needs to be supported by both government and public universities. Major private Italian think-tanks, such as IAI and ISPI, already provide relevant information and analysis on such topics, but, given the relevance of the Asia-Pacific in current world affairs and the region's economic appeal to many business actors, increased participation in knowledge production and communication by public research centers and institutes with solid expertise on Japanese studies and established ties with local businesses and authorities at the national, regional and city levels is desirable. Specialists' engagement with policymakers and the broader public must start from an improved involvement of Japan scholars in Italy's major media outlets and broadcasters. In the long run, such a constructive relation might lead to a progressive de-orientalization of the popular knowledge available on Japan, while making specialist knowledge more widely accessible.¹⁰¹

Besides, apart from nurturing industrial relations and increasing security cooperation, given each other's geophysical vulnerabilities and recent pledges to combat global warming and promote environmentally sustainable growth by the two governments, Rome and Tokyo should work together to build a mutually beneficial partnership in relevant areas such as climate change mitigation and adaptation and disaster preparedness, circular economy and decarbonization. For instance, Italy's advance in recycling and reuse of raw materials and eco-innovation can be a model for Japanese policymakers striving to find solutions to the country's emerging waste

¹⁰¹ Particularly, the author has produced this piece of recommendation inspired by the conversation with Paolo Calvetti, July 2021.

problem, through national initiatives and international cooperation.¹⁰² Furthermore, both countries' research and development capabilities in renewable energies and low-carbon technologies might also be beneficial in terms of international cooperation in third countries and, particularly, in emerging regions, such as Southeast Asia, where environmental problems are affecting the livelihood of millions of people and EU-Japan cooperation is already underway.¹⁰³

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¹⁰² On Italy's circular economy, see: Roberto Morabito (2019) *2° Rapporto Sull'economia Circolare in Italia: Stato Dell'economia Circolare in Italia Sulla Base Del Piano Europeo per l'economia Circolare (2nd Report on the Circular Economy in Italy Based on the European Plan for Circular Economy)*, Available at: <https://www.enea.it/it/Stampa/File/PresentazioneRobertoMorabitoEnea.pdf> (Accessed 5 March 2022). On Japan's circular economy and sustainability strategies, please refer to the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan (METI) (2020) *Circular Economy Vision 2020 Compiled*, Available at: https://www.meti.go.jp/english/press/2020/0522_003.html (Accessed 5 March 2022). World Economic Forum (2021) *Japan Launches Circular Economy Collaboration with World Economic Forum*, Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/press/2021/03/japan-launches-circular-economy-collaboration-with-world-economic-forum/> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

¹⁰³ Marco Zappa (2021) *A "Post-Carbon" Diplomacy? Japan's Southeast Asia Conundrum*, Available at: <https://www.twai.it/journal/tnote-101/> (Accessed 15 August 2022).

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Lithuania-Japan relations: From life-saving visas to lasers

By Arvydas KUMPIS*

Overview

As a relatively young country, Lithuania has both a modest and an exceptional track record of bilateral relations with Japan. Starting with the first Japanese travelers through Lithuanian territory, during the Russian Empire period (1795-1915), and ending with the highest-ranking political visits after 1990, the relations between the two countries were dynamic, despite the geographical and cultural distance.

Bilateral relations are not adequately reflected in trade volumes – Japan is not among top destinations of Lithuanian goods. The same is true looking at Japanese export markets. In recent years, Lithuania has mostly imported machinery and mechanical appliances, vehicles, man-made staple fibers, electrical machinery, and equipment; Lithuanian export to Japan mainly consists of tobacco products, optical apparatuses, and various chemical products. While agricultural products were first to be exported to Japan after 1990, presently, this branch of industry is not dominating in export volumes. Recent years mark a positive trade balance for Lithuania. Bilateral investments, on the other hand, are relatively small.

Lastly, Lithuania and Japan are linked by the personality of Chiune Sugihara, a diplomat who issued transit visas to Polish Jews in 1940, while working in Lithuania. His legacy enabled the initiation of cultural ties after 1990 and was one of the main factors promoting the positive public image of Japan. Culture festivals, pop culture events and other grassroots initiatives like planting of Japanese cherry trees and establishing Japanese-style gardens further support the positive image of Japan in

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Lithuania.

A history of Lithuania-Japan relations

It is quite difficult to talk about Japan-Lithuania relations before 1918 and there are a couple of serious reasons for that. Most importantly, the statehood of Lithuania: until 1795, the territorial unit was known as the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL). From 1569, GDL was a part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. It is not known whether anything related to Japan had reached GDL until 1795. On the other hand, Lithuanian Jesuit missionaries are said to have visited Japan before the seclusion period,¹ but their legacy is not researched thoroughly.

After the last partition of the Commonwealth among Prussia, Austria-Hungary and Russia, in 1795, the largest part of the former GDL became a part of the Russian Empire. This situation remained until 1915, when Germany occupied the Baltic region during the First World War. Therefore, the earliest connections between Japan and Lithuania, however sporadic and scarce, are found from this period. The first contact was the 1861-1863 Bunkyu Mission.² The route of the mission included what was then the Kaunas governorship. It means that the first Japanese who visited Lithuanian territory were the Bunkyu Mission members. But this fact could have slipped unnoticed and remained only in the memories of the travelers, if a young translator of the mission, Yukichi Fukuzawa, had not written about it in his diary.³ A promising person of 27-years-old back then and later one of the most important intellectuals of the 19th century, he is credited as the first Japanese who documented his visit to Lithuanian land. Fukuzawa's fellow traveler Wataru Ichikawa wrote about a railway tunnel and, intentionally or not, he mentioned that climate and people are different here from Russia,⁴ indirectly suggesting that Bunkyu Mission members were aware of the

¹ Vytautas Spečiūnas (2021) *Japonijos lietuviai (Lithuanians in Japan)*, Available at: <https://www.vle.lt/straipsnis/japonijos-lietuviai/> (Accessed 5 September 2021).

² Rio Kojima (2019) *Tarpkultūrinių ryšių ir lyginamosios intelektualinės istorijos takoskyra (The Divide Between Intercultural Relations and Comparative Intellectual History)*, Kaunas: Vytautas Magnus University Press, p. 70.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 70.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 72.

historical situation in the region and distinguished ethnic Russian lands from the incorporated ones. Eleven years later, another official mission traveled across Lithuanian lands, in late March 1873. This time it was Iwakura Mission, which took place in 1871-1873. However, the details about the visit are quite modest.⁵

Some 20 years later, there was another interesting Japanese visit in Lithuania. This time, it was not a group of people but a solitary traveler, who was greeted in Kaunas Fortress,⁶ in late February 1892. Baron Yasumasa Fukushima took a horseback ride from Berlin to Vladivostok⁷ and this adventure later brought him national fame.⁸ In contrast to the previous two missions, Fukushima's visit was presented to the public in the local newspaper. Fukushima was greeted in Kaunas with reception dinners and parades and a massive attention from the locals who, for some reasons, were shouting "Vive la France!" and throwing hats in the air.⁹ Among other details, ironically, a journalist mentioned that Fukushima did not really know how to treat his horse.¹⁰

The next event where Japanese and Lithuanian roads have crossed was the Russo-Japanese War, between 1904-1905. Here, Lithuanian nationals were fighting under the Russian flag. Looking at Lithuanian newspapers, we can find some messages and letters from the captured Lithuanians, who were sharing their life in captivity from a prison in Matsuyama, in Ehime Prefecture. What is important to notice is that the messages were praising the Japanese for their hospitality and good treatment of the

⁵ Kume Kunitake (2009) *Japan Rising. The Iwakura Embassy to the USA and Europe 1871-1873*, New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 326-327.

⁶ In 1879, the Russian government decided to make Kaunas a city-fortress. The unique geographical position (on the Germany-Russia border, on the confluence of two major local rivers) made this town a crucial defense point of the Northwestern border, if Germany were to start an invasion. In 1892, a circle of 8 fortresses around Kaunas was already built and a permanent garrison was stationed there. Therefore, the visit to Kaunas was of strategic importance to Fukushima.

⁷ Pribavlenye k Kovenskim gubernskim vedomostyam (1892) *Pribavlenye k Kovenskim gubernskim vedomostyam (An Addition to the News of Kaunas Governorship)*, 1892 February 26, No. 17, p. 2.

⁸ Sven Saaler (2018) "Fukushima Yasumasa's Travels in Central Asia and Siberia: Silk Road Romanticism, Military Reconnaissance, or Modern Exploration?" in Selçuk Esenbel (ed.) *Japan on the Silk Road*, Leiden: Brill, p. 71.

⁹ Pribavlenye k Kovenskim gubernskim vedomostyam (1892) *Pribavlenye k Kovenskim gubernskim vedomostyam (An Addition to the News of Kaunas governorship)*, 1892 March 4, No. 19, p. 2.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 2.

prisoners.¹¹

Indirectly, the Russo-Japanese War had many implications for the later development of Lithuanian statehood. For example, in 1906, Steponas Tumasonis-Kairys wrote the first books about Japan in Lithuanian language.¹² The books are relatively short, written in introductory manner using secondary sources, which were found in the University of St. Petersburg, because he himself did not know the Japanese language nor had ever visited Japan. The writing of these books was directly related to the victory of previously unknown Japan against one of the strongest countries in the world, Russia. It inspired Kairys to write these books and to praise everything Japanese – the patriotism, devotion, national unity – and to use Japan as an example for Lithuanians, to strive for their own independence from Tsarist Russia.

It could be said that Japan's positive image in Lithuania lasted until the Second World War, during the period of First Republic (1918-1940). Japan was portrayed as the strongest opposition and a reliable force in the Far East to deal with Communist countries, like Soviet Russia and the Communist movements in China.¹³ Therefore, even after the Manchurian Incident broke out in 1931, the pro-military press in Lithuania seemed to support the Japanese side, clearly reciting and justifying the official rationale of territorial expansion in Mainland Asia.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the same year (1933), Lithuanian travelers and journalists were not allowed to enter Japan because of their publications, having criticized the Japanese expansionist policy.¹⁵

Lithuania gained independence in 1918 and official relations with Japan started after more than four years, in December 1922 – a bit later than neighboring Estonia and

¹¹ Vilniaus žinios (1905) *Vilniaus žinios (News of Vilnius)*, 1905 January 5. Vilnius, front page.

¹² “Japanese Constitution,” “Japan now and before” and “How Japanese live now.” All of them were written with alias „Dėdė” (Uncle).

¹³ Juozas Miškų (1933) “Japonija kovoje su komunizmu (Japan Fighting with Communism),” *Misijos*, Kaunas, pp. 125-126.

¹⁴ Karys (1933) *Karys (Soldier)*, No. 10, p. 194; Karys (1933) *Karys (Soldier)*, No. 24, p. 478.

¹⁵ Linas Didvalis (2019) “The Most Warlike Nation from Heavenly Beautiful Islands: Japan in Matas Šalčius's Travels” in Solveiga Krūmiņa-Koņkova (ed.) *Reliģiski-filozofiski raksti XXVI, Dinamiskā Āzija (Religious-Philosophical Articles XXVI, Dynamic Asia)*, Riga: University of Latvia Press.

Latvia.¹⁶ After that, diplomatic relations improved slowly, mainly because of the physical distance between the countries. On the legal side, the countries signed two relevant bilateral documents: the Agreement on Abolition of Visas (February 1929) and the Treaty of Commerce and Navigation (May 1930).¹⁷

Until 1939, Japan did not have a separate legation in Lithuania, but soon after the Second World War broke out, a consulate was established in Kaunas. Chiune Sugihara was appointed as a vice-consul but worked there only less than one year, because in June 1940 Lithuania was occupied by Soviet Russia. Between 1945-1990, all official international relations were managed from Moscow, making bilateral relations between Lithuania and Japan impossible.

After Lithuania regained its independence on 11 March 1990, Japan recognized it on 6 September 1991 and reestablished diplomatic relations on 10 October of the same year.¹⁸ From May to December 1992, Yoshifumi Matsuda was appointed as the first Japanese ambassador to Lithuania (residing in Russia).¹⁹ In 1993-1997, the Japanese ambassador in Copenhagen was covering Lithuanian matters as well.²⁰ An embassy building was built in Vilnius in January 1997²¹ and, from 2008, the Japanese ambassador is constantly representing Japan in Lithuania.

Political relations

Starting from 2001, Lithuania has had four ambassadors to Japan, until 2021, and there

¹⁶ Charles Szymanski and Gertrūda Čepulytė (2020) “Chiune Sugihara in the Context of Public International Law” in Linas Venclauskas (ed.) *Conventions, Quotas, Refugees: European Jews in 1938-1945*, Vilnius: Versus, p. 145.

¹⁷ Makoto Onaka (2005) “The Relationship Between the Baltic States and Japan During the Interwar Period,” *Journal of Baltic studies*, 36(4), p. 412.

¹⁸ Embassy of Japan in Lithuania (2020) *Japan-Lithuania Relations*, Available at: https://www.lt.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_lt/nichi_lt_kankei.html (Accessed 14 September 2021).

¹⁹ Lietuvos respublikos Užsienio reikalų ministerija (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania) (2014) *Japonija (Japan)* Available at: <https://www.urm.lt/default/lt/dvisaliai-japonija> (Accessed 28 September 2021).

²⁰ Visuotinė lietuvių enciklopedija (2022) *Japonijos santykiai su Lietuva (Japan's Relations with Lithuania)*, Available at: <https://www.vle.lt/straipsnis/japonijos-santykiai-su-lietuva/> (Accessed 12 February 2022).

²¹ Embassy of Japan in Lithuania (2020) *Japan-Lithuania Relations*, Available at: https://www.lt.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_lt/nichi_lt_kankei.html (Accessed 14 September 2021).

have been five Japanese ambassadors appointed and residing in Lithuania, since 2008. There are also five honorary consuls of Lithuania in Japan.²² Since 2017, Lithuania has an attaché for agriculture in Japan²³ and a position of an attaché for cultural matters was established in 2021.²⁴ No military attachés were appointed in either of the two embassies, but in August 2016 the Japan Training Squadron visited Lithuania, as a part of the 25th Anniversary of reestablished diplomatic relations.²⁵

A series of high-level bilateral visits of Japanese representatives have taken place since 2001, when Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus visited Japan.²⁶ Until 2020, 15 Japanese high representatives visited Lithuania, among them Emperor Akihito (2007) and Prime Minister Shinzō Abe (2018). From Lithuania, there have been more than 40 official visits to Japan, ranging from vice-minister level (12 visits), to minister (19 visits), to prime minister (1991, 2005, 2006, 2012, 2018) and president (1997, 2001, 2019)²⁷ levels. Looking at the represented fields, most of the visits from Lithuanian ministries were from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (9), Ministry of Agriculture (6) and Ministry of Energy (5), while Japanese representatives mostly came from the foreign affairs sector (8 visits out of 15).²⁸

Lithuania and Japan have signed two bilateral agreements: Agreement on Abolition of Visa Requirements (concluded by exchange of notifications, in 2000) and Convention for the Elimination of Double Taxation with respect to Taxes on Income and

²² Lietuvos respublikos ambasada Japonijoje (Embassy of Lithuania in Japan) (2021) *Japonijoje (In Japan)*, Available at: <https://jp.mfa.lt/jp/lt/garbes-konsulai/japonijoje> (Accessed 29 September 2021).

²³ LRV (2017) *Lietuva turės žemės ūkio atašė Japonijoje (Lithuania Will Have an Attaché for Agriculture in Japan)*, Available at: <https://lr.v.lt/lt/naujienos/lietuva-tures-zemes-ukio-atase-japonijoje> (Accessed 29 September 2021).

²⁴ Lietuvos respublikos kultūros ministerija (Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania) (2021) *Isteigta kultūros atašė pareigybė Japonijoje (A Position of Attaché for Culture Has Been Established in Japan)*, Available at: <https://lrkm.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/isteigta-kulturos-atase-pareigybe-japonijoje> (Accessed 29 September 2021).

²⁵ Embassy of Japan in Lithuania (2016) *Japan Training Squadron Visit to Lithuania*, Available at: <https://www.lt.emb-japan.go.jp/files/000176621.pdf> (Accessed 12 February 2022).

²⁶ Embassy of Japan in Lithuania (2020) *Japan-Lithuania Relations*, Available at: https://www.lt.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_lt/nichi_lt_kankei.html (Accessed 14 September 2021).

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ Ibidem.

the Prevention of Tax Evasion and Avoidance (ratified in 2018).²⁹ The third agreement on working holiday visas (effective since April 2019) does not have a status of international agreement.³⁰

Economic and commercial relations

Lithuania considers Japan as a strategic partner and its most important one in Asia.³¹ Consequently, export to Japan is said to be one of the top priorities, according to Lithuanian authorities.³² Although the importance might seem symbolic, looking at the historical economic relations, the fact that Lithuania left the 17+1 initiative in 2021 and started distancing itself from the People's Republic of China should also be taken into consideration. Therefore, the import-export volumes are subject to change during the upcoming years.

Trade relations between Japan and Lithuania began soon after Lithuania reclaimed its independence. That period was difficult for Lithuania, because the transition from the Soviet Union was followed by an economical blockage from the Russian market. Industrial production had stopped without imported raw materials, especially metals, oil and gas. Therefore, post-Soviet Lithuania could mostly offer agrarian products for export and naturally, until 2002, the dominant export items to Japan were dairy products. Later though, the volumes did not grow and did not even make it to the top 10 export industries to Japan, except for the 2012-2015 period, with a peak in 2014, when the total export of dairy products reached 11.6 million dollars.³³

²⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania (2022) *Japonija (Japan)*, Available at: <https://urm.lt/default/lt/japonija> (Accessed 12 February 2022).

³⁰ Ministry of Social Security and Labor of Lithuania (2020) *Dvišalės sutartys (Bilateral Agreements)* Available at: <https://socmin.lrv.lt/lt/veiklos-sritys/tarptautinis-bendradarbiavimas-ir-es/tarptautines-sutartys/dvisales-sutartys> (Accessed 12 February 2022).

³¹ 15min.lt (2021) *I. Šimonytė: Lietuva vertina Japoniją kaip strateginę partnerę Azijoje (I. Šimonytė: Lithuania Values Japan as a Strategic Partner in Asia)*, Available at: <https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/i-simonyte-lietuva-vertina-japonija-kaip-strategine-partnere-azijoje-56-1530168> (Accessed 10 August 2021).

³² BNS (2021) *Nuo Kinijos nusisukanti Lietuva pavadino Japoniją svarbiausia partnere Azijoje (Lithuania, Turning Away From China, Called Japan the Most Important Partner in Asia)*, Available at: <https://news.bns.lt/64173661> (Accessed 10 August 2021).

³³ UN Comtrade (2022) *Lithuania exports of goods in 2014*, Available at: <https://dit-trade-vis.azurewebsites.net/?reporter=440&partner=392&type=C&year=2014&flow=2> (Accessed 12 October 2022).

However, lasers and laser-based optical apparatuses were the first industrial products to be exported to Japan after 1990. This started in 1993 and the first exporter was the company Ekspla. Although lasers were not the main export items, they were constantly traded, with a noticeable increase after the year 2005. This coincided with the expansion of Lithuanian laser production and sales in general. According to 2009 statistics, Japan was the second largest market for Lithuanian laser products (235 units exported) after the United States (355 units exported).³⁴ After the global financial crisis, between 2010-2013, these products dominated Lithuanian exports to Japan, demonstrating the stability of the industry of Lithuanian laser-based optical apparatuses.

Nevertheless, from 2015, the main export goods were tobacco and manufactured tobacco substitutes. This is because major tobacco producer, Philip Morris, closed its factory in the Netherlands, in 2015, and the Lithuanian branch was given the previous export markets which belonged to the one in the Netherlands.³⁵ The Lithuanian factory in Klaipėda was expanded and a substantial part of the production was sent to Japan.³⁶ Constant growth of tobacco exports to Japan caused a major jump in statistics – in 2018, exports to Japan rose by almost 136% compared to 2017,³⁷ grossing 293.6 million dollars. By contrast, the rest top 9 export branches totaled 56.5 million dollars in 2018.³⁸ Nevertheless, as Japan started shifting from traditional to new tobacco products, Lithuanian exports plummeted in 2019 and are not expected to recover until the

³⁴ Lazerių ir šviesos mokslo ir technologijų asociacija (2009) “Lazerių technologijos Lietuvoje. Pramonė. Mokslas. Studijos (Laser Technologies in Lithuania. Industry. Science. Studies),” *Vilnius: Lazerių ir šviesos mokslo ir technologijų asociacija*, pp. 2-3.

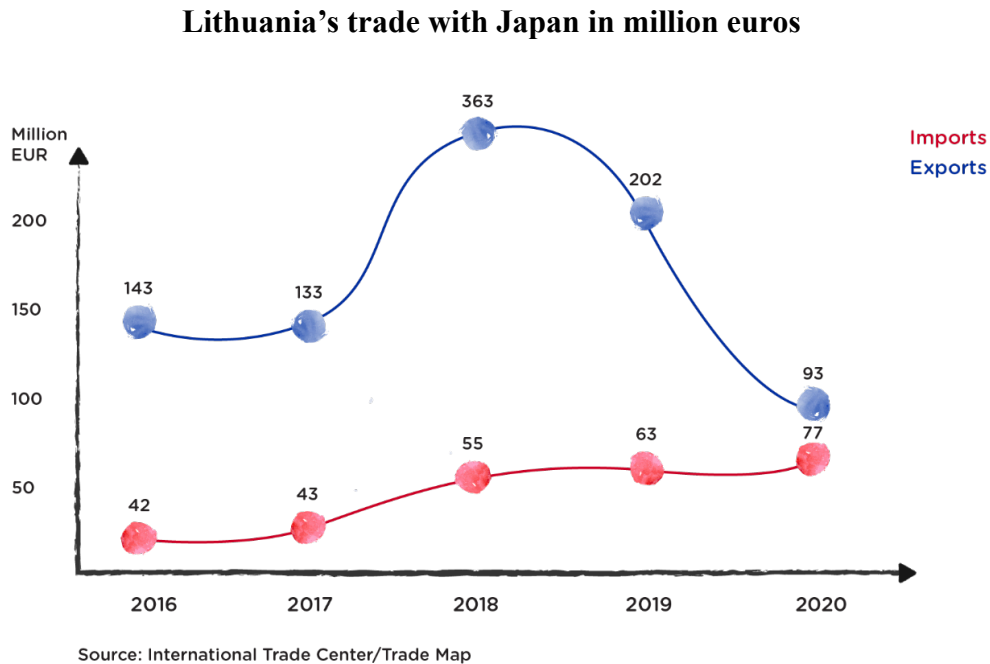
³⁵ Verslo žinios (2015) *Uždarius gamyklą Olandijoje – įspūdingas „Philip Morris Lietuva” eksporto augimas (After Closing the Factory in the Netherlands, an Impressive Export Growth of Philip Morris Lithuania)*, Available at: <https://www.vz.lt/archive/article/2015/2/25/uzdarius-gamykla-olandijoje-ispudingas-philip-morris-lietuva-eksporto-augimas> (Accessed 12 February 2022).

³⁶ 15min.lt (2018) *Lietuvos eksporto variklis – rūkantys japonai, (The Engine of Lithuania's Export is Japanese Smokers)*, Available at: <https://www.15min.lt/verslas/naujiena/finansai/lietuvos-eksporto-variklis-rukantys-japonai-662-1027472> (Accessed 12 February 2022).

³⁷ Foris Consulta (2018) *Lietuvos eksporto rinkų apžvalga, 2018 m. I pusm (Review of Lithuanian Export Markets, 2018 1st half)*, Available at: <https://forisconsulta.com/wp-content/uploads/Lietuvos-eksporto-rinku-apzvalga-2018-m.-I-pusmetis.pdf> (Accessed 12 February 2022).

³⁸ UN Comtrade (2021) *Lithuania Trade in Goods with Japan since 2020*, Available at: <https://dit-trade-vis.azurewebsites.net/?reporter=440&partner=392&type=C&year=2020&flow=2> (Accessed 12 August 2021).

production assortment is updated.³⁹ The updates should include e-cigarettes or other heated tobacco products.



While Lithuania's production capacities are barely comparable to that of Japan, the trade balance between the two countries has since 2012 favored the Lithuanian side. Looking at the data from 2020, Lithuania imported goods from Japan totaling 77.7 million dollars,⁴⁰ while exports reached 93.53 million dollars.⁴¹ With such volumes, Japan was the 37th largest export market (0.3% of Lithuanian exports) for Lithuania and the 34th largest import market (0.2% of Lithuanian imports), in 2020.⁴²

Imports from Japan to Lithuania in recent years are as follows: machinery and mechanical appliances, vehicles, man-made staple fibers, electrical machinery and equipment, optical, photographic, cinematographic, measuring, checking, precision,

³⁹ Andrius Geležauskas (2021) *Andrius Geležauskas. Prekybos keliu tarp Lietuvos ir Japonijos (Andrius Geležauskas. Trade Route Between Lithuania and Japan)*, Available at: <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/verslo-pozicija/692/1461055/andrius-gelezauskas-prekybos-keliu-tarp-lietuvos-ir-japonijos> (Accessed 18 September 2021).

⁴⁰ Trading economics (2021) *Lithuania Imports by Country*, Available at <https://tradingeconomics.com/lithuania/imports-by-country> (Accessed 18 September 2021).

⁴¹ Trading economics (2021) *Lithuania Exports by Country*, Available at: <https://tradingeconomics.com/lithuania/exports-by-country> (Accessed 18 September 2021).

⁴² Ibidem.

medical or surgical instruments.⁴³

As for the direct investment abroad, there were no financial assets or liabilities looking at all outward Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) activities in the period since the first quarter of 2015 until 2021, in Japan, according to Bank of Lithuania.⁴⁴ Department of Statistics data show that FDI from Japan was only 0.24 million euros at the end of 2017, becoming negative afterward and reaching -1.17 million euros, at the end of 2020.⁴⁵

According to the data from September 2020, there were 13 companies of Japanese origin operating in Lithuania. Nine of these are related to parent Japanese companies (Yazaki Corporation, Mimaki Engineering, Kyocera Corporation, Komatsu Ltd., Konica Minolta, Inc., Olympus Corporation, SMC Corporation, Japan Tobacco International, Takeda Pharmaceutical Company Limited).⁴⁶ As of 2021, Yazaki Corporation has closed its factory in Klaipėda.⁴⁷

Business relations with Japanese companies are promoted by public agencies, such as “Enterprise Lithuania”⁴⁸ or, more specific, “Litfood,”⁴⁹ which works with Lithuanian food industry companies. However, there are no Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) representative branch offices in Lithuania.

⁴³ Versli Lietuva (2021) *Lietuvos-Japonijos dvišalė prekyba (Bilateral Trade of Lithuania and Japan)*, p. 4, Available at: <https://www.verslilietuva.lt/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/2021-04-17-LT-Japonija.pdf> (Accessed 12 February 2022).

⁴⁴ Bank of Lithuania (2021) *Outward Foreign Direct Investment by Country*, Available at: <https://www.lb.lt/en/outward-foreign-direct-investment-by-country-1> (Accessed 28 September 2021).

⁴⁵ Indicators database (2022) *Portal of Official statistics*, Available at: <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/statistiniu-rodikliu-analize?hash=8884535b-ec87-450d-b7f2-0ca4c4d72095#/> (Accessed 12 February 2022).

⁴⁶ Embassy of Japan in Lithuania (2020) *Japan-Lithuania Relations*, Available at: https://www.lt.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_lt/nichi_lt_kankei.html (Accessed 14 September 2021).

⁴⁷ LRT (2021) *Klaipėdoje veikianti įmonė „Yazaki“ traukiasi iš Lietuvos ir atleidžia 435 darbuotojus (The Company “Yazaki” Operating in Klaipėda is Withdrawing from Lithuania and Laying off 435 Employees)*, Available at: <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/verslas/4/1395318/klaipedoje-veikianti-imone-yazaki-traukiasi-is-lietuvos-ir-atleidzia-435-darbuotojus> (Accessed 12 February 2022).

⁴⁸ Enterprise Lithuania (2022) *Home Page*, Available at: <https://www.enterpriselithuania.com/en/> (Accessed 12 February 2022).

⁴⁹ Litfood (2022) *Japonija (Japan)*, Available at: <https://export.litfood.lt/eksporto-gidas/japonija/> (Accessed 12 February 2022).

Cultural relations

Japanese culture is viewed positively in Lithuania. This is best seen looking at the festivals which are dedicated to various aspects of Japanese culture, most of which, it is important to note, are grassroots initiatives. The most popular festivals are “Now Japan,” “Anime nights” and the Japanese cinema festival.

“Now Japan” is an annual event and the longest running festival of Japanese culture. Until 2020, it was organized 12 times.⁵⁰ It is a multi-layered and broad festival, encompassing traditional, contemporary and pop culture from Japan. The festival usually takes place in late summer, in Vilnius.

As the name suggests, “Anime nights” is especially dedicated to anime movies screened at night. The festival is traditionally organized in late spring, in Kaunas, by the students’ council of Kaunas Technology University.⁵¹ The original idea evolved over the course of 14 years and besides traditional night movie sessions, daytime events were added – cosplay shows, manga drawing contests, video games tournaments, etc.

The Japanese cinema festival is a non-commercial annual festival, organized by the Embassy of Japan in Lithuania.⁵² Until 2020, the festival has been organized 19 times and presented various Japanese movies – both classical and contemporary. The festival usually takes place in early spring and includes not only Vilnius and Kaunas, but other cities of Lithuania as well (the locations vary yearly).

Sakura parks and gardens can be considered as passive tools of image creation. Sakura trees are planted in 17 different towns and cities in Lithuania.⁵³ The places vary from four trees in front of the Sugihara Museum, in Kaunas, to a couple of hundreds of

⁵⁰ Now Japan (2020) *Savaitgalis Japonijoje (Weekend in Japan)*, Available at: <https://nowjapan.lt/savaitgalis-japonijoje/> (Accessed 28 September 2021).

⁵¹ The webpage of the festival is under maintenance, so the main information is accessed from the Facebook platform: <https://www.facebook.com/AnimeNights> (Accessed 28 September 2021).

⁵² Embassy of Japan in Lithuania (2020) *Kviečia 19-asis Japonijos kino festivalis (The 19th Japan Film Festival Invites You)*, Available at: https://www.lt.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_lt/filmfestival19LT.html (Accessed 3 September 2021).

⁵³ LRT (2021) *17 vietų visoje Lietuvoje, kur galima pasigrožėti sakurų žiedais (17 Places Throughout Lithuania Where You Can Admire Japanese Cherry Blossoms)*, Available at: <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/gyvenimas/13/1396656/17-vietu-visoje-lietuvoje-kur-galima-pasigrozeti-sakuru-ziedais> (Accessed 28 September 2021).

cherry trees in Vilnius, on the bank of river Neris.⁵⁴ The smaller scale cherry planting projects are mostly initiated by the local communities, which were inspired by the beauty of sakura blossoms. The larger projects, like the Kaunas-Japan Friendship Park⁵⁵ or the Sugihara Park in Vilnius, include various nonprofit and non-governmental organizations, from both Japan and Lithuania, and it somewhat represents the concept of “Cherry blossom diplomacy.”

Cultural ties between the two countries are also seen in Japanese-style gardens. Presently, gardens in Lithuania are created by individuals and driven basically by their own personal aspirations (*inter alia*, Sei Shin En⁵⁶ in Vilnius, the garden in Pypliai town, in Kaunas district,⁵⁷ the garden of The Morning Dew in Alytus⁵⁸). The exception is the Japanese-style exhibition in Vilnius University’s botanical garden, because it belongs to the university.⁵⁹ Currently, the construction of a municipality-run Japanese garden in Vilnius⁶⁰ (with the provisional name Taku Soku En) and the preparation for a

⁵⁴ Go Vilnius (n.d.) *Čiunės Sugiharos sakurų sodas (Chiune Sugihara Sakura Garden)*, Available at: <https://www.govilnius.lt/aplankykite/lankytinios-vietos/ciunes-sugiharos-sakuru-sodas> (Accessed 28 September 2021).

⁵⁵ Kaunas.lt (2018) *Kauno ir Japonijos draugystę įamžino naujas sakurų parkas (The Friendship Between Kaunas and Japan was Immortalized by a New Sakura Park)*, Available at: <http://www.kaunas.lt/2018/09/naujienos/kauno-ir-japonijos-draugyste-iamzino-naujas-sakuru-parkas/> (Accessed 28 September 2021).

⁵⁶ Vilniaus parkai (2021) *Japoniškas sodas Sei Shin En (Japanese Garden Sei Shin En)*, Available at: <http://www.vilniausparkai.lt/japoniskas-sodas-sei-shin-en/> (Accessed 28 September 2021).

⁵⁷ Kauno diena (2017) *Ambasadorių sužavėjo japoniškos kultūros sala Kauno rajone (The Ambassador Was Impressed by the Island of Japanese Culture in Kaunas District)*, Available at: <https://kauno.diena.lt/naujienos/kaunas/miesto-pulsas/ambasadoriu-suzavejo-japoniskos-kulturos-sala-kauno-rajone-830925> (Accessed 28 September 2021). Lrytas.lt (2017) *Ambasadorių sužavėjo lietuviškame kaime išpuoselėtas japoniškas sodas (The Ambassador Was Impressed by the Japanese Garden Cultivated in the Lithuanian Village)*, Available at: <https://www.lrytas.lt/bustas/pasidaryk-pats/2017/10/07/news/ambasadoriu-suzavejo-lietuviskame-kaime-ispuoseletas-japoniskas-sodas-2890450> (Accessed 28 September 2021).

⁵⁸ Modesta Gaučaitė (2020) *Grįžęs iš Afganistano alytiškis ramybę atrado augindamas bonsus: gydo ir prezidento medelį (After Returning from Afghanistan, the Man from Alytus Found Peace by Growing Bonsai Trees: He Also Treats the President's Tree)*, Available at: <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/1201355/grizes-is-afganistano-alytiskis-ramybe-atrado-augindamas-bonus-gydo-ir-prezidento-medeli> (Accessed 28 September 2021).

⁵⁹ VU Botanikos sodas (2019) *Japoniškas sodas VU botanikos sode (Japanese Garden in VU Botanical Garden)*, Available at: <https://www.botanikos-sodas.vu.lt/apie-mus/projektai/japoni%C5%A1kas-sodas-vu-botanikos-sode> (Accessed 28 September 2021).

⁶⁰ Vilnius.lt (2020) *Vilniuje netrukus prasidės japoniško sodo įrengimo darbai (In Vilnius, the Installation of a Japanese Garden Will Soon Begin)*, Available at: <https://vilnius.lt/lt/2020/11/13/vilniuje-netrukus-prasides-japonisko-sodo-irengimo-darbai/> (Accessed 29 September 2021).

community-inspired garden in Alytus are taking place.⁶¹

A garden located in Mažučiai town, in western Lithuania, although unfinished, already covers 16 hectares of terrain and is considered the largest Japanese style garden in Europe.⁶² Like the majority of gardens, it was started as a personal initiative. The initiator and owner is a Lithuanian medical doctor, but all the designing and planning is done by Japanese artists Hajime Watanabe and Hidemi Onishi.⁶³ Master Watanabe has created more than 150 gardens in Japan and abroad during his career, spanning for more than 50 years,⁶⁴ and the above-mentioned Japanese style exhibition in Vilnius University's botanical garden is also designed by him. The Mažučiai garden is well known nationally and is a popular destination among domestic tourists. The fact that the garden is created voluntarily – artists get no salary and most of the labor is done with the help of volunteers – also adds to its distinctiveness. Additionally, a festival for Japanese culture was organized in the Mažučiai garden for nine years, until the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶⁵

As for academic relations, 10 Lithuanian universities and colleges have bilateral agreements with 51 Japanese universities. Two universities – Vilnius University⁶⁶ and Vytautas Magnus University⁶⁷ – administer study programs, which either include Japanese studies in the curricula or are entirely dedicated to Japanese studies. As Japanese studies were not organized before 1990, this field is still relatively young and

⁶¹ Japoniškas sodas Alytuje (2021) *Japoniškas sodas Alytuje (Japanese Garden in Alytus)*, Available at: <https://www.japangardenalytus.lt/> (Accessed 15 September 2021).

⁶² Japoniškas sodas (2021) *Home Page*, Available at: <https://japangarden.lt/en/> (Accessed 28 August 2021).

⁶³ Japoniškas sodas (2021) *Sodas (Garden)*, Available at: <https://japangarden.lt/sodas/> (Accessed 28 August 2021).

⁶⁴ Alvydas Ziabkus (2018) *Dykai triūsiantis japonas sukūrė dievišką dovaną (A Japanese Man Laboring for Free Created a Divine Gift)*, Available at: <https://ve.lt/naujienos/lietuva/vakaru-lietuva/dykai-triusiantis-japonas-sukure-dieviska-dovana-1656616> (Accessed 28 August 2021).

⁶⁵ Japoniškas sodas (2018) *9-asis japoniškas festivalis japoniškame sode (The 9th Japanese Festival in the Japanese Garden)*, Available at: <https://japangarden.lt/liepos-21-d-9-asis-japonskas-festivalis/> (Accessed 28 August 2021).

⁶⁶ VU ATSI (n.d.) *Institute of Asian and Transcultural Studies*, Available at: <https://www.fsf.vu.lt/en/institute-of-asian-and-transcultural-studies/about-institute> (Accessed 12 February 2022).

⁶⁷ Centre for Asian Studies (n.d.) *Home Page*, Available at: <https://asc.vdu.lt/> (Accessed 12 February 2022).

quickly developing.

The number of Japanese tourists visiting Lithuania has almost tripled between 2013 and 2018, from 10,079 to 28,200,⁶⁸ steadily increasing every year until 2019, when it recorded a slight decrease, to 27,318. Lithuanian tourists to Japan, on the other hand, totaled much smaller numbers: 260 in 2015, 387 in 2016, 482 in 2017⁶⁹ and increased to 5,260 in 2019.⁷⁰

Between 2016 and 2021, the number of Japanese in Lithuania was quite stable, fluctuating between 28⁷¹ and 41,⁷² but the number of Lithuanians in Japan has been shrinking, from 643⁷³ to 323.⁷⁴

The most impactful factor for Japan-Lithuania relations is undoubtedly the personality of Chiune Sugihara, the Japanese diplomat who played an important role during the Second World War, by helping Polish Jews escape persecutions.

Born in 1900, Sugihara was appointed as a vice-consul in Lithuania in 1939, being an excellent Russian speaker. Before that, there were no Japanese diplomats working in Kaunas, which was the capital of Lithuania at that time. The Embassy in Riga, Latvia, was covering Lithuanian matters. But the beginning of the war meant that Japan needed a separate legation. Its primary function was to gather information from

⁶⁸ Keliuok Lietuvoje (2022) *Turizmo statistika* (Tourism Statistics), Available at: <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.lithuania.travel%2Fuploads%2Fckeditor%2Fdefault%2F0001%2F02%2Fcd132a587398b3690dc6a2f08abb8e832de9c2ec.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK> (Accessed 1 July 2022).

⁶⁹ Statistics Lithuania (2018) *Turizmas Lietuvoje 2017* (*Tourism in Lithuania 2017*), p. 39, Available at: http://www.tourism.lt/uploads/documents/Turizmas-Lietuvoje_2017.pdf (Accessed 12 February 2022).

⁷⁰ Embassy of Japan in Lithuania (2020) *Japan-Lithuania Relations*, Available at: https://www.lt.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_lt/nichi_lt_kankei.html (Accessed 14 September 2021).

⁷¹ As for the beginning of 2018. Migracijos departamentas (2018) *Migracijos metraštis 2017* (*Migration Yearbook 2017*), p. 114, Available at: <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/services-portlet/pub-edition-file?id=29780> (Accessed 29 September 2021).

⁷² As for the beginning of 2021. Migracijos departamentas (2021) *Migracijos metraštis 2021* (*Migration Yearbook 2021*), p. 119, Available at: <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/services-portlet/pub-edition-file?id=37580> (Accessed 29 September 2021).

⁷³ Migracijos departamentas (2017) *Migracijos metraštis 2016* (*Migration Yearbook 2016*), p. 16, Available at: <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/services-portlet/pub-edition-file?id=26660> (Accessed 29 September 2021).

⁷⁴ Migracijos departamentas (2021) *Migracijos metraštis 2021* (*Migration Yearbook 2021*), p. 18, Available at: <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/services-portlet/pub-edition-file?id=37580> (Accessed 29 September 2021).

allied Germany and from opposing Soviet Russia, and to send it to the Foreign Ministry of Japan⁷⁵.

Ironically, the consular tasks which were of second importance to Sugihara gained him worldwide recognition. The beginning of the Second World War was marked by the occupation and division of Poland – Nazi Germany took the western part and Soviet Russia claimed the eastern one. It is important to note that the Evian Conference, which took place in 1938, concluded that no major Western countries wanted to accept Jewish refugees.⁷⁶ An independent Lithuania, which did not participate in this conference, became the only feasible route for the thousands of Polish Jews to escape persecution from both Nazis and Soviets. On 15 June 1940, the Soviet Red Army marched into Lithuanian territory, thus starting the occupation.

For the refugees, the occupation of Lithuania meant that they needed to find ways to continue their journey. The war in continental Europe drastically diminished the possible directions and destinations. But there was still an option, which later became known as the Visas for Life. First, the refugees had to get the final destination visas from Jan Zwartendijk, who was acting as a consul of the Netherlands in Lithuania.⁷⁷ These visas were actually the permissions to enter the Caribbean Island of Curaçao and Surinam, the overseas territories of the Netherlands. The permissions, often called the “Curaçao visas,” allowed the refugees to ask for transit visas, to travel through other countries. In case of Visas for Life, those countries were Soviet Russia and Japan.

According to Yukiko Sugihara’s memoirs, her husband Chiune went to the Embassy of Soviet Russia and negotiated the possibility of granting passage to those who had final destination visas and transit visas through Japan.⁷⁸ As the negotiations were successful, Chiune Sugihara started issuing transit visas, even though he did not get the permission to do so from the foreign ministry.

⁷⁵ Charles Szymanski and Gertrūda Čepulytė (2020) “Chiune Sugihara in the Context of Public International Law” in Linas Venclauskas (ed.) *Conventions, Quotas, Refugees: European Jews in 1938-1945*, Vilnius: Versus, p. 146.

⁷⁶ Simonas Strelcovas (2018) *Geri, blogi, vargdieniai. Č. Sugihara ir Antrojo pasaulinio karo pabėgėliai Lietuvoje (The Good, the Bad, the Miserable. Ch. Sugihara and World War II Refugees in Lithuania)*, Vilnius: Versus, p. 56.

⁷⁷ Hillel Levine (1996) *In search of Sugihara*, New York: The Free Press, p. 232.

⁷⁸ Yukiko Sugihara (1995) *Visas for Life*, San Francisco: Edu-Comm Plus, p. 19.

During July and August 1940, Sugihara issued 2,139 transit visas.⁷⁹ With them, about 6,000 people left Lithuania to Japan. The refugees did not reach their official final destination – Curaçao or Surinam. After arriving in Japan, via Tsuruga port, they were either transferred to Shanghai or managed to travel to the United States, Australia and other places later.⁸⁰

Although Visas for Life included a few different institutions and acting persons, Sugihara's case is peculiar. While Zwartendijk operated in accordance with his superiors, Sugihara was more like a "lone wolf," who acted according to his conscience and moral principles. Also, after returning home, both diplomats remained silent about the Kaunas events, leaving them known only to their families. This might be one of the reasons why the Japanese themselves did not really know about Sugihara's deed up until the 1990s.⁸¹ The Jewish community, on the other hand, acknowledged Sugihara's importance in the late 1960s, after Sugihara was "found" by the Visas for Life survivors in 1968.⁸²

Sugihara is the only Japanese person recognized as a Righteous Among the Nations by the Israeli government. Also, until recently, he was the only Japanese known for helping Jews.⁸³ Therefore, Sugihara has a special meaning for Japanese soft power strategies and positive image building. For Japan-Lithuania relations, this has served as a major catalyst boosting connections and sustaining them.

The former Japanese consulate is now a museum, where visitors can learn about the story of Visas for Life. This small museum has become a major attraction for

⁷⁹ Chiharu Inaba (2017) "Documents related to Visas for Life and historiography of Chiune Sugihara," *Darbai ir dienos*, 67, pp. 263-271.

⁸⁰ Simonas Strelcovas (2018) *Geri, blogi, vargdieniai. Č. Sugihara ir Antrojo pasaulinio karo pabėgėliai Lietuvoje (The Good, the Bad, the Miserable. Ch. Sugihara and World War II Refugees in Lithuania)*, Vilnius: Versus, p. 254.

⁸¹ UPI (1993) *Textbook's Chronicle Diplomat's Wartime Aid to Refugees*, Available at: <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1993/08/17/Textbooks-chronicle-diplomats-wartime-aid-to-refugees/3329745560000/> (Accessed 12 February 2022). Eldad Nakar (2008) "Sugihara Chiune and the Visas to Save Lives: Assessing the Efforts to Memorialize a Japanese Hero," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 6 (1), Available at: <https://apjif.org/-Eldad-Nakar/2640/article.html> (Accessed 12 February 2022).

⁸² Yukiko Sugihara (1995) *Visas for Life*, San Francisco: Edu-Comm Plus, p. 124.

⁸³ The other two Japanese are Nei Saburo, vice-consul in Vladivostok, and lieutenant general Kiichiro Higuchi, Okabe Noburu (2021) *A Lesser-Known "Japanese Schindler": Lieutenant General Higuchi Kiichirō*, Available at: <https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-topics/g01097/a-lesser-known-japanese-schindler-lieutenant-general-higuchi-kiichiro.html> (Accessed 25 September 2021).

Kaunas visitors and especially Japanese tourists. On the Trip Advisor website, the Sugihara Museum ranks 3rd on the list of things to do in Kaunas.⁸⁴ Around 86% of the visitors of the museum are Japanese, averaging around 13,000 per year.⁸⁵ According to the Lithuanian Tourism agency, 146,923 Japanese tourists visited Lithuania in 2013-2019 and about 61% of them went to the Sugihara Museum. The yearly number of Japanese visitors tripled from 5,376 in 2013, to 16,515 in 2019.⁸⁶

To compare, only around 14% of all the Japanese tourists in 2018 and 2019 visited one of the most popular tourist sites in Lithuania, the Trakai Castle.⁸⁷ Japanese tourists in Lithuania are usually traveling in medium-sized groups (25-30 people) by bus. This means the Sugihara Museum is included in most tours, while the generally acknowledged tourist attractions gain lesser attention from Japanese visitors.

The Sugihara Museum was also visited by high-ranking guests, like Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, ministers of foreign affairs Toshimitsu Motegi and Tarō Asō, other high representatives and Diet members. Basically, the visits to Sugihara house became more frequent after 2015, when the movie “Persona non grata” (in Japan, the movie was titled *Sugihara Chiune*), by Cellin Gluck, was screened in cinemas. Famous actors Toshiaki Karasawa and Koyuki Katō played the main roles of Chiune Sugihara and his wife Yukiko,⁸⁸ which gave extra popularity to this movie.

The Sugihara Museum belongs to the “Sugihara Foundation – Diplomats for Life.” This public entity not only runs the museum but also organizes events, scientific conferences and carries out research related to the Visas for Life story, combating

⁸⁴ Trip Advisor (2021) *Sugihara House*, Available at: https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g274948-d2170650-Reviews-Sugihara_House-Kaunas_Kaunas_County.html (Accessed 9 September 2021).

⁸⁵ Between years 2015-2019. 2020-2021 were not included due to the global lockdown. Statistics retrieved from Sugihara Museum reports.

⁸⁶ Data retrieved from Lithuania Travel (n.d.) *Turizmo statistika (Tourism Statistics)*, Available at: <https://www.lithuania.travel/lt/news/turizmo-statistika>, (Accessed 9 September 2021). Statistics Lithuania (2016) *Tourism in Lithuania*, Available at: <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/services-portlet/pub-edition-file?id=23620> (Accessed 9 September 2021) and Sugihara Museum.

⁸⁷ Trakai (n.d.) *Trakų turizmo informacijos centro lankytojų statistika (Trakai Tourism Information Center Visitor Statistics)*, Available at: <https://www.trakai-visit.lt/turizmo-informacijos-centro-lankytoju-statistika/> (Accessed 25 August 2021).

⁸⁸ IMDB (2021) *Persona Non Grata*, Available at <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4162012/> (Accessed 29 September 2021).

antisemitism and promoting tolerance in general. The Foundation's activities reflect the basic idea that Sugihara's name in Lithuania is usually associated with the positive image of all Japanese and Japan as a country. A good example is the use of Chiune Sugihara's name in Lithuania. A festival called Sugihara Week,⁸⁹ meant to spread the message about Sugihara's work and its significance, was held three times (2017, 2018 and 2020) and concerts, exhibitions and cultural activities were presented not only by Lithuanians but by Japanese as well. The festival was widely advertised not only in Kaunas but at a national level as well. Apart from the Sugihara Museum, there are memorial plaques on the places related to Sugihara's activities and a sculpture "Chiune Sugihara" (inaugurated in 2020),⁹⁰ in Kaunas. In Vilnius, there are two sculptures: "Moonlight," built in 1992 in front of the Holocaust exposition of the Vilnius Ghetto Museum of Jewish History,⁹¹ and a memorial stone in front of the Sugihara Sakura Park, which was opened in 2001. There is also the Chiune Sugihara Street in Vilnius. Looking at the governmental level, 2020 was declared the "Year of Chiune Sugihara" in Lithuania, because two anniversaries were celebrated that year – 120 years since Sugihara's birth and 80 years since the issuing of Visas for Life.⁹² The memory of Sugihara and his actions during the war have thus played an important role in the development of Lithuania-Japan relations.

Conclusions and recommendations

Japan-Lithuania diplomatic relations were reestablished in 1991 and have been slowly evolving ever since. Historical moments matter a lot to current relations, as the main link connecting the two countries is Chiune Sugihara, the former consul who worked in

⁸⁹ Sugihara Week (2020) *Sugihara Week*, Available at: <http://sugiharaweek.kaunas.lt/> (Accessed 29 September 2021).

⁹⁰ Kaunas.lt (2020) *Kaune iškilis skulptūra Pasaulio tautų teisuolio Č. Sugiharos atminimui įamžinti (A Sculpture to Perpetuate the Memory of Chiune Sugihara, the Righteous Among the Nations, Will be Erected in Kaunas)*, Available at: <http://www.kaunas.lt/2020/10/naujienos/kaune-iskils-skulptura-pasaulio-tautu-teisuolio-c-sugiharos-atminimui-iamzinti/> (Accessed 28 September 2021).

⁹¹ Go Vilnius (2021) *Čijunės Sugiharos paminklas (Monument to Chiune Sugihara)*, Available at: <https://www.govilnius.lt/atostogos-vilniuje/atostogos-vilniuje-renginiai/savarankiskas-pazinimas/cijunes-sugiharos-paminklas> (Accessed 25 August 2021).

⁹² Lietuvos respublikos vyriausybė (2019) *2020-aisiais bus paminėtas Čiunės Sugiharos žygdarbis (The Chiune Sugihara's Feat Will be Commemorated in 2020)*, Available at: <https://lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/2020-aisiais-bus-paminetas-ciunes-sugiharos-zygdarbis> (Accessed 25 August 2021).

Lithuania between 1939-1940 and who issued transit visas, to travel through Japan, to Polish Jews. Because of his deeds, Lithuania appears in Japanese textbooks, popular media, TV shows and movies and travel literature.

Japan's positive image in Lithuania is created with soft power tools, like planting sakura trees, establishing Japanese-style gardens and organizing cultural festivals. It is important to note that these are grassroots initiatives. Also, it is safe to say that, thanks to the younger generation, Japanese pop culture is being promoted in Lithuania.

As for economic relations, the two countries are not trading intensively. Lithuanian exports to Japan were 0.3% of its total exports and the imports from Japan were 0.2% of its total imports.⁹³ From 2015, tobacco products became the main export goods to Japan, but in 2019-2020 the volumes started to shrink, because of changing smoking habits, as Japanese smokers started using more e-cigarettes than conventional ones. Modernizing the production and adapting to the changing needs of the consumers are vital in order to return to the peak level of 2018. Nevertheless, the laser-based apparatuses and miscellaneous chemical products continue to be stable export items to Japan.

According to estimations of Export Opportunity Assessment Model, there are 1,721 item groups which are considered as having potential for export to Japan.⁹⁴ Looking from a broader perspective, these items are chemical products, foodstuffs, textiles and machinery and equipment. Thus, it is suggested to continue the development of these branches and their products.

Lithuania's withdrawal from China's "17+1" initiative, in 2021, is an important factor for furthering bilateral relations between Japan and Lithuania. The vacuum which is starting to expand in various sectors of import to Lithuania needs to be filled and Japanese industry might be used for this.

⁹³ UN Comtrade (2022) *Lithuania exports of goods in 2020*, Available at: <https://dit-trade-vis.azurewebsites.net/?reporter=440&partner=392&type=C&year=2020&flow=2&commodity> (Accessed 12 October 2022).

⁹⁴ Versli Lietuva (2021) *Lietuvos-Japonijos dvišalė prekyba (Lithuania-Japan Bilateral Trade)*, p. 4, Available at: <https://www.verslilietuva.lt/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/2021-04-17-LT-Japonija.pdf> (Accessed 12 February 2022).

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Van hier tot Tokio: The 400-year-old bond between the Netherlands and Japan continues to prosper

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Overview

With more than 400 years of continued relations to build on, the Dutch-Japanese relationship is an exceptionally stable and productive bilateral relationship. From the earliest contacts in the early 1600s, to the continued cooperation today, the focus has primarily been on economic contacts. For more than two centuries, Dutch traders on the artificial island of Dejima were Japan's only link with the Western world. Today, roughly half of the Dutch embassy staff in Japan is focused on economic diplomacy, especially trade promotion, investment promotion and innovation cooperation. Both countries have mutually desirable economic strong suits, and whether it is Dutch agriculture-tech or Japanese hydrogen energy innovations, the nearly constant economic relationship between the Netherlands and Japan has been very fruitful.

The Netherlands has played a unique role in Japanese history. As the only Western nation to continue trading throughout Japan's period of isolation (*sakoku*), which lasted from 1639 to 1853, the Netherlands was Japan's window to the world. However, the 20th century brought the two countries in conflict, as they found themselves on opposite sides of the Second World War – Asia's Pacific War. Japan's

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invasion and occupation of the Dutch East Indies was traumatic for the Dutch people living there. The memories and lingering resentments from that period still impact the otherwise amicable relationship from time to time. However, after the war had passed, the Netherlands and Japan built back their strong trade relationship and have maintained close economic ties since. Furthermore, Dutch culture and national identity is also uniquely appreciated by the Japanese, although there are differences in approaches to social issues. Many Japanese experience traditional Dutch delights like wearing wooden shoes or eating gouda cheese in the “Huis ten Bosch” theme park near Nagasaki and enjoy old Dutch painting masters from Vincent van Gogh to Johannes Vermeer in special exhibits in Japan’s top museums. Meanwhile Japanese and Dutch students and professionals connect in the high-tech and cultural fields, through working holidays, student exchanges and “artist in residence” programs.

For long, experts had lamented the fact that the only problem between the two countries, which kept them from developing strong bilateral relations, was that there were no problems. In recent years, a mutual interest in building a free, open and rules-based multilateral trading system and Indo-Pacific region has presented the opportunity for a new chapter in the relationship to be opened. As challenges to the open, rules-based multilateral system grow, ties between the Netherlands and Japan as partners grow broader and deeper and official leaders and documents increasingly emphasize like-mindedness. More accurately, perhaps, is a characterization of two countries whose vital interests increasingly align – notwithstanding different approaches and prioritization to cultural, societal, historical and political issues. In any case, there can be little doubt that today the Dutch-Japanese relationship is moving forward, beyond its traditional focus, primarily trade and investment relations.

History of relations

Japan and the Netherlands share a long and unique historical relationship together, going back more than 400 years. Beginning in 1639 and continuing until the forceful end of Japan’s isolationist policy in the mid-1800s, the Netherlands was the only nation other than China that was allowed to trade with Japan. This came as the result of the Shimabara uprising in 1637, in which Christian Japanese rebels revolted against the

Tokugawa Shogunate. The Dutch sailors present in Japan at the time helped to put down the armed rebellion, fighting side-by-side with the Shogunate's forces. The result was that the Dutch were allowed to remain Japan's trade partners, while all other Christian nations – notably Portugal and Spain – were expelled for being unwanted sources of foreign influence. The Dutch were granted the Dutch trading post on Dejima, an island close to Nagasaki.¹

This Dutch trading post on Dejima was effectively Japan's only link to the West, which made social, cultural and scientific exchanges with the Netherlands invaluable to the Japanese for roughly two centuries. The Netherlands' "foreign influence" became crucial for Japan's continued scientific and technological development. *Rangaku* or "Dutch learning" was the study of various technological and medical knowledge, which Dutch traders sold to Japanese partners. This exchange helped build the knowledge base necessary for Japan's rapid rate of industrialization during the Meiji period, in the second half of the 19th century, and continues to color the current Dutch-Japanese relationship. An example of the lingering impact of this shared history is the presence of Dutch words in the Japanese vocabulary, including lancet (*ransetto*), pistol (*pisutoru*) and lamp (*lampu*).² In the period following the opening of Japan, diplomatic contacts were formalized. The first Dutch consulate was opened in Yokohama in 1859, followed by a legation in Tokyo and a consulate in Kobe in 1868.³

Although the Netherlands and Japan have shared a unique bond for many centuries, the relationship has not been exclusively positive. During Japan's imperial expansion in the lead up and during the Second World War, it invaded and occupied what was then known as the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia). Japan's invasion of the Dutch colony was swift and decisive. Within three months, the Dutch and allied forces were entirely defeated. During the occupation, inhabitants of the colony, both native and

¹ Yoko Matsui (2018) "Japanese-Dutch Relations in the Tokugawa Period," *Transactions of the Japan Academy*, 72 Available at: https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/tja/72/Special_Issue/72_139/_pdf (Accessed 23 November 2021).

² The Netherlands and you (n.d.) *Dutch-Japanese Relations*, Available at <https://www.netherlandsandyou.nl/your-country-and-the-netherlands/japan/and-the-netherlands/dutch-japanese-relations> (Accessed 15 July 2021).

³ Ibidem.

Dutch, were subject to forced labor and forced internment, resulting in thousands of deaths.⁴ Also, the Japanese military forced many women into forced prostitution as “comfort women” for enlisted Japanese soldiers. The trauma of this occupation – which to the Indonesians was the beginning of independence – remains controversial, especially among the remaining survivors and their families, up until the present day. Differences on how to remember and commemorate this period in the shared history of Japan and the Netherlands is still contested. Japan has made an official apology for wrongdoings during the war, but many in the Netherlands still feel that Japan’s approach to this subject lacks empathy – and increasingly so in recent years.⁵ That said, the Japanese Embassy in the Netherlands organizes annual visits to Japan for victims and their families. At the same time, since 1994, Japan’s ambassador to the Netherlands has received representatives of the former Dutch community in Indonesia who experienced the occupation, every month, when a relatively small but well-organized group protests in front of the Japanese embassy in the Netherlands.⁶

After the war came to an end, the Dutch and Japanese worked to rebuild their mutually beneficial relationship and were eventually successful in this but not without some notable contentious moments. One such moment came in 1971, when Emperor Hirohito (the Showa Emperor) visited the Netherlands, marking the first such visit to the Netherlands since the end of the war. Prior to the visit, Emperor Hirohito said that the Netherlands was a particularly important stop in his European tour, as he was eager to improve relations.⁷ However, the visit was marked by large-scale protests. At times, Dutch security personnel were concerned that they could not ensure the emperor’s safety, although ultimately no harm came to him.⁸ Despite this backlash, Emperor

⁴ Merle Calvin Ricklefs (2008) *A History of Modern Indonesia Since c. 1200*, (4th ed.), Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 337.

⁵ Interview with an official of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

⁶ DW (2007) *Japanese Occupation of the Dutch East Indies*, Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/japanese-occupation-of-the-dutch-east-indies/a-5213411> (Accessed 28 November 2021).

⁷ John Lee (1971) *Hirohito Is Met by Dutch Hostility on Tour*, Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/1971/10/09/archives/hirohito-is-met-by-dutch-hostility-on-tour.html> (Accessed 15 July 2021).

⁸ Ibidem.

Hirohito declared the visit a success when he returned to Japan.⁹ His statement, however plain, dissipated much of the anger the Japanese felt at the cold reception and harassment the emperor had faced. Tensions faded slowly after Emperor Hirohito was succeeded by Emperor Akihito, who made it a key aspect of his reign to seek forgiveness for Japan's aggression.

A very different memorable moment in the history of the Netherlands and Japan lies in the 1964 Olympics, when a Dutch athlete gained considerable respect from the Japanese public. Japan hosted the Tokyo Summer Olympics in 1964, as a representation of its reacceptance in the world community and a celebration of Japan's progress and reemergence after the devastation of the war. Judo, a Japanese martial art, was added to the Olympics for the first time, with four classes. Although Japan was expected to win gold medals in every class, Dutchman Anton Geesink won the open weight class. Geesink's win shocked Japan, but the judoka earned great respect among the Japanese people through his display of courtesy and understanding of Japanese sports culture. After his win, Geesink stopped his teammates, as they rushed onto the tatami to hoist him onto their shoulders. In a show of "reigi-tadashii" (polite) behavior, he first bowed to acknowledge his opponent and the referee, before joining his teammates in celebration. Geesink's victory reshaped the sport forever and popularized judo beyond Japan's borders.¹⁰

Political relations and the royal houses

Throughout the years, the Dutch and Japanese have largely managed to rebuild their constructive relationship. The Japanese government worked to mend lingering tensions. This allowed for a gradual thawing of the tension that came with the historical memories of the war. An example of this rebuilt relationship is the warm bond which the Dutch and Japanese royal families have developed in the decades after the low of the Emperor's visit in 1971. Today, the Dutch and Japanese royal families are said to be

⁹ Door A. Jansen (2000) *Boegeroep en Stenen voor de Keizer (Boos and Stones for the Emperor)*, Available at: https://www.digibron.nl/viewer/collectie/Digibron/id/tag:RD.nl,20000523:newsml_ef5c623e4826d1a40b08cdad4818c135 (Accessed 28 November 2021).

¹⁰ Peter Nichols (2010) *Anton Geesink Obituary*, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2010/sep/06/anton-geesink-obituary> (Accessed 23 November 2021).

quite close and have enjoyed several formal visits and informal encounters with each other over the years. Queen Beatrix and then-Crown Prince Willem-Alexander visited Emperor Akihito in 1991, apparently sparking a warm friendship. Emperor Akihito later reciprocated the visit in 2000, visiting several places around the Netherlands. During his visit to Leiden, the emperor surprised onlookers by stopping to speak with three Dutch students who were sitting by the window of their flat as the emperor walked by.¹¹ The pleasant exchange was a stark contrast to the welcome Emperor Hirohito received decades earlier. The personal connections between the royal families have only increased in more recent years. Queen Beatrix invited the whole Japanese royal family for a two-week holiday at her residence in Apeldoorn, which the Japanese royals accepted.¹² Former top foreign ministry official Hisashi Owada, the father-in-law of the current Emperor Naruhito, resided in the Netherlands for many years, serving as a judge and later as the president of the International Court of Justice between 2003-2018.¹³ Queen Máxima also reportedly has a very warm relationship with Princess Masako, perhaps owing to the fact that both are of the same generation, commoners who married into a royal family and strong women with a career of their own before their marriage.¹⁴ Attesting to this warm bond, Queen Máxima personally invited Princess Masako to King Willem-Alexander's coronation.¹⁵ The Queen and King also made an official state visit to Japan in 2014.

¹¹ Reuters (2000) *Japanese Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko Chat with Students who Hang out of a Window During their Visit to Leiden University May 25. Japan's Emperor and His Wife Are on a Fourth Day Official State Visit to the Netherlands*, Available at: <https://www.alamy.com/japanese-emperor-akihito-and-empress-michiko-chat-with-students-who-hang-out-of-a-window-during-their-visit-to-leiden-university-may-25-japans-emperor-and-his-wife-are-on-a-four-day-official-state-visit-to-the-netherlands-feews-image375060881.html> (Accessed 28 November 2021).

¹² Hello Magazine (2014) *Splendid Welcome for Queen Maxima in Japan as Princess Masako Attends First State Banquet in 11 Years*, Available at: <https://ca.hellomagazine.com/royalty/2014103021657/queen-maxima-king-willem-alexander-tokyo-state-visit-japan/> (Accessed 23 November 2021).

¹³ The Mainichi (2018) *Crown Princess's Father to Retire from Int'l Judge Role, Return to Japan*, Available at: <https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180206/p2a/00m/0na/017000c> (Accessed 28 November 2021).

¹⁴ Hello Magazine (2014) *Splendid Welcome for Queen Maxima in Japan as Princess Masako Attends First State Banquet in 11 Years*, Available at: <https://ca.hellomagazine.com/royalty/2014103021657/queen-maxima-king-willem-alexander-tokyo-state-visit-japan/> (Accessed 23 November 2021).

¹⁵ Hello Magazine (2013) *Queen Maxima Played Key Role in Princess Masako's Improving Health*, Available at: <https://ca.hellomagazine.com/royalty/2013121516170/princess-masako-helped-by-queen-maxima/> (Accessed 28 November 2021).

Today, the Dutch have an embassy in Tokyo and a consulate in Osaka. Japan has an embassy in The Hague, which also serves as the representative to the various international institutions based in The Hague, such as the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ). In addition, there are two honorary Japanese consuls, in roles filled by Dutchmen, in Amsterdam and Rotterdam – where most Japanese companies are located, as well as Japanese schools. The Netherlands also has two honorary consuls in Japan, stationed in Nagoya and in Nagasaki.

In the 2000s, The Netherlands and Japan came into conflict over Japan's controversial whaling practices. Although the Netherlands has also engaged in whaling historically, it has since supported an international memorandum on the hunting and killing of whales.¹⁶ In contrast, Japan has continued to hunt various species of whale under the guise of scientific research for many years, drawing intense criticism from environmental activist groups such as Greenpeace and the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, which is registered in the Netherlands. The latter organization operated ships which directly and regularly harassed and disrupted the activities of Japanese whalers, and the Japanese government asked Dutch counterparts to take "practical measures" against these activities.¹⁷ The Dutch government's tolerance toward anti-whaling advocacy, including allowing the Sea Shepherds to register and sail under the Dutch flag, ignited tensions which lingered for some years. However, Japan's move in 2019 to limit whaling to its Exclusive Economic Zone and end the practice of whaling in Antarctic waters has allowed this issue to fade in prominence, and whaling is no longer a major issue in Dutch-Japanese relations.

Over the past two decades, there have been multiple official state visits between the Dutch and Japanese prime ministers. Prime Minister Willem Kok visited Japan in February 2000, the year of commemoration of 400 years of Dutch-Japanese relations. Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende followed this up with an official state visit to

¹⁶ Jim Goyjer (2020) *Dutch Whaling: The history of Whaling in the Netherlands*, Available at: <https://dutchreview.com/culture/history/dutch-whaling-the-history/> (Accessed 28 November 2021).

¹⁷ Voice of America (2014) *Japan Appeals to Netherlands to Take Action Against Anti-Whaling Group*, Available at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/japan-appeals-to-netherlands-to-take-action-against-antiwhaling-group/1843019.html> (Accessed 28 November 2021).

Japan in October 2009. The most recent official state visit was held in November 2015, when Prime Minister Mark Rutte visited Japan and both sides decided to launch a Strategic Partnership, aiming to “address common challenges and to further strengthen the bilateral ties.”¹⁸

In turn, Japanese Prime Minister Junichirō Koizumi briefly stopped by in the Netherlands in 2005, as he visited Luxembourg for an EU-Japan summit. Former Prime Minister Abe – in office between 2012-2020 – visited the Netherlands twice, first in 2014, to attend the Hague Nuclear Security Summit, and then in 2019, on an official state visit. In addition, Dutch foreign ministers Ben Bot, Maxime Verhagen and Uri Rosenthal have visited Japan in 2005, 2008 and 2011 respectively. Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida also visited the Hague, in 2013. The Netherlands was also invited to participate in the 2019 G20 summit by Japan, which was the host country that year. Therefore, a delegation led by Prime Minister Rutte participated.

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte and former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe are said to have shared a close personal bond, which developed over the years, as both took office in the early 2010s to become one of the longest-serving prime ministers of their respective countries.¹⁹ This friendly connection facilitated agreements such as the Dutch-Japanese Strategic Partnership and enabled the two leaders to work together on other concerns that have impacted the two countries.

Less politically sensitive issues, like economic relations and cooperation on research and technology, have dominated ties between the countries in recent decades. A common aim of the Netherlands and Japan has been to find high-tech solutions to major issues like climate change and demographic aging. Rutte highlighted this during Abe’s visit to the Netherlands in 2019, stating that the two countries are working together on the challenges of the 21st century – from cybersecurity and the Internet of Things to

¹⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2015) *Joint Statement on the Establishment of a Strategic Partnership for Sustainable Peace and Prosperity between Japan and the Kingdom of the Netherlands*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000110049.pdf> (Accessed 28 November 2021).

¹⁹ Authors’ communication with various Dutch officials.

nanotechnology and sustainable agriculture.²⁰ Japan's interest in Dutch high-tech horticulture and greenhouses was also evident from Abe's visit to a Dutch pepper grower in The Westland, on the sidelines of the 2014 Nuclear Security Summit in the Hague. The Japanese have also displayed an interest in Dutch social policies, such as increasingly flexible work weeks and euthanasia, while the Netherlands is interested in benefiting from Japan's experiences addressing broad areas, from Japanese solutions to societal challenges, such as the impact of an aging society on the labor market, pension systems and other aspects of the economy.²¹

In the 2010s, three developments have led to closer political ties between the European Union (EU) and Japan, and therefore, the Netherlands and Japan. Firstly, there are mutual concerns about the rising influence and importance of China in international politics, economics and in the security field. Secondly, United States' President Donald Trump's protectionist rhetoric and policies made the US a challenger of, rather than an ally in protecting the rules-based economic system and the liberal values it embodies. This forced Japan and the EU to be more active in promoting and safeguarding the economic status-quo. Finally, Brexit and especially the possibility of a no-deal Brexit gave Japan serious anxieties about its access to the European market, as the UK had been a key partner for Japan in the EU. To improve and bolster the multilateral system and its existing institutions became a shared goal. The Netherlands – as key proponent of a liberal and open trading system in the EU as well – became more important to Japanese companies and diplomats, as the United Kingdom left the bloc in 2020, after almost three years of negotiations about the terms of its departure.

Ultimately, the Netherlands' changing global outlook resulted in the Dutch Indo-Pacific Guidelines, published in November 2020.²² Although not formally aligned with

²⁰ Government of Netherlands (2019) *Speech by Prime Minister Mark Rutte at a Dinner on the Occasion of the Visit by the Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzō Abe*, Available at: <https://www.government.nl/documents/speeches/2019/01/09/speech-by-prime-minister-mark-rutte-at-a-dinner-on-the-occasion-of-the-visit-by-the-japanese-prime-minister-shinz%C5%8D-abe-rotterdam> (Accessed 28 November 2021).

²¹ Interview with officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

²² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands (2020) *Indo-Pacific: Een Leidraad voor Versterking van de Nederlandse en EU-Samenwerking Met Partners in Azië (Indo-Pacific: Guidelines for Strengthening Dutch and EU Cooperation with Partners in Asia)*, Available at: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/publicaties/2020/11/13/indo-pacific-een-leidraad-voor-versterking-van-de-nederlandse-en-eu-samenwerking-met-partners-in-azie> (Accessed 27 November 2021).

Japan's ongoing efforts to promote a "free and open Indo-Pacific," the Dutch push has been very much welcomed by the Japanese government.²³ In addition to the German and French efforts, the Netherlands has advocated for a more concise vision and more action from the EU and its member states in this important region. This push facilitated the adoption of the EU Indo-Pacific Strategy in September 2021.²⁴ At the June 2021 foreign minister's meeting between Toshimitsu Motegi and Sigrid Kaag, held on the sidelines of a G20 meeting, Motegi stated that he was "reassured by the increased involvement of the Netherlands in the Indo-Pacific,"²⁵ as both shared the view to strengthen cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

Security and military relations

The Netherlands and Japan have engaged in some security cooperation over the years, but there is potential for increasing the level of security cooperation. Japan's close alliance with the United States and its focus on France and the United Kingdom in Europe – which have far stronger military capabilities and, on occasion, a real presence in Japan's neighborhood – have resulted in a situation where the Netherlands has been somewhat overlooked.

Today, both countries closely align on many security and international law issues in the Indo-Pacific, including issues related to maritime security in the South China Sea. The Netherlands and Japan have also cooperated closely through multilateral security fora, like the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), as the Japanese embassy in the Hague also covers the international organizations located in the Hague. Similarly, the two countries have also cooperated on issues such as nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament. They have done so bilaterally, as well as in the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative – formed in 2010, to

²³Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2020) *Japan-Netherlands Summit Telephone Talk*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/we/nl/page6e_000224.html (Accessed 22 December 2021). See also: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Press Conference by Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/kaiken/kaiken6e_000032.html (Accessed 22 December 2021).

²⁴ European Commission (2021) *Questions and Answers: EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*, Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/QANDA_21_4709 (Accessed 27 November 2021).

²⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Japan-Netherlands Foreign Ministers' Meeting*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/we/nl/page4e_001153.html (Accessed 27 November 2021).

support the implementation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty – and in the “Broadly likeminded group” – an unofficial coordination group on non-proliferation and disarmament in Geneva and New York.²⁶ However, concrete examples of cooperation remain relatively scarce, although the two sides seem increasingly open to further security cooperation.

The Netherlands has a lieutenant-colonel stationed in Tokyo as a military attaché, who is also responsible for South Korea and the Philippines. Meanwhile, Japan has a colonel stationed in the Hague. These personnel focus largely on ceremonial functions, like war memorials and similar events which require a military presence. However, there have also been several contacts between each countries’ respective ministers of defense. In 2016, then Dutch Minister of Defense Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert visited the Japanese minister of defense at the time, Tomomi Inada, in Tokyo. This was followed by a meeting of their respective successors, Ank Bijleveld-Schouten and Itsunori Onodera, in the Hague, in 2018. These contacts, shared-security interests and a mutual appreciation of the changing power dynamics in the international system, especially in relation to China, are driving a desire for closer security cooperation.

Building on the bilateral strategic partnership which was signed in 2015 and the Memorandum on Defense Cooperation and Exchanges from 2016, cooperation and coordination have built up. Japan has become slightly more willing to involve itself internationally in security issues, although primarily through multilateral arrangements and strictly in non-combat roles. As a result of this push, Japanese forces worked with Dutch personnel in both the Iraq (2004-2006) and Afghanistan wars (2001), although the Japanese personnel were legally obligated to remain in non-combat zones.²⁷ In both cases, the Japanese focused on logistics or reconstruction efforts, rather than engaging as armed combatants.

The Dutch Indo-Pacific guidelines, published in November 2020, called for more active security engagement of Europe in the Indo-Pacific – more specifically, to

²⁶ Authors’ communication with an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

²⁷ Interview with an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

promote maritime security and unhindered safe passage on shipping routes.²⁸ The Dutch contribution to a mission in cooperation with the United Kingdom attests to its willingness to deliver on this intention, even if the Netherlands is unable to deliver on a sustained maritime presence in the Indo-Pacific. The Dutch government sent the frigate HNLMS Evertsen to accompany a UK Aircraft Carrier Strike Group on its mission to make port in Japan.²⁹ The ships departed Europe in May 2021 and many observers interpret the move as a direct message to the Chinese, as well as a symbolic gesture of solidarity with Japan and other countries in the region. The voyage was also, however, a useful opportunity for the Dutch Navy to practice in conjunction with a powerful naval force far from the homeland, which the Dutch Navy has not done in recent years. In the years ahead, the Dutch government will be challenged to follow through on rhetoric with solid, tangible examples of security cooperation, or risk losing their momentum. Despite overlapping interests and ideals, limited capabilities and differences in prioritization do limit security cooperation on the ground. It was hence remarkable that Minister of Defense Kajsa Ollongren, at the Shangri-La Dialogue, in June 2022, stated that the Netherlands would “strive to be present” in the Indo-Pacific in a European formula, once every two years.³⁰ Although Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, in February 2022, shifted much of the attention away from security concerns in the Indo-Pacific in the early stages of the war, Ollongren’s statement and previous policies indicate that the Netherlands will seek to strike a balance that gives challenges in the Indo-Pacific the attention they deserve.

Economic and commercial relations

As previously mentioned, economic relations play a significant role in the Japanese-Dutch relationship. At the Netherlands Embassy in Tokyo, a total of 18 people,

²⁸ Government of Netherlands (2020) *Indo-Pacific: Guidelines for Strengthening Dutch and EU Cooperation with Partners in Asia*, Available at: <https://www.government.nl/documents/publications/2020/11/13/indo-pacific-guidelines> (Accessed 27 November 2021).

²⁹ Jaime Karremann (2021) *HNLMS Evertsen to Join UK Task Group to Japan*, Available at: <https://naviesworldwide.com/navy-news/hnlms-evertsen-to-join-uk-taskgroup-to-japan/> (Accessed 28 November 2021).

³⁰ Ministry of Defense of the Netherlands (2022) *Mogelijk Vaker Marineschip Naar Indo-Pacific (Possibly More Often Marine Ship to the Indo-Pacific)*, Available at: <https://www.defensie.nl/actueel/nieuws/2022/06/13/mogelijk-vaker-marineschip-naar-indo-pacific> (Accessed 28 June 2022).

including five accredited officials from various Dutch ministries, work in four clusters: trade, agriculture/agri-tech, investment, and innovation.³¹ In recent years, climate-related topics – sustainable and circular economy – have gained in importance. On the Japanese side, officials from the Ministry of Economy Trade and Industry (METI), as well as the Ministry of Agriculture, have been stationed in the Netherlands for many years (although METI abolished this position in 2021) and the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) runs an office in Amsterdam. Trade and investment ties are also being promoted by dedicated chambers of commerce and more informal trade and investment promotion groups led by businessmen (in the Netherlands, the Dutch Japanese trade federation, called Dujat, since 1984), honorary consuls and private consultancies. Overall, Japan is considered to be a relatively difficult, closed market.³²

The strong economic relationship has weathered even the turbulence of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the first months of the pandemic, trade between the Netherlands and Japan was at a significantly high level. Brexit has also made the Netherlands more important for Japan, bilaterally and as a proponent within the EU of an open, liberal economic system. The Netherlands has benefited from economic activity relocating to the EU, as the Netherlands is widely seen as a stable, uncomplicated country for international business. Japanese electronics giant Panasonic, for example, moved its headquarters from London to Amsterdam, while investment bank Norinchukin opened a new branch in the Dutch city.³³ Amsterdam is thus rising in importance in international finance, at the expense of London. Also, the Netherlands and Japan are both important players in high-tech sectors, including semiconductors – and as an extension of this, in the multilateral debate on revising the international system on export controls.

Although COVID-19 put a massive damper on international trade, the figures have recovered well. Diplomats and experts on both sides are confident that these close,

³¹ Authors' communication with an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

³² Authors' communication with Dutch officials and private sector representatives.

³³ BBC (2018) *Panasonic to Move Europe Headquarters from UK to Amsterdam*, Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-45351288> (Accessed 27 November 2021). Invest in Holland (2019) *Norinchukin Bank Will Locate its New European Office in Amsterdam in 2019*, Available at: <https://investinholland.com/news/norinchukin-bank-will-locate-its-new-european-office-in-amsterdam-in-2019/> (Accessed 27 November 2021).

cooperative trade ties will not only continue but also improve.³⁴

Although the Netherlands had a trade deficit with Japan of about 3.6 billion euros in 2019, Dutch exports to Japan have been steadily increasing in recent years, from 5.35 billion euros in 2016 to 7.66 billion euros in 2020, including both goods and services.³⁵ The most valuable goods exported to Japan are machinery and transport equipment and chemical products. Specifically, the top exports are instruments and devices for professional practice, specialized machines and medical/pharmaceutical products. Services from the Netherlands have also grown quickly over recent years, especially in the realm of intellectual property. Many lucrative pieces of intellectual property are owned by actors within the Netherlands, which bring in revenue when they are streamed or purchased abroad.³⁶ Services in general between the two countries, flowing in both directions, have picked up pace in recent years. Services like research and development, professional or management advice and various forms of consulting are commonly exchanged.

The most recent investment figures are also healthy, as Dutch investments in Japan topped 16.49 billion euros in 2018.³⁷ The largest Dutch companies active in Japan are Randstad, with 1,200 workers; NL Life, which is the first European insurance firm to begin operating in Japan, with 700 workers; and Royal Philips, with 500 workers.³⁸ Dutch investments in Japan tend to focus on life-science and healthcare technology. Conversely, about 350 Japanese companies are presently registered in the Netherlands and Japanese companies have invested in key Dutch companies in recent years, including the acquisition of Dutch energy company Eneco by Mitsubishi and Chubu Electric Power and of USG People by Recruit Holdings.

³⁴ Interviews with officials of the Netherlands' and Japanese Ministries of Foreign Affairs.

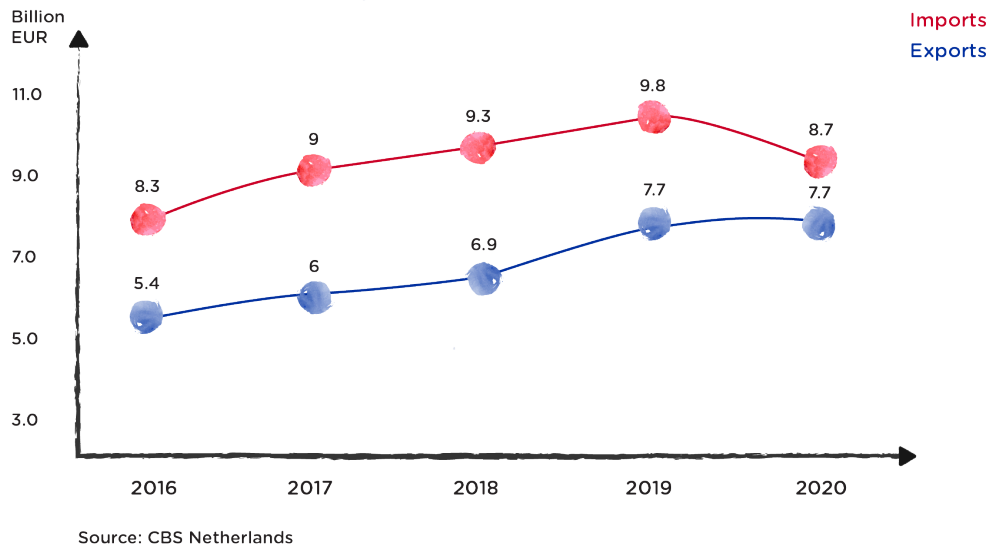
³⁵ Statistics Netherlands (2021) *Dutch Trade in Facts and Figures*, Available at: https://www.cbs.nl/-/media/_pdf/2021/44/dutch-trade-2021.pdf (Accessed 27 November 2021).

³⁶ Interview with an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

³⁷ Netherlands Enterprise Agency (2021) *Handel Nederland-Japan (Trade Netherlands-Japan)*, Available at: <https://www.rvo.nl/onderwerpen/internationaal-ondernemen/landenoverzicht/japan/handel-nederland-japan#> (Accessed 22 December 2021). For statistics of the Bank of Japan (BOJ) see Bank of Japan (n.d.) *Statistics*, Available at: https://www.boj.or.jp/en/statistics/br/bop_06/bpdata/index.htm/#p003 (Accessed 22 December 2021).

³⁸ Interview with an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

The Netherlands' trade with Japan in billion euros



Dutch imports from Japan have remained steady, typically ranging between 8-9 billion euros annually, the majority of these imports being goods, rather than services. The most valuable imports from Japan are machinery and transport equipment. More specifically, the main imports from Japan are office and automatic data processing machines, specialized machines and electrical devices. The most valuable Japanese services which the Dutch purchase are telecommunications and computer services. Japanese direct investments in the Netherlands were roughly 19.61 billion euros in 2018.³⁹ Dutch agricultural technology is also highly sought after in Japan, which the Dutch embassy in Tokyo has promoted through the organization of agriculture-tech expos, in cooperation with Dutch firms. Furthermore, the Dutch are also experts in the so-called “night-economy,” a catch-all term which applies to economic activity after the sun has set. More specifically, it refers to late-night cultural events and the entertainment industry.

The Netherlands is said to enjoy a reputation as an environmental technology leader in Japan, especially on the circular economy.⁴⁰ Japanese stakeholders are interested in Dutch expertise and experience, as Japan has recently become more

³⁹ Netherlands Enterprise Agency (2021) *Handel Nederland-Japan (Trade Netherlands-Japan)*, Available at: <https://www.rvo.nl/onderwerpen/internationaal-ondernemen/landenoverzicht/japan/handel-nederland-japan#> (Accessed 22 December 2021).

⁴⁰ Interview with an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

ambitious with its climate policies. Under Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, Japan has accepted the pledge to become carbon-neutral by 2050 and has passed some plastic waste regulations as well.⁴¹ Dutch insights on meeting Japan's climate goals are highly appreciated, as Japan views these goals as firm commitments, not just rhetoric.

Digital trade is an emerging area of Dutch Japanese trade which has immense potential for growth. Officials in both countries are actively working to grow this aspect of the relationship. Mona Keijzer, a Dutch State Secretary for Economic Affairs and Climate Policy, led a digital trade mission in February 2021, in support of this goal. The trade mission had three main areas of focus, smart industries, smart agriculture and smart services. It was met with a warm welcome and enthusiasm in Japan.⁴²

Economic officials in the Dutch embassy in Tokyo are also involved in the promotion of women in the workplace and other gender related initiatives. The Netherlands has much more progressive social policies and norms, including on women and gender related issues, than Japan. This results in Japan seeing the Netherlands as a leader on social issues, putting the Dutch in a position to help share knowledge and experience on the subject. An example of this was the Women Tech Heroes initiative launched by the Universiteit Eindhoven with a Japanese counterpart, which the embassy helped to facilitate. The initiative was meant to showcase successful women in technology sectors, traditionally dominated by men. It was met with some success, however engagement with the initiative was somewhat limited to women, which hampered its impact.⁴³

Japan is an important economic partner for the Netherlands because Japan is already contending with many of the economic challenges which the Netherlands, and many other European states, will face in the longer term. An aging population, slowing economic growth and other significant, systemic difficulties are already pressing concerns for Japanese policymakers and according to current projections, they will be in the Netherlands soon as well. As such, Japan is working to find solutions and

⁴¹ Japan Times (2020) *Suga Calls for "Bold Action" to Fight Climate Change*, Available at: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/12/14/national/suga-bold-action-climate-change/> (Accessed 27 November 2021).

⁴² Interview with an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

⁴³ Interview with an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

innovations that will be invaluable to the Netherlands in the coming years. As Japan develops a more qualitative economic approach, with a focus beyond the pursuit of growth, the Netherlands will be increasingly interested in profiting from shared best practices and innovations.

Cultural and people-to-people relations and perceptions of Japan

The long history of relations between Japan and the Netherlands has resulted in a unique cultural relationship. The centuries-old relationship that the Netherlands and Japan share is so often used to categorize relations that it is nearly a cliché, but it remains a natural introduction in many cases. The 400-year anniversary celebrations in 2000 were an important milestone in relations and are still viewed very warmly by the two sides.⁴⁴ Roughly 400 events were held in Japan, including classical and pop concerts, 17th century art exhibitions, design expos, trade fairs and many more. Most showcased the modern Netherlands, as well as the historical relationship. The pinnacle of this celebration was “Holland Week,” which began on 19 April 2000. During this week, the then-Crown Prince, now King Willem-Alexander, led a group of Dutch VIPs on a tour of Japan, visiting many areas of special interest to the historical relationship.⁴⁵

The number of Japanese nationals residing in the Netherlands totaled 10,460 in October 2020, while roughly 1,500 Dutch nationals reside in Japan (2018 figures).⁴⁶ People-to-people exchanges – whether for business, research and education, cultural or tourism purposes – are much facilitated by the availability of direct flights. The geographically favorably located Schiphol Airport, nearby Amsterdam, is a transit hub for flights within Europe. As such, KLM Dutch Royal Airlines flies directly to Narita every day and to Osaka 5-6 times per week. Direct flights to Fukuoka were offered for several years, until they were suspended in 2016. Japan Airlines (JAL) operated direct flights between Narita and Amsterdam but discontinued this service in 2010.

⁴⁴ Interviews with officials of the Netherlands’ and Japanese Ministries of Foreign Affairs.

⁴⁵ The Netherlands and you (n.d.) *Dutch-Japanese Relations*, Available at: <https://www.netherlandsandyou.nl/your-country-and-the-netherlands/japan/and-the-netherlands/dutch-japanese-relations> (Accessed 15 July 2021).

⁴⁶ Interview with an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

Japan is one of 23 focus countries for Dutch cultural outreach, which aims to improve the Netherlands' visibility abroad, support the Dutch cultural sector and use the cultural sector to support the pursuit of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.⁴⁷ As such, the country is an important target of Dutch cultural outreach. In addition, Japan is earmarked as one of 10 countries with which the Netherlands has a coordinated cultural heritage cooperation, which includes cooperation between museums, and much of which is related to the former Dutch East Indies Company (VOC, in Dutch), which owned the Dutch trading post in Dejima.⁴⁸

Japan's appreciation of the long and deep cultural ties with the Netherlands has aided diplomatic and people-to-people exchanges. Dutch diplomats have found that they can use Japan's love of the traditional arts – such as Delft blue porcelain – to fuel an interest in the new Dutch high-tech and innovation. For years, an artist-in-residence program has facilitated exchanges between contemporary Dutch artists and industrial designers that seek to contribute to the (much-needed) revitalization of Japan's traditional Arita porcelain.⁴⁹

Cultural relations between Japan and the Netherlands deepened in 1983, with the opening of the “Holland Village” theme park near Nagasaki. As a result, products like gouda cheese and wooden shoes became popular. “Holland Village” was such a success that the management decided, in 1993, to expand the project, thus building “Huis ten Bosch,” named after the royal palace in the Hague.⁵⁰ Students of Japanese Studies at Leiden University, home to one of the oldest and most established centers for Japanese

⁴⁷ Government of the Netherlands (2019) *Beleidskader Internationaal Cultuurbeleid 2021-2024 (International Cultural Policy 2021-2024)*, Available at: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2019/12/06/beleidskader-internationaal-cultuurbeleid-2021-2024> (Accessed 22 December 2021).

⁴⁸ Interview with an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. Government of the Netherlands (2021) *Kamerbrief over Voortgang Internationaal Cultuurbeleid (Progress Report International Cultural Policy 2020)*, Available at: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2021/11/17/kamerbrief-inzake-voortgang-internationaal-cultuurbeleid> (Accessed 22 December 2021).

⁴⁹ Asia-Europe Foundation (2015) *Dutch Ceramicists at Work in Arita, Japan*, Available at: <https://culture360.asef.org/news-events/dutch-ceramicists-work-arita-japan/> (Accessed 27 November 2021).

⁵⁰ The Netherlands and you (n.d.) *Dutch-Japanese Relations*, Available at <https://www.netherlandsandyou.nl/your-country-and-the-netherlands/japan/and-the-netherlands/dutch-japanese-relations> (Accessed 15 July 2021).

Studies in the Western world, worked in the park.⁵¹

Dick Bruna's creation "Nijntje," obviously popular in the Netherlands, captured the hearts of many Japanese children as "Miffy-chan". However, this popularity eventually led to a very public legal dispute between Bruna and the owners of "Hello Kitty" over possible copyright infringement.⁵² The two characters, Nijntje and Hello Kitty, roughly resemble each other, prompting both sides to seek compensation. However, this was put aside as the two creators reconciled to help victims of the Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami in 2011, effectively transforming the cultural friction into a heart-warming story, which was appreciated by the Japanese people.⁵³

Alongside to cultural exchanges, educational exchanges have also been very fruitful for Dutch-Japanese relations. Typically, there are roughly 9,300 Japanese students studying in the Netherlands per year and many come away from the experience with a warm impression of the country.⁵⁴ This is especially true for students of the creative arts, specifically design and architecture. Design students tend to go to the University of Eindhoven, while architecture students flock to TU Delft and students of music to the Dutch royal conservatories. Some former students who have since returned to Japan from the Netherlands have gone on to set up student associations, such as the Japan Netherlands Architecture Cultural Association (JNACA), to promote further educational exchanges. The focus areas of the JNACA are design, art, water management and architecture.

Meanwhile, various Dutch universities partner with Japanese universities in student exchange programs. These are attractive as they involve relatively simple administrative procedures, as students continue to be registered at their home university when studying abroad.

Separately, the Japanese Embassy in the Netherlands seeks every year to attract

⁵¹ Interview with an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

⁵² Dutch News (2011) *Hello Kitty and Miffy Bury the Hatchet*. Available at: https://www.dutchnews.nl/news/2011/06/hello_kitty_and_miffy_bury_the/ (Accessed 27 November, 2021).

⁵³ The Netherlands and you (n.d.) *Dutch-Japanese Relations*, Available at: <https://www.netherlandsandyou.nl/your-country-and-the-netherlands/japan/and-the-netherlands/dutch-japanese-relations> (Accessed 15 July 2021).

⁵⁴ Interview with an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

Dutch students for longer-term exchange programs and short-term visits that are financially fully supported by the Japanese Government. This includes the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) programs for undergraduate and research students and the MIRAI (meaning “Future” in Japanese) Program, featuring intellectual exchange among students from across Japan and Europe.

Starting in April 2020, the Netherlands and Japan introduced a working holiday visa program.⁵⁵ The program is open to people between the ages of 18 and 30 years old and allows participants of either country to stay up until a year in the other, on an extended holiday visa. During this stay, they are also permitted to work in order to support themselves. This program has been very successful in the cultural sector, allowing young Dutch and Japanese creatives to enjoy each other’s cultures.

Finally, turning to media coverage and elite perceptions of the other country, it is noticeable that the relative ease of maintaining stable relations between the two countries has also caused the relationship to fly under the radar at times. Although Dutch policymakers recognize Japan’s importance as a G7 nation, the third largest economy in the world and a key strategic actor in the Indo-Pacific, there is still a sense of unfamiliarity which clouds Japan. This difficulty Dutch elites have in understanding Japan is exacerbated by the fact that domestic political developments in the geographically distant country, for example, are considered not to be of real importance to the Netherlands. In addition, despite many shared interests, there are distinctions between the two countries. Japan’s media is much less open than the Netherlands, gender issues are not as progressive, and Japanese society is more hierarchical than in the Netherlands. This limits mutual understanding and suggests that, ultimately, the mortar which holds the Netherlands and Japan together is not like-mindedness but rather shared interests.

Reporting on the Netherlands in Japan tends to rely on external Dutch contributors, as no full-time journalists are stated based in the Netherlands, while Japanese journalists based in Brussels tend to report on the Netherlands. As a result, reporting tends to be limited to crises, standard and hot topics (like war-time history,

⁵⁵ Embassy of Japan in the Netherlands (n.d.) *Working Holiday Visa*, Available at: https://www.nl.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/r_workingholidayvisa.html (Accessed 15 July 2021).

whaling and the Olympics) and “remarkable” stories (such as Dutch euthanasia practices and the high Japanese government debt), while in-depth stories are oftentimes lacking.

Conclusions and recommendations

Throughout the long 400 years of relations, the Dutch-Japanese relationship has varied substantially. From the unique trust that Japan and the Netherlands shared during Japan’s period of isolation, through the sharp animosity which clouded the post-war decades, to the mutually beneficial economic cooperation of today, the relationship has seen its peaks and valleys. However, as the Netherlands and the EU as a whole turn to the Indo-Pacific, there is ample room for the Dutch-Japanese relationship to continue to prosper. For the Netherlands, Japan is a key ally in a region which is quickly pulling the geopolitical center of gravity toward it. Regarding the shared-interests between the Netherlands and Japan, whether it is safeguarding and encouraging free and open trade, defending international law or sharing technological innovations, the two countries often see eye-to-eye. Yet there is still work to be done. Important parts of the Dutch society still feel that Japan has not yet mended the trauma of the invasion and occupation of the Dutch-East Indies, which is still a painful memory for some. There are also still vast social and cultural differences between Dutch and Japanese people, although cultural exchanges, especially through education and the arts, are working to bring these unique peoples together.

Although the potential for increased cooperation and closer relations is there, the reality is ultimately that the Netherlands is a small country and Japan is on opposite sides of the globe. While the relationship is productive, it is not likely to be prioritized by either side. However, this does not mean that the collaborative Dutch-Japanese relationship is irrelevant but rather that it should be a driver of a closer EU-Japan relationship and a more effective EU Indo-Pacific strategy.

More work needs to be done by stakeholders in the Netherlands and in Europe more broadly to pursue the core aspects of the Dutch Indo-Pacific Guidelines, the EU Indo-Pacific Strategy and the EU-Japan Connectivity Partnership more actively. Both of these documents are of critical importance to the Dutch and the European approach to

the broader Indo-Pacific region, and Japan specifically, and to developing appropriate responses to China's growing role and influence internationally. Although direct cooperation between the Netherlands and Japan on these ambitious policy programs may be difficult, effectively coordinating and synergizing activities will help achieve the shared goals of both sides. Both the Indo-Pacific Guidelines and the EU connectivity agenda – relabeled Global Gateway in December 2021 – are intended to reinforce the open, rules-based international system and the democratic norms which underpin it. It is both in the Dutch interest, as well as the Japanese one, to effectively counter the authoritarian challenges and disruptions arising in the Indo-Pacific and globally. Coordinating on a multifaceted policy approach, which includes a focus on green technologies, digital development cooperation⁵⁶ and economic resilience, upholding international law and deepening economic relations, would benefit the Netherlands and the EU, Japan and the other states in the Indo-Pacific.

The Dutch-Japanese relationship may also improve if more concrete examples of cooperation on security issues are achieved. There has been a limited number of tangible results since the signing of the strategic partnership between the Netherlands and Japan. More exercises, like the voyage of the HMS Evertsen, may be useful, but the Dutch government must find a balance between investments in a presence and projects in the Indo-Pacific and Eurasian theaters – which are inherently interconnected – and between being provocative toward China and signaling support for Indo-Pacific allies like Japan.

Increased effort from both sides to promote EU-Japanese relations is also of the essence. The strong working relationship between the Netherlands and Japan could be used as an asset for a broader, stronger relationship between Japan and the rest of the EU. Occasionally, EU-Japanese relations have been held back by Japan's preference for dealing with member states, whom Tokyo regards as more effective. This could be an opportunity for EU member states like the Netherlands, who have a good working relationship with Japan, to work with EU officials to bridge this gap. At the same time,

⁵⁶ For more details, see for example Maaïke Okano-Heijmans and Wilhelm Vosse (2021) "Promoting Open and Inclusive Connectivity: The Case for Digital Development Cooperation," *Research in Globalization*, 3.

both the Netherlands and Japan agree that a stronger EU is needed. Both sides would like to see an EU which can leverage the combined strength of EU members to adequately address today's geopolitical competition.

Ultimately, the open, rules-based system needs to be protected and promoted not just at sea but also on land – in the economic, digital and cultural realms and in societies at large. Japan and the Netherlands can do more to act on shared interests and norms here as well. Assisting countries with sustainable economic and societal development is an important way to see to it that governments and people opt for rules-based solutions that benefit all people. Real investments are needed for this purpose – in transport, energy and digital infrastructures, as well as in the businesses that rely on such infrastructure and the regulations that underpin it. Aligned efforts of the Netherlands, EU and Japan in each of these fields will ensure that the shared interests and the norms their societies stand for guide the relationship in the years ahead.

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- www.nytimes.com/1971/10/09/archives/hirohito-is-met-by-dutch-hostility-on-tour.html (Accessed 15 July 2021).
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Relations between Poland and Japan: Sympathy despite remoteness

By Karol ŻAKOWSKI*

Overview

Poland has been one of the most important partners of Japan in Central and Eastern Europe. At the beginning of bilateral relations, both countries were linked by their common perception of the USSR or Russia as a potential threat to their security. Despite having been in enemy camps during the Second World War, no enmity between Poland and Japan has ever existed, which facilitated mutual cooperation. Poland's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), in 1999, and the European Union (EU), in 2004, paved way toward deepening bilateral contacts in political, economic, and cultural fields. As a United States ally and a free-market economy, Poland became Japan's strategic partner and an important target of Japanese Foreign Direct Investments. At the same time, a never-ending interest of the Japanese in Chopin music, as well as growing popularity of Japanese cuisine, manga and anime in Poland fueled people-to-people exchanges.

History of relations – United by a common enemy

The first contact between the Polish and the Japanese peoples dates back to 1585, when Polish Bishop Bernard Maciejowski met with Japanese diplomatic emissaries to Europe, in the Vatican. The first Japanese who visited Polish territory was Major Yasumasa Fukushima, who traveled by horse from Berlin to Vladivostok in 1892.¹

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¹ Embassy of Japan in Poland (2019) "Japonia i Polska – 100 lat stosunków dyplomatycznych (Poland and Japan – 100 Years of Diplomatic Relations)," *Biuletyn Informacyjny*, Available at: <https://www.pl.emb-japan.go.jp/kultura/documents/Biuletyny/biuletyn0119.pdf> (Accessed 17 December 2021).

Initial political contacts between both sides started before the regaining of independence by Poland in 1918. During the Russo-Japanese War, in 1904, a Polish independence activist and future head of state, Józef Piłsudski, visited Tokyo to promote Japan's financial and military support for the Polish revolt against Russia.² Interestingly, at the same time, another Polish patriot, nationalist leader Roman Dmowski, traveled to Japan to warn the imperial government against inciting an uprising in Poland, which, he feared, could be easily crushed.³ Tokyo envisaged forming a brigade from Polish prisoners of war among Russian soldiers, but eventually this plan was deemed too risky and abandoned.⁴ Still, intelligence cooperation between Polish patriots and the Japanese Imperial Army paved the way toward swift establishment of official diplomatic relations between Japan and independent Poland, in 1919.⁵

After the First World War, it was the Soviet threat that pushed bilateral cooperation further. Although Warsaw, despite encouragement from Tokyo, refused to join the Anti-Comintern Pact, it did recognize Japan-occupied Manchukuo, in 1938. Tokyo reciprocated by attempting eventually futile diplomatic mediation between Warsaw and Berlin.⁶ Interestingly, cordial relations between both countries continued after the German invasion of Poland, in September 1939. The Polish government in exile provided intelligence against the Soviet Union to Japan, while the Japanese consul in Kaunas, Chiune Sugihara, organized a large-scale operation of saving Polish Jews.⁷ The Polish Embassy in Tokyo operated until October 1941, and only after the Pacific War started in December 1941, did the Polish government in exile declare war on Japan.

² Raymond Hutchings (1999) *Japan's Economic Involvement in Eastern Europe and Eurasia*, Basingstoke and London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 107-108.

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 107-108.

⁴ Grzegorz Baziur (2017) "Biały Orzeł i Złota Chryzantema. Współpraca polsko-japońska: Mit, możliwość czy konieczność dziejowa? – wybrane aspekty (White Eagle and Golden Chrysanthemum. PolishJapanese Cooperation: Myth, Historical Possibility, or Necessity? – Selected Aspects)," *Politeja*, 1(46), pp. 309-310.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 310.

⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 312-313.

⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 313-314.

Still, Polish-Japanese espionage cooperation was not completely broken until 1944.⁸

As Poland became a USSR-satellite country in 1945, in the immediate postwar period, Warsaw's policy toward Tokyo was largely determined by Soviet grand strategy. Together with the USSR and Czechoslovakia, Poland refused to sign the San Francisco Peace Treaty in 1951. Only after Tokyo normalized diplomatic relations with Moscow, in 1956, did favorable conditions for reestablishment of official contacts between both countries appear. According to the Agreement Relating to the Restoration of Normal Relations Between the People's Republic of Poland and Japan, signed in February 1957, both sides mutually waived all claims related to the past war against the other state.⁹

Economic relations between communist Poland and Japan were not overly intensive. In 1958, Warsaw and Tokyo signed a commercial treaty and in 1967 they established a joint committee to plan intensification of trade exchange.¹⁰ Poland exported to Japan mainly coal, while Japan assisted in the modernization of Polish steel and machine industries.¹¹ In 1972, representatives of the largest Japanese companies established the Japan-Poland Economic Committee.¹² Businesses from both countries also cooperated in third states – in Libya and East Germany in the 1970s, as well as in Iraq, in the 1980s.¹³

At the beginning of the 1980s, Japan closely observed the creation of Solidarity, an anti-communist labor movement in Poland. In 1980, Warsaw was visited by the leaders of the two largest Japanese trade unions: *Dōmei* and *Sōhyō*.¹⁴ In the spring of 1981, in turn, Solidarity Chairperson Lech Walesa paid a visit to Japan, where he met

⁸ Ibidem, pp. 314-316.

⁹ Ewa Pałasz-Rutkowska (2016) "Difficult Beginnings: The Problem Concerning the Restoration of Diplomatic Relations between Poland and Japan after World War II", *Acta Asiatica Varsoviensia*, 29, pp. 159-162.

¹⁰ Grzegorz Baziur (2017) "Biały Orzeł i Żółta Chryzantema. Współpraca polsko-japońska: Mit, możliwość czy konieczność dziejowa? – wybrane aspekty (White Eagle and Golden Chrysanthemum. Polish-Japanese Cooperation: Myth, Historical Possibility, or Necessity? – Selected Aspects)", *Politeja*, 1(46), p. 317.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 317.

¹² Ibidem, p. 317.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 318.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 318.

many trade union activists, politicians, and people of culture and media.¹⁵ Relations between Tokyo and Warsaw were shaken after the introduction of martial law in Poland, in December 1981. While Japan did not join economic sanctions against Poland, instituted by the US, it suspended bilateral cooperation in all fields.¹⁶ Many ordinary Japanese sympathized with the Poles' struggle against the communist regime, and the Japanese government granted asylum to those Polish citizens who were afraid to return to their motherland, including former Ambassador to Japan Zdzislaw Rurarz.¹⁷ Interestingly, during a meeting with European ambassadors in March 2018, Japanese Foreign Minister Tarō Kōno brought up his experience with this difficult period in Polish history. In 1984, he got arrested when, as a foreign exchange student in Poland, he visited Lech Walesa's house.¹⁸

The collapse of communism and democratization of Poland in 1989 opened a new chapter in bilateral relations. By waiving Polish debts and investing in Poland, Japan contributed to the success of Poland's regime transition.

Political and strategic relations

Political relations between Poland and Japan were reevaluated after the collapse of communism in Europe. The process of deepening mutual ties accelerated after the accession of Poland to the EU in 2004. As the largest of new EU members, Poland was perceived by Tokyo as one of the leaders of Central European countries.

The intensification of Poland–Japan diplomatic contacts dates back to the last years of the existence of the People's Republic of Poland. Initially, negotiations during summit meetings were dominated by Poland's financial problems. In January 1987, Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone visited Warsaw, which was followed by a visit of Chairperson of the Council of State of Poland Wojciech Jaruzelski to Tokyo, in July

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 318.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 319.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 319.

¹⁸ Sankei Shinbun (2018) *Kōno Tarō Gaishō: "Ōshū wa Tomeoki-ba made Keiken Shita Najimibukai Tokoro. Gakusei Jidai ni Pōrando de Taiho (Foreign Minister Kōno Tarō: "For Me Europe Is a Familiar Place Where I Even Experienced a Detention Center". Arrested as a Student in Poland)*, Available at: <https://www.sankei.com/article/20180301-IS5BVM2JFRI37JSNZEN7NTKD6I/> (Accessed 3 July 2021).

1987. Both sides signed a letter of intent regarding the provision of new loans to Poland, but eventually credits were suspended until the resolution of the foreign debt problem by Warsaw.¹⁹ After the end of the Cold War, Tokyo participated in a stabilization fund aimed at assisting Central European countries' transition from a centrally planned economy to a free market.²⁰ The second visit by a head of the Japanese government to Poland took place in January 1990. During his stay in Warsaw, Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu discussed the issues of relaunching credits to Poland, providing technologies for the protection of the natural environment, intensifying students' and cultural exchanges, as well as organizing bilateral trainings for managers.²¹ Eventually, it was President Lech Walesa's visit to Japan, in December 1994, that paved the way toward the final resolution of Poland's foreign debt problem.²²

After Warsaw managed to overcome financial obstacles, it started being treated by Tokyo as a more equal partner. Poland's rising importance for Japan was symbolized by Emperor Akihito's and Empress Michiko's visit to Poland in July 2002. The imperial couple was cordially welcomed not only by Polish politicians but also by the inhabitants of Warsaw and Krakow.²³ Mutual friendship was symbolized by the fact that the Emperor laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Warsaw. President Aleksander Kwasniewski stated that the visit opened a new chapter in cooperation with Japan, which Poland considered "one of the most important political and economic partners."²⁴ The positive atmosphere in bilateral relations was not spoiled even by the fact that Prime Minister Leszek Miller's wife, Aleksandra Miller, committed a diplomatic *faux pas*, when she greeted the imperial couple dressed in a white and pink

¹⁹ Grzegorz Baziur (2017) "Biały Orzeł i Żółta Chryzantema. Współpraca polsko-japońska: Mit, możliwość czy konieczność dziejowa? – wybrane aspekty (White Eagle and Golden Chrysanthemum. PolishJapanese Cooperation: Myth, Historical Possibility, or Necessity? – Selected Aspects)," *Politeja*, 1(46), p. 319.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 320.

²¹ Ibidem, pp. 320-321.

²² Ibidem, p. 321.

²³ Dziennik Polski (2002) *Cesarz w królewskim mieście (Emperor in Royal City)*, Available at: <https://dziennikpolski24.pl/cesarz-w-królewskim-mieście/ar/2263602> (Accessed 19 December 2021).

²⁴ Interia/PAP (2002) *Cesarz Japonii rozpoczął wizytę w Polsce (Japanese Emperor Started Visit in Poland)*, Available at: <https://wydarzenia.interia.pl/polska/news-cesarz-japonii-rozpoznal-wizyte-w-polsce,nId,791246> (Accessed 5 July 2021).

dress, painted with inscriptions “sexy” and “love.”²⁵

Poland’s accession to NATO, in 1999, and the EU, in 2004, created a favorable environment for further intensification of diplomatic exchanges between Poland and Japan. In August 2003, Prime Minister Junichirō Koizumi visited Warsaw, where he met with Prime Minister Leszek Miller. Both leaders discussed the problems of North Korean nuclear armaments and cooperation in the US-occupied Iraq, and Miller expressed his support for Tokyo’s efforts to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.²⁶ Importantly, the two sides signed the Joint Statement towards the Strategic Partnership. They agreed that the expected EU enlargement would facilitate rapid development of mutual cooperation in all spheres. For that reason, they declared their will to establish a “Strategic Partnership on matters of mutual interest in both European and global dimensions” and hold regular consultative meetings of ministries of foreign affairs officials in Tokyo or in Warsaw, alternately.²⁷

While the following decade was characterized by a deepening of economic and cultural exchange between both countries, political contacts remained relatively shallow. Visits to Japan by Prime Minister Marek Belka, in January 2005, and by President Lech Kaczyński, in December 2008, did not bring any new agreements. The situation changed under the administration of Prime Minister Shinzō Abe (2012-2020), who put emphasis on strengthening ties with democratic countries, based on common values. During his visit to Warsaw, in June 2013, Abe held a summit meeting not only with Prime Minister Donald Tusk but also with the heads of government of three other Visegrad Group (V4) countries: the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia. Abe and Tusk reconfirmed the importance of such values as freedom, democracy, and human rights in enhancing bilateral cooperation.²⁸ Both sides agreed to hold the first meeting between the defense authorities of the two countries in autumn 2013, and the Polish

²⁵ Wprost (2002) *Pani Miller jest “sexy” i “love” (Ms. Miller Is “Sexy” and “Love”)*, Available at: <https://www.wprost.pl/zycie/27251/Pani-Miller-jest-sexy-i-love.html> (Accessed 7 December 2021).

²⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2003) *Joint Statement towards the Strategic Partnership between Japan and the Republic of Poland*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/poland/joint0308.html> (Accessed 6 July 2021).

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2013) *Japan-Poland Summit Meeting*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/page6e_000081.html (Accessed 6 July 2021).

prime minister invited a training squadron of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force to make a port call in Gdynia, in August 2013 – the first event of this kind in the history of bilateral relations.²⁹ Strengthening ties with Poland was consistent with Abe’s policy of increasing Japan’s engagement in both regional and global security matters, aimed mainly at counterbalancing China’s rise.

Japan’s values diplomacy toward Poland continued in the following years. In February 2015, President Bronislaw Komorowski paid a working visit to Tokyo. Both sides expressed their intention to upgrade the bilateral relationship and signed the joint statement “Building Framework for Strategic Partnership for Freedom, Growth and Solidarity.”³⁰ President Komorowski supported the policy of “Proactive Contribution to Peace” promoted by the Abe administration, and Abe shared with his guest a view that the problem of the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia should be resolved peacefully, respecting the sovereignty of Ukraine.³¹ Both leaders agreed to initiate consultations between Japan’s newly-created National Security Secretariat and Poland’s National Security Bureau, which symbolized gradual institutionalization of bilateral contacts.³²

The strategic partnership between the two countries was continued after Law and Justice party came to power in Poland, in November 2015. In May 2017, both sides signed the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategic Partnership for 2017-2020. According to the document, the two sides would hold political consultations at the deputy foreign minister level once every two years and at the level of corresponding high-level officials in charge, respectively, of Europe and Asia once a year, in addition to regular dialogue on national security and defense issues.³³

In January 2020, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki visited Tokyo. He agreed

²⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2015) *Joint Statement between Japan and Poland “Building Framework for Strategic Partnership for Freedom, Growth and Solidarity,”* Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000069289.pdf> (Accessed 6 July 2021).

³¹ Ibidem.

³² Ibidem.

³³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2017) *Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategic Partnership between the Government of Japan and the Government of the Republic of Poland for the years 2017-2020,* Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000257372.pdf> (Accessed 8 July 2021).

with Prime Minister Abe that both governments should coordinate their policies on maintaining an international order based on the rule of law, on promoting denuclearization of North Korea, and on resolving the problem of abductions of Japanese citizens by North Korean agents.³⁴ In May 2021, a new Action Plan for the implementation of bilateral strategic partnership was signed. It stipulated signing a memorandum on defense cooperation and exchanges between defense ministries of both countries, exploring the possibility of initiating consultations on cyber and digital issues, as well as developing collaboration through NATO,³⁵ which was signed in February 2022.³⁶ Nevertheless, mutual agreements in the security field have not been followed by any practical forms of defense cooperation.

In April 2022, Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Yoshimasa Hayashi, who visited Poland as a special envoy of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, expressed solidarity with Warsaw over the refugee crisis caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, started in February 2022. The imposition of sanctions on Russia by both countries became an opportunity to strengthen mutual cooperation. In particular, Poland assisted Tokyo in the evacuation of Japanese expatriates from the war zone and in the transportation of defense equipment to Ukraine.³⁷

Japan has maintained an embassy in Warsaw, as well as an honorary consulate in Krakow, while Poland has maintained an embassy in Tokyo, as well as honorary consulates in Kobe and Hiroshima. Embassies of the two countries have hosted defense attachés. Cordial relations were maintained not only by both governments but also by the two Diets. Mutual friendship parliamentary groups have existed in both countries

³⁴ Public Relations Office, Government of Japan (2020) *Japan-Poland Summit Meeting*, Available at: https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/202002/202002_00_en.html (Accessed 8 July 2021).

³⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategic Partnership between the Government of the Republic of Poland and the Government of Japan for the years 2021-2025*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/100186407.pdf> (Accessed 8 July 2021).

³⁶ Ministry of Defense of Japan (2022) *Signing Ceremony of the Japan-Poland Memorandum on Defense Cooperation and Exchanges, and Defense Ministers' Video Teleconference*, Available at: <https://www.mod.go.jp/en/article/2022/02/e456cb999db5e19e80c1be11a8f41c0a4d01cef6.html> (Accessed 28 June 2022).

³⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2022) *Japan-Poland Foreign Ministers' Meeting*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/c_see/pl/page4e_001221.html (Accessed 28 June 2022).

since 1974 – initially led by Ichitarō Ide and Tadeusz Rudolf.³⁸ Over the years, many prominent politicians presided over the Japan-Poland Parliamentary Friendship League, including Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama and Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone, which indicated Japan’s growing interest in Poland.

The intensification of diplomatic exchanges between Japan and Poland did not change the fact that both governments still considered the other’s role in one’s foreign policy as marginal. Poland remained focused on European affairs and transatlantic relations. The Polish Foreign Policy Strategy for 2017-2021 did not mention Japan even once, while it stressed China’s role “in the implementation of regional infrastructure projects.”³⁹ The Japanese National Security Strategy from 2013, in turn, only briefly mentioned Poland, along with other European states, as countries that share universal values with Japan and cooperate “in ensuring the peace, stability and prosperity of the international community.”⁴⁰

Economic and commercial relations

In the initial period after the collapse of communism in Poland, the problem of international debts incurred by the former communist regime dominated relations between Warsaw and Tokyo. The government of the People’s Republic of Poland had used most loans from Japan for consumption, rather than investments. Nevertheless, following Poland’s accession to the EU in 2004, Poland started being perceived as a convenient target for Japanese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

During the period of regime transition, after the end of the Cold War, Poland profited from Japan’s Official Development Assistance (ODA). Between 1989 and 2008, Poland received about 36 million dollars (4.04 billion yen) of grant aid, about 80

³⁸ Grzegorz Baziur (2017) “Biały Orzeł i Żółta Chryzantema. Współpraca polsko-japońska: Mit, możliwość czy konieczność dziejowa? – wybrane aspekty (White Eagle and Golden Chrysanthemum. PolishJapanese Cooperation: Myth, Historical Possibility, or Necessity? – Selected Aspects),” *Politeja*, 1(46), pp. 317-318.

³⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Poland (2017) *Polish Foreign Policy Strategy 2017-2021*. Available at: <https://www.gov.pl/attachment/869184c0-bd6f-4a20-b8af-a5c8190350a1> (Accessed 14 July 2021).

⁴⁰ Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet (2013) *National Security Strategy*, Available at: http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/documents/2013/___icsFiles/afiedfile/2013/12/17/NSS.pdf (Accessed 14 July 2021).

million dollars (8.97 billion yen) for technical cooperation, and loan aid worth approximately 190 million dollars (21.39 billion yen).⁴¹ Within ODA, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) financed the establishment of the Polish-Japanese Institute (currently Academy) of Information Technology in Warsaw, in 1994, and the Energy Conservation Technology Center, in 2004.⁴² Japan also sent Japanese language teachers and sports trainers to Poland, within the framework of the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers Program. After its accession to the EU, Poland was no longer perceived by Japan as a developing country, so the ODA programs were terminated.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, Poland has continuously experienced a trade deficit with Japan. After the collapse of communism, Poland imported from Japan ten times more than it exported to Japan. While the trade imbalance relatively decreased over time, in 2020, Japan's exports to Poland still exceeded imports sixfold. Moreover, it is important to note that Poland's exports to Japan have been largely shaped by factories of Japanese companies located in Poland.

Despite temporary disturbances, due to the 2008 financial crisis and the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, trade volume kept increasing – from 1 billion euros (Poland's imports from Japan) and 69 million euros (Poland's exports to Japan) in 2001, to 4.1 billion euros and 616 million euros in 2020, respectively.⁴³ In 2020, the most important imports from Japan included automobiles, machines, electrical and electronic equipment, toys and sports requisites, inorganic compounds, as well as optical, photo, technical and medical apparatus.⁴⁴ The most important exports to Japan, in turn, were machines, automobiles, electrical and electronic equipment, ceramic products, optical,

⁴¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019) *Japan-Poland Relations (Basic Data)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/poland/data.html> (Accessed 8 July 2021).

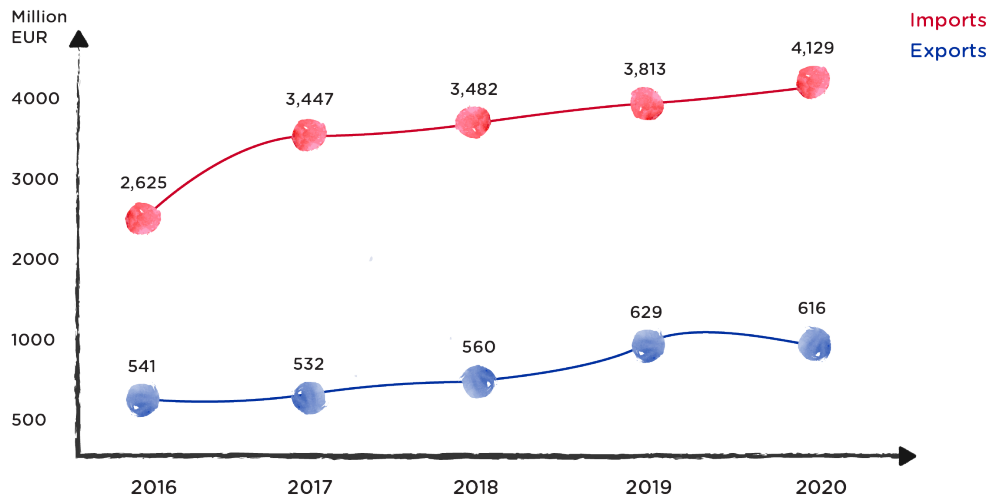
⁴² Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet (2005) *Joint Press Release. Tangible results of the cooperation based on the Joint Statement towards the Strategic Partnership between Japan and the Republic of Poland issued in August 2003 and prospects for further cooperation*, Available at: https://japan.kantei.go.jp/koizumispeech/2005/01/14pressrelease_e.html (Accessed 18 December 2021).

⁴³ Data compilation from Trade Map (International Trade Center) and United Nations Comtrade Database.

⁴⁴ Trading Economics (2021) *Poland Imports from Japan*, Available at: <https://tradingeconomics.com/poland/imports/japan> (Accessed 9 July 2021).

photo, technical, medical apparatus, as well as miscellaneous chemical products.⁴⁵ The entry into force of the EU–Japan Economic Partnership Agreement, in 2019, gave an additional impetus to develop bilateral economic ties.

Poland’s trade with Japan in million euros



Source: United Nations

In the 1990s, Japanese business circles tended to consider Poland as a country of high investment risk, which resulted from the fact that Warsaw had asked for partial amortization of foreign debts after the collapse of communism.⁴⁶ This cautious attitude changed after Poland’s accession to the EU. Access to the European market, coupled with a relatively cheap and well-educated labor force, made Poland an attractive investment target. The number of Japanese companies in Poland doubled between 2004 and 2010, from 120 to 263, among which the number of manufacturing companies increased from 40 to 77.⁴⁷ In 2018, Japanese capital in Poland was worth 1.16 billion złoty (approximately 278 million euros), which made Japan the 18th largest investor in

⁴⁵ Trading Economics (2021) *Japan Imports from Poland*, Available at: <https://tradingeconomics.com/japan/imports/poland> (Accessed 9 July 2021).

⁴⁶ Raymond Hutchings (1999) *Japan’s Economic Involvement in Eastern Europe and Eurasia*, Basingstoke and London: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 111.

⁴⁷ Tomasz Kołakowski (2011) “Inwestycje firm japońskich w Polsce – dynamika i kierunki rozwoju (Investments of Japanese Companies in Poland – Development Dynamics and Directions of Development),” *Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu*, 158, pp. 665-666.

Poland, with a 0.6% share in the whole foreign capital in the country.⁴⁸ As stated by Prime Minister Morawiecki in 2021, about 300 Japanese firms in Poland employed approximately 40,000 people, and 14 new Japanese investment projects were serviced by the Polish Investment and Trade Agency.⁴⁹

Major Japanese investors in Poland included companies from such sectors as manufacturing and sale of motor vehicles and automobile parts (Boshoku, Daicel, Denso, Itochu, Marubeni, Mitsui, Sanden, Suzuki, Takata Petri AG, TBAI), machinery (Amatsuji Steel Ball Mfg, Juki, Komatsu, Mitsubishi Electric, Nittan Valve, NSK Europe, Toho Industrial, Yamazaki Mazak), tobacco products (Japan Tobacco), rubber products (Bridgestone, Toyo Seal Industries), communications and electronic equipment (Fujitsu, Orion Electric, Sharp, Sony), batteries and accumulators (Panasonic), as well as food products and beverages (Ajinomoto Frozen Foods, Asahi, Lotte).⁵⁰ Japanese companies are present in an overwhelming majority of special economic zones in Poland, in particular in Mazovia and Silesia regions. On the other hand, while Japanese companies expanded rapidly in Poland, Poland's investments in Japan remained almost non-existent.

The Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategic Partnership between Poland and Japan for 2021-2025 stipulated encouraging the Polish Investment and Trade Agency and the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) to establish subcommittees promoting bilateral economic exchange in different fields. The Polish government seemed the most interested in strengthening cooperation in the energy sector. In 2019, representatives from the Polish Ministry of Energy and the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry signed a Memorandum of Cooperation in the

⁴⁸ Główny Urząd Statystyczny (2019) *Economic Activity of Entities with Foreign Capital in 2018*, Available at: https://stat.gov.pl/download/gfx/portalinformacyjny/pl/defaultaktualnosci/5502/4/14/1/dzialalnosc_gospodarcza_podmiotow_z_kapitałem_zagranicznych_w_2018.pdf (Accessed 15 July 2021).

⁴⁹ EJ, JCH & MRB (2021) *About 300 Japanese Firms in Poland, Investments Total EUR 25 mln – PM*, Available at: <https://www.thefirstnews.com/article/about-300-japanese-firms-in-poland-investments-total-eur-25-mln---pm-20238> (Accessed 10 July 2021).

⁵⁰ Polish Investment & Trade Agency (2019) *List of Major Foreign Investors in Poland – February 2019*, Available at: https://www.paih.gov.pl/files/?id_plik=35257 (Accessed 10 July 2021).

area of clean coal technologies.⁵¹ For the heavily coal-reliant Polish energy sector, the gasification of coal was perceived as a method to limit emission of greenhouse gases.

Bilateral economic exchange was supported by various institutions in both countries. In addition to the Japan-Poland Economic Committee, established in 1972, in 2000, the Poland-Japan Economic Committee, chaired by a former Polish minister of industry and trade, was created in cooperation with the Polish Investment and Trade Agency. Its members include the largest Polish companies, such as KGHM (copper industry), PKN ORLEN (oil sector), Polkomtel (telecommunications service provider), Polish Post, Gdynia Shipyard, Optimus (computer producer), PZU S.A. (insurance company), and Polish State Railways.⁵²

Cultural and people-to-people relations and perceptions of Japan

Mutual perception between the Japanese and Polish nations has been traditionally cordial. While the Japanese people have valued Chopin music, Poles have been fond of both traditional and popular Japanese culture. The 100th anniversary of the establishment of bilateral relations in 2019 became an opportunity to hold a number of exhibitions, seminars, and other cultural events in both states.

Intensified diplomatic contacts and economic exchange resulted in strengthening people-to-people relations between both countries. As of April 2019, there were 1,776 Japanese citizens residing in Poland, and as of June 2018, there were 1,496 Polish nationals residing in Japan.⁵³ In 2019, approximately 91,000 Japanese tourists visited Poland, which was 7.5% more than one year earlier.⁵⁴ In addition, 31,384 Polish tourists

⁵¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategic Partnership between the Government of the Republic of Poland and the Government of Japan for the years 2021-2025*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/100186407.pdf> (Accessed 8 July 2021).

⁵² Polska Agencja Inwestycji i Handlu (n. d.) *Polsko-Japoński Komitet Gospodarczy*, Available at: <https://www.paih.gov.pl/index/?id=3b9be7e15b46c42911f39a4a9e861022> (Accessed 9 July 2021).

⁵³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019) *Japan-Poland Relations (Basic Data)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/poland/data.html> (Accessed 8 July 2021).

⁵⁴ Zagraniczny Ośrodek Polskiej Organizacji Turystycznej w Tokio (2020) *Sprawozdanie. Rok 2019 (Report. 2019)*, Available at: <https://www.pot.gov.pl/attachments/article/1804/ZOPOT%20Japonia%202019.pdf> (Accessed 12 July 2021).

visited Japan in 2019, 13% more than in 2018.⁵⁵ Bilateral tourist exchange was facilitated by direct flights between Warsaw and Tokyo, which have been operated since the 1970s, though not ceaselessly, by LOT Polish Airlines. The signing of the Agreement on a Working Holiday Scheme in 2015, in turn, contributed to intensification of mutual exchange of young people.⁵⁶

Poland and Japan have been involved in some cooperative research activities since signing the bilateral Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Science and Technology, in 1978. Despite this fact, the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategic Partnership for 2021-2025 did not stipulate much more than “encouraging exchanges of experience between the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Poland and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan.”⁵⁷

Knowledge about Japan has been popularized by several specialized institutions in Poland. In 1994, the Manggha Center of Japanese Art and Technology (currently Manggha Museum of Japanese Art and Technology) was established in Krakow, thanks to a financial contribution from the famous Polish film director Andrzej Wajda, who had received the Kyoto Award.⁵⁸ It has not only hosted a rich collection of Japanese arts but also organized many events on Japanese culture. A different role was played by the Polish-Japanese Academy of Information Technology, which became an exam center for the Japanese-Language Proficiency Test.

While initially interest in Japan was driven in Poland by the rich traditional culture and high-tech products of Japanese companies, since the 1990s, Japanese modern music, manga, and anime also started gaining in popularity. In 2006, Foreign Minister (and future Prime Minister) Tarō Asō included Poland as an important partner

⁵⁵ JTB Tourism Research & Consulting (2021) *Japan-bound Statistics*, Available at: <https://www.tourism.jp/en/tourism-database/stats/inbound/> (Accessed 12 July 2021).

⁵⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2015) *Joint Statement between Japan and Poland “Building Framework for Strategic Partnership for Freedom, Growth and Solidarity,”* Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000069289.pdf> (Accessed 6 July 2021).

⁵⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategic Partnership between the Government of the Republic of Poland and the Government of Japan for the years 2021-2025*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/100186407.pdf> (Accessed 8 July 2021).

⁵⁸ Manggha (2021) *History*, Available at <https://manggha.pl/en/history> (Accessed 9 December 2021).

in his concept of the “arc of freedom and prosperity.” As a manga fan himself, Asō perceived the growing popularity of manga in Poland as a way to enhance Japan’s soft power in the whole of Eastern Europe.⁵⁹ Still, Polish political elites remained focused on relations in Europe and with the US, and they did not treat the partnership with Japan as an important vector for diplomacy.

Polish academia has been the most interested in Japanese language, culture, and history. Japanese language departments have existed at four Polish universities: University of Warsaw, Jagiellonian University, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, and Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun. In recent years, Asian studies have become popular as well, with notable courses taught at Jagiellonian University, University of Lodz, and SWPS University in Warsaw. Unlike traditional Japanese studies, they examined Japanese politics, society, and economy. Still, Polish media rarely reported in detail about the evolution of the political and societal situation in Japan, focusing rather on Japan’s economy and culture. Japan has been perceived as a remote country with a unique culture and sophisticated technology. Most of the media relied on international press agencies, though some of them received information from temporary correspondents – Polish people living in Japan or journalists dispatched to Japan for brief periods.

While knowledge about Poland in Japan has been rather shallow, a growing number of Japanese visitors to Poland attests to the attractiveness of Polish history and culture. In particular, the Fryderyk Chopin International Piano Competition has traditionally attracted a large group of participants from Japan.

Although Poland and Japan were formally enemy states during the Second World War, in reality they did not fight each other, and there have been no history issues between the two nations. Instead, the view of Japan in Poland has remained very positive throughout the postwar period. According to an opinion poll conducted in 2015, 19% of respondents in Poland perceived relations with Japan as very friendly and 59% as somewhat friendly. Moreover, as many as 53% of respondents valued highly and

⁵⁹ Asō, Tarō (2008) *Jiyū to Han'ei no Ko (The Arc of Freedom and Prosperity)*, Tokyo: Gentōsha, pp. 42-43.

23% valued partially Japan's performance as a peace-loving nation.⁶⁰

Conclusions and recommendations

While Poland has not belonged to the most important partners of Japan in Europe, both countries have been linked by joint national interests, economic cooperation, and sympathy between the two nations. Initially, it was the security threat from Russia/USSR that compelled Tokyo and Warsaw to seek bilateral intelligence cooperation, which lasted even after both countries formally became enemies during the Second World War. Ties between Poland and Japan weakened in the Cold War period, but the Japanese people sympathized with the Solidarity movement that led to collapse of communism in Poland in 1989. While in the 1990s, Poland was perceived by Japan as a poor country that necessitated financial support, Poland's accession to NATO, in 1999, and the EU, in 2004, created favorable conditions for a more equal partnership.

In the 21st century, considerable progress has been made in all fields of Poland-Japan relations. Intensification of bilateral diplomatic contacts was symbolized by Emperor Akihito's and Empress Michiko's visit to Poland in 2002, by a historic summit between V4 leaders and Prime Minister Shinzō Abe in Warsaw, in 2013, as well by the initiation of the strategic partnership, in 2015. Cooperation was extended to the security field as well, through port calls by a Maritime Self-Defense Forces training squadron in Poland and consultations between Japan's National Security Secretariat and Poland's National Security Bureau.

In the economic sphere, Poland's accession to the EU facilitated trade exchanges and the inflow of Japanese investments. The popularity of Japanese manufactured products in Poland, in particular from the automobile and electronic sectors, contributed to Poland's trade deficit with Japan. At the same time, access to the European market coupled with a relatively cheap and well-educated labor force attracted to Poland many Japanese investors manufacturing motor vehicles, machinery, electronic equipment, and tobacco or rubber products. Bilateral ties have also been enhanced in the field of people-to-people and cultural relations. While both nations historically held positive views of

⁶⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2016) *Image of Japan in Five European Countries*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000165371.pdf> (Accessed 13 July 2021).

each other, in recent years, this sympathy has been accompanied by intensification of bilateral tourist exchange and growing popularity of Japanese language, manga and anime in Poland.

Still, intensification of contacts did not mean the bilateral partnership indeed had strategic importance for both countries. A major obstacle has been the fact that Polish diplomacy remained largely focused on European, rather than global matters. While Japan reinvigorated its previously reactive foreign policy, under the Abe administration, it sought alliances with regional powers against China's rise, rather than being sincerely interested in building a new framework for cooperation with more remote countries. It remains to be seen if Abe's successors are equally interested in developing the V4+Japan format, which could serve Poland and Japan to enhance the strategic dimension of bilateral relations.

In order to further strengthen bilateral relations, both governments need to supplement cordial gestures and agreements with practical cooperation on daily footing. Regular, not only occasional, consultations between Japan's National Security Secretariat and Poland's National Security Bureau would contribute to better coordination of the security policies of the two countries. It is also recommendable to develop Poland–Japan collaboration through NATO, as stipulated in the 2021 Action Plan for the implementation of bilateral strategic partnership. Greater progress needs to be made in the economic field as well. Establishment of subcommittees to promote trade exchange and investments in different industry sectors by JETRO and the Polish Investment and Trade Agency would be helpful in addressing daily problems of Japanese investors, especially in the face of a growing importance of their Chinese competitors in Poland. Relatively less attention needs to be paid to cultural and people-to-people relations, as mutual perception between the two nations has already been very positive. Still, an information campaign in Japan could help to attract more Japanese tourists to Poland and enhance bilateral student exchange.

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- Sankei Shinbun (2018) *Kōno Tarō Gaishō: "Ōshū wa Tomeoki-ba made Keiken Shita Najimibukai Tokoro". Gakusei Jidai ni Pōrando de Taihō (Foreign Minister Kōno Tarō: "For Me Europe Is a Familiar Place Where I Even Experienced a Detention Center." Arrested as a Student in Poland)*, Available at: <https://www.sankei.com/article/20180301-IS5BVM2JFRI37JSNZEN7NTKD6I/>

(Accessed 3 July 2021).

Trading Economics (2021) *Poland Imports from Japan*, Available at: <https://tradingeconomics.com/poland/imports/japan> (Accessed 9 July 2021).

Trading Economics (2021) *Japan Imports from Poland*. Available at: <https://tradingeconomics.com/japan/imports/poland> (Accessed 9 July 2021).

United Nations (2021) *UN Comtrade Database*, Available at <https://comtrade.un.org/data/> (Accessed 8 July 2021).

Wprost (2002) *Pani Miller jest “sexy” i “love” (Ms. Miller Is “Sexy” and “Love”)*, Available at: <https://www.wprost.pl/zycie/27251/Pani-Miller-jest-sexy-i-love.html> (Accessed 7 December 2020).

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Portugal and Japan: Commercial and cultural relations grounded in historical bonds

By Mariana A. BOSCARIOL*

Overview

While the 160th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Portugal and Japan was celebrated in 2020, their relationship started much earlier than that, in the 16th century. The Portuguese empire was the first European power to establish a direct relationship with the Japanese archipelago. This was not achieved from a proper administrative structure from the Portuguese crown but through Jesuit missionaries and Portuguese merchants, who acted as its representatives. Nonetheless, during the early modern period, Portugal was the first bridge connecting Japan to Europe.

Japan-Portugal relations were ceased from 1640 until the Meiji Era, but this almost a century of prior contact remained a milestone for the two countries. As such, it was based on their historical bonds that the relationship between Japan and Portugal was reestablished, from the 19th century to the present. During this period, Portuguese writers, scholars, officials and diplomats started to exalt the memories from the past to feed and enhance stronger relations with Japan.

Nowadays, after many decades of a lack of activities, the theme has resurfaced and has been explored by many universities and institutions. Therefore, although socio-political relations between Portugal and Japan remain not so significant, we find a growing number of international academic programs and cultural events exploring their connections. On many of these occasions, official visits were paid from both sides.

Even if still modest, economic relations between the two countries have been

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stable and with positive prospects. In general, Portugal imports more goods from Japan than the other way around, but Portuguese companies are progressively investing in increasing their exports to Japan. From what it seems, things will remain balanced on the same terms for the next years.

Portugal: Japan's oldest partner in Europe

The direct relationship between Portugal and Japan is the oldest among European countries. The first Portuguese arrived in the Japanese archipelago in 1543, after a storm deviated one of their ships departing from the coast of China.¹ News about the archipelago soon spread through Asia. In 1547, on his way back from Japan, Portuguese Captain Jorge Alvares met in Malacca with the pioneer Jesuit in Asia, later known as the “Apostle of the Orient”, Francis Xavier. Together with Alvares was the Japanese Yajirō, who knew a little Portuguese and became Xavier’s close companion. Demonstrating great interest in the news about Japan, the priest returned to Goa, the capital of the Portuguese *Estado da Índia*,² already planning the trip to the Japanese archipelago. Together with three more Jesuits and three Japanese who were converted in the Indo-Portuguese capital, Xavier left Goa in April 1549, arriving in Japan a few months later, in August 1549.³ This new enterprise was then promoted by Jesuit missionaries and merchants, and not by Portuguese officials, and only the first ones settled in Japan.

The Jesuits were the main representatives of Portugal’s interests in Japan. More than anything, for many decades, they were responsible for describing and narrating to other Europeans how Japan and its people were. Therefore, their documents are a rich source for the study of the history of Japan in the 16th and 17th centuries.⁴ From Lisbon, many of their letters were translated, compiled and published in different European countries, feeding the desire for news and information about Asia on the European

¹ Michael Cooper (1974) *Rodrigues the Interpreter*, New York/Tokyo: Weatherhill, p. 18.

² The State of India (1505-1961) administered the Portuguese establishments from India to East Asia.

³ Charles R. Boxer (1951) *The Christian Century in Japan, 1549-1650*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 36-37.

⁴ Some Jesuit sources can be found translated in English in Michael Cooper (1995) *They Came to Japan: An Anthology of European Reports on Japan, 1543-1640*, Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan.

continent.

Besides the introduction of Christianity, the Portuguese representatives were deeply involved in a political and military conflict driven by the lack of a central power in Japan.⁵ In this scenario, another important element to consider is the introduction of firearms, the Portuguese *espingarda*,⁶ and of the Western-style movable type printing press.⁷ From 1591, stamps (wooden or metal blocks, where the letters were carved or fused) were not only produced in the Roman alphabet but also in Japanese characters.

The Japanese interest in allowing the Jesuits to stay in the archipelago was mainly due to their prominent role as facilitators of maritime commerce with China, based mostly on the exchange of Chinese silk and Japanese silver.⁸ From 1569, Sumitada Ōmura, one of the major Christian local lords of that period, facilitated the establishment of a proper Portuguese port.⁹ With that purpose, Nagasaki was founded in 1571, becoming the biggest and the most important center of the Portuguese, and later foreign, presence in Japan.¹⁰

Among the many curiosities from this period, the Jesuits brought the first Japanese to visit Europe, Bernardo de Kagoshima, in 1553.¹¹ He first arrived and lived in Portugal, where he joined the Society of Jesus and studied in Coimbra, having traveled to Spain in 1554, on his way to Rome. Bernardo died not much later, after his

⁵ The Sengoku period in Japan (1467-1615), also known as Warring States period, was marked by constant civil war and dispute for power by distinct local lords.

⁶ Delmer M. Brown (1948) "The Impact of Firearms on Japanese Warfare, 1543-98," *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 7 (3), pp. 237-238. Olof G. Lidin (2002) *Tanegashima - The Arrival of Europe in Japan*, Copenhagen: NIAS Press, p. 4.

⁷ Johannes Laures (1957) "The Jesuit Mission Press in Japan," *Monumenta Nipponica* 13 (1/2), pp. 163-165.

⁸ Charles R. Boxer (1963) "Introduction", *The Great Ship from Amacon: Annals of Macao and the Old Japan Trade, 1555-1640*, Lisbon: Centro de Estudos Ultramarinos, p. 1.

⁹ Diego Pacheco (1970) "The Founding of the Port of Nagasaki and its Cession to the Society of Jesus," *Monumenta Nipponica*, 25 (3-4), p. 305.

¹⁰ Charles R. Boxer (1967) *The Christian Century in Japan, 1549-1650*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 100-102. Alexandra Curvelo (2001) "Nagasaki: An European Artistic City in Early Modern Japan," *Bulletin of Portuguese - Japanese Studies*, 2, p. 23.

¹¹ Alexandra Curvelo (2009) *Coimbra e a Missão do Japão no Século XVI Numa Perspectiva Histórico-Artística (Coimbra and the Japan Mission in the 16th Century from an Art-Historical Perspective)*, Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, p. 178.

return to Portugal, in 1557.¹² Another emblematic episode was the organization of an embassy of Japanese students to Europe, by the Jesuit Alessandro Valignano (1539-1606).¹³ The group, formed by noble young Japanese,¹⁴ left Japan in 1582, arriving in Lisbon four years later. From Lisbon, they started a journey through Portugal, Spain, and Italy, on their way to Rome. It took four more years for them to come back to Nagasaki.¹⁵

From the time they arrived in Japan, the situation in the territory was completely changed. At the end of the 16th century, a sequence of events that started undermining the Portuguese presence in the archipelago took place. First, with the rise of Hideyoshi Toyotomi, the first expulsion edict addressed to the Jesuits was promulgated in 1587.¹⁶ Subsequently, the rising persecution of Christianity caused the first martyrdom, in 1597, with the death of 26 Christians – among them, 20 Japanese.¹⁷

From then on, the success of the missionaries in the first decades of their presence in Japan was never again restored. In the following decades, the relationship between the Portuguese representatives and the Japanese power was completely deteriorated. As a result, in 1636, they first ended up restricted to an artificial island built on the coast of Nagasaki, called Dejima, and not long after, they were finally banned from the territory, with the exclusion order from 1639.¹⁸ Thenceforth, the only Europeans allowed to stay in Japan were the Dutch, who settled in Japan from 1609.

In East Asia, the Portuguese still held Macao, a possession they kept until 1998.

¹² Ibidem, p. 176.

¹³ Derek Massarella (2013) “The Japanese Embassy to Europe (1582–1590),” *Journal of the Hakluyt Society*, February, p. 1.

¹⁴ Led by Mancio Itō, a nobleman who served as first Japanese emissary to Europe, the embassy also included Miguel Chijiwa, Julião Nakaura and Martinho Hara.

¹⁵ The embassy left Nagasaki in February 1582, having returned to Japan in July 1590.

¹⁶ Charles R. Boxer (1967) *The Christian Century in Japan, 1549-1650*, Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 147. Adriana Boscaro (1973) “Toyotomi Hideyoshi and the 1587 Edicts Against Christianity”, *Oriens Extremus*, 20 (2), p. 219.

¹⁷ Charles R. Boxer (1967) *The Christian Century in Japan, 1549-1650*, Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 166. In memory of this event, the *Twenty-Six Martyrs Museum and Monument* was founded in Nagasaki in 1962.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 384.

Portugal intended to reestablish relations with Japan from this outpost, but this goal was only achieved in the second half of the 19th century, after the softening of the Japanese restrictions in the Meiji era.

When Japan reopened its border to foreign countries, Portugal was the sixth to establish official diplomatic relations with the archipelago – after the USA, the Netherlands, Russia, England, and France. On 3 August 1860, bilateral diplomatic relations were formally established by the “Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Commerce,” signed by King Pedro V of Portugal and the Emperor of Japan.¹⁹ Since then, the two countries have sustained stable economic and political relations.

Since the late 19th century, different officials, diplomats and scholars from Portugal started to study and write about historical relations with Japan. Some of the most iconic were Venceslau de Moraes,²⁰ who wrote extensively about many subjects of the Japanese culture, and Armando Martins Janeira,²¹ a Portuguese diplomat and writer, who founded the Portugal-Japan Friendship Association.²²

The first experience of contact between Japan and Portugal ended dramatically after almost a century of interaction. But later, except for a brief period, the two countries have maintained positive and stable relations. The occupation of Timor by Japanese military forces during the Second World War was the reason for the temporary interruption of Luso-Japanese relations, which were re-established in 1953.²³ Soon after, Portugal reopened its representation in Japan, and the Japanese did the same in 1954.²⁴

¹⁹ Portal Diplomático, República Portuguesa (n.d.) *História Diplomática: Japão (Diplomatic History: Japan)*, Available at: <https://portaldiplomatico.mne.gov.pt/relacoesbilaterais/historia-diplomatica?view=article&id=403:japao&catid=119:relacoes-diplomaticas> (Accessed 25 February 2022).

²⁰ Among his books are *Traços do Extremo Oriente: Siam-China-Japão* (1895), *Dai-Nippon: O Grande Japão* (1897), *O Culto do Chá* (1905). In 2006, the Associação Wenscelau de Moraes was created in Lisbon.

²¹ Among his books are *Portugal e o Japão – Subsídios para a História Diplomática* (1955), *O Impacto Português sobre a Civilização Japonesa* (1970), *Figuras de Silêncio – A Tradição Cultural Portuguesa no Japão de Hoje* (1981).

²² The Associação de Amizade Portugal-Japão was created in 1980 with the objective of promoting a closer relationship between Portugal and Japan, including cultural and scientific events and projects.

²³ Embassy of Japan in Portugal (n.d.) *Relations between Japan and Portugal*, Available at: <https://www.pt.emb-japan.go.jp/relations.html> (Accessed 28 February 2022).

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

Portugal later raised their representation in Japan to the embassy level, in 1958.²⁵

Since 1974, Portugal and Japan accepted the principle of the abolition of visas for their respective nationals, based on an agreement by exchange of notes.²⁶

Emphasizing how the promotion of their historical bonds remains important, the Ambassador of Japan in Portugal, Ushio Shigeru, expressed in the inaugural message of his mandate, in 2020, that he is: “[...] determined to develop, as much as possible, the friendly relations between Japan and Portugal, our oldest friend in Europe, making them more solid and fruitful in the future.”²⁷

From the early modern period to the present: Political and strategic relations

Over the years, there has been a significant exchange of contacts in terms of official visits. A few special occasions from the 20th century are worth mentioning. First, in 1984, for the first time, Portuguese Prime Minister Mário Soares made an official visit to Japan. The following year, in 1985, Crown Prince Akihito and the Crown Princess Michiko also made a visit to Portugal.²⁸ In 1993, the Commemorative Year of the 450 Years of Friendship between Portugal and Japan was celebrated. Among several events, Prince Takamado and Princess Hisako made an official visit to Portugal.²⁹ Mário Soares also visited Japan as president of the Portuguese Republic.³⁰ A few years later, in 1998, Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko visited Portugal during the celebration of the Expo '98 (the 1998 Lisbon World Exposition). The Expo was then organized to celebrate 500 years of Portugal's expansionist enterprise.

Following the data provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan

²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ Embassy of Portugal in Japan (n.d.) *Acordos bilaterais (Bilateral Agreements)*, Available at: <https://toquio.embaixadaportugal.mne.gov.pt/pt/sobre-o-japao/acordos-bilaterais> (Accessed 27 February 2022).

²⁷ Embassy of Japan in Portugal (2020) *Mensagem de Boas-vindas (Welcome Message)*, https://www.pt.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_pt/00_000274.html (Accessed 27 October 2021).

²⁸ Embassy of Japan in Portugal (n.d.) *Relations between Japan and Portugal*, Available at: <https://www.pt.emb-japan.go.jp/relations.html> (Accessed 27 February 2022).

²⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Japan-Portugal Relations (Basic Data)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/portugal/data.html> (Accessed 15 August 2021).

³⁰ Ibidem.

(MOFA),³¹ from 2000 until now, we can trace distinct visits from the respective presidents, prime ministers and ministers of foreign affairs, besides imperial visits. Among the visits from Japan to Portugal there was a visit from Minister of Foreign Affairs Makiko Tanaka in 2002, the first to be made by a Japanese minister of foreign affairs to the Portuguese Republic; in 2004, Crown Prince Naruhito traveled to Portugal; in 2009, former Prime Minister Junichirō Koizumi; in 2014, Prime Minister Shinzō Abe made a first visit to Portugal; in 2020, Minister of Foreign Affairs Toshimitsu Motegi; finally, in 2021, Minister for the World Expo 2025 and Minister for Special Missions Shinji Inoue visited the country.

During this same period, visits from Portugal to Japan were paid by Minister of Foreign Affairs Teresa Patrício Gouveia, in 2004; by President Jorge Fernando Branco de Sampaio, in 2005, invited to the Ceremony of the National Day of Portugal at the Exposition of Aichi; Minister of Foreign Affairs Luís Filipe Marques Amado, in 2007; Minister of Foreign Affairs Paulo Sacadura Cabral Portas, in 2013, the year in which the 470th anniversary of the first bilateral exchanges between the two countries was celebrated; Prime Minister Pedro Manuel Mamede Passos Coelho and Minister of Foreign Affairs Rui Manuel Parente Chancerelle de Machete, in 2015; and finally, former President Cavaco Silva traveled to Japan to participate at the Ceremony of Enthronement, in 2019.

The Japanese Embassy in Portugal is located in Lisbon, the Portuguese capital, with Japan also having an Honorary Consulate in Oporto. The Embassy of Portugal is in Tokyo, with Honorary Consulates in Kobe, Kyoto, Nagasaki, Nagoya, Osaka, and Tokushima.

In Japan, there is a Japan-Portugal Friendship Parliamentary League, as well as Luso-Japanese Societies established in 11 cities.³² A Portugal-Japan Friendship

³¹ Ibidem.

³² Embassy of Portugal in Japan (n.d.) *Centro Cultural (Cultural Center)*, Available at: <https://toquio.embaixadaportugal.mne.gov.pt/pt/a-embaixada/centro-cultural#sociedades-e-associações> (Accessed 27 February 2022).

Parliamentary Group also exists in the Portuguese Parliament.³³ Portugal-Japan relations have been marked by the commitment of both countries to deepen bilateral ties in all sectors, further intensifying relations in the context of international organizations. On the foundation of this investment is their historical contact.

From exploring their historical connections, the two countries have established protocols between municipalities, creating twin cities that share a special bond in promoting mutual exchange and friendship at the level of youth, business, culture and individuals: Leiria-Tokushima, Porto-Nagasaki, Aveiro-Oita, Cascais-Atami, Vila do Bispo-Nishinoomote, Sintra-Omura, Nazaré-Zushi (International Friendship City), Abrantes-Hitoyoshi.

In 2013, Portugal and Japan celebrated the 470th anniversary of their first contact in 1543. The occasion was celebrated with the organization of many events in the two countries, aimed to emphasize, commemorate and strengthen their friendship. More recently, in 2020, the two countries also celebrated the 160th anniversary of their diplomatic relations, even though most events had to be rescheduled, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁴ Currently, a strategic partnership between Portugal and Japan works through the EU-Japan Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), signed in 2018. A more fluid circulation between Europe and Japan is expected to directly contribute to Portugal-Japan economic relations.

Economic and commercial relations

In 1543, three Portuguese arrived on the island of Tanegashima, becoming the first Europeans to arrive in Japan. From 1549, with the arrival and establishment of the first Jesuit missionaries, together with Portuguese merchants, Portugal became the main economic bridge connecting Japan to Europe. For about a century, the two countries

³³ About the presence of a Portugal-Japan Friendship League within the Portuguese administration see Assembly of the Republic (n.d.) *Projeto de Deliberação n.º 7/XIV/I.*ª (*Project of Deliberation n.º 7/XIV/I.*ª), Available at: <https://app.parlamento.pt/webutils/docs/doc.pdf?path=6148523063484d364c793968636d356c6443397a6158526c6379395953565a4d5a5763765247396a6457316c626e527663306c7561574e7059585270646d4576595463354d545a6b595459745a6a566c596930305a4745304c546b7a4d544d744f54426c5a54497a4d6a45784d5449344c6d527659773d3d&fich=a7916da6-f5eb-4da4-9313-90ee23211128.doc&Inline=true> (Accessed 27 February 2022).

³⁴ Embassy of Japan in Portugal (2021) *Greetings from the Ambassador of Japan in Portugal, Mr. Ushio Shigeru, on the occasion of the National Day and His Majesty the Emperor's Birthday*, Available at: <https://www.pt.emb-japan.go.jp/files/100168392.pdf> (Accessed 1 November 2021).

maintained intense commercial relations.

The *Kurofune* (the Black Ship), as the Portuguese merchant ship was called, promoted an intense trade, through the route connecting Macao and Nagasaki. As described above, this commercial activity was then based mainly on two products: Chinese silk and Japanese silver. But this exchange included many other goods, such as art materials, copper, and porcelain.³⁵ Even if extremely profitable, this trade was completely interrupted after the Portuguese expulsion from the archipelago in 1639, until the Meiji era, never being as significant as before.

A few decades after the establishment of diplomatic relations, through the treaty of 1860, in March 1932, a “Trade and Navigation Agreement” was signed by exchange of notes.³⁶ The Second World War brought a temporary disruption of Portugal-Japan commercial relations, and a new trade agreement, signed in Lisbon in July 1966,³⁷ came to restore their relationship. After that, in October 1978, a fisheries agreement was signed in Tokyo.³⁸ Both ceased to be in force after Portugal joined the European Economic Community (EEC), now the European Union (EU).³⁹

Around the same period, in 1971, the private and non-profit business association Luso-Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (*Câmara de Comércio e Indústria Luso-Japonesa* – CCILJ) was founded,⁴⁰ to boost commercial relations between the two countries. One year later, the CCILJ held an exhibition of Portuguese products in Japan,⁴¹ with the support of the Export Promotion Fund, the Embassy of Portugal in Tokyo and the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO). Having just celebrated its

³⁵ Among religious artifacts and other objectives, the Namban art (Japanese art from the 16th and 17th centuries originated from the contact with the 'Southern barbarians', or Nanban) can be seen in several museums around the world. In Portugal, there is an important collection at the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga (MNAA).

³⁶ Portal Diplomático do Ministério de Negócio Estrangeiros de Portugal (n.d.) *Japão (Japan)* <https://www.portaldiplomatico.mne.gov.pt/relacoesbilaterais/paises-geral/japao> (Accessed 10 October 2021).

³⁷ Ibidem.

³⁸ Ibidem.

³⁹ Ibidem.

⁴⁰ The Portuguese Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (n.d.) *Quem Somos (Who Are We)*, Available at: <https://cilj.pt/about/> (Accessed 25 February 2022).

⁴¹ Ibidem.

50th anniversary, the association states that its objective was and still is to promote the growth of its members, “through projects that contribute to the strengthening of socio-economic, business, and cultural relations between Portugal and Japan.”⁴²

“The Convention between Japan and the Portuguese Republic for the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Fiscal Evasion with respect to Taxes on Income” was signed in December 2011. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan,⁴³ the Convention was set to adjust the taxation rights between Japan and the Portuguese Republic, to avoid international double taxation from economic and human exchanges. This agreement was intended to strengthen economic relations between the two countries and contribute to the prevention of fiscal evasion.

But commercial activities between Portugal and Japan remain modest. According to the National Institute of Statistics (INE) of Portugal, in 2020, Japan was the 29th customer of Portuguese exports of goods, with a share of 0.5% of total exports, while also occupying the 29th position in terms of imports (0.4%). According to the European Commission (EC) website on the EU-Japan trade agreement, currently the value of Portuguese exports to Japan is 146 million euros, while the value of Portuguese imports from Japan 333 million euros.⁴⁴

The Portugal Global Trade & Investment Agency (*Agência para o Investimento e Comércio Externo de Portugal* – AICEP), an entity that has a delegation in Tokyo, informs that in the period between 2016 and 2020, there was an average annual growth in exports from Portugal to Japan of 17.4% and of 0.9% in imports from Japan to Portugal.⁴⁵ Still, even with a slightly more balanced situation, the total trade of goods is unfavorable to Portugal, showing a deficit of 50 million euros in 2020.⁴⁶ As indicated in

⁴² Ibidem.

⁴³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2011) *Convention between Japan and the Portuguese Republic for the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Fiscal Evasion with respect to Taxes on Income*. https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/treaty/submit/session183/pdfs/agree-09_01.pdf (Accessed 20 October 2021).

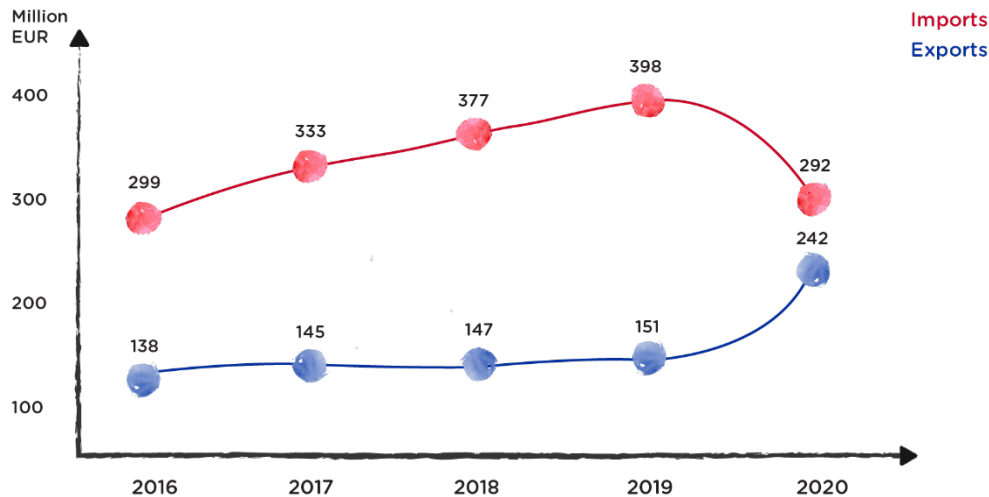
⁴⁴ European Commission (n.d.) *Portugal*, Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/in-focus/eu-japan-economic-partnership-agreement/eu-japan-in-your-town/portugal_en.htm (Accessed 27 October 2021).

⁴⁵ AICEP (n.d.) *Mercado – Japão (Market - Japan)*, Available at: <https://myaicep.portugalexporta.com/mercados-internacionais/jp/japao?setorProduto=-1> (Accessed 27 October 2021).

⁴⁶ Ibidem.

the report of the Office of Strategy and Study (*Gabinete de Estratégia e Estudos – GEE*) of Portugal,⁴⁷ in the trade balance of goods between Portugal and Japan, Portugal's deficit steadily grew from 160 million euros in 2016, to 247 million euros in 2019.

Portugal's trade with Japan in million euros



Source: National Institute of Statistics of Portugal

The main export items from Japan to Portugal are automobiles and auto parts, machinery, electrical equipment, rubber manufactures, precision instruments, processed oils, fats and waxes, nonferrous metals, manufactures of metal, textile yarn, fabrics, organic chemicals and plastic materials.⁴⁸ On the other hand, the main export items from Portugal to Japan are clothing and accessories, electrical equipment, vegetables, footwear, automobiles and auto parts, textile yarn, fabrics, fish, wood, lumber and cork, wine, machinery and chemicals.⁴⁹

According to the INE, in 2021, the exports from Portugal to Japan reached 297

⁴⁷ Gabinete de Estratégia e Estudos (2021) *Comércio Internacional de Portugal com o Japão (Portugal's International Trade with Japan)*, Available at: <https://www.gee.gov.pt/pt/documentos/publicacoes/estatisticas-de-comercio-bilateral/japao/1609-comercio-internacional-de-portugal-com-japao/file> (Accessed 15 October 2021).

⁴⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Japan-Portugal Relations (Basic Data)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/portugal/data.html> (Accessed 15 August 2021).

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

million euros and imports from Japan to Portugal reached 602 million euros.⁵⁰ This data shows a clear recovery after the crisis in 2020.

As described by the MOFA, in a meeting between Japanese and Portuguese foreign ministers, in 2020, both shared their interest to invest to expand Japan-Portugal economic relations, based on the Japan-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA).⁵¹ For this purpose, Toshimitsu Motegi asked for Portugal's cooperation with the softening of EU's import restrictions on Japanese food products.⁵²

As illustrated by the European Commission,⁵³ among the less than 1,000 Portuguese companies that currently export to Japan, 87% are small and medium-sized enterprises. The Japanese Ambassador to Portugal noted that since the Japan-EU EPA came into force, in February 2019, Portuguese products are more easily found in Japan – while the number of Japanese companies activating in Portugal is around 100.⁵⁴ Among the Japanese companies in Portugal with more prominence are Fujitsu, Hitachi, Marubeni and Howa Tramico Automotive. Within a sector of high-quality products, Japan is seen as a very selective and demanding market, as well as a reliable and secure one. While Japan doesn't rank very high on the Portuguese agenda, Japan is an important and interesting partner for Portugal's future – especially considering the old ties connecting them.

Following their pattern in trading, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) between Portugal and Japan is not balanced, showing that the Japanese capability to invest in Portugal is superior to that of the Portuguese in Japan. The data provided by the Bank of Portugal indicates that Japanese investment is significantly increasing. Japanese FDI in

⁵⁰ Instituto Nacional de Estatística (n.d.) *Comércio Internacional (International Commerce)*, Available at: https://www.ine.pt/xportal/xmain?xpid=INE&xpgid=ine_indicadores&contecto=pi&indOcorrCod=0005719&selTab=tab0 (Accessed 27 February 2022).

⁵¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2020) *Japan-Portugal Foreign Ministers' Meeting*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/we/page4e_001097.html (Accessed 27 October 2021).

⁵² Ibidem.

⁵³ European Commission (n.d.) *Portugal*, Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/in-focus/eu-japan-economic-partnership-agreement/eu-japan-in-your-town/portugal_en.htm (Accessed 27 October 2021).

⁵⁴ Embassy of Japan in Portugal (2021) *Greetings from the Ambassador of Japan in Portugal, Mr. Ushio Shigeru, on the occasion of the National Day and His Majesty the Emperor's Birthday*, Available at: <https://www.pt.emb-japan.go.jp/files/100168392.pdf> (Accessed 1 November 2021).

Portugal increased from 100 million euros in 2016, to 233 million euros at the end of 2021, despite a small contraction in 2018-2019.⁵⁵

In comparison, Portuguese investment in Japan is not that significant, not being included in the list of the Ministry of Finance of Japan.⁵⁶ The Bank of Portugal only includes the Portuguese FDI in Japan in the construction sector, which is only a fraction of the Japanese in Portugal.

Culture and people-to-people relations and perceptions of Japan

The number of Portuguese immigrants in Japan is so little that the country is not listed in the Japan Statistical Yearbook. In 2019, there were 455 Japanese nationals living in Portugal,⁵⁷ similar to the previous years – in general, more women than men, concentrated in Lisbon. This represents not even 0.5% of the foreign population living in Portugal.⁵⁸

Portugal has much fewer inhabitants than Japan, but the number of immigrants from the respective countries is quite balanced, staying under 1,000 per year. Even though the size of their communities is not big, we find a relevant number of language and cultural courses, besides the organization of events and festivities in both countries.

One of the most important legacies of the historical relationship between Portugal and Japan is in their vocabulary. Some Japanese words have their origin in the Portuguese language, reflecting, more than anything, the introduction of products and concepts during their first contact in the early modern period. Among them, for example, *bateren* (padre/priest), *bidoro* (vidro/glass), *birodo* (veludo/velvet), *botan* (botão/button), *karuta* (carta/letter), *kappa* (capa/cape), *kirisuto* (cristão/christian), *Oranda* (Holanda/Holand), *orugan* (órgão/organ), *pan* (pão/bread) and *tabako* (tabaco).

⁵⁵ Banco de Portugal, BPstat (2021) *IDE-Serviços-Japão-Pos-Trim-M€*, Available at: <https://bpstat.bportugal.pt/serie/12564682> (Accessed 3 February 2022).

⁵⁶ Ministry of Finance of Japan (n.d.) *International Investment Position*, Available at: https://www.mof.go.jp/english/policy/international_policy/reference/iip/index.htm (Accessed 27 February 2022).

⁵⁷ Gabinete de Estratégia e Estudos (2021) *População Estrangeira Residente em Portugal: Japão (Foreign Resident Population in Portugal: Japan)*, Available at: <https://www.gee.gov.pt/pt/lista-publicacoes/estatisticas-de-imigrantes-em-portugal-por-nacionalidade/paises/Jap%C3%A3o/3802-populacao-estrangeira-com-estatuto-legal-de-residente-em-portugal-japao/file> (Accessed 30 October 2021).

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*.

Another aspect that demonstrates the legacy of Portugal-Japan relations during the early modern period can be found in Japanese gastronomy. The Kasutera (Castella) cake, which has its origins in the Portuguese *pão-de-ló*, and the world-famous tempura, a dish that was at first prepared by Catholic priests in Japanese territory during Lent, were both brought to Japan by Jesuit missionaries, in the 16th century.

Still, the study of the Portuguese language and culture is not that common in Japan, although distinguished higher education institutions teach Portuguese as a second foreign language and/or language of choice: Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Kanda University of International Studies, Osaka University, Tenri University, Sophia University and Kyoto University of Foreign Studies. Besides them, there is also the Camões – Portuguese Cultural Center in Tokyo, located on the premises of the Chancellery of the Portuguese Embassy. Established in 1995,⁵⁹ this center serves to promote the Portuguese culture and language in Japan, also coordinating the contact between Japanese and Portuguese entities for the organization of cultural events.

The study of Japanese culture and language in Portugal is also not that disseminated. Most of the courses and activities that exist are restricted to the departments of language and history of several Portuguese universities: University of Aveiro, Catholic University of Portugal, University of Coimbra, University of Lisbon, University of Minho, Nova University of Lisbon and University of Porto.⁶⁰

Considering the emerging interest in exploring the historical bonds connecting Portugal and Japan, different study and research agreements between the two countries were signed in the last few decades. Following data provided by the Embassy of Japan in Portugal,⁶¹ some of the Portuguese universities with exchange programs with Japanese universities are: NOVA University of Lisbon – University of Osaka; University of Porto – University of Okayama; University of Coimbra – University of Kansai Gaidai, University of Foreign Studies in Kyoto, University of Foreign Studies in

⁵⁹ Camões, Centro Cultural Português em Tóquio (n.d.) *Onde Estamos (Where Are We)*, Available at: <https://www.instituto-camoes.pt/sobre/onde-estamos/japao> (Accessed 28 February 2022).

⁶⁰ Regarding non-academic institutions, the Fundação Oriente, founded in 1988, holds many research projects, exhibitions and events on topics related to Japan.

⁶¹ Embassy of Japan in Portugal (2017) *Universidades Com Programas de Intercâmbio Entre o Japão e Portugal (Universities with Exchange Programs Between Japan and Portugal)*, Available at: <https://www.pt.emb-japan.go.jp/files/000225190.pdf> (Accessed 15 October 2021).

Tokyo, University of Sophia, Tenri University; Catholic University of Portugal – University of Sophia; University of Lisbon – University of Waseda, Yokohama National University.

There are a few cultural events in Japan that explore the memory of Luso-Japanese early modern relations. For example, on the island of Tanegashima, where the Portuguese first arrived, the annual “Rifle Festival” (*Teppo Matsuri*) is held, an event that directly refers to the introduction of the Portuguese *espingarda*, in the 16th century. Every summer, the island’s most iconic festivity celebrates the Portuguese arrival in the early modern period, which demonstrates how the memory from this first contact is still alive in some regions and how it became an important subject of local identity.

Portugal also hosts an annual festival to celebrate its friendship with Japan. Organized in Lisbon, the “Japan Festival” is a non-profit organization that evokes not only the expressivity of the Japanese culture in Portugal but also the importance of their exchange in its many facets. Given its importance, the festival was included as part of the “Lisbon City Festivals,” being supported by, among other institutions, the CCILJ and the Portugal-Japan Friendship Association. Besides that, Portugal also holds a big event on Japanese Popular Culture (cosplay, anime, manga, etc), the Iberanime. This event is held twice per year, in the first semester in Lisbon and in the second semester in Oporto.

Even though there are no direct flights from Portugal to Japan, many companies offer flights with different connections. Indeed, the number of flights increased substantially in the past years. This is also reflected in the number of tourists that travel between the two countries, provided by the Embassy of Japan in Portugal. The number of tourists from Portugal that visited Japan grew every year, from 17,919 in 2016, to 28,116 in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶²

The number of Japanese nationals visiting Portugal is not that relevant when compared to tourists from other countries, not being included in the annual statistics

⁶² Information given via email by the Embassy of Japan in Portugal in October 2021.

book of the INE.⁶³ But, even though the number of tourists traveling between the two countries is not very high, it was increasing in the years before the pandemic.

Nowadays, besides the historical background linking the two countries, one of the topics that most receive attention among the Portuguese is contemporary Japanese popular culture. Above all, in Portugal, Japan is seen as an attractive and important country not only in economic, but also in political and cultural terms.

Conclusions and recommendations

Within Europe, Portugal maintains a particular connection to Japan given their singular historical relationship during the 16th and 17th centuries. Even after the complete disruption of their relations in 1640, it was based on their historical bonds that their diplomatic relations were restored, from 1860. From then on, the early modern experience of contact between Portugal and Japan was sporadically emphasized by Portuguese scholars, officials and diplomats, even though their political and economic relations were never as relevant as before.

Economic relations between the two countries are not so diverse or significant for their economy, but they are based on high-value and traditional products. The balance of trade between the two countries is less favorable to Portugal, but, in the past years, Portuguese business with Japan has been gradually increasing. Composed mostly of small and middle-sized companies, Japan is seen as a demanding but safe market.

The cultural interest regarding Japan in Portugal has grown in the last decades. From their historical relationship, this appeal is more than ever motivated by Japanese popular culture. In the past years, this phenomenon has encouraged not only the celebration of annual festivals in both countries but also the signing of different protocols between Portuguese and Japanese universities.

From what the data indicates, Portugal-Japan relations will remain on the same terms: stable and reliable political and economic relations, with a development of culture-related events and programs. More than anything, this is what seems to be most

⁶³ Instituto Nacional de Estatística (n.d.) *Estatísticas do Turismo (Tourism Statistics)*, Available at: https://www.ine.pt/xportal/xmain?xpid=INE&xpgid=ine_publicacoes&PUBLICACOESrevista=00&PUBLICACOESstema=55581 (Accessed 16 March 2022).

beneficial for the future of their interaction: to explore their historical and cultural connections, while promoting a more high-value commerce.

The best option for the future of Portugal-Japan relations is investment in a few areas. First, it will not only be beneficial but fundamental to foster more cultural and educational programs and events. The historical bonds linking the two countries are the most significant asset for improving Portugal's economic and diplomatic relations with Japan, which has already demonstrated positive results, considering the celebration of common events in the past decades. Second, it will be fundamental to explore in all its potential the Japan-EU EPA, which will facilitate a more fluid circulation and exchanges between the two countries. As it is made clear by the country's statistics, Portugal would have great difficulties accomplishing it alone, giving its modest dimensions and economic resources. Third, the kind of companies and products to engage in the trade between Japan and Portugal will be of the most importance. Considering Portugal has no capacity to compete in terms of volume with other countries, including some from the European Union, the main objective should be to find space in the Japanese market for traditional and high-value products.

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A new horizon for Romania-Japan relations: The common path of Bucharest and Tokyo

By George BOGHEAN*

Overview

The common path of Japan and Romania began with their emergence as new modern states in the second half of the 19th century. The establishment of bilateral ties was a long journey, mainly because of the distance between the two countries. From their first contacts in 1877, relations were finally established in 1917, during the First World War, when Romania and Japan were allies and Romania hoped to win Japan's support and recognition for its unification. The political and economic changes and instabilities of the 20th century shaped bilateral ties, which were interrupted during the Second World War, after Romania switched sides to the Allied camp and later fell under communist influence. Relations were reestablished in 1959 and started to develop even during Romania's communist years.

While cooperation began during the communist era, when Romania's president was one of the few from the East European communist block invited to visit Japan, bilateral relations only took off after Romania's transition to democracy and market economy. Japan provided aid to Romania that ranged from financial and technical assistance, to cultural grants and support for large infrastructure projects. Since Romania's accession to both NATO and the European Union, Japan's interest toward Romania has grown, recognizing its potential. Romania too has looked toward Japan for support during its transition period and, in the 1990s and 2000s, it was a tradition for newly inaugurated Romanian presidents to visit Japan – something that has no longer happened in the last decade.

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Today, Japan is the largest Asian investor in Romania, with numerous Japanese companies employing around 40,000 Romanians. But trade relations are less developed and in need of greater attention and support. In the cultural sphere, Japan and its culture, especially pop culture, are very popular in Romania, especially among the young generations. Based on this growing interest, there is scope to strengthen academic and cultural cooperation, and Romania can do more to increase its profile among the Japanese public.

Since 2018, Romania and Japan have been negotiating a Strategic Partnership Agreement, which would upgrade relations from their current status. This bilateral framework agreement will allow the development of relations along four fundamental coordinates: political, strategic, economic and cultural-scientific exchanges. While political relations have stagnated over the past decade, elevating ties to the level of a strategic partnership could stimulate renewed development and unlock the greater potential in bilateral relations, not just in established areas but also in new ones, such as strategic and security cooperation, where the two sides share many commonalities.

History of relations

Despite being a continent apart, Romania and Japan had a common point in history: the birth of the Romanian and Japanese modern states took place in the same period, in the second half of the 19th century. Diplomatic relations between the two states would develop only decades later and their evolution would be marked by the events and developments of the 20th century.

The unification of the Romanian principalities in 1859, through the double election of Alexandru Ioan Cuza as prince, both in Wallachia and Moldavia, led to the birth of the modern Romanian state, recognized by the European Great Powers in 1862.¹ For Japan, the birth of the modern state took place as an internal transformation, through the events that led to the Meiji Restoration, in 1868.²

Regarding the first official diplomatic records, after obtaining the state

¹ Florin Constantiniu (2010) *O Istorie Sinceră a Poporului Român (A Sincere History of the Romanian People)*, București: Univers Enciclopedic Gold, p. 229.

² Andrew Gordon (2003) *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 58-59.

independence of Romania, in 1877, Prince Carol addressed the Japanese Emperor Mutsuhito (Meiji) through a letter, informing him of Romania's new achievement. The Romanian prince proposed to the Japanese emperor to establish a friendly relationship between the two states.³ The response was a friendly and productive one and the two ruling houses started exchanging letters informing each other of the developments in their states.

Such letters show the bilateral interest of both Romania and Japan to develop a close and friendly relationship. However, because of the great distance between them, diplomatic relations would take longer to establish. Japan first proposed establishing official diplomatic relations with Romania in 1902, in Vienna, but even though Romania was interested in Japan's initiative, progress took time.⁴

Until 1917 and for some periods thereafter, there were no diplomatic relations between Romania and Japan, which were allies during the First World War. Under such circumstances, their interests were mediated by other states, such as Italy (1898-1917), the Netherlands (1917-1921), France (1922-1927) and, later on, Sweden (1944-1953).⁵

While on the same side during the war, Romania and Japan were also influenced by their common neighbor, the Russian Empire. Given the burden of the war and the economic difficulties of that time, Romania was looking for help, and since Japan was its ally, the Romanian Prime Minister Ion I. C. Brătianu saw an opportunity for support. Because Japan was one of the countries that could support Romania's interests during the Paris Peace Conference, he expressed Romania's intentions to establish diplomatic relations with Japan and contacted the Japanese ambassador in St. Petersburg⁶. The Petersburg negotiations concluded with the establishment of diplomatic relations, Romania sending its first minister to Tokyo, the politician and economist Nicolae Xenopol. He presented his accreditation letters to Emperor Yoshihito on 19 November 1917, allowing this moment to be considered as the establishment of diplomatic

³ Ion Scumpieru (2013) *133 de Ani de Relații România-Japonia (133 Years of Romania-Japan Relations)*, București: Editura Fundația Europeană Titulescu, p. 19.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 25.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 26.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 26.

relations between Romania and Japan.⁷

Unfortunately, this achievement would not last long, because of a kidney illness that led to Nicolae Xenopol's untimely death.⁸ As he was the only Romanian diplomat sent to Tokyo, the mission ended. This was a setback, as it was one of Romania's objectives to get all its allies and great powers to recognize its unification and new territories at the end of the war, in 1918. In this particular case, it was Romania's goal to convince Japan to ratify the Treaty of Paris.⁹

Such an attempt could be recognized when young Prince Carol of Romania (later King Carol II) visited Japan in 1920. The Romanian prince was welcomed by the heir to the imperial throne of Japan, Hirohito, at the Tokyo Train Station.¹⁰ In response to this visit, in 1924, the new emperor's uncle, Prince Naruhito Higashikuni, visited Romania.¹¹

After the war, in 1921, Romania's legation in Tokyo was reopened, an event celebrated today as the official establishment of diplomatic relations between the two states. However, because of the new international context and Japan's desire to normalize relations with the new Soviet Union, the ratification of the Paris Treaty by Japan was postponed.¹²

Because of the lack of funding, Romania's diplomatic mission to Tokyo had to be closed between 1922-1927.¹³ The rise of the Soviet Union and its ideology represented a menace for both Romania and Japan, regarding their leadership and

⁷ Ibidem, p. 26.

⁸ Historia (n.d) *100 de Ani de la Stabilirea Efectivă a Relațiilor Diplomatice dintre România și Japonia (100 Years since the Effective Establishment of Diplomatic Relations Between Romania and Japan)*, Available at: <https://www.historia.ro/sectiune/actualitate/articol/100-de-ani-de-la-stabilirea-efectiva-a-relatiilor-diplomatice-dintre-romania-si-japonia> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁹ Octavian Țicu (2019) *Ratificarea Tratatului Basarabean (IV): Refuzul Japoniei (Ratification of the Bessarabian Treaty (IV): Japan's Refusal)*, Available at: [https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/ratificarea-tratatului-basarabean-\(iv\)-refuzul-japoniei/30179140.html](https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/ratificarea-tratatului-basarabean-(iv)-refuzul-japoniei/30179140.html) (Accessed 12 May 2022)..

¹⁰ Ion Scumpieru (2013) *133 de Ani de Relații România-Japonia (133 Years of Romania-Japan Relations)*, București: Editura Fundația Europeană Titulescu, p. 119

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 137.

¹² Ibidem, p. 29.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 28.

political systems. The two countries later found themselves on the same side in the Second World War, as allies of Nazi Germany. After Romania switched sides, in 1944, and joined the Allies, it is important to mention that a state of war was never declared between the two countries.¹⁴

From that moment, there were no diplomatic ties until 1959, when they were re-established, after negotiations that took place in Warsaw.¹⁵ In 1964, the level of representation was upgraded to embassy.¹⁶

Since the abolition of the Romanian Royal House by the communists, in December 1947, there have been no more visits between the ruling houses of the two countries.¹⁷ As such, the first post-war official visit of great importance was the visit of the Romanian minister of foreign affairs, Corneliu Mănescu, to Japan, in 1967. He was the first Romanian minister of foreign affairs to visit Japan in the entire history of bilateral relations.¹⁸

In 1975, came another milestone: the first visit to Japan of the president of the Socialist Republic of Romania, Nicolae Ceaușescu, accompanied by his wife. It is interesting that the only other invitation to a leader of a country from the Eastern European communist block was addressed to the leader of Yugoslavia, Iosif Broz Tito, in 1968.¹⁹ This invitation was a consequence of Romania's unique position regarding the People's Republic of China and because of Romania's reaction to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, in which it refused to take part. The visit led to a joint communiqué by Nicolae Ceaușescu and Takeo Miki, the prime minister of Japan at that time, governmental agreements in the fields of science and technology, 80 million dollars in government credit for the development of the Port of Constanța and 100

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 32.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 37.

¹⁶ Embassy of Romania to Japan (n.d.) *Relații Bilaterale – Scurt Istoric (Bilateral Relations – Brief History)*, Available at: <https://tokyo.mae.ro/node/221> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

¹⁷ Ion Scumpieru (2013) *133 de Ani de Relații România-Japonia (133 Years of Romania-Japan Relations)*, București: Editura Fundația Europeană Titulescu, p. 25

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 380.

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 407.

million dollars in credit for supplies.²⁰

As a response to the visit, the Crown Prince of Japan, Akihito, and his wife, Princess Michiko, visited Romania in 1979, as Emperor Hirohito was advised not to travel anymore, because of his age. The visit even included the sightseeing of some famous monasteries in north-east Romania, like Voroneț or Sucevița.²¹

During the Romanian Revolution of 1989, the Japanese public opinion supported the fight for democracy and freedom and condemned the abuses of the government. Japanese Prime Minister Kaifu Toshiki also expressed the deep concern of the Japanese Government regarding the events in Romania.²² Japanese public opinion was curious about the events in Eastern Europe, including Romania, and some even pursued this desire for an encounter with the revolutionary spirit.²³

After the Romanian Revolution, bilateral relations between Japan and Romania experienced an increase in cultural, political and economic exchanges. This was made possible by Romania's adoption of free markets, human rights and liberal democratic principles.

For Japan, it was also a new era, as the new Emperor Akihito took the throne. The crowning ceremony was a perfect opportunity for a meeting between the new emperor of Japan and the new president of Romania. In November 1990, the newly elected Romanian president, Ion Iliescu, undertook an official visit to Japan.²⁴ This visit was a good opportunity for Romania to encourage Japan and Japanese businesses to help Romania's economic development. Several important visits were made to some of Japan's largest companies, for talks with some of the key economic actors of the Japanese economy.²⁵

²⁰ Ibidem, pp. 424-426.

²¹ Ibidem, p. 39

²² Ibidem, p. 580.

²³ Asociația Bucureștiul Meu Drag (2017) *București – 1990 Fotografiat de Norihiro Haruta (Bucharest – 1990 Photographed by Norihiro Haruta)*, Available at: <https://bucurestiulmeudrag.ro/blog/articol/norihiro-haruta> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

²⁴ Ion Scumpieru (2013) *133 de Ani de Relații România-Japonia (133 Years of Romania-Japan Relations)*, București: Editura Fundația Europeană Titulescu, p. 619

²⁵ Ibidem, pp. 620-621.

Soon afterward came the visit of Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Adrian Năstase, with the same objective of obtaining financial assistance.²⁶ While Romania did not receive the privileged relationship with Japan it aimed for, it obtained many economic advantages, among the most important being a 100 million dollars loan.²⁷

In response to Iliescu's 1990 visit, Prince and Princess Hitachi visited Romania in 1995,²⁸ during a trip to Europe that also included Finland.²⁹ Over the next two years came two more important Romanian visits to Japan. The minister of foreign affairs, Teodor Meleşcanu, traveled to Tokyo in 1995, and one year later, the new president of Romania, Emil Constantinescu, visited Japan.³⁰ Once again, Japan helped Romania financially, especially through loans.

After his reelection as president, Ion Iliescu visited Japan again, in 2002, in order to celebrate a century of diplomatic contacts, in honor of the first dialogue that took place in Vienna, in 1902.³¹ On the same occasion, Princess Sayako, the only daughter of Emperor Akihito, visited Romania in the autumn of 2002.³² Iliescu's visit in Japan concluded with the signing of the "Joint Statement on Friendship, Co-operation and Partnership between Japan and Romania," an important moment for bilateral relations.³³

²⁶ Ibidem, p. 622.

²⁷ Ibidem, pp. 623-624.

²⁸ Embassy of Japan in Romania (n.d.) *Relații Bilaterale – Vizite Oficiale din Japonia în România (Bilateral Relations - Official Visits from Japan to Romania)*, Available at: https://www.ro.emb-japan.go.jp/relatii_vizite.htm (Accessed 12 May 2022).

²⁹ The Imperial Household Agency (n.d.), *List of Overseas Visits by the Emperor, Empress and Imperial Family (1989 - 1998)*, Available at: <https://www.kunaicho.go.jp/e-about/shinzen/gaikoku/gaikoku-1989-1998.html> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

³⁰ Embassy of Japan in Romania (2017) *Vizite Oficiale din Japonia în România (Official Visits from Japan to Romania)*, Available at: https://www.ro.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ro/relatii_vizite.html (Accessed 12 May 2022).

³¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019) *Japan-Romania Relations (Overview)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/romania/data.html> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

³² Ion Scumpieru (2013) *133 de Ani de Relații România-Japonia (133 Years of Romania-Japan Relations)*, București: Editura Fundația Europeană Titulescu, p. 632.

³³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2002) *Joint Statement on Friendship, Co-operation and Partnership between Japan and Romania*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/romania/pv0202/joint.html> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

Shaping what seemed to be a tradition for newly elected Romanian presidents, Traian Băsescu visited Japan in 2005. During the visit, the president and his wife met with the Emperor and Empress. For the first time, Japan signed an agreement with Romania regarding carbon dioxide excess rights.³⁴ The same year, the new minister of foreign affairs of Romania, Mihai Răzvan Ungureanu, had a meeting in Japan with his Japanese counterpart, Tarō Asō, who also visited Romania, in 2007.³⁵ That year, Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu became the first Romanian prime minister to visit Japan. The purpose of the visit was to encourage Japanese investors and companies to gain interest in Romania.³⁶

In 2009, Prince and Princess Akishino visited Romania, as a celebration of a half-century since the re-establishment of diplomatic relations in 1959. It was a visit rich in cultural and symbolic significance.³⁷

One year later, President Traian Băsescu traveled for another visit to Japan. On this occasion, the 315 million dollars loan agreement for building a subway line connecting Bucharest to its international airport was signed, which would begin a decade-long saga.³⁸ Unfortunately, the high tempo of bilateral visits no longer continued in the next decade.

Political relations

As reflected in the history of the diplomatic relations between Japan and Romania, the political relations between the two states have been strongly influenced by their

³⁴ Diana Stirlea (2005) *Traian Basescu, Prezent la EXPO 2005 (Traian Basescu, Present at EXPO 2005)*, Available at: <https://www.curentul.info/politic/traian-basescu-prezent-la-expo-2005/> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

³⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2005) *Visit to Japan by Mr. Mihai-Razvan Ungureanu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/event/2005/11/1122.html> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

³⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2007) *Visit to Japan by Mr. Calin Popescu-Tariceanu, Prime Minister of Romania (Summary and Evaluation)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/romania/pmv0702.html> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

³⁷ Mediafax (2009) *Prințul Akishino și Prințesa Kiko în România (Prince Akishino and Princess Kiko in Romania)*, Available at: <https://www.mediafax.ro/politic/printul-akishino-si-printesa-kiko-in-romania-galerie-foto-4427753> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

³⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2010) *Visit to Japan of His Excellency Mr. Traian BASESCU, President of Romania and Mrs. Maria BASESCU*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/event/2010/2/0219_02.html (Accessed 12 May 2022).

common interests. Both democratic states, interested in promoting values such as the rule of law, free markets and human rights, both interested in developing the best use of their resources, even though separated by such a distance from one another, Romania and Japan share this objective of developing the right conditions for their citizens and their future.

The partnership concluded in 2002 by Romania and Japan was upgraded in 2013, when the “Japan-Romania Foreign Ministers’ Joint Statement on the Renewed Partnership between Japan and Romania” was signed, during the visit of Titus Corlăţean, minister of foreign affairs of Romania, to Japan.³⁹ Romania, now as a member of both the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU), held a higher position and interest for Japan. Yet this was also the last visit of a Romanian or Japanese minister of foreign affairs to the other country.

Ironically, the past decade led to an unexpected lull in high-level bilateral visits. The next important visit was itself marked by an unforeseen and unfortunate event. In January 2018, the prime minister of Japan at that time, Shinzō Abe, visited Romania. It was the first visit of a Japanese prime minister in Romania. Unfortunately, this historic visit was marked by an unexpected situation, as one day before Abe’s visit, the Romanian prime minister clashed with the leader of his party, leading to his resignation. Thus, during the visit, Prime Minister Abe had no counterpart to engage with. While skipping the intergovernmental meeting for a trip to the Village Museum and a Japanese garden in Bucharest,⁴⁰ Abe was later welcomed by the Romanian President, Klaus Iohannis.⁴¹

The last historic moment regarding the bilateral relations of Romania and Japan was the coronation of Emperor Naruhito, on 22 October 2019, which President Iohannis

³⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019) *Japan-Romania Relations (Overview)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/romania/data.html> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁴⁰ RISAP (2018) *Vizita lui Abe, în Umbra Problemelor Politicii Interne (Abe’s Visit in the Shadow of Internal Political Problems)*, Available at: <http://risap.ro/vizita-lui-abe-in-umbra-problemelor-politicii-interne/> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁴¹ Presidency of Romania (2019) *Bilateral Meeting Between the President of Romania, Mr. Klaus Iohannis, and the Prime Minister of Japan, Mr. Shinzō Abe*, Available at: <https://www.presidency.ro/en/media/press-releases/bilateral-meeting-between-the-president-of-romania-mr-klaus-iohannis-and-the-prime-minister-of-japan-mr-shinz-abe> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

attended.⁴²

During Shinzō Abe's visit to Romania, in 2018, the Japanese prime minister and the Romanian president agreed to upgrade bilateral relations to the level of a Strategic Partnership. This fact has been confirmed once again during the Romanian president's visit to Japan, in 2019.⁴³ The bilateral Strategic Partnership will be a framework agreement that will allow the development of relations between the two countries along four fundamental coordinates: political, strategic, economic and cultural-scientific exchanges.⁴⁴ It will be complementary to the Strategic Partnership Agreement concluded between the European Union and Japan, in 2018. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected negotiations for the strategic partnership, which stalled. The partnership was later supposed to be signed in 2021, but the year passed without such a result.⁴⁵

Japan and Romania's political relations are also supported by their legislative institutions. The Parliament of Romania hosts a parliamentary friendship group with Japan, which has 20 members.⁴⁶ Such a structure also exists in Japan's National Diet.⁴⁷

Romania is represented in Japan by the Embassy of Romania in Tokyo, the Honorary Consulate of Romania in Osaka and the Honorary Consulate of Romania in

⁴² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania (n.d.) *Japan - Bilateral Relations*, Available at: <https://www.mae.ro/bilateral-relations/2047> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁴³ Embassy of Japan in Romania (2021) *Japan – Romania: 100 de Ani de la Stabilirea Relațiilor Diplomatice dintre Japonia și România (Japan – Romania: 100 Years since the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations Between Japan and Romania)*, Available at: https://www.ro.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ro/centenar2021.html (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁴⁴ Presidency of Romania (2019) *Bilateral meeting between the President of Romania, Mr. Klaus Iohannis, and the Prime Minister of Japan, Mr. Shinzō Abe*, Available at: <https://www.presidency.ro/en/media/press-releases/bilateral-meeting-between-the-president-of-romania-mr-klaus-iohannis-and-the-prime-minister-of-japan-mr-shinz-abe> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁴⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania (2021) *Parteneriate Strategice și Relații Speciale, Relația Specială a României cu Japonia (Strategic Partnerships and Special Relations, Romania's Special Relationship with Japan)*, Available at: <https://www.mae.ro/node/4853> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁴⁶ Chamber of Deputies (n.d.) *Friendship Parliamentary Group with Japan*, Available at: <http://www.cdep.ro/pls/parlam/structura2015.pr?idg=63&leg=2020> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁴⁷ Embassy of Romania to Japan (n.d.) *Reception in Honor of the Japan – Romania Parliamentary Friendship League*, Available at: <http://tokyo.mae.ro/en/local-news/1025> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

Yokohama.⁴⁸ There is also an Honorary Consulate of Romania in Shizuoka.⁴⁹ On the other side, the presence of Japan in Romania is achieved through the Embassy of Japan in Bucharest and an office of JETRO, the Japan External Trade Organization, in Bucharest.⁵⁰

Regarding other political aspects, there are other areas of specific cooperation, such as the cooperation in the field of justice and internal affairs. According to Romania's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, since August 2009, the Romanian Embassy in Tokyo has hosted home office attachés. For this, Romania's Ministry of Internal Affairs has delegated an officer who cooperates with Japan's authorities for fighting crime and illegal immigration. Since September 2020, the Romanian Embassy also hosts an Office of the Defense Attaché.⁵¹

In the field of security, as a member state of the EU and NATO, Romania works through these mechanisms in order to contribute to the stabilization of potential risk factors across the globe, focusing especially on its neighborhood.⁵² Over the years, NATO and Japan have worked together to stabilize Afghanistan, to counter piracy off the coast of Somalia, and to strengthen partners like Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Jordan.⁵³ Nonetheless, bilateral security cooperation between Romania and Japan has been limited, though there have been contacts on specific issues, like the Aegis Ashore Missile Defense System in Romania, which was visited by a delegation from the

⁴⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania (n.d.) *Missions of Romania*, Available at: <https://www.mae.ro/romanian-missions#766> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁴⁹ Embassy Pages (n.d.) *Honorary Consulate of Romania in Shizuoka, Japan*, Available at: <https://www.embassypages.com/romania-consulate-shizuoka-japan> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁵⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (n.d.), *Websites of Japanese Embassies, Consulates and Permanent Missions*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/about/emb_cons/mofaserv.html (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁵¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania (2021) *Japan – Bilateral Relations*, Available at: <http://mae.ro/bilateral-relations/2047#766> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁵² North Atlantic Treaty Organization (2022) *Relations with Japan*, Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50336.htm (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁵³ North Atlantic Treaty Organization (2020) *Secretary General Commends Strong Cooperation Between NATO and Japan*, Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_177380.htm?selectedLocale=en (Accessed 12 May 2022).

National Diet of Japan.⁵⁴

Concerning other aspects regarding national and international security, the interest in Romania has grown, especially since the European Cybersecurity Competence Centre and Network has been established in Bucharest.⁵⁵

Economic relations

In order to support Romania's democratization and its transition to a market economy after the fall of communism, in 1991, Japan began economic cooperation in the form of technical assistance and cultural grants. Later, after President Constantinescu's visit to Japan in 1996, Japan offered yen loans and financial aid in the form of grants. Among the projects for which Japan has provided loans are the construction of the container terminal in Constanța Sud, as part of the Constanța Port Development Project (approximately 200 million dollars), the rehabilitation of the Craiova-Timișoara section of the DN6 national road (approximately 80 million dollars), the modernization of the Fetești-Constanța section of the Bucharest-Constanța railway (approximately 220 million dollars) and the pollution reduction and rehabilitation project at the Turceni Thermal Power Plant (approximately 280 million dollars), projects highly appreciated by Romania.⁵⁶

In terms of local cooperation, 112 Japanese volunteers from the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers program worked in Romania between 1997 and December 2008,⁵⁷ mainly in areas related to youth activities and the healthcare sector. After Romania's accession to the EU and given its economic development, this type of

⁵⁴ Agerpres (2018) *O Delegație a Dietei Japoniei a Vizitat Baza Militară Deveselu (A Delegation of the Diet of Japan Visited the Deveselu Military Base)*, Available at: <https://www.agerpres.ro/social/2018/07/31/olt-o-delegatie-a-dietei-japoniei-a-vizitat-baza-militara-deveselu--153773> (Accessed 12 May 2022)

⁵⁵ European Commission (2021) *The European Cybersecurity Competence Centre and Network is now ready to take off*, Available at: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/european-cybersecurity-competence-centre-and-network-now-ready-take> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁵⁶ Embassy of Japan in Romania (2021), *Realizări în Domeniul Cooperării Economice (Achievements in the Field of Economic Cooperation)*, Available at: https://www.ro.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ja/11_000001_00374.html (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁵⁷ Ibidem.

assistance was phased out, all but one of the projects ending in 2011.⁵⁸

In March 2010, on the occasion of President Băsescu's visit to Japan, the Agreement on the loan granted to Romania by the Government of Japan was signed for the "Project for the connection of the Bucharest subway network with the Henri Coandă-Otopeni International Airport", estimated at approximately 324 million euros.⁵⁹ This project would face numerous obstacles, problems and delays over the next decade, with the Romanian government sometimes indicating its desire to abandon it.⁶⁰ Eventually though, the project was finally approved and implementation began in 2022. The overcoming of this stumbling block was possible through amplified discussions with both the European Union and the Japanese partners.⁶¹ In order to successfully accomplish this objective, the Romanian government has initiated the extension of the loan period until 2032, with JICA's approval.⁶²

Another form of Japanese assistance consisted in the participation of Romanian experts in professional development programs in Japan. Between July 1979 and June 2007, almost 770 Romanian students traveled to Japan for such training programs.⁶³

Romania is one of the countries that received a consistent amount of financial support from Japan, through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). In terms of non-refundable material assistance, Romania has received from Japan assistance for hospitals, the financial sector, reducing air pollution, agriculture and

⁵⁸ Ibidem.

⁵⁹ Ibidem.

⁶⁰ George Boghean (2016) *Magistrala M6 – O Poveste cu Iz Japonez (The M6 Subway Line - A Japanese Story)*, Available at: <http://risap.ro/magistrala-m6-o-poveste-cu-iz-japonez> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁶¹ Eduard Nicolae Popa (2022) *Epopoea Pro și Contra Metroului spre Aeroportul Otopeni (The Epic for and Against the Subway to Otopeni Airport)*, Available at: <https://panorama.ro/epopeea-pro-si-contrametroul-spre-aeroportul-otopeni/> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁶² Marius Oncu (2022) *Guvernul Extinde Până în 2032 un Acord de Împrumut cu Japonia pentru Magistrala de Metrou M6 (stațiile Tokyo – Aeroport Henri Coandă), din care a Cheltuit în 11 ani doar 8,5 Milioane de Euro pe Consultanță (The Government is Extending until 2032 a Loan Agreement with Japan for the M6 Subway Line (Stations Tokyo - Henri Coanda Airport), of which It Has Spent Only 8.5 Million Euros on Consulting in 11 years)*, Available at: <https://www.profit.ro/insider/guvernul-extinde-pana-2032-acord-imprumut-japonia-magistrala-metrou-m6-statiile-tokyo-aeroport-henri-coanda-cheltuit-11-ani-8-5-milioane-euro-consultanta-20563253> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁶³ Information provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania to the author (September 2021).

education.⁶⁴

From an economic and commercial point of view, relations between Japan and Romania are good but still with room for improvement. For Romania, Japan is one of the main Asian economic partners and the biggest investor from the Far East. Japan has greatly assisted Romania in the reform process, through financial and technical support. It has granted many loans for the rehabilitation of the Romanian transportation infrastructure, roads or railways.⁶⁵ At the moment, the future subway line to the airport is one of the most important projects in which Japan aids Romania.⁶⁶

Another recent and large infrastructure project in which Romania received support from Japan is the newest bridge over the Danube River, near the city of Brăila. It will be the largest bridge in Romania and the third largest in Europe, and the project is under construction, supervised by Japanese engineers, which recently advanced the huge steel cables.⁶⁷ In August 2021, on the occasion of the completion of the working platform (catwalk) of the bridge in Brăila, the Embassy of Japan and IHI Infrastructure Systems jointly organized an event to celebrate 100 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Romania, near the bridge, on a boat, on the Danube. The visit of the Japanese Ambassador Hiroshi Ueda at the Brăila Bridge was an event that marked the centenary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Romania.⁶⁸

Concerning commercial relations, the last decade saw a consistent growth in

⁶⁴ Embassy of Japan in Romania (2021) *Realizări în Domeniul Cooperării Economice (Achievements in the Field of Economic Cooperation)*, Available at: https://www.ro.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ja/11_000001_00374.html (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁶⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania (2021) *Japonia – Relații Bilaterale (Japan – Bilateral Relations)*, Available at: <http://mae.ro/bilateral-relations/2047#766> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

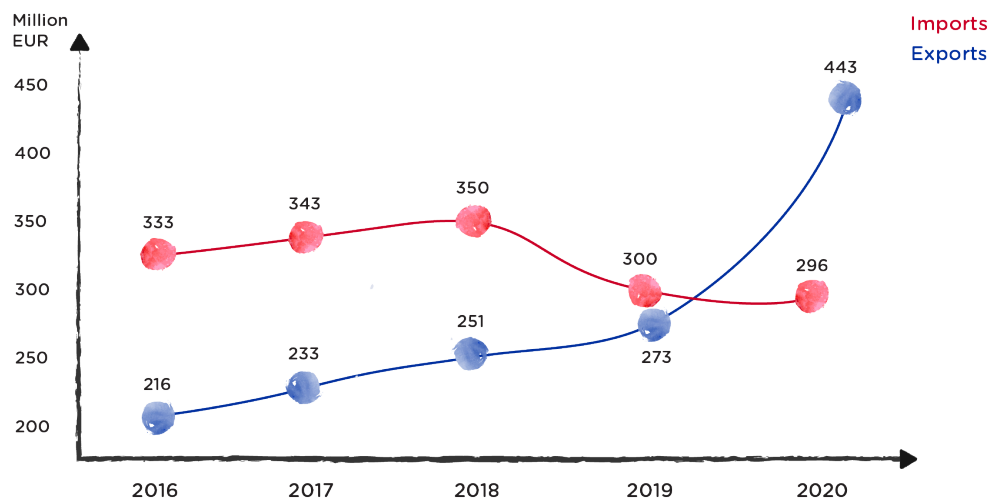
⁶⁶ George Boghean (2016) *Magistrala M6 – O Poveste cu Iz Japonez (The M6 Subway Line - A Japanese Story)*, Available at: <http://risap.ro/magistrala-m6-o-poveste-cu-iz-japonez> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁶⁷ Hotnews (2021) *Podul Suspendat de la Brăila: Japonezii de la IHI vor Începe Întinderea Perechii de Cabluri Principale (Brăila Suspension Bridge: The Japanese from IHI Will Start Laying the Main Cable Pair)*, Available at: https://monitorizari.hotnews.ro/stiri-infrastructura_articole-24744410-video-podul-suspendat-braila-japonezii-ih-i-vor-incepe-intinderea-perechii-cabluri-principale.htm (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁶⁸ Embassy of Japan in Romania (2021) *Podul de la Brăila - Eveniment ce Marchează Centenarul Stabilirii Relațiilor Diplomatice Dintre Japonia și Români (Brăila Bridge – An Event that Marks the Centenary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between Japan and Romania)*, Available at: https://www.ro.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ja/11_000001_00447.html (Accessed 12 May 2022).

total trade between Romania and Japan, which rose from around 360 million euros in 2010, to 739 million euros in 2020.⁶⁹ Romania has usually run a trade deficit with Japan, though in 2020 exports grew to 443 million euros, from 273 million euros in 2019, while imports remained constant at around 300 million euros.⁷⁰ Romania thus recorded a rare positive trade balance with Japan.

Romania's trade with Japan in million euros



Source: International Trade Center/Trade Map

The dynamics of the commercial exchanges between Romania and Japan, especially in the last years, has revealed a greater interest of Japan to conduct economic activities in Romania, especially in the context of Brexit.⁷¹ Japan has a long experience of exporting auto parts and electronic equipment to Romania, while importing clothing,

⁶⁹ Compiled based on Trade Map Data. Trade Map (n.d.) *Romania-Japan Exports*, Available at: https://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx?nvpm=1%7c642%7c%7c392%7c%7cTOTAL%7c%7c%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c2%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1 (Accessed 12 May 2022). Trade Map (n.d.) *Romania-Japan Imports*, Available at: https://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx?nvpm=1%7c642%7c%7c392%7c%7cTOTAL%7c%7c%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1 (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁷⁰ Ibidem.

⁷¹ The Japan Times (2017) *As Brexit Looms, Romania Makes Case for Japanese Investment*, Available at: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/09/20/business/brexit-looms-romania-makes-case-japanese-investment/> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

timber and raw goods.⁷² In 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, Romania's exports to Japan consisted mainly of cigarettes (29.1%), electrical equipment (21.4%), textiles (18.7%), wood and cork products (8.9%), raw materials of wood and cork (7.6%). Meanwhile, Romania's main imports from Japan in 2019 were vehicles (31.7%), car components (10.6%), electrical equipment (13.6%), equipment for metalworking (3.5%).⁷³

The main investments of Japanese companies in Romania are concentrated in the region near Bucharest and in Transylvania, in the western part of the country, closer to the EU. Japanese investments are mainly related to the automotive industry, which has led to an increase in imports of automotive parts from Japan, such as electrical circuit components for wiring.⁷⁴

According to a report of the Japanese Embassy from October 2019, there were 177 Japanese companies operating in Romania.⁷⁵ This long list of Japanese companies includes Daikin Airconditioning Central Europe - Romania, Fujitsu, Hitachi, Honda Trading Romania, Makita Corporation, Mazda Austria GmbH - Representative Office Romania, Mitsubishi Electric Europe Bv Amsterdam Bucharest Branch, Ursus Breweries.⁷⁶ While most of the companies operate in the auto and electronic sectors, Asahi Group Holdings Ltd, through the acquisition of SabMiller Eastern Europe, gained a very strong position on the Romanian brewery market, now owning Ursus Breweries.⁷⁷

Currently, the biggest Japanese investors in Romania are Makita, Koyo, Yazaki,

⁷² Embassy of Japan in Romania (2021) *Relații Economice Bilaterale (Bilateral Economic Relations)*, Available at: https://www.ro.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ja/11_000001_00373.html (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁷³ Ibidem.

⁷⁴ Ibidem.

⁷⁵ Ibidem.

⁷⁶ JETRO Romania (2022) *Major Japanese-Affiliated Companies Operating in Romania (Headquartered in Japan)*, Available at: https://www.jetro.go.jp/world/europe/ro/links/links_2.html (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁷⁷ Ștefan Stan (2016) *Tranzacție Gigant pe Piața Berii: Un Grup Japonez a Cumpărat Mărcile de Bere Ursus, Ciucaș și Timișoreana (Giant Transaction on the Beer Market: a Japanese Group Bought the Ursus, Ciucaș and Timișoreana Beer Brands)*, Available at: <https://www.zf.ro/zf-24/tranzactie-gigant-pe-piata-berii-un-grup-japonez-a-cumparat-marcile-de-bere-ursus-ciucas-si-timisoreana-16025872> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

Marelli, Plasess, Honda, Roki, Marubeni, Sumimoto, Calsonic Kansei and Japan Tobacco International (JTI).⁷⁸ In 2018, Japanese companies in Romania employed almost 40,000 Romanians, of which around 37,000 worked in manufacturing.⁷⁹ Investment is increasing, as Japan became in 2020 the 15th largest foreign investor in Romania, with an Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) stock of 1,548 million euros, according to Romania's National Bank.⁸⁰

Unfortunately, there are no notable Romanian investments in Japan. However, there are many Romanian companies exporting products in Japan, the main exporters being JTI, HS Timber, Ameropa Grains, Kronospan Trading, Pirelli, Artifex, to mention a few.⁸¹

A significant role in commercial relations between Japan and Romania is played by the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) which maintains an office in Bucharest, operating since 1971.⁸² Between the two countries, there are many bilateral agreements⁸³ but among the most important are the Convention on the avoidance of double taxation on income taxes (1976), the Agreement on the provision of non-reimbursable financial assistance for projects of local interest (1998) or the agreement regarding visa waiver for service passports (2005).⁸⁴

⁷⁸ Information provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania to the author (September 2021).

⁷⁹ Andrada Ghira (2018) *40.000 de Angajați Lucrează în Companiile Japoneze din România. Cei mai Mulți, în Producție (40,000 Employees Work in Japanese Companies in Romania. Most of Them, in Manufacturing)*, Available at: https://www.economica.net/40-000-de-romani-lucreaza-in-companiile-japoneze-din-romania-cei-mai-multi-in-productie_152592.html (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁸⁰ The National Bank of Romania (2021) *Investitiile Straine Directe in Romania in Anul 2020 (Foreign Direct Investment in Romania in 2020)*, p. 18, Available at: https://www.bnr.ro/files/d/Pubs_ro/InvestitiiStraine/ISD2020.pdf (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁸¹ Information provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania to the author (September 2021).

⁸² Nine O'clock (2015) *JETRO's Mission Is to Support the Mutual Investment between Romania and Japan and Promote the Export from Japan to Romania*, Available at: <https://www.nineoclock.ro/2015/12/23/jetros-mission-is-to-support-the-mutual-investment-between-romania-and-japan-and-promote-the-export-from-japan-to-romania/> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁸³ Chamber of Commerce and Industry Romania – Japan (n.d.) *Acorduri Bilaterale (Bilateral Agreements)*, Available at: <https://ccirj.ro/opportunitati-de-afaceri/acorduri-bilaterale/> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁸⁴ Ibidem.

Cultural relations

The interest of Romanians regarding Japan has grown significantly and it is reflected in the large number of cultural, technological and electronic Japanese products. It can also be seen in the number of citizens visiting and working in both states. According to the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at the end of 2020, there were 2,332 Romanian citizens working in Japan.⁸⁵

On the other hand, at the end of July 2021, in Romania, 289 Japanese citizens had residence permits for various purposes (family members 114, employment 95, other purposes 54, long-term residence 17, studies 9).⁸⁶ But when it comes to the official number of Japanese students in Romania, it is almost nonexistent, as only 9 Japanese students are officially recorded as studying in Romania, though there are probably other short-term exchange students as well.⁸⁷ In 2019, the number of Japanese tourists accommodated in tourist reception structures in Romania was 13,867, having then fallen to only 1,923 tourists in 2020, because of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁸⁸

Concerning cultural relations between the two countries, Japanese culture is regarded with much interest in Romania, and thus it is often the case that Japanese cultural events receive much appreciation and reputation. For example, Heisei Nakamura-za performed Kabuki in Sibiu, with great success, in 2008.⁸⁹ The Japanese language is also getting more and more popular, and currently around 2,000 Romanian pupils and students are studying Japanese.⁹⁰ The University of Bucharest established a MA program in Japanese studies, in 2005, and inaugurated the Center for Japanese Studies, in 2010. Babes-Bolyai University and the Bucharest University of Economic

⁸⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania (2021) *Japonia – Relații Bilaterale (Bilateral Relations)*, Available at: <http://mae.ro/bilateral-relations/2047#766> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁸⁶ Information provided by the General Inspectorate for Immigration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the author (September 2021).

⁸⁷ Ibidem.

⁸⁸ Information provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania to the author (September 2021).

⁸⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019) *Japan-Romania Relations (Overview)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/romania/data.html> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁹⁰ Ibidem.

Studies have opened Japanese Culture Centers, in 2017 and in 2018, respectively.⁹¹ Also, according to the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as of January 2019, the University of Bucharest has concluded agreements for academic exchanges with 16 Japanese universities, while Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj has established partnerships with Kobe University and Ehime University.⁹²

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, through its Embassy in Romania, also grants scholarships and research grants.⁹³ Japanese is also taught in some Romanian high schools, for example, the “Ion Creangă” High School, in Bucharest.

Regarding the cultural interest of Romanians about Japan, an important role is played by the “Angela Hondru” Romanian-Japanese Studies Center. It was established in May 2005 at the Romanian-American University, with the support of the Japanese Embassy in Bucharest and JTI.⁹⁴ The center aims to promote the study of the Japanese language, culture and business environment for those interested, both students of the Romanian-American University and those who are passionate about Japan. The educational offer consists of the participation in study programs at prestigious universities in Japan but also internships at Japanese companies, study trips to Japan and summer schools organized annually. It also organizes courses and activities related to tea ceremony, Ikebana, Taiko but also Aikido or Ninjutsu.⁹⁵ For those who appreciate the beauty of spring, they also organize the Hanami festival.⁹⁶ When it comes to cultural events, Japan-Romania relations are marked by annual events such as “Zilele Culturii Japoneze” (the Days of Japanese Culture), organized by the Romanian-American

⁹¹ Ibidem.

⁹² Ibidem.

⁹³ Embassy of Japan in Romania (2022) *Începerea Înscrierilor pentru Programul de Burse de Cercetare (“Research student”)* (*The Start of Enrollment in the “Research student” Program*), Available at: https://www.ro.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ro/kenkyusei.html (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁹⁴ “Angela Hondru” Romanian-Japanese Studies Center (n.d.) *Home Page*, Available at: <https://csrj.ro/> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁹⁵ Ibidem.

⁹⁶ Embassy of Japan in Romania (2022) *Hanami - Sărbătoarea Florilor de Cireș (Hanami - Cherry Blossom Festival)*, Available at: https://www.ro.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ro/Hanami_2022.html (Accessed 12 May 2022).

University, or by more generalist festivals, like Asia Fest.⁹⁷

The mutual interest of the Japanese and Romanian citizens for each other's countries is growing, but, unfortunately, there are still some aspects which need further development. The future Strategic Partnership aims to facilitate the access for both Japanese and Romanian citizens to the other country. However, there are no direct flights from Romania to Japan, which makes exchanges a bit more difficult.⁹⁸

Over time, the Japanese Government has made donations to cultural, sports and educational institutions in Romania, including: the Romanian Athenaeum, the "George Enescu" Philharmonic, the National Theater in Bucharest, the Bucharest National Opera, the Romanian Opera in Iași, the Romanian Federation of Gymnastics, the Central University Library, the University of Bucharest, the National School of Political and Administrative Studies, the Târgu Mureș Philharmonic, the Brașov Philharmonic, the Romanian Olympic Committee, the "Radu Stanca" Theater in Sibiu (winner of the Japan Foundation Award 2015 for contributions to promoting Japanese culture).⁹⁹

Cultural and political relations between Japan and Romania can also be observed through the relationship of the cities of both countries and their citizens. For example, there have been established twinning relations between the cities of Yokohama – Constanța, Musashino – Brașov, Kawasaki – Breaza and a partnership between the cities of Takayama and Sibiu.¹⁰⁰

A very popular Japanese cultural product is the manga-anime industry. The Romanian public is quite interested in such manga-anime products and the Japanese Embassy in Romania organizes and supports activities related to them, including supporting participation in the Japan International Manga Award, a contest which has reached its 15th edition.¹⁰¹

Regarding the perception of the Japanese toward Romanians, they follow the

⁹⁷ Asia Fest (n.d.) *Home Page*, Available at: <https://asiafest.eu/> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁹⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania (2021) *Japan – Bilateral Relations*, Available at: <http://mae.ro/bilateral-relations/2047#766> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

⁹⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁰¹ Japan International MANGA Award (n.d) *Home Page*, Available at: https://www.manga-award.mofa.go.jp/index_e.html (Accessed 12 May 2022).

general rule according to which the larger nations are less interested in and know less about smaller nations. For Japan, because of the great geographical distance, the difficulties of transport and direct contacts between the citizens of the two countries, knowledge of the history, culture, customs and traditions of the Romanian people is diminished. In addition, when Romania belonged to the group of communist states, the ordinary Japanese regarded Romanians with coldness or indifference.¹⁰² Information about the abuses of the communist regime increased these feelings. However, the Romanian Revolution in December 1989 awoke compassion toward the population of Romania, which was fighting for its freedom, and condemnation of the past regime.¹⁰³

Gradually, with the increase of the knowledge obtained through mass media, official visits of political personalities, Romanians' participation in sporting events in Japan, the translation and editing of some works of Romanian history and literature, or of the visits to Romania of Japanese tourists, Romania's image has improved.¹⁰⁴

On the other hand, the involvement of some Romanian citizens in illegal activities during their stay in the Japanese archipelago or the incidents and crimes committed against some Japanese citizens in Romania have been harmful to Romania's image.¹⁰⁵ The death of two Japanese citizens in Romania, a businessman living in Romania who was attacked by a stray dog,¹⁰⁶ and a female language teacher who was raped and murdered by a cab driver,¹⁰⁷ had a strong negative impact on Romania's image in Japan.

Romanians have more knowledge about Japan than the other way around. In Romania, incomparably more books of Japanese literature have been translated, and a

¹⁰² Interview with retired Romanian diplomat and Japan expert Ion Scumpieru (September 2021).

¹⁰³ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁶ Ionut Baias (2006) *Stirea Mortii Japonezului Ucis de Caine Face Inconjurul Lumii (The News about the Japanese Man Killed by a Dog Makes Headlines Around the World)*, Available at: <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-arhiva-1191668-stirea-mortii-japonezului-ucis-caine-face-inconjurul-lumii.htm> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

¹⁰⁷ Ziare.com (2012) *Tanara Japoneza Violata si Ucisa in Bataie de un Roman (Young Japanese Woman Raped and Beaten to Death by a Romanian)*, Available at: <https://ziare.com/stiri/crima/tanara-japoneza-ucisa-in-bataie-de-un-taximetrist-roman-1184976> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

relatively large number of young people study and speak Japanese. The position of the Romanian elites toward Japan has been one of interest and appreciation for its political and economic evolution over time. For example, even a century ago, King Carol I appreciated this evolution, including militarily, particularly Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905.¹⁰⁸

Some Romanian writers such as Cincinat Pavelescu, Alexandru Stamadiad and Nichita Stanescu appreciated the short Japanese literary genre, "haiku", managing to translate and write poems in the same genre, in Romanian. Also, Romanian political leaders before and after 1989 appreciated the economic strength of Japan and the seriousness of the Japanese as business partners. A considerable number of Romanian personalities have interacted with Japan throughout history.¹⁰⁹

The perception of the Romanians about the Japanese has been, in general, a positive one, with laudatory appreciations of its impressive economic evolution, which allowed it to recover after the Second World War. This evolution determined Romanian authorities, starting from the 1960s, to carry out intense economic and commercial exchanges with Japanese companies. The assistance given to Romania after 1989, for the introduction and promotion of the market economy, had a positive impact on Romanians. The Japanese market has continuously attracted Romanians looking for a job, especially in the IT field.

Japanese customs and traditions, like Japanese martial arts, have attracted many intellectuals and young Romanians. This interest was also supported by the Japanese government, through its specialized agencies such as the "Japan Foundation," as well as other private organizations.

Regarding mass-media, the Romanian press sympathetically presented the troubles of the Japanese caused by frequent natural cataclysms: the 1923 earthquake, the 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster, and others.¹¹⁰ The Romanian public opinion was deeply moved by the tragedy of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, leading

¹⁰⁸ Interview with retired Romanian diplomat and Japan expert Ion Scumpieru (September 2021).

¹⁰⁹ Radu Șerban (2021) *Români de Roman în Japonia (Romanians of Novel in Japan)*, București: Editura Coresi.

¹¹⁰ Interview with retired Romanian diplomat and Japan expert Ion Scumpieru (September 2021).

to significant aid toward Japan from both the people and the government.¹¹¹ Accreditation in Japan of two permanent correspondents of the Agerpres National Press Agency, during the period 1967-1977, considerably increased the number of materials about Japan. Besides political and economic news and comments, those about the progress registered in the fields of science and technology, specific customs and traditions or Japanese sports also occupied a fairly large place.¹¹²

However, it cannot be neglected that a certain lack of reciprocity can be identified in the bilateral relations of Japan and Romania. More than once, the Romanian authorities had difficulties or even failed to express the same mutual respect and attention. The M6 subway connection to the Bucharest Airport, an important project for Japan, that has been delayed for over 12 years, is an example. Another was the diplomatic incident during Prime Minister Shinzō Abe's visit in Romania, when there was no Romanian counterpart available for a meeting, as the prime minister had just resigned, one day before.¹¹³ It is questionable if the same would have happened if a visit of the president of any important Western partner was scheduled.

Throughout the years, there have also been other planned visits to Japan of Romanian ministers, which were rescheduled or abandoned on short notice, because of domestic political events or changes in the diplomatic agenda. It would seem that the Romanian authorities have not been able to return the elegance and attention that the Japanese have shown toward Romania.

Conclusions and recommendations

Regarding the bilateral relations between Japan and Romania, it can be said that even though great progress has been made, there is still a long way to go.

The history of bilateral relations between Japan and Romania has revealed how a century can change a country so much. Both Japan and Romania have a similar age as

¹¹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2011) *Relief Supply from Romania*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2011/6/0628_01.html (Accessed 12 May 2022).

¹¹² Interview with retired Romanian diplomat and Japan expert Ion Scumpieru (September 2021).

¹¹³ Chris Harris (2018) *Anyone There? Shinzo Abe Picks Worst Moment to Visit Romania*, Available at: <https://www.euronews.com/2018/01/16/anyone-there-shinzo-abe-picks-worst-moment-to-visit-romania> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

modern states, however, given their geographical locations, their resources and opportunities have created different paths. Japan and Romania have a positive mutual history – they have been both allies and enemies in the World Wars, but never fought against each other.

The political relations between Japan and Romania are on an ascending path, as the Strategic Partnership is the next step aimed by both states. Because of its EU and NATO membership, Romania presents interesting opportunities for Japan, but it still needs to solve the problem of its political instability, in order to facilitate improved and more efficient cooperation.

Regarding economic and commercial relations, Japan has significantly supported Romania during their history of relations, especially in the post-1989 era, with financial aid and technical expertise. Numerous Japanese companies have invested in Romania, employing tens of thousands of Romanians. Japan is today the largest Asian investor in Romania, with potential for future growth.

Cultural and people-to-people relations are developing, mostly thanks to the internet, which has shortened the distance that traditionally defined Romania-Japan relations. Technology, the internet and mass-media have now increased cultural exchanges, and interest in the Japanese culture grows among the Romanian public. However, Romania needs to improve its soft power instruments in order to increase the curiosity of Japan toward its culture.

Soft power can also be manifested through environmental actions, given the fact that the concern for climate change and the environment is growing both in Japan and Romania. Major steps were taken both through the Kyoto Protocol¹¹⁴ and the Paris Agreement.¹¹⁵ It would be great if Romania and Japan would implement more common actions, especially regarding environmental education in Romanian schools.

Both Japan and Romania have a long way to go regarding future challenges. For Romania, it needs to build a stable and efficient framework in order to support upcoming projects and opportunities. It has a lot to do regarding corruption, political

¹¹⁴ United Nations Climate Change (n.d.) *What is the Kyoto Protocol?*, Available at: https://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol (Accessed 12 May 2022).

¹¹⁵ United Nations Climate Change (n.d.) *The Paris Agreement*, Available at: <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement> (Accessed 12 May 2022).

instability and its troublesome infrastructure. Until it provides a stable political and economic environment, it cannot be attractive enough for Japanese investors. Meanwhile, Japan needs to successfully identify the new opportunities given by the new generation of entrepreneurs, business partners, or politicians.

More needs to be done. When it comes to Romania's presence in Japan, both economic and cultural, the Romanian government can play a more active role. It would be encouraging to open in Japan an independent bureau for promoting Romanian investments and exports in Japan, like JETRO in Romania. At the same time, the government can be more proactive in presenting Romania to the Japanese people. When it comes to cultural exchanges and cooperation, both governments could support an increased number of scholarships for both Romanian and Japanese students, in order to provide more opportunities for a larger number of youngsters. This would be encouraging, given the fact that without governmental support, such cultural and educational experiences can be very expensive.

Regarding security and military cooperation, especially in the context of the War in Ukraine, Japan and Romania could enhance and increase the personnel exchanges and even organize common exercises, however small. Their magnitude should not matter as much as their message, as the common effort toward prevention, protection and stability.

For both Romania and Japan, the signing of the Strategic Partnership must receive an enhanced priority as a foreign policy objective. This step will deepen bilateral relations on multiple fronts: political, strategic, economic and cultural-scientific exchanges. Together with a well-planned strategy, it can encourage trade, attract investors, opportunities and tourists, and spur cooperation. Because they share common values, principles and aspirations, both Japan and Romania must do more for the sake of the future of their relations.

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Slovakia-Japan relations: Valuable, yet underestimated

By **Róbert VANCEL***

Overview

This chapter will provide an overview of bilateral relations between Japan and the Slovak Republic. Relations between them are based on the belief in the same universal values, the role of international law and cooperation, and free trade. This gives the relationship the potential to develop in all areas, but even so, Japan-Slovakia relations are primarily economic. Yet they are also highly unbalanced in this respect. Due to the growing interest of the European Union in the Indo-Pacific region, Slovakia's relationship with Japan is changing, not only in the economic but also political, security and cultural fields. In this respect, the change in the relationship must be understood primarily through the growing interest and efforts to deepen cooperation.

Slovakia-Japan relations began to develop at the end of the 1990s, mainly on the basis of trade and the inflow of Japanese investment into the developing Slovak economy. At the same time, along with investment, comes Official Development Assistance (ODA). It is trade that best defines the nature of the relationship between the two countries. The natural imbalance in trade and the level of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) between countries is irreversible, although there is some potential for resolving disparities. The main driver of economic cooperation is the automotive industry, which has the largest share of trade between the two countries.

The political level of relations between Japan and Slovakia, which has long been marginalized, gained in importance only in the second decade of the 21st century. Political relations are developing at the bilateral level, in particular by increasing the

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number of visits by representatives at the highest level. Relations are also developing at the multilateral level, notably through the V4 + Japan and EU formats.

At the level of people-to-people and cultural cooperation, it is possible to see great potential that is receiving new impetus to fulfill it. Continued support for academic cooperation and exchanges represents promising areas for the development of relations between the two nations.

History of relations

Official diplomatic relations between Japan and the Slovak Republic were established on 3 February 1993, more than a month after the establishment of the independent Slovak Republic, after the division of Czechoslovakia. Slovakia opened its embassy immediately after the establishment of contacts, in February 1993. In addition to Japan, the Embassy of the Slovak Republic in Tokyo represents Slovakia in three other Pacific states: the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands and Palau. The Slovak Republic also has three honorary consulates in Japan, in Osaka, Kirishima and Utsunomiya. Japan established an embassy in Bratislava in January 2002.

However, relations between the two nations have had a longer history, since the founding of Czechoslovakia in 1918, as official bilateral relations between the newly formed republic and Japan were established in 1919. We can also detect traces of cooperation even before the establishment of Czechoslovakia. During the First World War, Japan provided support to the Czechoslovak legions, in the form of supplies or uniforms sewn in Japan.¹ Likewise, Czechoslovak troops returned to their homeland, after an admirable campaign along the Trans-Siberian Railway, through Japan, specifically Yokohama.² The most prominent figure in the relations between the Slovak and Japanese nations in this period was certainly General Dr. Milan Rastislav Štefánik, who headed the legions and also led negotiations with Japanese officials. As a general in the French Army, he was also a member of the French delegation, which was received

¹ Martin Weiss (2015) *První československý legionář, který zemřel v Japonsku, pocházel z Boleslavska* (*The First Czechoslovak Legionnaire to Die in Japan Came from Boleslav*), Available at: https://boleslavsky.denik.cz/zpravy_region/prvni-ceskoslovensky-legionar-ktery-zemrel-v-japonsku-pochazel-z-boleslavska-20151209.html (Accessed 5 May 2022).

² *Ibidem*.

by the Emperor himself. This audience subsequently aroused the interest of the Japanese society in the newly formed Czechoslovakia.³

During the 2000s, the most important bilateral political visit was that of Slovak Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda, who visited Japan in 2005.⁴ From the Japanese side, Foreign Minister Tarō Asō visited Slovakia in 2007, while Slovak foreign ministers paid four visits to Japan in that decade: Eduard Kukan in 2000 and 2005, Ján Kubiš in 2007 and Miroslav Lajčák 2009.

In general, relations between Japan and Slovakia throughout history can be considered very good, without tensions, disagreements or conflicts. The main reason for this situation is considered to be the physical distance between the two countries and the low level of Slovakia's involvement in the affairs of East Asia and the Asia-Pacific region. The only problematic episode in mutual relations was when Japanese company Taisei sued the Slovak Republic for compensation for exchange rate loss in financing the construction of the Sitina tunnel as a part of D2 highway, in 2006, which was settled through international arbitration.⁵

Partnership rooted in values

Political bilateral relations between Japan and Slovakia are developing primarily against the background of multilateral cooperation, whether Visegrad Four (V4) + Japan or EU-Japan cooperation. These multilateral formats help to conclude agreements or implement specific initiatives, thus strengthening ties and facilitating cooperation between Japan and Slovakia. Meetings of representatives of the Slovak Republic and Japan on the fringes of multilateral forums also contribute to the cultivation of relations.

Based on the frequency of high-level bilateral visits between 2000 and 2021,

³ Česká televize (2018) *Štefánik v Tokiu trávil 28. říjen, legionáři se tam léčili. Vznik republiky má i japonskou stopu (Štefánik Spent October 28 in Tokyo, the Legionnaires Were Treated There. The Establishment of the Republic Also Has a Japanese Footprint)*, Available at: <https://ct24.ceskatelivize.cz/svet/2633462-stefanik-v-tokiu-travil-28-rijen-legionari-se-tam-lecili-vznik-republiky-ma-i-japonskou> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Japan – Slovakia Relations*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/slovak/data.html> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

⁵ Pravda (2010) *NDS nemusí platit Japoncom za kurzové straty pri tuneli Sitina (The NDS Does Not Have to Pay the Japanese for Exchange Rate Losses at the Sitina Tunnel)*, Available at: <https://ekonomika.pravda.sk/ludia/clanok/193249-nds-nemusi-platit-japoncom-za-kurzove-straty-pri-tuneli-sitina/> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

there is a clear trend of intensifying contacts between the two countries,⁶ especially in the period after 2012. That year, Slovak President Ivan Gašparovič and his wife visited Japan, marking the first visit of a Slovak Head of State to Japan. In addition to the meeting with the Imperial couple, President Gašparovič also attended the meeting with then Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda. In addition to general topics, such as support for the development of bilateral relations or the development of cooperation between Slovak and Japanese universities, the Slovak president promised support for Japan in obtaining the position of Permanent Member of the UN Security Council.⁷ The presidential couple also visited the areas affected by the devastating earthquake in 2011. The turning point of 2012 continued with visits by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Miroslav Lajčák, and ministers of economy and finance Peter Kažimír and Tomáš Malatinský.⁸

The following year, in 2013, the historic first V4+Japan summit took place.⁹ The approximately 70-minute meeting of the prime ministers of the V4 countries and Shinzō Abe was held in the spirit of an evaluation of the economic cooperation to date, or the forthcoming Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between the EU and Japan. Also, the same year, the current emperor's brother, Crown Prince Fumihito, and his wife visited Slovakia¹⁰, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, at the invitation of President Gašparovič. In addition to the meeting with the president, the Prince and his wife met with Prime Minister Robert Fico and the vice-president of the National Council of the Slovak Republic. They spent the second part of their visit in eastern Slovakia, specifically in the High Tatras and in the Spiš region, where they visited the Botanical Garden of the Tatra National Park, the

⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Japan – Slovakia Relations*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/slovak/data.html> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2012) *Japan-Slovakia Summit Meeting (Summary)*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/slovak/meeting1206_pm.html (Accessed 10 December 2021).

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ Visegrad Group (2013) *Visegrad Group Plus Japan Joint Statement*, Available at: <https://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2013/visegrad-group-plus> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

¹⁰ Webnoviny (2013) *Japonský princ a princezná navštívia Devín i centrum mesta (The Japanese Prince and Princess Will Visit Devín and the City Center)*, Available at: <https://www.webnoviny.sk/japonsky-princ-a-princezna-navstivia-devin-i-centrum-mesta/> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

library for the blind, or the UNESCO monuments Levoča and Spiš Castle¹¹.

A special chapter of the timeline of meetings, especially the visits of Minister of Foreign Affairs Miroslav Lajčák in 2015 and 2016, must be seen in the context of his candidacy for the post of UN Secretary-General, and thus the efforts to gain support for his election. Thanks to Miroslav Lajčák and these activities, the intensity of bilateral meetings increased in the second half of the last decade, either as visits or as meetings on the edge of multilateral forums. Miroslav Lajčák was not a stranger to Japan, as he served as the second ambassador of the independent Slovak Republic in Japan, from 1994 to 1998. He later traveled two more times to Japan, as foreign minister, in 2017 and 2019.¹²

The most exceptional year of bilateral relations between Japan and Slovakia was clearly 2019. In April, Shinzō Abe became the first Japanese prime minister in history to visit Slovakia.¹³ He visited Bratislava on the occasion of the V4+Japan summit. The main topic of discussion was the relations between the Central European states and Japan in the light of the EU-Japan EPA, which entered into force in February of that year. That year, President Zuzana Čaputová also attended the enthronement ceremony of the Japanese Emperor Naruhito, and briefly met with Prime Minister Abe, with whom she discussed political and economic relations and the topic of environmental innovation. She also met with representatives of the energy company TEPCO and visited the innovative housing project Fujisawa Sustainable Town.¹⁴

The year 2020, during which the 100th anniversary of Japanese-Slovak relations and the Tokyo Summer Olympics were supposed to continue to bring visits and a rich accompanying program, was marked by a global pandemic. The Olympic Games were

¹¹ Teraz.sk (2013) *Japonský princ a princezná Akišino navštívili Vysoké Tatry a Spiš (Japanese Prince and Princess Akishino visited the High Tatras and Spiš)*, Available at: <https://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/japonsky-princ-akisino-tatry-spis/50402-clanok.html> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

¹² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Japan – Slovakia Relations*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/slovak/data.html> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

¹³ The Slovak Spectator (2019) *Japanese PM Shinzo Abe Visits Slovakia for the First Time*, Available at: <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/22107324/japanese-pm-visits-slovakia-for-the-first-time.html> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

¹⁴ Pravda (2019) *Prezidentka Čaputová odcestovala do Japonska, zúčastní sa na intronizácii cisára (President Caputova has Traveled to Japan and Will Take Part in the Emperor's Enthronement)*, Available at: <https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/529830-prezidentka-caputova-odcestovala-do-japonska-zucastni-sa-na-intronizacii-cisara/> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

moved to 2021, and planned activities for the centenary of relations were variously moved and modified.

As Japan and the Slovak Republic are parliamentary democracies, parliamentary diplomacy is an important part of their relations. Its importance is evidenced not only by the relatively high number of Diet representatives who have visited Slovakia but also by the existence of parliamentary friendship groups. The friendship group with Japan belongs to the permanent friendship groups within the National Council of the Slovak Republic. It has 13 members and its current chairman is a relatively prominent figure on the political scene, Peter Osuský, a member of the Sloboda a Solidarita (Freedom and Solidarity) governing party.¹⁵ In the past, the chairman of the group was František Šebej, a member of the Most-Híd party. He was chairman of the group for a relatively long time, of almost 10 years.¹⁶ As a former karate practitioner, he actively promoted Slovak-Japanese relations, precisely through this sport, for which he was the first Slovak to be awarded the Order of the Rising Sun with a Gold and Silver Star.¹⁷ However, MP Šebej resigned from his parliamentary seat due to his party's decisions, which led to the vacant position of the chairman of the friendship group. Subsequently, the position of chairman was occupied by another member of the Most-Híd party, Tibor Bastrnák. A doctor by profession, who was an indistinct person outside the party's electorate, he apparently did not have a stronger ambition to move the group toward a more proactive approach to building stronger ties between Japan and Slovakia.

Economic relations

Economic cooperation plays a dominant role in relations between Slovakia and Japan. However, this relationship is very unbalanced, whether it is FDI flows or trade. Thus,

¹⁵ National Council of the Slovak Republic (2022) *Skupina priateľstva s Japonskom (Group of Friendship with Japan)*, Available at: <https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Default.aspx?sid=eu/sp/sp&SkupinaId=156> (Accessed 5 May 2022).

¹⁶ Aktuality (2017) *František Šebej získal japonské štátne vyznamenanie (František Šebej Received a Japanese State Award)*, Available at: <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/536853/frantisek-sebej-ziskal-japonske-statne-vyznamenanie/> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

¹⁷ SME (2018) *Šebej získal, ako prvý Slovák, japonský Rad vychádzajúceho slnka (Šebej Was the First Slovak to Receive the Japanese Order of the Rising Sun)*, Available at: https://domov.sme.sk/c/20761098/sebej-ziskal-ako-prvy-slovak-japonsky-rad-vychadzajuceho-slnka.html#storm_gallery_83712 (Accessed 10 December 2021).

Slovakia's trade balance with Japan is markedly negative and the FDI ratio is equally unbalanced. At the same time, Slovak investments in Japan are negligible and only ESET stands out as a significant investor in Japan. On the other hand, Japan is the second most important Asian investor in Slovakia in terms of FDI, although it lags significantly behind South Korea.

The volume of Japanese FDI in Slovakia is 74 million euros.¹⁸ However, it should be noted that the benefit from Japanese companies lies not only in the inflow of investment but, for example, in job creation. It is worth mentioning that Japanese companies have created approximately 13,000 jobs in Slovakia.¹⁹ According to research by CEIAS, 60 Japanese companies operating in Slovakia pay on average more than 10.5 million euros in taxes every year.²⁰ Marelli Kechnec Slovakia, Plzeňský Prazdroj (part of the Asahi Breweries Group) and Trim Leader are among the most important Japanese companies in Slovakia in terms of the amount of taxes paid. The largest employers (from 1,000 to 1,999 employees) are Yazaki Wiring Technologies Slovakia, Panasonic Industrial Devices Slovakia and U-Shin Slovakia.²¹

Slovak investments in Japan boil down to ESET, whose 2018 investment builds on the partnership with Canon IT Solutions, with which ESET has established a joint venture. In 2019, ESET received the award in the category of the best investor from Central and Eastern Europe in the Japanese market at the first event "Japan-CEE Investment Summit & Awards."²² In Slovakia, investment promotion is primarily the agenda of the Slovak Investment and Trade Development Agency (SARIO) and peripherally of the Slovak Business Agency (SBA). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Affairs, together with the Ministry of Economy, provides promotion of

¹⁸ National Bank of Slovakia (2020) *Dáta k PZI (FDI Data)*, Available at https://www.nbs.sk/_img/Documents/STATIST/SPB/PZI/PZI_2019_XLS.zip (Accessed 10 December 2021).

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ Matej Šimalčík (2020) *Ekonomický prínos ázijských investorov pre Slovensko - daňový pohľad (Economic Benefits of Asian investors for Slovakia - Tax Perspective)*, Available at: <https://ceias.eu/sk/ekonomicky-prinos-azijskychinvestorov-pre-slovensko-danovy-pohlad/> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

²¹ Matej Šimalčík (2020) *Príspevok ázijských investorov k zamestnanosti na Slovensku (The Contribution of Asian Investors to Employment in Slovakia)*, Available at: <https://ceias.eu/sk/prispevok-azijskych-investorov-k-zamestnanosti-na-slovensku/> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

²² ESET (2020) *Consolidated Annual Report 2019*, p. 13, Available at: <https://www.eset.com/fileadmin/ESET/SK/Docs/Vyrocne-spravy/vyrocna-sprava-2019-eng.pdf> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

investment in third countries and assistance to entrepreneurs with applications in foreign markets.

In terms of mutual trade, the unevenness and relatively low importance of the share in the total trade of both countries are two basic characteristics. The Slovak Republic imports goods from Japan of about 500 million euros, which represents less than 1% of Slovak imports.²³ In the case of exports, Slovakia exports goods to Japan with an average annual value of 145 million euros, which represents approximately 1.5% of all Slovak exports.²⁴ In terms of mutual trade, Japan is the fourth most important trading partner among Asian countries after China, South Korea and Vietnam.²⁵ The increase in exports of almost 40 million euros between 2018 and 2019 was probably the result of the EU-Japan EPA. Given the structure of the Slovak economy, which is focused on the automotive industry, it can be assumed that export growth is related to removed trade barriers. The value of Slovak exports to Japan in 2020 was almost 199 million euros²⁶. Together with the decrease in the total value of imports, the Slovak Republic thus achieved a negative trade balance of 215 million euros, implying a deficit smaller by 160 million euros compared to 2019.²⁷

In terms of trade structure, the automotive industry has the largest share. Almost 50% of Slovak exports are made up of cars or car parts, followed by products from other engineering industries (23%) and the electrical engineering industry (9.5%).²⁸ Imports from Japan are divided relatively evenly between the electrical (27%),

²³ Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of Slovak Republic (2021) *Ekonomická informácia o teritóriu: Japonsko (Economic Information About Territory: Japan)*, Available at: <https://www.mzv.sk/documents/10182/620840/Japonsko++ekonomick%C3%A9+inform%C3%A1cie+o+terit%C3%B3riu+2021> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

²⁴ Ibidem.

²⁵ Ibidem.

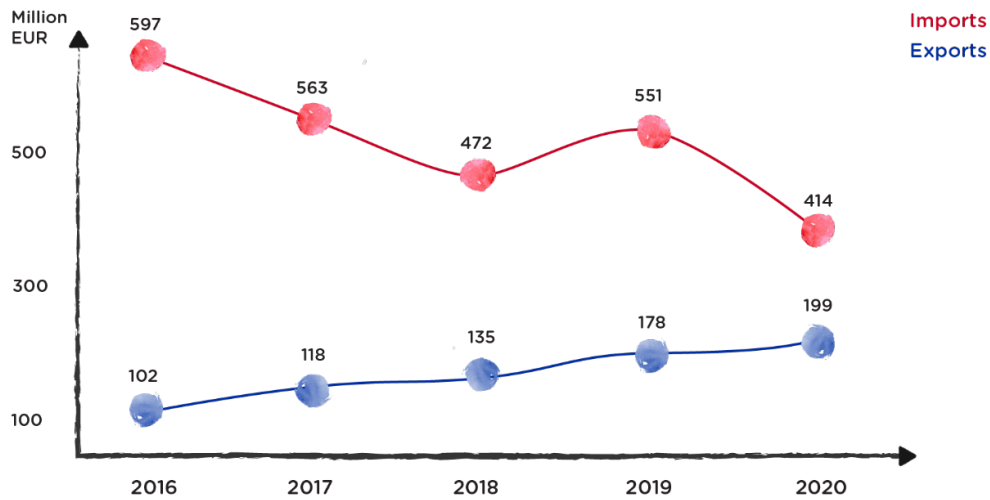
²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ Atlas of Economic Complexity (2020) *What Did Slovakia Import From Japan in 2018?*, Available at: <https://atlas.cid.harvard.edu/explore?country=206&product=undefined&year=2018&tradeDirection=import&productClass=HS&target=Partner&partner=114&startYear=undefined> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

mechanical (26%) and automotive (26%) industries.²⁹ Thus, for a long time, the electronics industry, specifically batteries, dominated trade.³⁰

Slovakia's trade with Japan in million euros



Source: International Trade Center/ Trade Map

On the one hand, this concentration of Slovakia-Japan trade in three key sectors, the automotive industry, electrical engineering and mechanical engineering, poses a risk to Slovakia and its future economic development, due to the unilateral focus of the economy. In addition, the automotive sector is one of the most affected by automation, so up to 35% of jobs are directly at risk.³¹ On the other hand, these sectors provide the potential for further development of cooperation with Japan. In particular, cooperation in this area of research and development would provide the necessary added value to Slovak industry. At the opening of the Minebea plant in Košice, in 2018, the

²⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ Mišo Hudec (2019) *Sme pripravení na revolúciu v preškolení? Automatizácia mení spôsob práce aj potrebné zručnosti (Are We Ready For a Retraining Revolution? Automation Changes the Way You Work and the Skills You Need)*, Available at: <https://euractiv.sk/section/spolocnost/news/sme-pripraveni-na-revoluciu-v-preskolovani-automatizacia-meni-sposob-prace-aj-potrebne-zrucnosti/> (Accessed 5 May 2022).

construction of a research and development center was emphasized.³² It was the proximity of the Technical University in Košice that laid the foundation for a sufficient number of qualified professionals for such a center.³³ Here, Slovakia is probably hitting its limits. It is the low quality of education that probably hinders the more intensive development of cooperation between Japan and Slovakia in the field of research and development.

Other potential areas of cooperation certainly include the transport sector, in which Japan is one of the world's leaders. The purchase of technology, the sharing of know-how or even the construction of transport infrastructure could be the basis for the development of cooperation in this area. In this context, it is necessary to mention Japan's efforts to compete with China in the construction of transport infrastructure. Although their rivalry has so far focused on Southeast and South Asia, it can extend to Europe. Another area of cooperation between Japan and Slovakia could be the energy sector, especially nuclear energy. Slovakia, like Japan, is dependent on the stable production of available electricity with an emphasis on sustainability and environmental friendliness. In this respect, cooperation in the field of nuclear energy seems natural.

An important area of Slovak-Japanese economic relations has been Official Development Assistance (ODA). According to the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, between 1993 and 2005, Japan provided the Slovak Republic with ODA worth little over 13 billion yen, or more than 101 million euros in today's money.³⁴ Of this, 415 million yen were in the form of grants, 1.49 billion yen in the form of technical assistance and 11.1 billion yen in the form of a loan for the construction of road infrastructure.³⁵ This loan was used to build a highway section: Lamačská cesta – Staré Grunty, with a length of 3.7 kilometers. The section, which was built by the Japanese-Czech consortium Taisei corporation-SKANSKA D.S., also includes the 1.4 kilometer-long Sitina

³² Korzár Košice TASR (2018) *Nový závod v Košiciach zamestná viac ako tisíc ľudí (The New Plant in Košice Will Employ More than a Thousand People)*, Available at: <https://kosice.korzar.sme.sk/c/20850991/novy-zavod-minebea-v-kosiciachzamestna-1100-ludi.html> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

³³ Ibidem.

³⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Japan – Slovakia Relations*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/slovak/data.html> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

³⁵ Ibidem.

motorway tunnel.³⁶ It is interesting that the Japanese side suffered an exchange rate loss of approximately 21 million euros due to a significant strengthening of the Slovak koruna (the national currency until 2009) against the euro. This led to a dispute between the two sides. However, the International Commercial Court in Paris has ruled that the Slovak Republic does not have to compensate the loss to the Japanese company.³⁷

Cultural and people-to-people relations and perceptions of Japan

Japan is generally perceived positively in Slovakia, but there is a lack of a more thorough public opinion survey on the perception of Japan and individual aspects of Japanese culture and history.

Cooperation in the field of culture is extremely stable, with an interesting specificity being the cooperation of Japanese institutions with the Slovak Chamber Orchestra and the State Opera in Banská Bystrica.³⁸ In the field of culture and promotion of Japan, the state-owned RTVS is a highly active institution, regularly broadcasting documentary series about Japan. Promoting tourism and growth of exchanges between the two countries plays an important role in bilateral relations. An example was the signing of the Agreement on Social Security in 2017³⁹ and the launch of the Working Holiday Program for people aged 18 to 30 in 2016.⁴⁰

As far as Japanese tourists in Slovakia are concerned, the numbers aren't very high, even though the trends are positive. In 2019, 9,691 Japanese people visited Slovakia, which represented a year-on-year increase of 24%. The global pandemic

³⁶ Ibidem.

³⁷ Pravda (2010) *NDS nemusí platiť Japoncom za kurzové straty pri tuneli Sitina (The NDS Does Not Have to Pay the Japanese for Exchange Rate Losses at the Sitina Tunnel)*, Available at: <https://ekonomika.pravda.sk/ludia/clanok/193249-nds-nemusi-platit-japoncom-za-kurzove-straty-pri-tuneli-sitina/> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

³⁸ Štátna Opera (2021) *Keď Slovensko a Japonsko majú k sebe blízko... (When Slovakia and Japan Are Close to Each Other...)*, Available at: <https://www.stateopera.sk/sk/ked-slovensko-japonsko-maju-k-sebe-blizko>. (Accessed 10 December 2021).

³⁹ Ministry of Labour, Social Issues and Family of Slovak Republic SR (2017) *Zmluva s Japonskom o Sociálnom Zabezpečení (Social Security Agreement with Japan)*, Available at: <https://www.employment.gov.sk/sk/informacie-media/aktuality/zmluva-japonskom-socialnom-zabezpeceni.html>. (Accessed 10 December 2021).

⁴⁰ Embassy of Japan in the Slovak Republic (2016) *Program pracovných dovolení medzi Japonskom a Slovenskou republikou (Working Holiday Program Between Japan and the Slovak Republic)*, Available at: https://www.sk.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ja/00_000299.html (Accessed 10 December 2021).

situation has damaged the tourism sector, when the number of visitors to Slovakia decreased by almost 80% compared to the first half of 2019.⁴¹ However, we can assume that after the end of the pandemic, the situation will gradually be restored and the number of tourists will return to pre-pandemic levels. In this regard, a well-timed campaign will be needed to support the influx of tourists from East Asia to Slovakia.

Education and research are an important area of cooperation with the potential for further development. In 2016, 32 cooperation agreements were signed between state and private universities, colleges and other institutions.⁴² At the same time, cooperation in this area is influenced by a relatively wide range of grant schemes and research and study scholarships in Japan, which mostly operate on an annual basis.

Regarding the study of fields related to Japan, the only Slovak university that provides Japanese studies is Comenius University, in Bratislava. Japanese can be studied at various levels in private language schools. However, their offer is limited and uneven within Slovakia. In Slovakia, there is no offer of study programs focused on modern East Asian studies. In this regard, the Japanese initiative to provide financial support for research on issues related to Japan, through the so-called Chair Program, opens up opportunities for change in this area. However, due to the weak experience of the Slovak academic community with similar programs, as well as the low number of people specialized on Japan, the implementation of the program will not be an easy matter.

Regarding the number of citizens living in the other country, the numbers are relatively balanced and stable, at around 300. According to the Japanese side, 250 Japanese lived in Slovakia in 2020 and 355 Slovaks lived in Japan.⁴³

As already mentioned, one of the important determinants of mutual Slovak-Japanese relations is physical distance. This is exacerbated by the absence of a direct

⁴¹ Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic (2020) *Ubytovacia štatistika 2019 (Accommodation Statistics 2019)*, Available at: <https://www.mindop.sk/ministerstvo-1/cestovny-ruch-7/statistika/ubytovacia-statistika/rok-2019/navstevnici-v-ubytovacich-zariadeniach-cr-na-slovensku-za-rok-2019> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

⁴² Embassy of Japan in the Slovak Republic (2016) *Slovensko-Japonská Medziuniverztná Výmena 2016 (Slovakia-Japanese Interuniversity Exchange 2016)*, Available at: <https://www.sk.emb-japan.go.jp/files/000146559.pdf> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

⁴³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Japan – Slovakia Relations*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/slovak/data.html> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

transport connection, in this case an air connection. Currently, there is no direct flight connection between Japan and Slovakia, especially due to the location of the largest Slovak airport in Bratislava, which is less than an hour's drive from Vienna's much larger and more important international airport and three hours' drive from Budapest Airport. This, in turn, is closer to a large part of Slovakia than Bratislava. However, even these do not provide direct flights but only flights with at least one transfer, most often in Istanbul, Paris or London. Due to the proximity of larger air hubs, it is unlikely that a direct air connection will be established in the future.

Conclusions

Slovakia-Japan relations are currently entering a new phase, mainly due to global changes, which are forcing global actors to increase their interest and engagement in East Asia and, respectively, in the Indo-Pacific region. One of these actors is the European Union, of which Slovakia is a member state. As shown by the results of the EPA between Japan and the EU, this change benefits the Slovak-Japanese relationship. The basis on which Slovaks and Japanese will build their relations is relatively solid, anchored in all areas: political, economic, cultural, interpersonal. However, given the weak awareness of Japanese realities and the overall importance of Japan for Slovakia, especially as an economic partner, there is a lack of human capacity ready to guide Slovakia's direction in relation to Japan in a changing world. Slovakia will have to defend its interests in relation to Japan, especially in the EU, and to this end it will be necessary to have sufficient human and material capacities to be able to come up with initiatives that will ultimately strengthen bilateral relations with the East Asian partner. In the near future, it will be necessary to reflect on the ongoing global changes in medium-term strategic documents, while strengthening relations with Japan will certainly be one of the priorities in Slovakia's relationship with East Asia.

Cooperation in the V4+Japan group is proving to be an important tool for developing bilateral relations. It is understandable that the Japanese perceive this format as useful in relation to the four Central European states. Many of the meetings of the top representatives of Slovakia and Japan took place on the occasion of the V4+Japan summit. Likewise, the first and, so far, only visit of a Japanese prime minister to

Slovakia was organized on the occasion of the Slovak Presidency of the V4 group. This format also has some potential in terms of shaping European strategies and policies, but it runs into its own damaged reputation.

It will also be necessary to come up with innovative ways of attracting Foreign Direct Investment from Japan, but this will have to be linked to R&D support, especially in areas related to the automotive, engineering and electrical engineering industries. Furthermore, the Slovak Republic should strive for investment or cooperation with Japan in the field of energy transport, sustainable development or green technologies. These areas have a relatively high potential for developing cooperation. Balancing the significantly negative trade balance between Slovakia and Japan is in principle excluded. However, companies operating in Slovakia can strive to participate in subcontracting chains, especially in the already mentioned industries. This would help increase the volume of exports from Slovakia to the hard-to-penetrate Japanese market.

With regard to cultural and interpersonal relations, it would be appropriate to mutually strengthen, in particular, student exchange programs, scholarship programs, or to actively work on connecting the academic sphere. The promotion of Slovak culture in Japan and vice versa, not only the traditional one, deserves a more significant space in the media but also through events for the general public. However, due to the ongoing pandemic situation, these options are limited. With the upcoming EXPO 2025, which will be held in Osaka, Japan, it is necessary for Slovakia to thoroughly prepare the presentation and content of the Slovak part of the exhibition. It will be a unique opportunity to present itself not only to the Japanese public but also to investors

In 2023, the Slovak Republic and Japan will celebrate 30 years of diplomatic relations. Even in the context of the above opportunities, the opening fourth decade of Slovak-Japanese relations has the opportunity to be not only more successful than before but, in many ways, also more innovative and better in terms of quality.

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Slovenia-Japan relations: A new hub for the Japanese robotics industry in Central Europe

By Boštjan BERTALANIČ*

Overview

Official relations between Japan and Slovenia began developing after the formation of the first independent Slovenian state, in the beginning of the 1990s, and gradually strengthened after Slovenia's accession to the European Union, in 2004. Political relations were further invigorated in 2008, during the first Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU, and after 2013, when Slovenian President Borut Pahor paid his first visit to Japan. Since 2015, the number of Japanese companies operating in Slovenia has expanded and the value of Japanese investments and trade with Slovenia increased dramatically. The greatest beneficiary of this investment boost has been the technological sector.

The overall perception of Japan and Japanese culture in Slovenia remains positive. Japan enjoys an attractive image that can be ascribed to a high level of popularity of its techno-cultural products, especially robotics, as well as its traditional culture. Slovenian business and government elites comprehend Japan somehow narrowly, mostly as a technological powerhouse and source of high-tech investment that could help improve the overall business ecosystem of Slovenia. The strengthening of EU-Japan relations in recent years, especially in trade, has received mixed reactions. In 2018, the Slovenian government took the official position that the Economic Partnership Agreement is good for Slovenian business, despite criticism from civil society and economic analysis showing that the agreement will probably have a

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negative impact on Slovenian exports.

One of the major propulsive forces behind the expansion of cultural relations and people-to-people relations between Japan and Slovenia has been Japanese language education in Slovenia. The Japanese Studies Program at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana has developed into a hub for Japanese language and culture in Slovenia that also attracts students from neighboring countries, especially successor states of the former Yugoslavia. People-to-people relations in other areas, such as art and tourism, are vigorous. Slovenian artists regularly visit and perform in Japan. Japanese performing arts and exhibitions have also enjoyed a remarkable level of popularity in Slovenia, since the early contacts. Tourism has been another area of exchange of increased importance and expanding in numbers.

History of relations: From prisoners of war to independence

Slovenes began discovering Japan toward the middle of the 19th century, when literacy among the general public drastically improved. Popular literature, in the form of travelogues and reports from abroad, became more accessible and led to the expansion in the scope of the public world awareness, which, from here on, also included Japan and other civilizations from Asia. Very basic information about Japan and Japanese culture could be obtained through school textbooks and the domestic Catholic press, which often described Japan with religious contours, stressing persecutions of Christians during the Edo period.¹ From the second half of the 19th century on, however, foreign publications became major sources of information about Japan, mostly in German language, which for Slovenes were more accessible than English. For example, writings by Wilhelm Heine, the German painter who traveled to Japan, were read in Ljubljana from the 1860s on.² During this period, Slovenian perceptions of Japan were still indirect and often filtered through foreign literary accounts. Eventually, more systematic writing on Japan by Slovenian authors began emerging by the end of the century. One of the representative works is the book “Chinese and Japanese,” written in

¹Aleš Gabrič (2018) “Slovenian Familiarization with Japan and the Japanese,” in Žarko Lazarević et al. (eds) *The 20th Century through Historiographies and Textbooks: Chapters from Japan, East Asia, Slovenia and Southeast Europe*, Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, pp. 150–151.

² Ibidem, p. 153.

1893, by the historian Josip Stare. These accounts are however still very prosaic, scant and based on an indirect experience of Japan.³

The first direct interactions started at the beginning of the 20th century and gradually evolved during and after the First World War. One of the first Slovenes to visit Japan was the architect and urban planner Ivan Jager, who was commissioned to work on the reconstruction of the Austro-Hungarian embassy in Beijing. Between 1901 and 1902, he briefly visited Japan and assembled a remarkable art collection, made of Chinese and Japanese objects.⁴ By the time the First World War started, a group of Slovene sailors stationed on the cruiser S.M.S Kaiserin Elizabeth, in Qingdao (China), became part of the Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war who were captured during the Japanese siege of the port and later transferred to the Aonogahara prison camp, in the vicinity of Kobe.⁵ After the war, during the 1920s, Ana Karlin, a world traveler and a journalist, became the first Slovene woman to visit and reside in Japan. During her stay in Tokyo (1922-1923), she worked at the German Embassy and actively explored Japanese arts.⁶

During this period, the Japanese also began visiting and living in Slovenian regions. Tsuneko Kondō Kawase, while working as a nurse in China, met and married Ivan Skušek, a navy officer from the cruiser Kaiserin Elisabeth. After the war, Kondō moved with Skušek to Ljubljana, where they established a family and changed her name to Marija Skušek.⁷ At the same time, Japanese military officers Heisuke Yanagawa, Genji Nagamochi and Juhachi Yamaguchi, belonging to the Japanese delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, worked in the International Border Commissions that drew the

³ Ibidem, p. 156.

⁴ Nataša Vampelj-Suhadolnik and Maja Veselič (n.d.) *The Hidden Gems of Slovenian Museums - Culture of Slovenia*, Available at: https://www.culture.si/en/The_Hidden_Gems_of_Slovenian_Museums (Accessed 23 August 2021).

⁵ Boštjan Bertalanič (2011) “Les Rapports Entre Le Japon et Le Royaume Des Serbes, Croates et Slovenes Lors de La Conference de Paix de Paris (Relations Between Japan and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes During the Paris Peace Conference),” in Andrej Rahten and Janez Šumrada (eds.) *Les Cinq Grands et La Creation Du Royaume Des Serbes, Croates et Slovenes (The Big Five and the Creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes)*, Ljubljana: CEP/SAZU/ZRC, pp. 393–416.

⁶ Nataša Vampelj-Suhadolnik and Maja Veselič (n.d.) *The Hidden Gems of Slovenian Museums - Culture of Slovenia*, Available at: https://www.culture.si/en/The_Hidden_Gems_of_Slovenian_Museums (Accessed 23 August 2021).

⁷ Ibidem.

international borders of the new Yugoslav state and consequently also contributed to the demarcation of Slovene national territory.⁸ After the Second World War, until the end of the Cold War, interactions continued in the context of Japanese-Yugoslav relations.

Official direct relations between Japan and Slovenia began developing only after the formation of the first independent Slovenian state, in the beginning of the 1990s. Following the disintegration of Yugoslavia and Slovenia's independence in June 1991, Japan established diplomatic relations with the newly formed Republic of Slovenia, in October 1992.⁹ A year later, Slovenia opened its diplomatic mission in Tokyo and, in the same year, the Japanese diplomatic mission in Vienna began covering relations with Slovenia.¹⁰

Slovenian-Japanese relations gradually strengthened in the second half of the 1990s, first in the cultural and academic domain and, later on, at the political and economic level. In 1995, Professor Andrej Bekeš with colleagues established the Japanese studies program at the University of Ljubljana, leading to a more active cooperation and exchanges with Japanese universities.¹¹ In 1997, under the leadership of the Japan Business Federation (*Keidanren*), Japan sent its first economic mission to Slovenia.¹² Political relations significantly strengthened after Slovenia's accession to the EU, in 2004, which was emphasized by the opening of the Japanese Embassy in Ljubljana, in 2006.¹³

⁸ Boštjan Bertalanč (2018) "Lt. Col. Yanagawa Heisuke and the Demarcation of Prekmurje: A Japanese Account of the Yugoslav-Hungarian Border Commission's Activities in 1921-1922," in Žarko Lazarević et al. (eds.) *The 20th Century through Historiographies and Textbooks : Chapters from Japan, East Asia, Slovenia and Southeast Europe*, Ljubljana: INZ, pp. 191–202.

⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019) *Japan-Slovenia Relations (Basic Data)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/slovenia/data.html> (Accessed 5 August 2022).

¹⁰ Nobuhiro Shiba (2017) "Nihon to Surobenia No Kōryushi Gaikan (Historical Outline of Exchange between Slovenia and Japan)," in Nobuhiro Shiba et al. (eds.) *Surobenia Wo Shiru Tame 60 Shou (60 Chapters to Know Slovenia)*, Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, p. 326.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 327.

¹² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019) *Japan-Slovenia Relations (Basic Data)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/slovenia/data.html> (Accessed 5 August 2022).

¹³ *Ibidem*.

Political and strategic relations: The stability of the Western Balkans still a key topic

With the opening of Japan's embassy in Ljubljana, political and diplomatic relations were considerably reinforced. Since 1992, Japan had covered diplomatic, consular and cultural matters with Slovenia from Vienna, Austria. However, when Slovenia joined the EU, in 2004, and later, in 2008, when it was designated as the first country from the group of new member states to hold the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU, direct Japanese diplomatic representation in Ljubljana became a necessity. The opening of the embassy was attended by Slovenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Dimitrij Rupelj and Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan Akiko Yamanaka, who emphasized that Japan was pleased with the progress Slovenia made in joining the Euro-Atlantic institutions. Both sides also mentioned good working relations between the two parliaments, where friendship groups have been established.¹⁴ Rupelj also emphasized that Slovenia's EU membership added another crucial dimension to the political and economic dialogue.¹⁵

During the first Slovenian Presidency of the Council, in April 2008, Prime Minister Janez Janša attended the EU-Japan Summit, in Tokyo. This became the highest-level Slovenian visit in Japan up to that point. On his first visit to Japan, Janša was accompanied by the minister of economy and a business delegation.¹⁶ During the EU Presidency, the Embassy of Slovenia in Japan organized more than 120 local events. Japan, as Chair of the G8, invited Slovenia to all major events during its EU Council Presidency.¹⁷

In March 2013, Slovenian President Borut Pahor paid his first official visit to Japan. During his stay, he made a state call on the Emperor of Japan and met with the

¹⁴ STA (2006) *Otvoritev Japonskega Veleposlaništva (Opening of Japan's Embassy)*, Available at: https://www.24ur.com/novice/slovenija/otvoritev-japonskega-veleposlanistva.html?ts=1396753908&stream_cat=2 (Accessed 24 October 2021).

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia (2008) *MZZ Letno Poročilo 2008 (Annual Report of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia, 2008)*, p. 67, Available at: https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MZZ/Dokumenti/javne-objave/letna-porocila/Porocilo_MZZ_2008.pdf (Accessed 5 August 2022).

¹⁷ Ibidem, pp. 67–68.

prime minister of Japan, Shinzō Abe.¹⁸ At their meeting, Prime Minister Abe proposed holding the first Japan-Slovenia “Joint Committee on Cooperation in Science and Technology” and pointed out that the Japan Energy and Industrial Technology Development Organization (NEDO) has been exploring cooperation with Slovenia in smart communities, which could become a model for technological cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe.¹⁹ President Pahor’s visit was reciprocated by the official visit of Imperial Prince and Princess Akishino, in Slovenia, in June 2013. Prince Akishino met with President Pahor and Prime Minister Alenka Bratušek.²⁰

The year 2014 marked the 50th anniversary of Japan’s accession to the OECD and Japan chaired the OECD Ministerial Council Meeting, with Slovenia being the vice-chair. On the sidelines of the Ministerial Council Meeting, Prime Minister Alenka Bratušek met with Prime Minister Abe, who expressed gratitude for Slovenia’s cooperation and praised the strengthening of bilateral economic relations.²¹ Both sides also reaffirmed their intention to cooperate on stability and development of the Western Balkans.

In 2016, Prime Minister Miro Cerar visited Japan and met with Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, in Kyoto.²² During the official meeting, they discussed further development of economic relations, the signing of the bilateral tax convention, the incoming visit of Japan’s business delegation to Slovenia and tourism. Cooperation on human security and a mine-clearing program in Bosnia and Herzegovina was also discussed. On the occasion, Abe pointed out that the father of Prime Minister Cerar,

¹⁸ President of the Republic of Slovenia (2013) *Predsednik Republike Borut Pahor Na Japonskem Tudi s Cesarjem Akihito (President Pahor in Japan Meets Also Emperor Akihito)*, Available at: <https://www.up-rs.si/up-rs/uprs.nsf/objave/4A5FE8E9C8A749F1C1257B27004A683D> (Accessed 31 October 2021).

¹⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan ((2013) *Japan-Slovenia Summit Meeting 2013*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/slovenia/130306_01.html (Accessed 31 October 2021).

²⁰ Zorana Baković (2013) *Japonski Princ Fumihito in Princesa Kiko Na Obisku (Japanese Prince Fumihito and Princess Kiko on a Visit)*, Available at: <https://old.delo.si/novice/svet/japonski-princ-fumihito-in-princesa-kiko-na-obisku.html> (Accessed 9 March 2022).

²¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2014) *Japan-Slovenia Summit Meeting 2014*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/c_see/si/page18e_000076.html (Accessed 31 October 2021).

²² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2016) *Japan-Slovenia Summit Meeting 2016*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/c_see/si/page1e_000110.html (Accessed 31 October 2021).

Miroslav Cerar, was a gold medalist in gymnastics at the Tokyo Olympics in 1964.²³

On the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, in 2017, State Minister of Foreign Affairs Kazuyuki Nakane met with State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Andrej Logar, during the 13th ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting) Foreign Ministers' Meeting, being held in Myanmar. At the meeting, they both praised the strengthening of the political dialogue and Nakane specifically praised the constructive role played by Slovenia between the EU and the Western Balkans.²⁴

In terms of strategic relations, 2019 was one of the most active years. For instance, the foreign ministers met twice. In February, during the Munich Security Conference, in Germany, Minister of Foreign Affairs Tarō Kōno met with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Slovenia Miro Cerar (former prime minister).²⁵ In August, Kōno met again with Cerar, in Ljubljana, and became the first foreign minister of Japan to visit Slovenia. During his visit, the discussion was centered on investments, cooperation in IT and the situation in the Western Balkans.²⁶

For the occasion of the ceremony of the enthronement of Emperor Naruhito, in October 2019, President Borut Pahor visited Japan, for the second time. Pahor met with Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, who spoke highly about recent advancement in technological cooperation between the two countries and emphasized Slovenia's logistical advantages as a good match for Japanese companies.²⁷

In view of the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations and the second Slovenian Presidency of the Council of EU, Minister of Foreign Affairs Toshimitsu Motegi visited Ljubljana, in April 2021. Motegi met with his Slovenian

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2017) *State Minister for Foreign Affairs Kazuyuki Nakane Meets with the State Secretary of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_001804.html (Accessed 31 October 2021).

²⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019) *Japan-Slovenia Foreign Ministers' Meeting 2019 (February)*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/c_see/si/page6e_000206.html (Accessed 31 October 2021).

²⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019) *Japan-Slovenia Foreign Ministers' Meeting 2019 (June)*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/c_see/si/page6e_000170.html (Accessed 31 October 2021).

²⁷ STA (2019) *Pahor Meets Abe in Tokyo*, Available at: <https://www.total-slovenia-news.com/politics/4814-pahor-meets-abe-in-tokyo> Accessed 31 October 2021). Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019) *Meeting between Prime Minister Abe and President Pahor of Slovenia*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/c_see/si/page4e_001135.html (Accessed 31 October 2021).

counterpart Anže Logar, Prime Minister Janez Janša and President Borut Pahor.²⁸ With Foreign Minister Logar, they again emphasized strong bilateral relations. Motegi also expressed Japan's wish to work closely with Slovenia during the Slovenian Council Presidency, in the second half of 2021. Both parties agreed to further promote EU-Japan cooperation in areas such as the response to COVID-19, resilient supply chains and climate change.²⁹

Especially since 2013, Slovenian political and business elites began reconceptualizing Japan as a strategic, political and economic partner, by emphasizing similarity in values and ideas, especially in the context of EU-Japan strategic dialogue. For example, during his second visit in Japan, President Borut Pahor underlined that "Japanese business culture is close to Slovenians" and that Slovenia embraces Japan's interest in expanding investments in the country.³⁰ Regardless of what President Pahor meant by the concept of "Japanese business culture," and how that fits with Slovenian working culture, the gradual increase in Japanese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) that followed has been applauded with similar zeal in all segments of Slovene society, from top to bottom. For example, when Yaskawa announced its plans to build another robotics factory in Slovenia in 2016, Prime Minister Miro Cerar immediately announced on social media: "I got wonderful news. I have just been called from Tokyo, Japan, and announced that the renowned Yaskawa company has taken the decision to invest further in Slovenia, which will bring new jobs and is proof that we are able to get such an investment in a very serious competition."³¹

Slovenian business and government elites perceive Japan in a narrow way,

²⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Foreign Minister Motegi Visits Slovenia*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/c_see/si/page1e_000315.html (Accessed 31 October 2021).

²⁹ Ibidem. STA (2021) *Foreign Ministers Call for More Cooperation Between Slovenia & Japan*, Available at: <https://www.total-slovenia-news.com/politics/8204-foreign-ministers-call-for-more-cooperation-between-slovenia-japan> Accessed 31 October 2021).

³⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019) *Meeting between Prime Minister Abe and President Pahor of Slovenia*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/c_see/si/page4e_001135.html (Accessed 31 October 2021). STA (2019) *Pahor Meets Abe in Tokyo*, Available at: <https://www.total-slovenia-news.com/politics/4814-pahor-meets-abe-in-tokyo> Accessed 31 October 2021). Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019) *Meeting between Prime Minister Abe and President Pahor of Slovenia*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/c_see/si/page4e_001135.html (Accessed 31 October 2021).

³¹ Nejc Gole and Miha Jenko (2016) *Yaskawa Bo v Sloveniji Postavila Tovarno Robotov (Yaskawa Will Build a Robot Factory in Slovenia)*, Available at: <https://old.delo.si/gospodarstvo/podjetja/ne-objavi-yaskawa-bo-v-sloveniji-postavila-tovarno-robotov.html> (Accessed 31 October 2021).

predominantly as a technological powerhouse and source of high-tech investment that could help improve the overall business ecosystem of Slovenia. In Slovenia, Japan has been often represented as a country of robots and samurai,³² and the image of Japan as a source of high-tech investment has been more clearly ingrained and accepted through the introduction of national economic action plans, after 2015, where the Slovenian government identified Japan as a strategic market. For example, State Secretary for the Ministry of Economy and Technology Aleš Cantarutti, during his visit in Japan, in 2020, commented: “The fact is that Japan is synonymous with quality and high technology and, by investing in Slovenia, they put us on the map of countries with excellent conditions for foreign investment. [...] It is good that they invest in new manufacturing technologies, develop higher value-added products, implement the 5S strategy and introduce 6S technology, and the country needs to provide a predictable, stable and competitive business environment.”³³

Workers’ unions also seem to be open and welcoming toward the increase of Japanese business presence in Slovenia. When the company Helios was bought by Kansai Paint, the syndicate leader Tomaž Kumer expressed that under Japanese management the company will finally see better times.³⁴ Local communities expect that Japanese investments will add jobs, open new school programs, and help improve local infrastructure.³⁵

This new zeal for Japan has been also influenced by the recent developments in EU-Japan relations, more precisely by the conclusion of the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). Some media in Slovenia described the EPA as a strong slap in the face of US protectionism, as well as a defense of the global free trade

³² Bogomil Ferfila (1999) *Japonska: Dežela Samurajev in Robotov (Japan: Country of Samurai and Robots)*, Radovljica: Didakta.

³³ Government of Slovenia (2020) *Japonske Investicije v Slovenijo Še Vedno Rastejo (Japanese Investments in Slovenia Still Growing)*, Available at: <https://www.gov.si/novice/2020-02-03-japonske-investicije-v-slovenijo-se-vedno-rastejo/> (Accessed 31 October 2021).

³⁴ Nejc Gole and Maja Grgič (2016) *Helios Iz Avstrijskih v Japonske Roke (Helios from Austrian into Japanese Hands)*, Available at: <https://old.delo.si/gospodarstvo/podjetja/helios-iz-avstrijskih-v-japonske-roke.html> (Accessed 31 October 2021).

³⁵ A. Č. (2017) “*Novo Štetje Let Za Kočevje*” - *Yaskawa Podpisala Pogodbo Za Nakup Zemljišča (A New Year Count for Kočevje – Yaskawa Signed Contract to Buy Land)*, Available at: <https://www.rtvsl.si/gospodarstvo/novo-stetje-let-za-kocevje-yaskawa-podpisala-pogodbo-za-nakup-zemljisca/415840> (Accessed 31 October 2021).

regime.³⁶ Civil society and left leaning commentaries, however, have been more critical and have pointed out risks, such as further deregulation of the finance sector, an increase in environmental degradation and the erosion of labor rights and standards.³⁷ The Slovenian leadership had already expressed strong support for the EU-Japan trade negotiations in 2013, when President Pahor made his first visit to Japan. In 2018, the government took the final position that the EPA is good for Slovenian business, despite economic analysis showing that the agreement will most probably have a negative impact on Slovenian exports.³⁸

Economic and commercial relations: Tech and robotics drive growing relations

Bilateral economic relations have witnessed steady improvement over the past decade. The number of Japanese companies operating in Slovenia has been increasing and, according to the Statistical Office of Slovenia, there were 34 Japanese business operating in Slovenia in 2019, almost triple from 2010, when there were only 10.³⁹ While compared to the situation in other Central European countries, this is still a modest number, in the context of historically weak economic ties between the two countries, it nevertheless marks a remarkable improvement.

Through the 1990s and the first decade of the new millennium, the Japanese economic presence and ties with Slovenia remained weak for several reasons. According to Yoshiaki Makino, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, the proximity of Slovenia to the conflicts in the Balkans and the overall instability of the region had a major impact on its investment attractiveness among Japanese businesses. Even though, after the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, Slovenia did not

³⁶ Jure Kosec (2018) *V Protekcijonizmu Ni Zaščite, EU in Japonska Sporočata ZDA (No Protection in Protectionism – EU and Japan Send a Message to US)*, Available at: <https://www.delo.si/novice/svet/v-protekcijonizmu-ni-zascite-eu-in-japonska-sporocata-zda/> (Accessed 31 October 2021).

³⁷ NOVICE (2018) *Sporazum EU-Japonska: Prosta Trgovina Na Račun Demokracije in Ljudi (EU-Japan Agreement: Free Trade at the Expense of Democracy and People)*, Available at: <https://www.levica.si/jefta-eu-japonska/> (Accessed 31 October 2021).

³⁸ Kristina Božič (2018) *EU Pred Vzpostavitvijo Največjega Prosto-Trgovinskega Območja z Japonsko (EU Before Establishing Largest Free-Trade Zone with Japan)*, Available at: <https://www.vecer.com/slovenija/eu-pred-vzpostavitvijo-najvecjega-prosto-trgovinskega-obmocja-z-japonsko-6500646> (Accessed 31 October 2021).

³⁹ Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (n.d.) *Performance of Enterprises by Country*, Available at: <https://pxweb.stat.si/SiStatData/pxweb/en/Data/-/3075820S.px> (Accessed 31 October 2021).

experience a protracted civil war and managed to transition into a market economy relatively quickly, the negative image of insecurity and risk remained. Another reason offered by Makino relates to the slow market reforms and economic liberalization during the transition period, over the 1990s, which worked as a deterrent for Japanese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).⁴⁰ Finally, in contrast to other Central European countries, Slovenia also had much higher labor costs and higher real estate prices, that further raised the bar for profitability of international business. For example, by the end of the 1990s, average monthly earnings in Slovenia were more than double when compared to those in the Visegrad countries.⁴¹

Based on recent data, we can say that a real improvement in Slovenia-Japan economic relations began during the last six years, after 2014, when the Slovenian government started working on a new strategic framework for the promotion of internationalization and global competitiveness of Slovenian businesses.⁴² Another important step was the government action plan “International challenges 2015-2016,” which identified Japan as one of the priority markets for Slovenia and explicitly set goals, activities and financial resources for improving economic ties with Japan.⁴³ Better cooperation and dialogue between Japanese and Slovenian business executives, who established the Slovenia-Japan Business Council, was also a step leading to stronger economic links.⁴⁴

As a result of these reforms, the number of Japanese companies doing business in Slovenia and the amount of Japanese FDI increased. According to the Bank of Slovenia, from 2011 up to 2015, the average of the accumulated value of total Japanese FDI in Slovenia was a little over 35 million euros per year. From 2015 to 2020,

⁴⁰ Yoshiaki Makino (2017) “Shirarezaru Gijutsu Rikkoku (The Unknown Technology Nation),” in Nobuhiro Shiba, Andrej Bekeš, and Shinichi Yamazaki (eds.) *Surobenia Wo Shiru Tame 60 Shou (60 Chapters to Know Slovenia)*, Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, p. 343.

⁴¹ Ibidem, pp. 343–344.

⁴² Government of Slovenia (n.d.) *Spodbujanje Internacionalizacije (Promoting Internationalization)*, Available at: <https://www.gov.si teme/spodbujanje-internacionalizacije/> (Accessed 31 October 2021).

⁴³ Ministry of Economic Development and Technology of Slovenia (2015) *Mednarodni Izzivi 2015-2016 (International Challenges 2015-2016)*, Available at: <https://www.ora.si/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Mednarodni-izzivi-2015-2016.pdf> (Accessed 31 October 2021).

⁴⁴ Japan-Slovenia Business Council (n.d.) *News and Topics*, Available at: <https://www.jsbc-jp.org/> (Accessed 23 October 2021).

however, the average FDI stock jumped to 55.5 million euros per year.⁴⁵ However, when considering investments based on the ultimate investing country, the picture is quite different, with a far larger value: thus, in 2020, for example, Japanese FDI stood at 362.6 million euros, compared to 43.5 million euros⁴⁶, when only considering the immediate partner country. This shows that many Japanese investments come from branches of Japanese companies in other countries. On the other hand, the total stock of Slovenian FDI to Japan remained stable and relatively low over the entire period, averaging close to 2 million euros per year.⁴⁷

The greatest beneficiary of this boost in investments has been the technological sector, especially robotics. Japanese robot manufacturer Daihen was one of the first companies to take advantage of the new investment climate. In 2014, Daihen bought the Slovenian welding machine manufacturer Varstroj and established a new company, Daihen Varstroj, which develops, manufactures and sells automated and robotic welding devices.⁴⁸ Daihen industrial robots are used in automated production lines all over the globe. Robotics giant Yaskawa also followed suit and, through indirect investment, established companies Yaskawa Slovenia and Yaskawa Ristro, a sales and service production line and an assembly base for industrial robots, focused on central European markets.⁴⁹ In 2019, Yaskawa launched another manufacturing complex with research and development capabilities, in the town of Kočevje, that would complement the production capacities in Japan and China, satisfying some 80% of the European market's demand for Yaskawa robots.⁵⁰ The production center in Kočevje plans to manufacture up to 10,000 industrial robots per year and, by 2023, employ some 200

⁴⁵ Bank of Slovenia (n.d.) *Direct Investment 2020*, p. 50, Available at: https://bankaslovenije.blob.core.windows.net/publication-files/direct-investment-2020_en.pdf (Accessed 23 October 2021).

⁴⁶ Ibidem, p. 27.

⁴⁷ Ibidem, p. 74.

⁴⁸ Daihen Varstroj (n.d.) *Home Page*, Available at: <http://www.daihen-varstroj.si/eng/> (Accessed 23 October 2021).

⁴⁹ Yaskawa Slovenia (n.d.) *Home Page*, Available at: <https://www.yaskawa.si/> (Accessed 31 October 2021).

⁵⁰ Slovenia Times (2019) *Yaskawa Officially Launches Production in Slovenia*, Available at: <https://sloveniatimes.com/yaskawa-officially-launches-production-in-slovenia/> (Accessed 23 October 2021).

people.⁵¹ Fanuc is another Japanese global manufacturer of factory automation and robomachines that established a subsidiary in Slovenia: Fanuc Adria is stationed in the town of Celje and services countries of the former Yugoslavia.⁵²

Besides a better investment climate, Slovenia's location in Central Europe and its extensive business links in East and Southeast European markets have been one of the strong points that have attracted Japanese companies. Already, in 2013, Panasonic Corporation and the Slovenian home appliances manufacturer Gorenje launched a strategic alliance that emphasized joint development of new washing machines and refrigerators, to be distributed in the EU, Russian and other Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) markets.⁵³ The partnership was suddenly terminated in 2018, when, citing changes in the business environment, Panasonic decided to sell its shares in Gorenje to the Chinese consumer electronics manufacturer Hisense Group.⁵⁴

In contrast to Panasonic, Astellas Pharma (AP) and Makita have managed to establish stronger roots in Slovenia. AP, an international pharmaceutical company, part of the Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group, established Astellas Pharma (AP) Adriatic & Baltics, with its headquarters in Ljubljana, which services 11 countries across Central and Eastern Europe.⁵⁵ In 2011, Makita, which previously covered Southeast Europe from Vienna, moved its operations to Slovenia, because of its stronger links with markets of countries of the former Yugoslavia. From Slovenia, Makita services 9

⁵¹ Vesna Žarkovič (2019) *Yaskawa's Production Is Fully Operational*, Available at: <https://slovenia.si/business-and-innovation/yaskawas-production-is-fully-operational/> (1 March 2022).

⁵² FANUC Adria (n.d.) *Who we are*, Available at: <https://www.fanuc.eu/si/en/who-we-are/sl-country-landing-page> (Accessed 31 October 2021).

⁵³ Panasonic Corporation (2013) *Gorenje and Panasonic Create Strategic Alliance*, Available at: <https://news.panasonic.com/global/press/data/2013/07/en130705-3/en130705-3.html> (Accessed 31 October 2021).

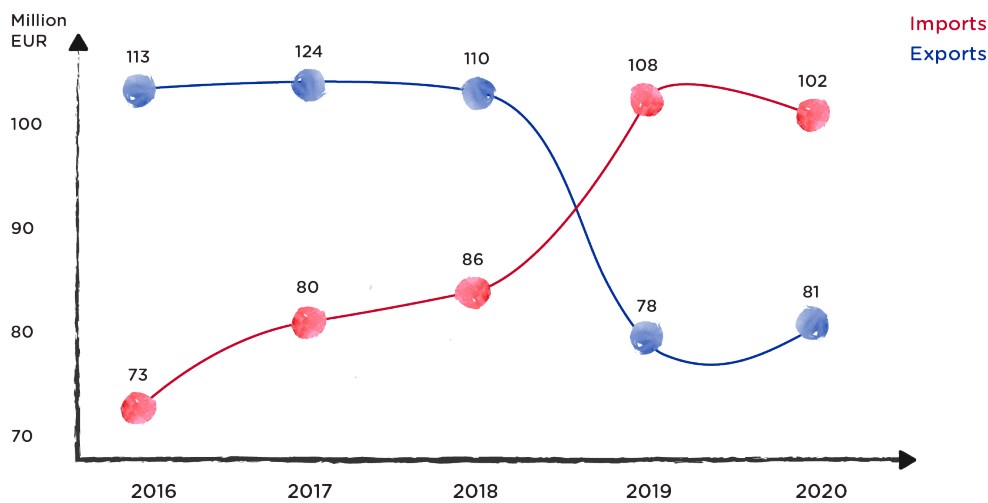
⁵⁴ Marja Novak (2016) *Panasonic Decides against Taking over Slovenia's Gorenje*, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-gorenje-m-a-panasonic-idUSKBN1351J3> (Accessed 31 October 2021). STA (2018) *Gorenje's New Strategic Partner Is China's Hisense*, Available at: <https://www.total-slovenia-news.com/business/1206-gorenje-s-new-strategic-partner-is-china-s-hisense> (Accessed 31 October 2021). Panasonic Corporation (2018) *Sales of Gorenje Shares Completed*, Available at: <https://news.panasonic.com/global/press/data/2018/07/en180709-4/en180709-4.html> (Accessed 31 October 2021).

⁵⁵ Astellas Pharma Slovenia (n.d.) *AP - Adriatic & Baltics*, Available at: <https://www.astellas.com/si/about/ap-adriatic-baltics> (Accessed 31 October 2021).

countries in Southeast Europe.⁵⁶ Two other major Japanese companies entering Slovenia were Kansai Painting, in 2016, and Sumitomo Rubber Industries, in 2017.⁵⁷

Eventually, as the business climate improved and economic ties strengthened, a considerable increase in bilateral trade followed. In 2010, the total value of trade amounted to 70 million euros: 52.5 million euros being the value of imports from Japan and 17.4 million the value of Slovene exports to Japan. Trade volume gradually increased and, by 2015, the value of Slovenian exports to Japan compared to 2010 tripled, amounting to 52 million euros. Between 2015 and 2020, with the government action plan to push for stronger internationalization and a more proactive focus on attracting Japanese FDI, the overall trade volume doubled and in 2020 amounted to 183.5 million euros: the value of imports from Japan was 102.2 million euros and the value of Slovene exports to Japan was 81.2 million euros.⁵⁸

Slovenia's trade with Japan in million euros



Source: Statistical Office of Slovenia

⁵⁶ Makita Slovenija (n.d.) *Home Page*, Available at: <https://www.makita.si/> (Accessed 31 October 2021).

⁵⁷ STA (2016) *Helios Sold to Japanese Kansai Paint*, Available at: <https://english.sta.si/2332509/helios-sold-to-japanese-kansai-paint> (Accessed 31 October 2021). STA (2017) *Sumitomo to Produce Elastomers in Logatec*, Available at: <https://english.sta.si/2434940/sumitomo-to-produce-elastomers-in-logatec> (Accessed 31 October 2021).

⁵⁸ Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (n.d.) *Exports and Imports by Country, Year and Unit*, Available at: <https://pxweb.stat.si/SiStatData/pxweb/en/Data/Data/2490004S.px/> (Accessed 31 October 2021).

In 2016, a bilateral tax convention was concluded, to further promote investment and economic exchanges between the two countries. The convention helps clarify taxation on cross-border investment and economic activities, adjusts for international double taxation as well and introduces mutual agreement procedures (including arbitration) for the tax authorities to resolve disputes on tax matters.⁵⁹

On the logistical side, the port of Koper has established itself as the central gateway for Japanese companies doing business in Central and Southeast Europe. The port of Koper is a public limited company, which provides port and logistics services in the only Slovenian port. It is situated in the northern part of the Adriatic Sea, connecting mainly markets of Central and Southeast Europe with the Mediterranean Sea and Asia.⁶⁰ Compared to other major ports, Koper's location allows for shorter transportation periods from Japan to Central Europe. Compared to other ports in Northern Europe, the transit from Asia can be shortened by up to 10 days.⁶¹ In 2015, Nippon Express, one of the largest global logistics operators, launched the "Danube Express" service from Japan to Budapest, Hungary, via Koper. The following year, Nippon Express introduced "Adria Express" as another service, where a group of companies handle cargo from Japan to the final destinations in Central Europe.⁶² In 2019, Yusen Logistics followed suit and also established its office in Koper.⁶³

In 2016, Slovenia and Japan also stepped-up cooperation on energy and green technology. The Slovenian Ministry of Economic Development and Technology and Japan's New Energy and Industrial Technology Development Organization (NEDO) signed a memorandum of cooperation on a project to introduce smart energy

⁵⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2016) *Signing of the Tax Convention between Japan and Slovenia*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_001288.html (Accessed 31 October 2021).

⁶⁰ Luka Koper (n.d.) *Home Page*, Available at: <https://www.luka-kp.si/en/> (Accessed 23 October 2021).

⁶¹ Railpage (2019) *Poland New Hinterland for Port of Koper*, Available at: <https://www.railpage.com.au/news/s/poland-new-hinterland-for-port-of-koper> (1 March 2022).

⁶² Nippon Express (2016) *"Adria Direct" Reducing Transit Days, Costs through Route via Koper Port, Slovenia*, Available at: <https://www.nipponexpress.com/press/release/2016/26-Oct-16.html> (Accessed 31 October 2021).

⁶³ Yusen Logistics (2019) *Yusen Logistics Opens New Office in Koper, Slovenia*, Available at: <https://www.yusen-logistics.com/en/resources/press-and-media/36756> (Accessed 31 October 2021).

networks.⁶⁴ Both sides agreed to coordinate research and demonstration actions for smart grid and smart community projects, and to facilitate cooperation with the state-owned operators.⁶⁵ It has been described as a national project unique in Europe. The overall value of the project was 37 million euros and it ran from 2018 to 2021.⁶⁶ Both countries also hope that this will become a business model that could be expanded to other European markets.⁶⁷

Cultural and people-to-people relations: Backed up by strong Japanese language education

The overall perception of Japan and Japanese culture in Slovenia is positive. Japan enjoys an attractive image that can be ascribed to a high level of popularity of its techno-cultural products, as well as traditional culture. Traditional arts, gaming culture, J-pop music, anime and manga are some of the key factors that, like in other parts of the world, drive popular interest for Japanese culture and language among Slovenes. Furthermore, during the last few years, a traditionally active exchange in the cultural and scientific-academic domain has been augmented also by a marked improvement in political and economic cooperation.

One of the major propulsive forces behind the expansion of cultural relations and people-to-people relations between the two countries has been Japanese language education in Slovenia. This dates back to the interwar period, after the First World War, when Tsuneko Kondō (naturalized as Marija Skušek) moved to Slovenia and began offering private lessons in Japanese language. In the former Yugoslavia, in the 1980s, a voluntary Japanese language course was launched at the Slovenian Eastern Society,

⁶⁴ Balkan Green Energy News (2016) *Slovenia and Japan's NEDO Sign Smart Grid Agreement*, Available at: <https://balkangreenenergynews.com/slovenia-japans-nedo-sign-smart-grid-agreement/> (Accessed 31 October 2021). New Energy and Industrial Technology Development Organization (2018) *NEDO and Hitachi to Start Cloud-Based Advanced Energy Management System Demonstration Project in Slovenia*, Available at: https://www.nedo.go.jp/english/news/AA5en_100394.html (Accessed 31 October 2021).

⁶⁵ Eles (n.d.) *NEDO Project*, Available at: <https://www.eles.si/en/nedo-project> (Accessed 23 October 2021).

⁶⁶ Ibidem.

⁶⁷ Ibidem.

with Professor Chikako Shigemori as a lecturer.⁶⁸ After finishing his doctoral studies in Japan, Professor Andrej Bekeš joined the group and the course expanded and prospered until 1995, when the Japanese Studies Program was established.⁶⁹ Consequently, Japanese language education and learning about Japanese culture, history, literature and arts developed dramatically. Many graduates who became teachers at elementary schools established language education circles as extracurricular activities. The Ministry of Science, Education and Sports in Slovenia also considers the possibility to introduce the Japanese language as an elective course in the upper grades of high school. Other graduates have pursued careers in business, tourism, education and academia.⁷⁰

Many students can apply for Japanese government scholarships at undergraduate, graduate and postdoctoral levels and spend time studying and researching in Japan. The University of Ljubljana has established cooperation agreements with several Japanese universities: Gunma University, University of Tokyo, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Japan Women University, University of Tsukuba, Tohoku Fukushi University and University of Miyazaki.

The basis for scientific and technological cooperation between Japan and Slovenia are the Agreement between Yugoslavia and Japan on cooperation in science and technology that Slovenia succeeded to, in 1994, and the Memorandum of Understanding on Scientific Cooperation between The Ministry of Science, Education and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia and The Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, from 2001.⁷¹ Slovenian and Japanese researchers also collaborate on projects under the Horizon Europe framework program for research and innovation. Among the best-known bilateral projects in the field of science is the long-lasting collaboration on

⁶⁸ Andrej Bekeš (2017) “Surobenia Ni Okeru Nihon Kenkyū Oyobi Nihongo Kyōiku (Japanese Studies and Japanese Language Education in Slovenia),” in Nobuhiro Shiba et al. (eds.) *Surobenia Wo Shiru Tame 60 Shou (60 Chapters to Know Slovenia)*, Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, p. 338.

⁶⁹ Ibidem.

⁷⁰ Andrej Bekeš (2017) “Surobenia Ni Okeru Nihon Kenkyū Oyobi Nihongo Kyōiku (Japanese Studies and Japanese Language Education in Slovenia),” in Nobuhiro Shiba et al. (eds.) *Surobenia Wo Shiru Tame 60 Shou (60 Chapters to Know Slovenia)*, Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, p. 338.

⁷¹ The Ministry of Science, Education and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia (2001) *Memorandum of Understanding on Scientific Cooperation between The Ministry of Science, Education and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia and The Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (2001)*, Available at: <https://www.arrs.si/sl/medn/dvostr/sporazumi/me-japonska.asp> (Accessed 31 October 2021).

particle accelerators between Slovenian physicists from the Josef Stefan Institute (JSI) and the Tsukuba KEK laboratory.⁷²

In the past years, scholars have been the main promoters of mutual understanding and have received high decorations for their work. In 2008, Professor Andrej Bekeš was conferred The Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette, for his role in promoting Japanese studies and exchanges.⁷³ In 2017, President Borut Pahor decorated the late Professor Nobuhiro Shiba, of the University of Tokyo, with the Medal of Merit, for educating the Japanese public on the historical circumstances in which Slovenia gained independence.⁷⁴

People-to-people relations in other areas, such as art and tourism, have been also vigorous. Slovenian artists regularly visit and perform in Japan. Slovenian movies can be seen in Japan, at the annual EU-Japan movie festival. Slovenian artists are also active in the “EU-Japan fest” cultural exchange program, between the EU and Japan. Information on Slovenian cultural events in Japan can be accessed through the social media outlets of the Embassy of Slovenia in Japan.⁷⁵

On the other hand, Japanese performing arts and exhibitions have enjoyed a high level of popularity in Slovenia since the early contacts. Nowadays, Japanese films can be regularly seen in cinemas around Ljubljana. Japanese modern dance performances (for example, *Butoh*), traditional theater, music, art exhibitions and other Japanese culture promotion events are regularly organized, with the assistance of the Embassy of Japan in Slovenia. A detailed calendar of Japanese cultural events in Slovenia can be accessed through the embassy website.⁷⁶

⁷² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia (2011) *MZZ Letno Poročilo 2011 (Annual Report of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia 2011)*, p. 69, Available at: https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MZZ/Dokumenti/javne-objave/letna-porocila/Porocilo_MZZ_2011.pdf (Accessed 5 August 2022).

⁷³ Embassy of the Republic of Slovenia in Tokyo (2009) *Prof. Andrej Bekeš, Ph.D., Conferred a High-Ranking Japanese Order*, Available at: http://www.tokyo.embassy.si/index.php?id=964&L=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=2528 (Accessed 31 October 2021).

⁷⁴ STA (2017) *President Honours Japanese History Professor*, Available at: <https://english.sta.si/2427024/president-honours-japanese-history-professor?q=shiba> (Accessed 31 October 2021).

⁷⁵ Embassy of the Republic of Slovenia in Tokyo (n.d.) *Home Page*, Available at: <http://www.tokyo.embassy.si/index.php?id=48&L=1> (Accessed 31 October 2021).

⁷⁶ Embassy of Japan in Slovenia (n.d.) *Home Page*, Available at: https://www.si.emb-japan.go.jp/itprtp_si/index.html (Accessed 31 October 2021).

Tourism has been another area of exchange of increased importance. Despite a decrease, starting in 2016, the number of Japanese tourists visiting Slovenia has averaged 40,000 persons per year.⁷⁷ There were 33,916 Japanese tourists visiting Slovenia, in 2019.⁷⁸ On the other hand, the number of Slovenian tourists visiting Japan has been steadily increasing and has averaged around 2,400 persons per year.⁷⁹ In 2019, 3,347 Slovenian tourists visited Japan.⁸⁰ There are also about 200 Japanese residents living in Slovenia⁸¹ and 93 Slovenian residents living in Japan.⁸²

Conclusions and recommendations

Official relations between Japan and Slovenia began developing after the formation of the first independent Slovenian state, in the beginning of the 1990s. Political relations significantly strengthened after Slovenia's accession to the EU, in 2004, which was emphasized by the opening of the Japanese Embassy in Ljubljana, in 2006. Political relations further improved in 2008, during the first Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU and especially after 2013, when Slovenian President Borut Pahor paid his first visit to Japan. In 2016, Prime Minister Miro Cerar met with Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, which was followed by the signing of a bilateral tax convention and a considerable strengthening of Japanese investments in Slovenia. In 2019, President Pahor visited Japan for the second time and Foreign Ministers Tarō Kōno and Miro Cerar met twice. Also, Kōno became the first Japanese minister of foreign affairs to visit Slovenia.

Although through the 1990s and 2000s, the Japanese economic presence in

⁷⁷ Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (n.d.) *Tourist Arrivals and Overnight Stays by Country, Measures and Year*, Available at: <https://pxweb.stat.si/SiStatData/pxweb/en/Data/Data/2164524S.px/> (Accessed 23 October 2021).

⁷⁸ Ibidem.

⁷⁹ Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) (n.d.) *Japan Tourism Statistics*, Available at: <https://statistics.jnto.go.jp/en/> (Accessed 23 October 2021).

⁸⁰ Ibidem.

⁸¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019) *Japan-Slovenia Relations (Basic Data)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/slovenia/data.html> (Accessed 31 October 2021).

⁸² Immigration Services Agency of Japan (n.d.) *Statistics on Foreign Residents in Japan (Formerly Registered Alien Statistics)*, Available at: https://www.isa.go.jp/en/policies/statistics/toukei_ichiran_touroku.html (Accessed 31 October 2021).

Slovenia remained weak, over the last ten years, bilateral economic relations have strengthened considerably. The number of Japanese companies operating in Slovenia has expanded and, after 2015, the value of Japanese investments and trade with Slovenia increased dramatically. The greatest beneficiary of this boost in investments has been the technological sector, especially robotics. After 2016, Slovenia and Japan also stepped-up cooperation on energy and green technology, namely in smart energy networks.

On the one hand, Japan and Japanese culture enjoy a high level of popularity in Slovenia. Its techno-cultural development, backed up by a highly refined traditional culture, remains a strong attractive factor for Slovenian students, researchers, business owners, political elites and even the average person. Japan is still perceived as a technological powerhouse and a source of high-tech investments that carry with them a high potential to improve the business ecosystem and the economic growth of the country. On the other hand, the gradual strengthening of EU-Japan relations in recent years, especially in trade, has received mixed reactions. The Slovenian government took the stance that the EPA is advantageous for Slovenian businesses, despite concerns and criticism from civil society and academia that the agreement will probably have a negative impact on Slovenian exports.

One of the central driving forces behind the gradual and firm expansion of cultural relations between the two countries has been, without doubt, the high quality of Japanese language education in Slovenia. The Japanese Studies Program at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana has, over the past decades, developed into a hub for Japanese language and culture in Slovenia that also attracts students from neighboring countries.

Slovenia has also gradually positioned itself on the map of Japanese tourism. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism was recognized as one of the key areas of exchange with substantial potential for growth. Dynamic cooperation in tourism and academic exchanges is also supported by active relations in the artistic domain. Slovenian artists regularly visit and perform in Japan. Also, Japanese performing arts and exhibitions have traditionally enjoyed a high level of popularity in Slovenia, since the early contacts.

As for the future development of relations, apart from the already expanding technological and economic cooperation, education exchange is one area that could be further explored and strengthened. In the area of education and training, Slovenian authorities and business circles could use the current positive momentum to introduce internships and additional scholarship schemes that would attract more Japanese students to Slovenia. Students could learn and acquire direct working experience in Slovenia, which would allow them a smoother entry into the Japanese employment market after their return to Japan. Slovenia's position in Europe also offers ample possibilities to develop collaborative study-internship programs, spanning over neighboring countries, like Italy, Austria, Croatia and Hungary. The same approach could be implemented in Japanese educational institutions, which have exchange programs with Slovenia. Current study exchanges tend to concentrate mostly on curricular aspects of learning and less on gaining working experience in Japanese companies and other institutions. Given the current demographic situation of Japan and Slovenia, building active exchange networks among the younger generations is a prerequisite to further sustain the improvement in bilateral relations over the past decade. In this way, people-to-people links and cooperation in other areas would, without doubt, also benefit.

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Spain-Japan relations: From mutual indifference toward an emerging strategic partnership

By Just CASTILLO IGLESIAS*

Overview

Relations between Spain and Japan date back to the 16th century. However, long periods of discontinuity, a historical inability to clearly define common interests and the lack of mutual understanding have given way to historically weak ties.

This historical legacy began to change from the 1980s onwards, when cooperation intensified against the backdrop of Spain's European Communities (EC) membership. However, it was in the 2010s that cooperation took on a new meaning and both countries began to recognize their potential to cooperate in all areas.

Political and strategic ties have strengthened significantly during the 2010s, with the signing of several framework agreements to promote cooperation, even in new areas of interest, such as security and defense.

Economic and trade relations have also improved positively since the 1980s. However, bilateral exchanges are still weaker than what would be expected given the size of the two economies. The historical asymmetry in trade has been progressively reducing, although Japanese investment in Spain is still greater than vice versa.

In recent years, there has also been a notable growth of interest in Japan and its culture among Spaniards. This has translated into a proliferation of institutions that facilitate cultural exchanges, as well as Japanese language programs.

In short, relations between Spain and Japan have been moving away from the

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legacy of centuries of mutual indifference toward an incipient strategic partnership. These relations continue to develop below their full potential in all areas. However, the fact that political, strategic, commercial and personal ties are now stronger than ever indicates that this work in progress is well on track.

History of relations

Spain was among the first Western nations to establish relations with Japan, after the Portuguese arrived in the archipelago in 1543. The first documented contact between Spaniards and Japanese took place in August 1549, when the Jesuit priest Francis Xavier landed in Kagoshima, on a Portuguese-led mission to set up the first Catholic colony in the country.¹ In the mid-16th century, Japan was fragmented and mired in internal conflicts² and Spaniards who went there at that time did so with the main motivation of spreading Christianity. Yet, those early contacts led to a period of commercial and intellectual exchanges,³ which intensified after the Spanish settled permanently in the Philippines, in 1565, and lasted until the 1620s.⁴

A remarkable episode in those early relations was the arrival in Spain of the Keichō Embassy,⁵ in 1614, a mission⁶ (1613-1620) authorized by the *daimyō* of Sendai to travel to New Spain, in the Americas, onward to Spain, to discuss trade agreements with King Philip III, and end in Rome with a papal audience. Just like their forerunners,

¹ Florentino Rodao García (2014) “Impulso Insuficiente: Las Relaciones Hispano-Japonesas Dentro del Marco Europeo (Insufficient Impetus: Spanish-Japanese Relations within the European Framework),” *Observatorio de la Economía y la Sociedad del Japón*, 6(21), p. 2. Amadeo Jensana Tanehashi (2014) “Las Relaciones Entre España y Japón (Relations between Spain and Japan),” *Anuario internacional 2013*, Barcelona: CIDOB, p. 1.

² This period is known as the warring states period (*sengoku jidai* in Japanese).

³ Arturo Pérez Martínez (2000) *Las Relaciones Diplomáticas Entre España y Japón (Diplomatic Relations between Spain and Japan)*, Madrid: Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, p. 15.

⁴ Some authors have described the period 1543-1643 as Japan’s “Iberian century.” For more details, see Antonio Cabezas García (1995) *El Siglo Ibérico del Japón: la presencia hispano-portuguesa en Japón (1543-1643) (The Iberian Century in Japan: the Spanish-Portuguese presence in Japan (1543-1643))*, Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid.

⁵ Keichō refers to the period in Japanese history spanning between 1596 and 1615.

⁶ The mission was headed by the *samurai* Tsunenaga Hasekura and the Franciscan friar Luis Sotelo.

in the lesser-known Tenshō Mission,⁷ the envoys failed to attain both their religious and commercial goals.⁸ Nevertheless, the arrival of the Keichō Embassy is regarded as an important event that contributed to the mutual knowledge between the two countries.⁹ What is perhaps its most curious legacy can be found in the municipality of Coria del Río (Seville), where several hundred people bear the surname *Japón* (literally, “Japan”). It is believed that the distinctive cognomen was adopted by the descendants of Keichō envoys that settled there, instead of returning to their homeland.¹⁰

By 1610, religion had permeated all aspects of the bilateral relationship and tensions between the missionaries and the Japanese authorities were running high. The growing animosity eventually led to the banning of all Spanish ships from Japanese ports and the rupture of diplomatic and commercial relations, in 1624.¹¹ This marked the beginning of a period during which the two countries turned their backs on each other. With the adoption of the *sakoku* isolationist policy in Japan, it would remain so for more than two centuries.¹²

Diplomatic relations were resumed in 1868, in the context of the Meiji Restoration, with the signing of the Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation.¹³ The Treaty ushered in a new era of political, economic, and cultural exchanges that have

⁷ Jonathan López Vera (2018) *La Embajada Tenshō (1582-1591), Adolescentes Japoneses en la Europa del Siglo XVI, (The Tenshō Embassy (1582-1591), Japanese Teenagers in 16th Century Europe)*, Available at: <https://www.historiajaponesa.com/la-embajada-tensho-1582-1591-adolescentes-japoneses-en-la-europa-del-siglo-xvi/> (Accessed 7 September 2021).

⁸ By the time the Keichō Embassy arrived in Spain, King Philip III had become aware of the power disputes within Japan and, consequently, he preferred to wait before signing any agreement. Similarly, when the Japanese envoys arrived in Rome, the Pope knew of the persecution of Christians that had started in that country. Jonathan López Vera (2013) “La Embajada Keicho (1613-1620) (The Keicho Embassy (1613-1620))”, *Asiadémica*, 2, p. 94.

⁹ Between 2013 and 2014, Japan and Spain commemorated the 400th anniversary of this mission with a program of cultural and academic events in both countries, labeled as the Spain-Japan Dual Year.

¹⁰ Manuel Planelles (2013) *A Samurai's 600-strong Seville Legacy*, Available at: https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2013/06/11/inenglish/1370961238_162476.html (Accessed 7 September 2021).

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² Florentino Rodao García (2014) “Impulso Insuficiente: Las Relaciones Hispano-Japonesas Dentro del Marco Europeo (Insufficient Impetus: Spanish-Japanese Relations within the European Framework),” *Observatorio de la Economía y la Sociedad del Japón*, 6(21), p. 2.

¹³ Arturo Pérez Martínez (2000) *Las Relaciones Diplomáticas entre España y Japón (Diplomatic Relations between Spain and Japan)*, Madrid: Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, p. 17.

continued almost uninterruptedly to this day. Until the 1970s, however, relations remained shallow and often at the mercy of short-term interests, gaining a certain notoriety mainly in the context of international conflicts.¹⁴

One such occasion was the Spanish-American War of 1898. As Spain was losing control over the Philippines, relations acquired a general tone of mistrust, particularly from the Spanish side. Elites in Madrid became concerned that Tokyo viewed the Philippines with imperialist aspirations and that Japanese pan-Asian nationalists were providing support to pro-independence insurrectionists.¹⁵ In consequence, Spain eventually blocked the arrival of Japanese to its Pacific colonies, fearing they would jeopardize its national interests.¹⁶

That episode made it evident that the two countries had entered opposite power trajectories. On the one hand, the defeat in the Philippines was an unequivocal sign of Spain's decline, that manifested in its withdrawal from Asia and the abandonment of its interests in the region. In contrast, Meiji Japan was emerging as a regional power. Diplomatic relations continued to develop amicably, albeit discreetly, until the turbulent period between the mid-1930s and 1945, when they would again attain a good degree of salience and volatility.

Relations between Japan and the Second Spanish Republic (1931-1939) were largely unremarkable. A point of contention was the occupation of Manchuria, which Madrid opposed. This encouraged anti-Japanese sentiments that even the president of

¹⁴ Florentino Rodao García (2014) "Impulso Insuficiente: Las Relaciones Hispano-Japonesas Dentro del Marco Europeo (Insufficient Impetus: Spanish-Japanese Relations within the European Framework)," *Observatorio de la Economía y la Sociedad del Japón*, 6(21), p. 3.

¹⁵ Juan Leña Casas (2015) "Las Relaciones de España con China y Japón (Spain's Relations with China and Japan)" in Marta Hernández Ruiz, José María Beneyto and Juan Carlos Pereira Castañares (eds) *Historia de la Política Exterior Española en los Siglos XX y XXI (History of Spanish Foreign Policy in the 20th and 21st Centuries)*, Madrid: Fundación Universitaria San Pablo CEU, p. 474. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain and Embassy of Japan in Spain (2013) *Tratado de 1868: Los Cimientos de la Amistad Japón-España (The Treaty of 1868: The Foundations of Japanese-Spanish Friendship)*, p. 49, Available at: <https://www.exteriores.gob.es/es/ServiciosAlCiudadano/PublicacionesOficiales/Tratado%20de%201868.%20%20Los%20cimientos%20de%20la%20amistad%20Jap%C3%B3n-Espa%C3%B1a.pdf> (Accessed 2 February 2022).

¹⁶ Florentino Rodao García (1991) "España Ante Japón en el Siglo XIX. Entre el Temor Estratégico y la Amistad (Spain and Japan in the 19th Century. Between Strategic Fear and Friendship)," *Supein-shi Kenkyū*, 7, pp. 9-10.

the Republic expressed in public occasionally.¹⁷ In any case, in 1937, only one year after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), Japan's militaristic government recognized Franco's regime. As a curiosity, it is believed that four Japanese volunteered to fight the Spanish Civil War on the side of the Republic, including brigadist Jack Shirai, of whom several biographies have been published in Japan.¹⁸

The simultaneity of the Spanish Civil War and the Second Sino-Japanese War brought Franco's nationalists and Japanese militarists to forge an alliance, upon the idea that they were fighting the common enemy of international communism at the opposite ends of Eurasia.¹⁹ After the Spanish Civil War ended in 1939, Franco's regime adopted an official policy of neutrality vis-a-vis the Second World War, although, in fact, links with the Axis powers intensified. In that context, Spain continued to assist Japan's war effort against the US, after the war broke out in the Pacific.²⁰

As the war advanced, however, the possibility of an Axis defeat increased the pressure on Franco. The regime was isolated from the international community and thus, they understood that their survival in this context required a *rapprochement* with the Allies. In February 1945, the murder of several hundred Spaniards in the Japanese-occupied Philippines²¹ provided the regime with a pretext to attempt shifting its support. Official propaganda soon began to portray the Japanese as "Asian barbarians" and, on

¹⁷ Juan Leña Casas (2015) "Las Relaciones de España con China y Japón (Spain's Relations with China and Japan)" in Marta Hernández Ruiz, José María Beneyto and Juan Carlos Pereira Castañares (eds) *Historia de la Política Exterior Española en los Siglos XX y XXI (History of Spanish Foreign Policy in the 20th and 21st Centuries)*, Madrid: Fundación Universitaria San Pablo CEU, p. 481.

¹⁸ Nancy Tsou and Len Tsou (2004) "The Asian Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War: A Report," *Science & Society*, 68(3), p. 344. For more details, see also Yo Kawanari (2013) *Jakku Shirai to Kokusairyodan - Supein Naisen o Tatakatta Nihonjin (Jack Shirai and the International Brigade: Japanese Who Fought in the Spanish Civil War)*, Tokyo: Chūōkōronshinsha.

¹⁹ Florentino Rodao García (1993) *Relaciones Hispano-Japonesas, 1937-1945*, PhD thesis, Madrid: Universidad Complutense, p. 202.

²⁰ According to Rodao García, Spain helped Japanese intelligence, once Japanese espionage networks within the US had been ruined, and assumed the representation of Japanese nationals and interests in countries at war or that did not maintain relations with Japan. Florentino Rodao García (2005) "Franco's Spain and the Japanese empire (1937-45)," *Bulletin of Portuguese - Japanese Studies*, 10-11, p. 247.

²¹ Between 3 February 3 and 3 March 1945, Japanese troops killed at least 100,000 civilians during the Battle of Manila. For a more detailed account, see Werner Gruhl (2007) *Imperial Japan's World War Two: 1931 - 1945*, New York: Routledge, pp. 94-98.

12 April 1945, the regime cut diplomatic relations with Tokyo.²² Invoking the Manila deaths as a *casus belli*, Franco even considered declaring war against Japan,²³ on the assumption that, by doing so, Spain would automatically be considered an ally of the US and the UK. Expectedly, neither Washington nor London showed an interest in such a move.²⁴

By 1952, the Cold War provided the context for the resumption of diplomatic relations. In a bipolar world, both countries became of strategic value to the United States. Since then, relations remained friendly, with no major political or economic disagreements but also without significant common interests until the end of Franco's regime in 1975.

Over the past four decades, two factors have allowed Spain-Japan relations to move toward more stable and meaningful cooperation: Spain's transition to democracy (1975-1978) and its entry into the European Communities (1986).²⁵ This momentum has been most notable since the decade of 2010, due to the coincidence in a short time frame of two important anniversaries. Between 2013 and 2014, the 400th anniversary of the Keichō Embassy was commemorated, with the celebration of the Spain-Japan Dual Year, during which numerous bilateral visits and cultural exchange activities took place. In 2018, the 150th anniversary of the Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation provided the context for the signing of a Strategic Partnership Agreement.

All in all, in spite of the history of shallow relations, over the past four decades –

²² Florentino Rodao García (2003) "La Colonización Filipina y las Relaciones con Asia (Colonization of the Philippines and Relations with Asia)" in Juan Carlos Pereira Castañares (ed.) *La Política Exterior de España (1800-2003). Historia, Condicionantes y Escenarios (Spanish Foreign Policy (1800-2003). History, Constraints and Scenarios)*, Barcelona: Ariel, p. 352.

²³ Florentino Rodao García (2005) "Franco's Spain and the Japanese empire (1937-45)," *Bulletin of Portuguese - Japanese Studies*, 10-11, p. 254.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 254.

²⁵ Florentino Rodao García (2014) "Impulso Insuficiente: Las Relaciones Hispano-Japonesas Dentro del Marco Europeo (Insufficient Impetus: Spanish-Japanese Relations within the European Framework)," *Observatorio de la Economía y la Sociedad del Japón*, 6(21), p. 9. Juan Leña Casas (2015) "Las Relaciones de España con China y Japón (Spain's Relations with China and Japan)" in Marta Hernández Ruiz, José María Beneyto and Juan Carlos Pereira Castañares (eds) *Historia de la Política Exterior Española en los Siglos XX y XXI (History of Spanish Foreign Policy in the 20th and 21st Centuries)*, Madrid: Fundación Universitaria San Pablo CEU, p. 489. Amadeo Jensana Tanehashi (2021) "El Acuerdo de Partenariado Económico UE-Japón. Implicaciones Para España (The EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement. Implications for Spain)," *Documento de Trabajo. Serie Unión Europea y Relaciones Internacionales*, Madrid: CEU Ediciones, p. 25.

but particularly since the 2010s – Japan-Spain cooperation has experienced an unprecedented development, becoming less volatile and more multifaceted and institutionalized than ever.

Political and strategic relations

Political and strategic relations between Japan and Spain have gradually advanced toward an incipient strategic partnership. Today, the two countries recognize each other as like-minded partners that share values and visions regarding the main global challenges.

Spain and Japan regard bilateral visits as effective means for furthering relations, smoothing out problems and identifying new opportunities for cooperation. At the head of state level, there have been three official bilateral visits since 1990. Former Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko visited Spain in 1994.²⁶ In turn, former King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofía visited Japan in 2008²⁷ and the current Spanish monarchs, King Felipe VI and Queen Letizia, did so in 2017.²⁸

The friendship ties between the two royal families have often been highlighted as a contributing factor to the strengthening of relations after Spain's transition to democracy.²⁹ In addition to the aforementioned official visits, there have been numerous trips by members of both royal households, including non-official visits by the monarchs. As Crown Prince, Emperor Naruhito was a frequent visitor to Spain, doing so

²⁶ Màrius Carol (1994) *El Emperador de Japón Destaca el Cambio Producido en España. Akihito Llega Hoy a Barcelona en la Última Etapa de Su Viaje (The Emperor of Japan Highlights Spain's Transformation. Akihito Arrives in Barcelona Today on the Last Stage of His Journey)*, p. 15 Available at: <http://hemeroteca.lavanguardia.com/preview/1994/10/12/pagina-15/34423208/pdf.html> (Accessed 7 February 2022).

²⁷ Mariángel Alcázar (2008) *Los Reyes Viajan a Japón Para Potenciar la Imagen de España (The King and Queen travel to Japan to promote the image of Spain)*, p. 16, Available at: <http://hemeroteca.lavanguardia.com/preview/2008/11/10/pagina-16/75309090/pdf.html> (Accessed 7 February 2022).

²⁸ Spanish Royal Household (2017) *Viaje de Estado a Japón (State Visit to Japan)*, Available at: https://www.casareal.es/ES/Actividades/Paginas/actividades_viajes_detalle.aspx?data=810 (Accessed 2 February 2022).

²⁹ Scholar Leña Casas argues that “the most remarkable occurrence in Spain-Japan relations between 1975 and 1982” was the 1980 visit of King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofía to Tokyo, alongside the minister of foreign affairs. Juan Leña Casas (2015) “Las Relaciones de España con China y Japón (Spain's Relations with China and Japan)” in Marta Hernández Ruiz, José María Beneyto and Juan Carlos Pereira Castañares (eds) *Historia de la Política Exterior Española en los Siglos XX y XXI (History of Spanish Foreign Policy in the 20th and 21st Centuries)*, Madrid: Fundación Universitaria San Pablo CEU, p. 489.

on at least four occasions since 1990: in 1992, to attend the opening ceremony of the Barcelona Olympic Games and “Japan Day” at the Seville Universal Exposition; in 2004, to attend the wedding ceremony of the current monarchs; in 2008, to visit the International Exposition in Zaragoza; and in 2013, to participate in the opening ceremony of the Dual Year commemorations.³⁰ In turn, King Felipe VI and Queen Letizia visited Japan in 2019, to attend Emperor Naruhito’s enthronement ceremony.³¹ Previously, they had traveled to Japan in 2005, as Prince and Princess of Asturias.³²

There have also been numerous bilateral visits by the heads of government. Since 1990, Spanish prime ministers have made six official visits to Japan. In 2019, Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez attended the G20 Summit in Osaka, during which he held talks with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe.³³ Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, accompanied by the minister of foreign affairs, visited Japan in 2013.³⁴ Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero did so in 2010, after having canceled two visits, in 2003 and 2005.³⁵ Prime Minister José María Aznar visited Japan in 1997,³⁶ and held another bilateral meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto the following year,

³⁰ Pablo M. Díez (2019) *La «Pasión Española» de Naruhito, el Nuevo Emperador de Japón (The “Spanish Passion” of Naruhito, the New Emperor of Japan)*, Available at: https://www.abc.es/estilo/gente/abci-pasion-espanola-naruhito-nuevo-emperador-japon-201905120038_noticia.html (Accessed 2 February 2022).

³¹ Spanish Royal Household (2019) *Viaje de Sus Majestades los Reyes a Japón Para Asistir a la Ceremonia de Entronización de Su Majestad el Emperador Naruhito (The King and Queen to Japan to attend the Enthronement Ceremony of His Majesty the Emperor Naruhito)*, Available at: https://casareal.es/EN/Actividades/Paginas/actividades_viajes_detalle.aspx?data=825 (Accessed 3 August 2021).

³² Almudena Martínez-Fornés (2005) *Los Príncipes de Asturias Viajan a Japón Para Visitar la Expo de Aichi (The Prince and Princess of Asturias Travel to Japan to Visit the Aichi Expo)*, Available at: https://www.abc.es/espana/abci-principes-asturias-viajan-japon-para-visitar-expo-aichi-200506030300-202894349620_noticia.html (Accessed 3 August 2021).

³³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019) *Meeting between Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and President of the Government of Spain Pedro Sánchez*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/ep/page6e_000197.html (Accessed 7 July 2021).

³⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain (2021) *Ficha País: Japón (Country File: Japan)*, p. 4, Available at: http://www.exteriores.gob.es/documents/fichaspais/japon_ficha%20pais.pdf (Accessed 7 July 2021).

³⁵ El Mundo (2010) *Zapatero Comienza un Viaje a China y Japón Para Vender la “Marca España” (Zapatero Begins Trip to China and Japan to Promote Spain's Nation Brand)*, Available at: <https://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2010/08/28/espana/1282989745.html> (Accessed 7 July 2021).

³⁶ José Miguel Larraya (1997) *Aznar una Gira por Kazajstán y Japón Para Reforzar la Presencia de España en Asia (Aznar to visit Kazakhstan and Japan to Strengthen Spain's Presence in Asia)*, Available at: https://elpais.com/diario/1997/10/26/espana/877816815_850215.html (Accessed 7 July 2021).

during the 1998 London Asia-Europe Summit.³⁷ Finally, Prime Minister Felipe González visited Japan on two occasions, 1991 and 1996.³⁸

Conversely, before Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's visit in Spain for the NATO Summit in Madrid in 2022, Japanese prime ministers had traveled to Spain only three times since 1990. Prime Minister Abe did so twice during his second tenure, although his first visit, in 2014, had an unofficial character. On that occasion, Abe visited the city of Santiago de Compostela and walked the last stretch of the Way of Saint James,³⁹ as part of the Dual Year commemorations. His second, in 2018, was an official visit that took place in the context of the 150th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations.⁴⁰ During that visit, prime ministers Abe and Rajoy signed a declaration elevating the bilateral relationship to a strategic partnership.⁴¹ Abe's 2018 trip to Spain was the first official visit by a Japanese prime minister since Junichirō Koizumi's in 2003.⁴² Before Koizumi, the last Japanese prime minister to visit Spain was Yasuhiro Nakasone, in 1987.⁴³

Recent years have also seen a development of parliamentary diplomacy between

³⁷ Lourdes Gómez (1998) *Aznar Aspira a Crear en Asia una "Nueva Frontera" de la Política Española, Que Participará en las Ayudas a la Región (Aznar Seeks to Create a "New Frontier" for Spanish Policy in Asia, Which Will Participate in Aid to the Region)*, Available at: https://elpais.com/diario/1998/04/05/economia/891727202_850215.html (Accessed 7 July 2021).

³⁸ La Vanguardia (2013, 10 June) *El Príncipe Naruhito de Japón Inicia su Sexta Visita a España (Prince Naruhito of Japan Begins Sixth Visit to Spain)*, Available at: <https://www.lavanguardia.com/internacional/20220422/8215517/putin-quiere-ocupar-sur-ucrania-transnistria.html> (Accessed 7 July 2021).

³⁹ The Way of Saint James (*Camino de Santiago*) is a network of pilgrimage routes leading to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, Northeastern Spain. Some of the routes are listed under UNESCO's World Heritage List.

⁴⁰ Spanish Royal Household (2018) *Audiencia al Sr. Shinzo Abe, Primer Ministro de Japón (Audience with Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan)*, Available at: https://www.casareal.es/GL/Actividades/Paginas/actividades_actividades_detalle.aspx?data=13734 (Accessed 3 August 2021).

⁴¹ Government of Spain (2013) *Rajoy: "Hemos Dado un Paso de Gigante en las Relaciones Bilaterales" de España y Japón (We Have Taken a Giant Step Forward in the Bilateral Relations Between Spain and Japan)*, Available at: <https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/presidente/actividades/paginas/2013/031013RuedaPrensa.aspx> (Accessed 2 February 2022).

⁴² María Roldán (2018) *Abe, el Invicto Primer Ministro Nipón que Abre en España una Gira Europea (Abe, Japan's Undefeated Prime Minister Opens European Tour in Spain)*, Available at: <https://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20181016/452388444632/abe-el-invicto-primer-ministro-nipon-que-abre-en-espana-una-gira-europea.html> (Accessed 2 February 2022).

⁴³ Peru Egurbide (2003) *El Primer Ministro de Japón Debate hoy con Aznar la Crisis Internacional (Prime Minister of Japan to Discuss International Crisis with Aznar Today)*, Available at: https://elpais.com/diario/2003/04/28/espana/1051480816_850215.html (Accessed 2 February 2022).

Japan and Spain. During the commemoration of the Dual Year in 2013-2014, the speakers of the Spanish Congress and Senate visited Japan and several members of both Japanese Diet Houses visited Spain.⁴⁴ Furthermore, in 2014, several members of the Japanese Diet founded the Parliamentary League for Spain-Japan Exchanges (*Nihon-Spain Yūkō Giin Renmei*).⁴⁵ No similar group exists in the Spanish Cortes. Instead, as international friendship groups were abolished in the context of the 2008 crisis, inter-parliamentary cooperation with Japan is organized on an *ad hoc* basis, through the respective embassies and the foreign affairs committees of the two parliaments.⁴⁶

Toward a more strategic partnership

At the turn of the 21st century, the main imbalance in Spain's foreign policy continued to be its weak presence in the Asia-Pacific,⁴⁷ a legacy of its disengagement with the region after the defeat in the Philippines, in the late 19th century. Since then, successive governments have taken steps to revert the situation⁴⁸ and to improve relations with partners throughout the region.

Developments since the 2010s reflect the mutual interest in fostering bilateral ties. In October 2013, prime ministers Abe and Rajoy signed a joint declaration to form

⁴⁴ Embassy of Japan in Spain (2014) *Año Dual España-Japón. 400 Años de Relaciones (Spain-Japan Dual Year. 400 Years of Relations)*, p. 6, Available at: https://www.es.emb-japan.go.jp/download/Japan_Spain_400_Fotos_InformeFinal_ESP.pdf (Accessed 1 September 2021).

⁴⁵ Ibidem, p. 6.

⁴⁶ Personal communication with the International Affairs Office of the Cortes Generales (1 March 2022).

⁴⁷ Mario Esteban (2014) *Asia-Pacífico: El Mayor Desequilibrio de la Política Exterior Española (Asia-Pacific: The Greatest Imbalance in Spanish Foreign Policy)*, pp. 1, 8, Available at: <https://media.realinstitutoelcano.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/eee10-2014-esteban-asia-pacifico-mayor-desequilibrio-politica-exterior-espanola.pdf> (Accessed 2 February 2022).

⁴⁸ Juan Leña Casas (2015) "Las Relaciones de España con China y Japón (Spain's Relations with China and Japan)" in Marta Hernández Ruiz, José María Beneyto and Juan Carlos Pereira Castañares (eds) *Historia de la Política Exterior Española en los Siglos XX y XXI (History of Spanish Foreign Policy in the 20th and 21st Centuries)*, Madrid: Fundación Universitaria San Pablo CEU, pp. 489-494. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain (2018) *Una Visión Estratégica para España en Asia 2018-2022 (A Strategic Vision for Spain in Asia 2018-2022)*, pp. 11-13, Available at: https://www.exteriores.gob.es/es/ServiciosAlCiudadano/PublicacionesOficiales/2018_02 ESTRATEGIA%20ASIA.pdf (Accessed 28 September 2021). Gracia Abad (2011) "La Política Exterior Española Hacia Asia-Pacífico: de Inexistente a Insuficiente (Spain's Foreign Policy Towards Asia-Pacific: From Nonexistent to Insufficient)", *UNISCI Discussion Papers*, (54), pp. 153-155.

a “Partnership for Peace, Growth and Innovation.”⁴⁹ The declaration listed common positions and outlined a cooperation agenda along four main axes – political and security relations, economic cooperation, science and technology, and cultural exchanges and civil society – to be developed over a five-year period (2013-2018). Among others, the two countries agreed to hold an annual dialogue between the respective foreign affairs ministries; to increase the frequency of working-level bilateral meetings; to consult regularly on their respective relations with Latin America and the Caribbean; and to devise some concerted actions regarding Syria, Mali, North Korea, and Iran.

Five years later, the two governments decided to elevate the bilateral relationship to a “strategic partnership,” invoking shared values and the progress achieved under the previous agreement. The partnership agreement was signed on 16 October 2018, during Prime Minister Abe’s official visit to Spain.⁵⁰ The Strategic Partnership Agreement aimed to provide a permanent framework to address common challenges and shared interests in various fields, political and diplomatic cooperation, security, economy and innovation, and people-to-people exchanges,⁵¹ in addition to institutionalizing a regular agenda of bilateral and multilateral dialogues and consultations.

Diplomatic presence

As of 2021, Japan’s diplomatic presence in Spain consists of an Embassy and consular office in Madrid, a Consulate-General in Barcelona, a Consulate in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and an honorary consulate in Seville.⁵² Conversely, Spain’s diplomatic representation in Japan consists of an Embassy, a consular office in Tokyo, and five

⁴⁹ Government of Spain (2013) *Partnership for Peace, Growth, and Innovation - Joint Statement by the Prime Minister of Japan and the President of the Government of Spain*, Available at: <https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/lang/en/documents/c24b-956d-finaldeclarationingls.pdf> (Accessed 2 July 2021).

⁵⁰ Government of Spain (2018) *España y Japón Refuerzan su Condición de Socios Estratégicos (Spain and Japan Strengthen their Status as Strategic Partners)*, Available at: <https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/presidente/actividades/Paginas/2018/161018-sanchezabe.aspx> (Accessed 7 August 2021).

⁵¹ Government of Japan (2018) *Joint Statement on Strategic Partnership between the Government of Japan and the Government of the Kingdom of Spain*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000409435.pdf> (Accessed 2 July 2021).

⁵² Japan’s Embassy in Spain (n.d.) *Home Page*, Available at: <https://www.es.emb-japan.go.jp/> (Accessed 2 July 2021).

honorary consulates in Fukuoka, Nagoya, Osaka, Takamatsu, and Sapporo.⁵³ However, it should be noted that, according to Spanish law, honorary consuls must not be employed by the public administration and their functions are carried out without the right to receive financial compensation. Therefore, honorary consulates perform only limited functions, such as facilitating forms or helping in situations of emergency.⁵⁴

During the Second Republic (1931-1939), Spain had a second consular office in Kobe that was closed in the wake of the Spanish Civil War and never reopened. With this, Spain's diplomatic representation in Japan is not only smaller than that of other large EU economies but also than what it had been in the past. Some authors have seen this as an expression of Spain's historical lack of interest in Japan.⁵⁵

Security and military relations

Until the 2010s, Spain-Japan cooperation in the military and security fields took place mainly through multilateral frameworks, such as the EU and NATO.⁵⁶ An illustrative example can be found in the anti-piracy operations in the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Aden, where Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Forces and the Spanish Navy – taking part in the EU's Atalanta operation – have conducted numerous joint bilateral⁵⁷ and

⁵³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain (n.d.) *Consular Jurisdiction*, Available at: <https://www.exteriores.gob.es/Embajadas/tokio/en/Embajada/Paginas/Consulados.aspx> (Accessed 7 July 2022)

⁵⁴ According to Royal Decree 1390/2007, approving the Regulations on Honorary Consular Agents of Spain abroad.

⁵⁵ Florentino Rodao García (2014) “Impulso Insuficiente: Las Relaciones Hispano-Japonesas Dentro del Marco Europeo (Insufficient Impetus: Spanish-Japanese Relations within the European Framework),” *Observatorio de la Economía y la Sociedad del Japón*, 6(21), p. 3.

⁵⁶ Mario Esteban and Elisa Lledó (2018) “Japan and Spain: a Strategic Partnership in the Making” in: Luis Simón and Ulrich Speck (eds) *Natural partners? Europe, Japan and security in the Indo-Pacific*. Madrid: Royal Elcano Institute, p. 29.

⁵⁷ EUNAVFOR (2016) *Spanish and Japanese Maritime Patrol Aircraft Meet in the Skies off the Coast of Somalia*, Available at: <https://eunavfor.eu/spanish-and-japanese-maritime-patrol-aircraft-meet-in-the-skies-off-the-coast-of-somalia/> (Accessed 14 August 2021). EUNAVFOR (2018) *Ongoing Cooperation with Japan: EU Navfor*, Available at: <https://eunavfor.eu/ongoing-cooperation-with-japan-eu-navfor/> (Accessed 14 August 2021).

multilateral⁵⁸ exercises in recent years.

Since then, Spain's growing interest in the Asia-Pacific and Japan's bid to position itself as a more proactive contributor to international peace have brought the two countries to seek a closer cooperation in this field. Bilateral defense and security cooperation is grounded in Japan and Spain's shared democratic and liberal nature, maritime orientations, strategic alliances with the US and similar geostrategic positions in their respective regions.⁵⁹ The most notable development in bilateral defense and security cooperation are the Memorandum of Understanding on Defense Cooperation and Exchanges, signed by the two ministries of defense on 3 November 2014,⁶⁰ and the Strategic Partnership Agreement of 2018.⁶¹ The 2014 memorandum, signed following a visit to Spain of Japan's vice-minister of defense, included a clause to establish a regular dialogue on defense and security matters. Since 2013, there have been two other high-level defense-related bilateral visits: the Spanish ministers of defense have officially visited Japan in November 2014⁶² and in January 2018.⁶³ Most recently, in 2021, Spain's minister of defense and Japan's ambassador exchanged views on growing

⁵⁸ EUNAVFOR (2020) *EU Naval Force Somalia Operation ATALANTA and the Japanese Navy Have Been Developing Further Their Cooperation in the Indian Ocean in Order to Strengthen Maritime Security in the Region*, Available at: <https://eunavfor.eu/eu-naval-force-somalia-operation-atalanta-and-the-japanese-navy-have-been-developing-further-their-cooperation-in-the-indian-ocean-in-order-to-strengthen-maritime-security-in-the-region/> (Accessed 14 August 2021). EUNAVFOR (2021) *EU Naval Force Somalia Operation ATALANTA Conducts First Trilateral Exercise with Japanese and Djiboutian Forces*, Available at: <https://eunavfor.eu/eu-naval-force-somalia-operation-atalanta-conducts-first-trilateral-exercise-with-the-japanese-and-djiboutian-forces/> (Accessed 14 August 2021).

⁵⁹ Mario Esteban and Elisa Lledó (2018) "Japan and Spain: a Strategic Partnership in the Making" in: Luis Simón and Ulrich Speck (eds) *Natural partners? Europe, Japan and security in the Indo-Pacific*. Madrid: Royal Elcano Institute, pp. 30-31.

⁶⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain (2021) *Ficha País: Japón (Country File: Japan)*, p. 8, Available at: http://www.exteriores.gob.es/documents/fichaspais/japon_ficha%20pais.pdf (Accessed 7 July 2021).

⁶¹ Government of Spain (2018) *España y Japón Refuerzan su Condición de Socios Estratégicos (Spain and Japan Strengthen their Status as Strategic Partners)*, Available at: <https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/presidente/actividades/Paginas/2018/161018-sanchezabe.aspx> (Accessed 7 August 2021).

⁶² Embassy of Spain in Japan (2014) *Pedro Morenés Visits Japan to Strengthen Defence Relations*, Available at: http://www.exteriores.gob.es/Embajadas/TOKIO/en/Noticias/Pages/Articulos/20141104_NOT1.aspx (Accessed 2 September 2021).

⁶³ Ministry of Defense of Spain (2018) *Cospedal Inicia un Viaje Oficial a Japón y Corea del Sur (Cospedal Begins Official Visit to Japan and South Korea)*, Available at: <https://www.defensa.gob.es/gabinete/notasPrensa/2018/01/DGC-180114-previo-viaje-japon-corea.html> (Accessed 4 August 2021). Ministry of Defense of Spain (2018) *España y Japón Acuerdan una Relación Bilateral "Más Fuerte e Intensa" en Defensa (Spain and Japan Agree on a "Stronger and More Intense" Bilateral Defense Relationship)*, Available at: <https://www.defensa.gob.es/gabinete/notasPrensa/2018/01/DGC-180115-visita-japon.html> (Accessed 4 August 2021).

bilateral security and defense ties.⁶⁴

The 2018 Strategic Partnership Agreement contained explicit commitments to strengthening defense and security cooperation, the rules-based international order, peaceful settlement of disputes and freedom of navigation and overflight. It is worth noting that the agreement explicitly highlighted Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy, which Spain supports. It also included a pledge to cooperate on issues such as non-proliferation.

According to expert analyses, closer cooperation on defense and security provides learning opportunities for both defense forces.⁶⁵ Furthermore, expanding security cooperation with Japan presents new opportunities for Spain's defense industry.

Despite being the seventh largest exporter of defense equipment,⁶⁶ Spain's defense-related exports to Japan are unremarkable. In 2020, Spain reported four defense-related export licenses to Japan, with a value of 4.12 million euros.⁶⁷ The value of dual-use equipment exports in 2020 was 1.7 million euros.⁶⁸

Recent developments include the deployment, in early 2022, of a Japanese permanent defense attaché to its Embassy in Madrid. Spain's Ministry of Defense intends to eventually reciprocate this move, however, for the time being, the defense attaché accredited to Japan remains resident at the Spanish Embassy in Seoul.⁶⁹

In sum, defense and security cooperation between Japan and Spain is still at an

⁶⁴ Ministry of Defense of Spain (2021) *Robles Recibe en la Sede del Ministerio al Embajador de Japón, Hiramatsu Kenji (Robles Receives Ambassador of Japan, Hiramatsu Kenji, at the Ministry's Headquarters)*, Available at: <https://www.defensa.gob.es/gabinete/notasPrensa/2021/04/DGC-210426-japones.html> (Accessed 28 August 2021).

⁶⁵ Mario Esteban and Elisa Lledó (2018) "Japan and Spain: a Strategic Partnership in the Making" in: Luis Simón and Ulrich Speck (eds) *Natural partners? Europe, Japan and security in the Indo-Pacific*. Madrid: Royal Elcano Institute, p. 31.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

⁶⁷ Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism of Spain (2021) *Estadísticas Españolas de Exportación de Material de Defensa, de Otro Material y de Productos y Tecnologías de Doble Uso, Año 2020 (Spanish Export Statistics of Defense Material, Other Material and Dual-use Products and Technologies, Year 2020)*, p. 56, Available at: https://comercio.gob.es/ImportacionExportacion/Informes_Estadisticas/Material%20Defansa%20Doble%20Uso/2020/informe_estadisticas_2020.pdf (Accessed 2 February 2022).

⁶⁸ *Ibidem.*, p. 92.

⁶⁹ Personal communication with an official from the Ministry of Defense at the Spanish Embassy in Seoul, March 2022.

early stage of development. Nevertheless, there are evident signs that the two sides have become aware of their potential for collaboration in this field and are taking steps to harness it.

Economic and commercial relations

Since the 1970s, economic and trade relations have been the backbone of Spain-Japan cooperation.⁷⁰ Until the early 2010s, Japan had a continued trade surplus with Spain, due to the following reasons: first, while Japan exports mainly manufactured products with high added value, until the mid-1990s, Spain's exports to Japan consisted mostly of products such as raw materials and fishery products. Second, due to the limited public support that Spanish exporting companies received until the 1980s, they often found it difficult to access a market as complex as Japan.⁷¹ Furthermore, many Japanese consumers tended to associate Spanish products with poor quality. A study published in 2004 revealed that 44% of Japanese consumers had a poor image of Spanish products, while only 41% had a positive impression.⁷²

Since the 2010s, however, three factors have contributed to this historical trade imbalance beginning to shift. First, the diversification of Spanish exports to Japan to include products with a higher added value. Second, an increase in Spanish energy exports, particularly liquefied natural gas, after Japan closed its nuclear power plants in the aftermath of the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi accident. Third, a steep decline in Spanish imports from Japan, after the 2008 crisis, which recovered gradually thereafter.⁷³

A comparison between the trade statistics reported by Japan and Spain reveals a

⁷⁰ Amadeo Jansana Tanehashi (2021) "El Acuerdo de Partenariado Económico UE-Japón. Implicaciones Para España (The EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement. Implications for Spain)," *Documento de Trabajo. Serie Unión Europea y Relaciones Internacionales*, Madrid: CEU Ediciones, p. 25.

⁷¹ Juan Leña Casas (2015) "Las Relaciones de España con China y Japón (Spain's Relations with China and Japan)" in Marta Hernández Ruiz, José María Beneyto and Juan Carlos Pereira Castañares (eds) *Historia de la Política Exterior Española en los Siglos XX y XXI (History of Spanish Foreign Policy in the 20th and 21st Centuries)*, Madrid: Fundación Universitaria San Pablo CEU, p. 493.

⁷² Javier Noya (2004) *La Imagen de España en Japón (Spain's Image in Japan)*, Madrid: Instituto Cervantes, p. 234.

⁷³ Amadeo Jansana Tanehashi (2021) "El Acuerdo de Partenariado Económico UE-Japón. Implicaciones Para España (The EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement. Implications for Spain)," *Documento de Trabajo. Serie Unión Europea y Relaciones Internacionales*, Madrid: CEU Ediciones, p. 25.

discrepancy⁷⁴ regarding the magnitude of the trade imbalance, particularly during the 2009-2019 period. According to Spanish reports, the value of Spanish merchandise exports to Japan more than doubled in this period, rising from 1.213 billion euros in 2009, to an all-time high of 2.725 billion euros in 2019.⁷⁵ Spanish imports from Japan increased from 3.173 billion euros in 2009, to 4.359 billion euros in 2019, albeit these are lower figures than those of the 2003-2008 period.⁷⁶ Accordingly, Spain's export-to-import ratio between 2009 and 2019 increased from 28.5% to 62.6%, although the trade balance continued to be favorable to Japan.⁷⁷ Statistics by the Japanese Ministry of Finance also reveal a gradual increase of Japanese imports from Spain, between 2009 and 2019. However, Japanese figures show a trade deficit for Japan between 2011 and 2017, peaking in 2014, at 1.79 billion dollars.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Such discrepancies are a common incidence, due to a range of factors, including differences between the sale/export value of a good and the purchase/import value, which, in the case of Japan, may usually include the value of transport and insurance; divergences caused by the exchange rate applied by the statistical authorities at destination; or divergences arising from the presence of intermediate countries, particularly in the EU, where goods produced in one country are exported from another. This sometimes leads to discrepancies in the criteria for allocating the country of origin, despite the existence of rules aimed at allocating the origin of goods and avoiding these differences in computation. Personal communication with the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Digital Transformation of Spain (4 March 2022).

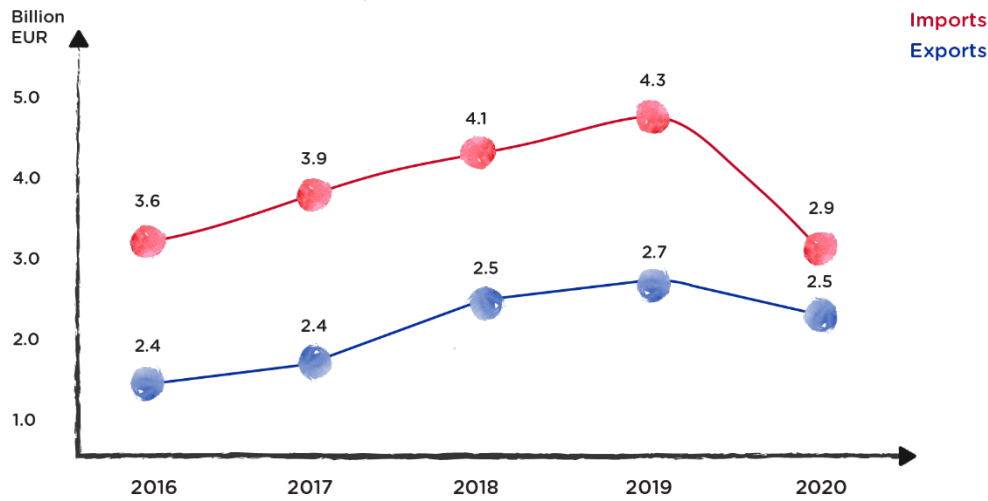
⁷⁵ ICEX (2021) *Japón. Relaciones bilaterales (Japan. Bilateral Relations)*, Available at: <https://www.icex.es/icex/es/navegacion-principal/todos-nuestros-servicios/informacion-de-mercados/paises/navegacion-principal/el-pais/relaciones-bilaterales/index.html?idPais=JP#5> (Accessed 7 September 2021). See also: Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism (2021) *DataComex – Estadísticas de comercio exterior de bienes de España y la UE (DataComex - Statistics of Foreign Trade in Goods of Spain and the EU)*, Available at: <https://datacomex.comercio.es/> (Accessed 7 September 2021).

⁷⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain (2021) *Ficha País: Japón (Country File: Japan)*, p. 5, Available at: http://www.exteriores.gob.es/documents/fichaspais/japon_ficha%20pais.pdf (Accessed 7 July 2021). See also: See also: Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism (2021) *DataComex – Estadísticas de comercio exterior de bienes de España y la UE (DataComex - Statistics of Foreign Trade in Goods of Spain and the EU)*, Available at: <https://datacomex.comercio.es/> (Accessed 7 September 2021).

⁷⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain (2021) *Ficha País: Japón (Country File: Japan)*, p. 5, Available at: http://www.exteriores.gob.es/documents/fichaspais/japon_ficha%20pais.pdf (Accessed 7 July 2021).

⁷⁸ UN Comtrade (2021) *International Trade Statistics Database*, Available at: <https://comtrade.un.org/data/> (Accessed 7 July 2021). For figures in JPY, see Ministry of Finance of Japan (2021) *Trade Statistics of Japan, Values by Country*, Available at: <https://www.customs.go.jp/toukei/srch/indexe.htm?M=23&P=0> (Accessed 7 July 2021).

Spain's trade with Japan in billion euros



Source: DataComex, Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism

According to the Spanish Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism, the number of companies regularly exporting goods to Japan in 2019 was 9,244, increasing from 9,084 in 2018 and 8,993 in 2017.⁷⁹ Spanish exports to Japan registered a year-on-year growth of 7.7%.⁸⁰ The main exports were meats and derived products (18.7%), automobiles and tractors (13.1%), pharmaceutical products (12.6%), oils (6%), minerals (5.6%), drinks excluding juices (4.1%), clothing (4%) and organic chemicals (3.9%).⁸¹ The largest growth in exports over the previous year were fuels and mineral oils (4,153%), aluminum and aluminum products (128%) and minerals (25.4%).⁸² The largest decreases were registered in iron and steel castings (-32%), fishing products (-20.8%) and pharmaceuticals (-8.7%).⁸³

Conversely, Spanish imports from Japan registered a 5.4% year-on-year increase in 2019.⁸⁴ The main imported products were automobiles and tractors (52.4%),

⁷⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain (2021) *Ficha País: Japón (Country File: Japan)*, p. 5, Available at: http://www.exteriores.gob.es/documents/fichaspais/japon_ficha%20pais.pdf (Accessed 7 July 2021).

⁸⁰ Ibidem, p. 5.

⁸¹ Ibidem, p. 5.

⁸² Ibidem, p. 5.

⁸³ Ibidem, p. 5.

⁸⁴ Ibidem, p. 5.

machines and mechanical devices (18%), electrical equipment and materials (9.4%), plus optical and measuring devices (4.9%).⁸⁵ Products with the largest year-on-year increase were iron and steel castings (52.3%), fuels and mineral oils (33.2%), automobiles and components (11.4%) and organic chemicals (8.8%).⁸⁶ The largest decrease was registered on other chemical products (-14.6%), rubber and rubber products (-10.6%) and optical and measuring devices (-7.6%).⁸⁷

Bilateral trade in goods in 2019 amounted to a total of 7.9 billion dollars, according to figures reported by Spain to UN Comtrade.⁸⁸ Japan was Spain's 16th largest customer, with a share of 1.35% of exports.⁸⁹ Conversely, Spain was Japan's 28th largest provider, with a share of 0.5% of the country's total imports.⁹⁰ With its exports representing 4.5% of the Union's total, Spain was Japan's 6th largest provider within the EU.⁹¹

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the overall trade volume reduced in 2020. Spanish exports to Japan fell by 7.7%, while exports from the EU-27 to Japan fell by 13.8%.⁹² The largest increase in Spanish exports were in fish and crustaceans (29.4%), machines (28.7%) and automotive components (14.07%).⁹³ The largest decrease was registered in meat products (-9.52%), a sector that represented nearly 18% of the total

⁸⁵ Ibidem, p. 5.

⁸⁶ Ibidem, p. 5.

⁸⁷ Ibidem, p. 5.

⁸⁸ The figure is 6.8 billion dollars according to data reported by Japan. See UN Comtrade (2021) *International Trade Statistics Database*, Available at: <https://comtrade.un.org/data/> (Accessed 7 July 2021).

⁸⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain (2021) *Ficha País: Japón (Country File: Japan)*, p. 5, Available at: http://www.exteriores.gob.es/documents/fichaspais/japon_ficha%20pais.pdf (Accessed 7 July 2021).

⁹⁰ ICEX (2021) *Japón. Relaciones bilaterales* (Japan. Bilateral Relations), Available at: <https://www.icex.es/icex/es/navegacion-principal/todos-nuestros-servicios/informacion-de-mercados/paises/navegacion-principal/el-pais/relaciones-bilaterales/index.html?idPais=JP#5> (Accessed 7 September 2021).

⁹¹ Ibidem.

⁹² Ibidem.

⁹³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain (2021) *Ficha País: Japón (Country File: Japan)*, p. 5, Available at: http://www.exteriores.gob.es/documents/fichaspais/japon_ficha%20pais.pdf (Accessed 7 July 2021).

exports to Japan in 2020.⁹⁴ Conversely, Spanish imports registered a year-on-year decrease of 47.9% (EU-27 imports fell by 17.3%), due to the sharp decline in automobiles and automotive components (-46.16%), which represented 54.23% of overall Spanish imports from Japan.⁹⁵ Despite this, Spanish sources highlight that the positive effects of the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement can already be noticed in some commercial exchanges, such as the increase in imports of vehicles and beef from Japan and wine and pork exported from Spain to Japan.⁹⁶

Trade in services has been growing since the early 2010s. According to the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it reached an all-time high in 2019, both in terms of exports from Spain to Japan (1.3 billion euros) and imports from Japan to Spain (780 million euros).⁹⁷ In the case of trade in services, the balance has been favorable to Spain since at least 2013, according to data reported to Eurostat.⁹⁸

According to information provided by the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic caused a 44% drop in Spain's export of services to Japan in 2020, and a 51% drop in imports.⁹⁹ Japan is the thirteenth largest investor in Spain in terms of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) stock.¹⁰⁰ According to data by the Spanish Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism, the stock of Japanese

⁹⁴ Ibidem, p. 5.

⁹⁵ Ibidem, p. 5.

⁹⁶ ICEX (2020) *Aumenta la Importación de Vacuno y Porcino de Japón Con Sus Socios del TPP (Imports of Beef and Pork from Japan with TPP Partners Increases)*, Available at: <https://www.icex.es/icex/es/navegacion-principal/todos-nuestros-servicios/informacion-de-mercados/paises/navegacion-principal/noticias/aumenta-importacion-japon-tpp-new2020845039.html?idPais=JP> (Accessed 4 September 2021).

⁹⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain (2021) *Ficha País: Japón (Country File: Japan)*, p. 5, Available at: http://www.exteriores.gob.es/documents/fichaspais/japon_ficha%20pais.pdf (Accessed 7 July 2021).

⁹⁸ Eurostat (2021) *Total Services, Detailed Geographical Breakdown by EU Member States (since 2010) (BPM6)*, Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/international-trade-in-services/data/database> (Accessed 8 July 2021).

⁹⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain (2021) *Ficha País: Japón (Country File: Japan)*, p. 5, Available at: http://www.exteriores.gob.es/documents/fichaspais/japon_ficha%20pais.pdf (Accessed 7 July 2021).

¹⁰⁰ ICEX (2021) *España y Japón Impulsarán las Inversiones Mutuas con la Firma de un Nuevo Convenio de Doble Imposición (Spain and Japan to Boost Mutual Investments by Signing New Double Taxation Agreement)*, Available at: <https://www.investinspain.org/es/noticias/2021/convenio-espana-japon> (Accessed 7 February 2022).

investments in Spain has more than doubled between 2015 (4.20 billion euros)¹⁰¹ and 2018 (10.26 billion euros).¹⁰² Japanese data corroborate this positive trend and indicate its continuity until 2020.¹⁰³

In terms of investment flows, Japanese gross investment in Spain increased between 2012 (76.6 million euros)¹⁰⁴ and 2016 (509.1 million euros),¹⁰⁵ according to the Spanish Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism. Following a decline to 162 million euros in 2017,¹⁰⁶ the historical peak was reached in 2018, with 3.97 billion euros.¹⁰⁷ A correction was registered in 2019, with gross investment flows falling back to 194 million euros,¹⁰⁸ although that year there were new Japanese companies investing in Spain for the first time.¹⁰⁹ In 2020, the value of Japanese investment increased again to

¹⁰¹ ICEX (2021) *Japón. Relaciones bilaterales (Japan. Bilateral Relations)*, Available at: <https://www.icex.es/icex/es/navegacion-principal/todos-nuestros-servicios/informacion-de-mercados/paises/navegacion-principal/el-pais/relaciones-bilaterales/index.html?idPais=JP#5> (Accessed 7 September 2021).

¹⁰² Ibidem.

¹⁰³ JETRO (2021) *Japan's Outward and Inward Foreign Direct Investment*, Available at: <https://www.jetro.go.jp/en/reports/statistics.html> (Accessed 17 September 2021).

¹⁰⁴ Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism of Spain (2022) *Datos de Inversión Extranjera en España, Flujos de Inversión Bruta en Miles de Euros, Operaciones no ETVE (Data on Foreign Investments in Spain, Gross Investment Flows in Thousands of Euros, Non-ETVE Transactions)*, Available at: <http://datainve.comercio.es/> (Accessed 2 February 2022).

¹⁰⁵ ICEX (2021) *Japón. Relaciones bilaterales (Japan. Bilateral Relations)*, Available at: <https://www.icex.es/icex/es/navegacion-principal/todos-nuestros-servicios/informacion-de-mercados/paises/navegacion-principal/el-pais/relaciones-bilaterales/index.html?idPais=JP#5> (Accessed 7 September 2021).

¹⁰⁶ Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism of Spain (2022) *Datos de Inversión Extranjera en España, Flujos de Inversión Bruta en Miles de Euros, Operaciones no ETVE (Data on Foreign Investments in Spain, Gross Investment Flows in Thousands of Euros, Non-ETVE Transactions)*, Available at: <http://datainve.comercio.es/> (Accessed 2 February 2022).

¹⁰⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain (2021) *Ficha País: Japón (Country File: Japan)*, p. 6, Available at: http://www.exteriores.gob.es/documents/fichaspais/japon_ficha%20pais.pdf (Accessed 7 July 2021).

729 million euros.¹¹⁰ Japanese data corroborate these trends.¹¹¹

Spanish investment in Japan, on the other hand, has been considerably lower. In terms of stock, the value of Spanish investment in Japan reached an all-time high in 2017, with 272.8 million euros.¹¹² In 2018, it was 232 million euros.¹¹³ In terms of flows, according to data provided by JETRO, the net value of Spanish investments in Japan amounted to 98.8 million euros in 2017.¹¹⁴ In 2018 and 2019, disinvestment exceeded investment.¹¹⁵ In 2020, Spain invested a net total of 31 million dollars in Japan, contrasting sharply with the net 1.21 billion dollars that Japan invested in Spain, according to JETRO.¹¹⁶

In sum, while figures show a positive trend in bilateral investments, there is room for further improvement, considering the size of the two economies. To draw some comparisons, according to data provided by JETRO,¹¹⁷ the stock of Japanese investment in the Netherlands represented 7.76% of Japanese FDI worldwide and 48% of Japanese investment in the EU, in 2020.¹¹⁸ Similarly, Japanese investment in Belgium represented 1.4% of Japanese FDI worldwide and 9.28% in the EU.¹¹⁹ By

¹¹⁰ Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism of Spain (2022) *Datos de Inversión Extranjera en España, Flujos de Inversión Bruta en Miles de Euros, Operaciones no ETVE (Data on Foreign Investments in Spain, Gross Investment Flows in Thousands of Euros, Non-ETVE Transactions)*, Available at: <http://datainvex.comercio.es/> (Accessed 2 February 2022).

¹¹¹ JETRO (2021) *Japan's Outward and Inward Foreign Direct Investment*, Available at: <https://www.jetro.go.jp/en/reports/statistics.html> (Accessed 17 September 2021).

¹¹² Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism of Spain (2022) *Datos de Inversión Extranjera en España, Flujos de Inversión Bruta en Miles de Euros, Operaciones no ETVE (Data on Foreign Investments in Spain, Gross Investment Flows in Thousands of Euros, Non-ETVE Transactions)*, Available at: <http://datainvex.comercio.es/> (Accessed 2 February 2022).

¹¹³ Ibidem.

¹¹⁴ JETRO (2021) *Japan's Outward and Inward Foreign Direct Investment*, Available at: <https://www.jetro.go.jp/en/reports/statistics.html> (Accessed 17 September 2021).

¹¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹¹⁹ Ibidem.

contrast, in the case of Spain, these values were 0.45% and 2.84%, respectively.¹²⁰ Likewise, Spanish investment in Japan represents less than 0.18% of the overall FDI that Japan receives and 0.73% of that from the EU countries.¹²¹ To put things in perspective, Spain is today the world's 13th largest foreign investor in terms of stock.¹²²

Japanese industrial presence and investment in Spain started in the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, it began to grow quickly after Spain joined the EC in 1986.¹²³ Initially, Japanese investment focused mainly on three sectors: consumer electronics and computing, chemicals, and the automotive industry. Over time, however, sectors such as consultancy, retail trade or architecture have gained prominence.¹²⁴ Spanish companies, by contrast, have been much slower in seeking a presence on the Japanese market.¹²⁵ Despite the low levels of Spanish investment in Japan, today, at least 51 Spanish companies have a permanent presence in Japan,¹²⁶ mostly in the sectors of fashion, luxury, vehicles, food and beverages, renewable energy and banking.¹²⁷ Overall, bilateral investment generates more than 40,000 jobs, 35,328 in Spain,

¹²⁰ Ibidem.

¹²¹ Ibidem.

¹²² ICEX (2021) *España y Japón Impulsarán las Inversiones Mutuas con la Firma de un Nuevo Convenio de Doble Imposición (Spain and Japan to Boost Mutual Investments by Signing New Double Taxation Agreement)*, Available at: <https://www.investinspain.org/es/noticias/2021/convenio-espana-japon> (Accessed 7 February 2022).

¹²³ Alfonso M. Jiménez Murcia (2019) “Las Relaciones Comerciales y de Inversión Entre España y Japón: Presente y Perspectivas,” *Boletín económico de ICE*, 3115, p. 14.

¹²⁴ Amadeo Jansana Tanehashi (2021) “El Acuerdo de Partenariado Económico UE-Japón. Implicaciones Para España (The EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement. Implications for Spain),” *Documento de Trabajo. Serie Unión Europea y Relaciones Internacionales*, Madrid: CEU Ediciones, p. 25.

¹²⁵ Florentino Rodao García (2014) “Impulso Insuficiente: Las Relaciones Hispano-Japonesas Dentro del Marco Europeo (Insufficient Impetus: Spanish-Japanese Relations within the European Framework),” *Observatorio de la Economía y la Sociedad del Japón*, 6(21), p. 4.

¹²⁶ Empresa Exterior (2017) *Hay 243 Empresas Japonesas en España y 51 Firmas Españolas en Japón (There Are 243 Japanese Companies in Spain and 51 Spanish Companies in Japan)*, Available at: <https://empresae exterior.com/art/61898/-hay-243-empresas-japonesas-en-espana-y-51-firmas-espanolas-en-japon> (Accessed 3 February 2022).

¹²⁷ Amadeo Jansana Tanehashi (2021) “El Acuerdo de Partenariado Económico UE-Japón. Implicaciones Para España (The EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement. Implications for Spain),” *Documento de Trabajo. Serie Unión Europea y Relaciones Internacionales*, Madrid: CEU Ediciones, p. 25.

according to 2021 data, and 5,146 in Japan.¹²⁸

With 267 of the 517 Japanese companies in Spain (51.6%) located there,¹²⁹ Catalonia is a region of key importance for Spain-Japan economic relations. Companies with a long-term presence in Catalonia include Yamaha, Denso, Ricoh, KAO chemicals, Panasonic, Otsuka, which have been established in the region for more than 50 years. Until its closure in December 2021, Nissan had operated a factory in Barcelona for over 40 years.¹³⁰ Between 2016 and 2020, Japan invested 613 million euros in Catalonia, representing 2.7% of the total inward FDI to the region. In 2020, Japan became the third largest investor in Catalonia, with 334 million euros (11.3%).¹³¹ Catalonia is thus today one of the European regions with a higher concentration of Japanese industrial companies. Furthermore, around one third of all Spanish exports to Japan originate in Catalonia.¹³² Hence, it is not surprising that the Catalan Government chose Tokyo as the location of its first commercial promotion office overseas, in 1988.¹³³

Over the past few years, both Japan and Spain have taken further steps to promote bilateral trade and investment. For instance, in 2013, JETRO and the Spanish Institute for Foreign Trade (ICEX) signed a memorandum of understanding on logistics

¹²⁸ ICEX (2021) *Ficha país: Japón (Country File: Japan)*, Available at: <https://www.icex.es/icex/es/navegacion-principal/todos-nuestros-servicios/informacion-de-mercados/paises/navegacion-principal/el-mercado/estudios-informes/ficha-pais-japon-doc2016645940.html?idPais=JP> (Accessed 4 September 2021).

¹²⁹ Government of Catalonia (2021) *Japan Action Plan 2009-2019 Balance*, Available at: https://exteriors.gencat.cat/web/.content/saeue/afers_exteriors_cooperacio/04_arees_actuacio/pla-catalunya-japo/diptic-pla-japo-en.pdf (Accessed 2 February 2022).

¹³⁰ Nissan, the Catalan and Spanish Governments and trade unions have launched a call for alternative investors to ensure the continuity of 3,000 direct and up to 20,000 indirect jobs, after Nissan's closure. Antonio Martos Villar (2021) *Nissan Barcelona: Un Año del Anuncio de Cierre y Sin Alternativa Convincente (Nissan Barcelona: One Year after the Closure Announcement and No Convincing Alternative)*, Available at: https://cincodias.elpais.com/cincodias/2021/06/11/companias/1623431874_470068.html (Accessed 2 February 2022).

¹³¹ Government of Catalonia (2021) *La Inversió Estrangera a Catalunya l'Any 2020 (Foreign Investment in Catalonia in 2020)*, p. 19, Available at: https://www.accio.gencat.cat/web/.content/bancconeixement/documents/informes_internacionalitzacio/La-inversio-estrangera-Catalunya-2020-CAT.pdf (Accessed 22 August 2021).

¹³² IDESCAT (2022) *Exportacions. Per Àrees Geogràfiques i Països (Exports. By Geographical Areas and Countries)*, Available at: <https://www.idescat.cat/indicadors/?id=anuals&n=10455> (Accessed 2 February 2022).

¹³³ Government of Catalonia (2020) *Japan Action Plan 2020-2023*, p. 24, Available at: https://exteriors.gencat.cat/web/.content/saeue/afers_exteriors_cooperacio/04_arees_actuacio/pla-catalunya-japo/pla-japo-2020-2023-en.pdf (Accessed 2 February 2022).

support in third countries.¹³⁴ Similarly, in 2017, the Spanish Ministry of Economy and the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) agreed to share information on economic policies and to promote cooperation in sectors such as industry, energy and industrial technology.¹³⁵ In 2018, the two governments signed a new double taxation agreement, which entered into force in May 2021. However, further steps are needed as, for example, to date, there is no bilateral agreement for the promotion and reciprocal protection of investments.¹³⁶

Both Japan and Spain have established bureaus of investment promotion in the other country. JETRO has had a permanent office in Madrid since 1964.¹³⁷ Likewise, ICEX¹³⁸ and the Catalan Agency for Business Competitiveness (ACCIÓ)¹³⁹ have permanent offices in Tokyo. In addition, several organizations in both countries work to

¹³⁴ ICEX (2021) *Japón. Relaciones bilaterales* (Japan. Bilateral Relations), Available at: <https://www.icex.es/icex/es/navegacion-principal/todos-nuestros-servicios/informacion-de-mercados/paises/navegacion-principal/el-pais/relaciones-bilaterales/index.html?idPais=JP#5> (Accessed 7 September 2021).

¹³⁵ Amadeo Jansana Tanehashi (2021) “El Acuerdo de Partenariado Económico UE-Japón. Implicaciones Para España (The EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement. Implications for Spain),” *Documento de Trabajo. Serie Unión Europea y Relaciones Internacionales*, Madrid: CEU Ediciones, p. 26.

¹³⁶ ICEX (2021) *Ficha país: Japón (Country File: Japan)*, Available at: <https://www.icex.es/icex/es/navegacion-principal/todos-nuestros-servicios/informacion-de-mercados/paises/navegacion-principal/el-mercado/estudios-informes/ficha-pais-japon-doc2016645940.html?idPais=JP> (Accessed 4 September 2021).

¹³⁷ JETRO Spain (n.d.) *Home Page*, Available at: <https://www.jetro.go.jp/spain/> (Accessed 4 September 2021).

¹³⁸ ICEX (n.d.) *Home Page*, Available at: <http://japon.oficinascomerciales.es/> (Accessed 4 September 2021).

¹³⁹ Gencat (n.d.) *International Office of Catalonia in Tokyo*, Available at: <http://www.accio.gencat.cat/en/serveis/oficines-exterioris/toquio> (Accessed 4 September 2021).

promote economic cooperation.¹⁴⁰

Cultural and people-to-people relations and perceptions of Japan

In a talk given in an academic event in July 2021, a Japanese diplomat to Spain offered a personal account of his experience living as a foreign student in a large provincial capital, during the 1980s. At that time – he described – the Spaniards he met knew almost nothing about his country, and the knowledge that they had was mostly based on stereotypes: the Japanese “made things smaller, did karate, worked long hours and ate raw fish.”¹⁴¹ Conversely, Spain was much better known in Japan: many universities offered courses of Spanish language and – as the diplomat recounted – many Japanese had a romanticized image of the country.

Today, this is no longer true. Spaniards are much more familiar with Japan, its brands, gastronomy and many aspects of its culture. Stereotypes undoubtedly continue to play a role,¹⁴² but in this case, they tend to be mostly positive. For instance, in a 2012 opinion poll commissioned by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 68% of

¹⁴⁰ The Spanish Chamber of Commerce in Tokyo, established in 2017 and recognized by both the Japanese METI and the Spanish Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Tourism, see Spanish Chamber of Commerce in Japan (n.d.) *Home Page*, Available at: <https://spanishchamber.or.jp> (Accessed 4 September 2021). The Spain-Japan Chamber of Commerce, an association under Spanish law, established in Barcelona in 1954 and today based in Madrid, see Cámara de Comercio Hispano-Japonesa (n.d.) *Home Page*, Available at: <https://camarajaponesa.com/> (Accessed 4 September 2021). The Bilateral Business Committee, a mixed organization that holds regular meetings with the support of the Spanish Chamber of Commerce, the Secretary of State of Commerce and the Spanish Confederation of Business Organization, see Camara de Comercio de España (n.d.) *Home Page*, Available at: <https://www.camara.es/comite-bilateral-hispano-japones> (Accessed 4 September 2021). The Shacho Kai, a business association comprising CEOs and presidents of companies based in Spain that have at least 10% of Japanese capital, see Shacho Kai (n.d.) *Home Page*, Available at: <https://shachokai.es> (Accessed 4 September 2021). The representation of the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Japan in Spain (Spain Nissho). And finally, the Japan-Spain Business Circle (CEJE), an independent organization involving Japanese companies established in Spain and Spanish companies with interests in Japan, see Círculo Empresarial Japón-España (n.d.) *Home Page*, Available at: <https://circulojpes.com/> (Accessed 4 September 2021).

¹⁴¹ Asia and the Pacific were virtually unknown to the majority of the Spanish population. See Xulio Ríos (2004) “El Plan Asia-Pacífico: ¿los últimos de Filipinas? (The Asia-Pacific Plan: Our last men in the Philippines?),” *Revista Papeles*, (85).

¹⁴² Stereotypes also play a key role in the image of Spain in Japan. A study conducted in 2017 revealed that many Japanese first associated Spain with the image of a bull and that over half of the respondents perceived Spain as an “idle” or “lazy” country. Elcano Royal Institute (2017) *Barómetro de la Imagen de España, 7ª Oleada (Opinion Survey on the Image of Spain, 7th Edition)*, Available at: http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_es/encuesta?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/observatoriomarcaespana/estudios/resultados/barometro-imagen-espana-7 (Accessed 28 August 2021).

respondents claimed to have an interest in Japan.¹⁴³ Culture and art, followed by science and technology, were the main fields of interest. When asked about the impression of Japan and the Japanese, some of the most frequent words mentioned included “creative,” “leadership,” “diligent” or “honest.” Likewise, most respondents had either good or very good impressions of Japanese culture, products and brands. Regarding the perceived importance of the country for Spain, Japan ranked second in Asia after China.¹⁴⁴ Other studies – targeting experts, not the general population – revealed that negative impressions of Japan are mostly related to phenomena such as suicide, stress, whaling or overpopulation.¹⁴⁵

In 2021, 6,186 Japanese were living in Spain, according to the National Statistics Institute,¹⁴⁶ while the Japanese Ministry of Justice reported 3,232 Spanish residents in Japan.¹⁴⁷ Both figures reveal a remarkable increase, compared to the 2,704 Japanese registered in Spain and the 1,338 Spaniards in Japan, in the year 2000.¹⁴⁸

Today, a range of public diplomacy institutions work to bring Japan and Spain together. In the case of Spain, two entities are worthy of mention. First, the Spain-Japan Council-Foundation,¹⁴⁹ which is the main public diplomacy institution focusing on

¹⁴³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2012) *Opinion Poll: Spanish Image of Japan (Outline of Results)*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2012/8/0801_03.html (Accessed 28 August 2021).

¹⁴⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁴⁵ María Cuiñas (2016) *Japón en España: El Sol Que no Termina de Nacer (Japan in Spain: The Sun That Is Not Quite Rising)*, Available at: https://ecfr.eu/madrid/article/japon_en_espana_el_sol_que_no_termina_de_nacer/ (Accessed 2 September 2021).

¹⁴⁶ Instituto Nacional de Estadística (2022) *Población Extranjera por Nacionalidad, Provincias, Sexo y Año (Foreign Population by Nationality, Provinces, Sex and Year)*, Available at: <https://www.ine.es/up/FkikO2rVi3> (Accessed 2 February 2022).

¹⁴⁷ Statistics of Japan (2022) *Registered Foreign Residents as of June 2021*, Available at: <http://www.e-stat.go.jp/SG1/estat/List.do?lid=000001280441> (Accessed 2 February 2022).

¹⁴⁸ Statistics of Japan (2022) *Registered Foreign Residents in 2000*, Available at: https://www.e-stat.go.jp/stat-search/files?page=1&layout=datalist&toukei=00250012&tstat=000001018034&cycle=7&year=20000&month=0&tclass1=000001060436&stat_infid=000032142035&result_back=1&tclass2val=0 (Accessed 2 February 2022).

¹⁴⁹ Fundación Consejo España-Japón (n.d.) *Home Page*, Available at: <http://www.spainjapanfoundation.com/> (Accessed 2 February 2022).

Japan.¹⁵⁰ It was established in 2001, as a public-private partnership, to act as the permanent secretariat of the Spain-Japan Forum, a dialogue platform started in 1997, to provide networking opportunities for professionals, businesses and institutions in both countries. Second, Casa Asia, a public diplomacy consortium, established 2001 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Catalan Government and the municipalities of Barcelona and Madrid,¹⁵¹ to promote knowledge about the Asia-Pacific in Spain.

Universities and research institutions also play a key role in fostering mutual knowledge and cooperation. In 2011, the two governments signed an agreement on Scientific and Technological Cooperation, that enables official institutions in both countries to reach specific agreements for scientific cooperation in key areas, such as nuclear fusion, renewable energy, smart cities, nanomedicine or nanotechnology.¹⁵² Besides, numerous Spanish universities offer programs that allow students to specialize in Japan. As of 2021, five universities offer multidisciplinary undergraduate studies in East Asian studies. In addition, at least eight officially recognized master's programs offer specialization in different fields related to Japan.¹⁵³ The majority of these universities have reached cooperation agreements with universities in Japan, allowing their students to participate in exchange programs. Bilateral ties on this field continue to grow, as illustrated by the fact that, in early 2022, the Autonomous University of Barcelona became the first Spanish university to host a Japan Foundation Sakura Network Office to promote Japanese studies.¹⁵⁴

The growing interest in Japan among Spaniards and vice versa is also reflected in the growing number of tourists that visit each other's country. In 2019, 136,700

¹⁵⁰ There are currently eight Council-Foundations that aim to promote Spain's relations with key partners around the world. They receive direct support by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and are regarded as an important public diplomacy instrument.

¹⁵¹ Casa Asia (n.d.) *Home Page*, Available at: <https://www.casaasia.eu/> (Accessed 2 February 2022).

¹⁵² CDTI (n.d) *Programa Bilateral Hispano-Japonés de Cooperación Tecnológica (Bilateral Spanish-Japanese Technological Cooperation Program)*, Available at: <https://www.cdti.es/index.asp?MP=101&MS=842&MN=2&TR=C&IDR=636> (Accessed 6 September 2021).

¹⁵³ According to information published by the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities.

¹⁵⁴ UAB (2022) *La UAB Esdevé la Primera Universitat d'Espanya Amb Una Oficina Sakura Network d'Estudis Japonesos (The UAB Becomes the First University in Spain With a Sakura Network Japanese Studies Office)*, Available at: <https://www.uab.cat/web/sala-de-premsa/detall-noticia/la-uab-esdeve-la-primera-universitat-d-espanya-amb-una-oficina-sakura-network-d-estudis-japonesos-1345829508832.html?detid=1345856000123> (Accessed 1 April 2022).

Spanish tourists visited Japan, a 15% increase since 2018.¹⁵⁵ Likewise, the number of Japanese tourists in Spain has not ceased to grow. In 2019, 68,609 Japanese visitors traveled to Spain, representing a 25.9% year-on-year increase.¹⁵⁶ For Spain, Japan is the second tourism market in Asia, while Spain is Japan's fifth source of tourists from within the EU.¹⁵⁷ For those interested in longer stays, a working holiday scheme for youth between 18 and 30 years old was launched in 2017. The program accepts 500 applicants a year per country.¹⁵⁸

Owing to this increased demand for travel between the two countries, Iberia Airlines started to operate three weekly flights between Madrid and Tokyo-Narita in 2016, the only direct flight between the two countries that exists to date. Iberia had previously operated this route for 12 years, ceasing to do so in 1998.¹⁵⁹ The frequency was increased to five weekly flights in each direction, in 2018, and in early 2020, shortly before COVID-19 travel restrictions began to be implemented, Iberia announced a 70% increase in the route's capacity.¹⁶⁰ At the time of writing, flights remain suspended due to the restrictions in place.

For most Spaniards, culture is the main point of contact with Japan. Japanese cuisine, anime, video games or manga have gained notorious popularity in recent years. The Japan Foundation, with a permanent office in Madrid since 2010, organizes

¹⁵⁵ ICEX (2021) *Japón. Relaciones bilaterales (Japan. Bilateral Relations)*, Available at: <https://www.icex.es/icex/es/navegacion-principal/todos-nuestros-servicios/informacion-de-mercados/paises/navegacion-principal/el-pais/relaciones-bilaterales/index.html?idPais=JP#5> (Accessed 7 September 2021).

¹⁵⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁵⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain (2021) *Ficha País: Japón (Country File: Japan)*, p. 6, Available at: http://www.exteriores.gob.es/documents/fichaspais/japon_ficha%20pais.pdf (Accessed 7 July 2021). Spain-Japan Council-Foundation (2020) *Nuevo Récord de Turistas Españoles en Japón (New Record Number of Spanish Tourists in Japan)*, Available at: <https://spainjapanfoundation.com/noticia/nuevo-record-de-turistas-espanoles-en-japon/> (Accessed 20 August 2021).

¹⁵⁸ Embassy of Japan in Spain (2020) *Working Holiday en Japón*, Available at: https://www.es.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_es/00_000378.html (Accessed 20 August 2021).

¹⁵⁹ EFE (2016) *Iberia Aterriza en Tokio 18 Años Después (18 Years Later Iberia Lands in Tokyo)*, Available at: <https://www.efe.com/efe/espana/efeempresas/iberia-atteriza-en-tokio-18-anos-despues/50000908-3070637> (Accessed 10 September 2021).

¹⁶⁰ Europa Press (2020) *Iberia Incrementará Este Verano los Vuelos a Tokio, Sede de los Juegos Olímpicos 2020 (Iberia to Increase Flights to Tokyo, Host City for the 2020 Olympic Games this Summer)*, Available at: <https://www.europapress.es/turismo/transportes/aerolineas/noticia-iberia-incrementara-verano-vuelos-tokio-sede-juegos-olimpicos-2020-20200218173607.html> (Accessed 20 September 2021).

activities to bring Japanese culture and language closer to the Spanish public.¹⁶¹ Furthermore, Barcelona regularly hosts festivals about Japanese traditional culture and pop-culture/manga. Finally, there are at least twelve sister city and sister region cooperation projects between Japan and Spain.¹⁶²

In recent years, there has also been a proliferation of schools and universities offering Japanese language programs.¹⁶³ The growing interest is reflected in the number of students that take the Japanese Language Proficiency Test in Spain. In 2010, 821 people took the exam¹⁶⁴. Back then, the test was offered only once a year in Barcelona and Madrid.¹⁶⁵ By 2019, it could be taken twice a year, in five different locations, and the number of test-takers had increased to 1,412.¹⁶⁶

Yet, one of the main obstacles preventing Spaniards from having a deeper understanding of Japan is superficial media coverage. Undoubtedly, one of the main reasons is the scarcity of Spanish journalists based in Japan. Several Spanish media outlets had Japan-based correspondents in the past. However, today, most journalists covering the Asia-Pacific region are based in China. Notable exceptions are the news agency EFE¹⁶⁷ and Antena 3, which have a permanent presence in Tokyo, although neither the public broadcaster RTVE¹⁶⁸ nor most of the private or regional broadcasters

¹⁶¹ Other initiatives that promote cultural exchanges include the Spain-Japan Cultural Center of the University of Salamanca, the Barcelona *Suiyokai*, Casa Nippon Barcelona or the Hasekura Cultural Association in Coria del Río, to name a few.

¹⁶² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019) *Japan-Spain Relations (Basic Data)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/spain/data.html> (Accessed 28 August 2021).

¹⁶³ Embassy of Japan in Spain (2016) *Estudiar japonés en España*, Available at: https://www.es.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_es/00_000021.html (Accessed 28 August 2021).

¹⁶⁴ Japan Foundation & JEES (2021) *Past Test Data*, Available at: <https://www.jlpt.jp/e/statistics/archive.html> (Accessed 3 September 2021).

¹⁶⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶⁷ EFE (2021) *Delegaciones Internacionales (International Delegations)*, Available at: <https://www.agenciaefe.es/delegaciones-internacionales/> (Accessed 10 September 2021).

¹⁶⁸ RTVE (2021) *Corresponsalias (Correspondents)*, Available at: <https://www.rtve.es/rtve/corresponsales/> (Accessed 8 August 2021).

or the main newspapers¹⁶⁹ have Japan-based correspondents.¹⁷⁰ Consequently, information about Japan that reaches the Spanish public tends to come from indirect sources or is translated from foreign media or agencies. Hence, media tend to discuss Japan only sporadically, mainly when the news demands it, and it often emphasizes aspects that are consistent with the stereotypical image of the country, such as the resilience or discipline of the Japanese people, as seen in the aftermath of the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake or with the celebration of the Tokyo Olympic Games, in 2021. While there is a positive side to this, it is also true that these images are often overly simplistic and do not contribute to the in-depth understanding of the country.

Among Spanish experts on Japan across different fields, there is certainly an interest in the bilateral relationship. According to a study conducted in 2016, they tend to agree that the image of Japan in Spain is positive. However, a main source of concern is the complex relationship between Japan and some of its neighbors, above all China and South Korea, according to that study.¹⁷¹

Lastly, political elites also have a positive image of Japan. There is a growing awareness that Japan and Spain share values, views, and face many similar challenges.¹⁷² The Spanish government fully supports Japan's growing role in peace and security issues and has an interest in further strengthening the bilateral partnership.¹⁷³ When it comes to the relations with Japan, Spanish political parties do not have diverging policies. Because of that, Spain-Japan relations are mostly kept outside of the

¹⁶⁹ La Vanguardia (2020) *Los Corresponsales de La Vanguardia Cuentan Cómo Vive el Mundo la Crisis del Coronavirus (La Vanguardia Correspondents Tell How the World is Experiencing the Coronavirus Crisis)*, Available at: <https://www.lavanguardia.com/vida/20200322/4822334838/coronavirus-corresponsales-la-vanguardia.html> (Accessed 8 August 2021).

¹⁷⁰ Casa Asia (2018) *Seminario de Corresponsales Españoles en Asia (Seminar of Spanish Correspondents in Asia)*, Available at: <https://www.casaasia.es/actividad/asiamedia-seminario-de-corresponsales-espanoles-en-asia/> (Accessed 7 September 2021).

¹⁷¹ María Cuiñas (2016) *Japón en España: El Sol que no Termina de Nacer (Japan in Spain: The Sun That Is Not Quite Rising)*, Available at: https://ecfr.eu/madrid/article/japon_en_espana_el_sol_que_no_termina_de_nacer/ (Accessed 2 September 2021).

¹⁷² Speech by the minister of foreign affairs at the roundtable "Europe and Spain Facing the New Strategic Environment in the Indo-Pacific," Barcelona, 18 March 2022. See Casa Asia (2022) *Roundtable: «Europe and Spain Facing the New Strategic Environment in the Indo-Pacific»*, Available at: <https://www.casaasia.eu/actividad/roundtable-europe-and-spain-facing-the-new-strategic-environment-in-the-indo-pacific/> (Accessed 20 March 2022).

¹⁷³ Ibidem.

mainstream political debate.¹⁷⁴

Conclusions and recommendations

Spain's historical lack of interest in the Asia-Pacific and its delay in recognizing the economic and geopolitical importance of the region have resulted in structural deficits in Spain-Japan relations. Despite notorious advances over the past four decades, relations between Spain and Japan remain fundamentally less developed than those between Japan and many other EU member states.

In recent years, as this article has reviewed, political and strategic relations have become increasingly institutionalized. Today, Japan and Spain recognize each other as like-minded partners and articulate their cooperation on the basis of shared values, common interests and challenges. This has allowed the development of closer relations in other areas, such as security. In this regard, however, we must not lose sight of the fact that the priorities of both countries remain focused on their respective geographic neighborhoods. It is therefore necessary to further develop bilateral ties, taking into account these possible limitations and the fact that cooperation within multilateral frameworks, such as the EU or NATO, remains essential. Measures such as the stationing of a permanent defense attaché at the Spanish Embassy in Japan will be key to further develop this area of cooperation.

Economic and trade relations have also developed significantly over the last four decades, although still well below their potential. For Spain, it is essential to continue working on the promotion of its image in Japan, highlighting the quality and competitiveness of its companies and products.

Finally, enabling a deeper mutual understanding remains an important pending task to fully overcome the negative legacy of the past. Although much progress has been made and today there are many possibilities to learn about each other's social, political and economic realities, culture or languages, stereotypes still influence – perhaps too much – the way Spaniards and Japanese see each other. On the one hand, a greater presence of correspondents from the leading media would be an important step forward

¹⁷⁴ María Cuiñas (2016) *Japón en España: El Sol que no Termina de Nacer (Japan in Spain: The Sun That Is Not Quite Rising)*, Available at: https://ecfr.eu/madrid/article/japon_en_espana_el_sol_que_no_termina_de_nacer/ (Accessed 2 September 2021).

in this regard. On the other hand, it is essential for Spain to work on promoting a more current image to the Japanese, to replace old clichés.

In conclusion, cooperation between Spain and Japan has intensified in all areas and important steps have been taken to advance in its consolidation. The path toward closer and more strategic cooperation seems to be underway and moving in the right direction, although challenges remain and further work will be needed to harness its full potential.

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Sweden-Japan relations: From economic partners to geopolitical allies?

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Overview

Sweden has a relationship with Japan similar to many other European countries: little engagement before the Meiji Restoration (1868), followed by an intense focus on trade and the establishment of Swedish businesses in Japan, before the Second World War. Japan's remarkable postwar rise heralded renewed economic engagement, which, in later years, has been followed by a strong soft power appeal, emanating from the country's cultural exports. The last 15-20 years have seen increased attention in Sweden to Japan's potential geopolitical role, a development that has gone hand in hand with a sharp decrease in how favorable China is viewed in Sweden. During this time, political cabinet-level exchanges have increased, but cooperation in the defense sphere is still largely limited to defense industry exchange, reflecting the trade-oriented roots of the relationship. These roots are also evident in the amount of large Swedish companies present in Japan, some of which have been in the country for a long time. Sweden holds a trade surplus with Japan, but Japanese investments in Sweden have increased sharply over the past 10 years, partly due to Sweden's growing IT sector.

Cultural relations between the two countries are vibrant, with great Japanese interest in Sweden as an interior design hub and "work-life balance" model, tied to interest in Sweden's welfare state. Particularly among young Swedes, there is a great attraction to Japan's cultural industry, including anime, manga, video games, and Japanese music. Every year, many tourists visit the other country, with Swedish tourists counting among the very largest national groups of tourists in Japan from the European

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Union, adjusted for population. The Japanese language is generally the most popular East Asian language among students at Stockholm University, experiencing a challenge, however, from the rising popularity of the Korean language. There is plenty of social science research on Japan emanating from Sweden, possibly a sign that Swedish academic researchers successfully nurture undergraduate students' interest in Japan, to motivate them to pursue an academic career.

History of relations

The history of diplomatic relations between Sweden and Japan dates back to 1868, having celebrated 150 years in 2018.¹ Exchanges between the two countries were of low intensity before the establishment of diplomatic relations, and a relevant account of that history primarily revolves around how the two countries viewed each other. Of particular interest to this chapter is how Japan was seen in Sweden. In this regard, there is a certain level of continuity in both Swedish and European perceptions of Japan since the first Europeans arrived in the country, from Portugal, in 1543. Between this year and the expulsion of all Westerners, bar the Dutch, from Japan in 1640, there were few European visitors from the non-seafaring nations of the time. Thus, the image of Japan in Europe and particularly in Sweden was shaped by the few accounts and books that did become available, in an environment characterized by a knowledge vacuum. This situation was exacerbated after 1640, when Dutch traders in Dejima were the only source of first-hand knowledge about Japan in Europe.²

A defining factor in how Japan came to be seen in Sweden was the travel report from a 16-month stint in Japan, between 1775-1776, by Swedish naturalist Carl Peter Thunberg.³ The report contained information on everything from flora and fauna, to history and society and stood out as a rather positive account of Japan, at a time when Enlightenment Europeans tended to look down on the country as backwards. In

¹ Sveriges ambassad, Tokyo, Japan (2017) *Om oss (About Us)*, Available at: <https://www.swedenabroad.se/sv/utlandsmyndigheter/japan-tokyo/om-oss/> (Accessed 7 July 2021).

² Bert Edström (2000) "Japan in Europe and Sweden," *European Review*, 8(4), p. 513.

³ Carl Peter Thunberg (1788-93) *Resa uti Europa, Africa, Asia, förrättad åren 1770-1779 (Travels in Europe, Africa, Asia, done in the years 1770-1779)*, Upsala: Edman.

studying Swedish geography textbooks from the 18th and 19th centuries, Bert Edström finds Thunberg's old accounts of Japan appearing virtually unchanged.⁴ The report functioned as the authoritative source on knowledge of Japan much longer in Sweden than in larger European countries like England, France and Italy.

The lasting power of Thunberg in Sweden resulted from the very small number of books and newspaper articles published on Japan in the country, and the non-existence, post-Thunberg, of Swedish first-hand accounts of Japan. Sweden was no longer a European great power, as it had been until the early 18th century, further limiting engagement with Japan. This lack of power and will to project power also led Sweden to avoid sending warships to Japan, unlike many European countries in the waning days of the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603-1868).⁵ This perhaps illustrates Bert Edström's remark that while Sweden-Japan relations are generally sound, this is partly due to the fact that they are not and have never been as deep as those between other European countries and Japan; when relations are shallow, there is also less room for disagreement.⁶

After Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War, in Sweden, as in the rest of Europe, interest in Japan as a military power rose. Particularly Swedish royalists and nationalists saw the militarily successful Japan as a model for Sweden,⁷ which had, up to that point, seen Japan through trade and economic lenses. In the end, however, Japan's military conquests were not enough to boost the domestic nationalists' call for a militarily engaged Sweden, which remained neutral in the subsequent great power bloodshed of the early 20th century.⁸

That diplomatic relations were established in 1868 was, of course, no coincidence. After United States Navy Commodore Matthew Perry contributed to the end to the Tokugawa Shogunate's policy of national isolation through the Convention of

⁴ Bert Edström (2000) "Japan in Europe and Sweden," *European Review*, 8(4), pp. 516-517.

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 517-518.

⁶ Bert Edström (1996) "Japan and Sweden: Two Countries Far Apart" in James Darby (ed.) *Japan and the European Periphery*, London: Palgrave MacMillan, p. 201.

⁷ Bert Edström (2000) "Japan in Europe and Sweden," *European Review*, 8(4), pp. 517-518.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 518.

Kanagawa, in 1854, a slew of Western countries signed similar treaties and established relations with Japan. In Sweden's case, it was not until 1906 that a physical diplomatic mission was established in Tokyo, headed by the naval officer G.O. Wallenberg.⁹ Before this, Sweden's affairs with Japan had been handled by the Dutch mission to the country.¹⁰ Japan's first minister to Sweden was stationed in Stockholm in 1905, before which the Japanese envoy to Russia had handled Japan's affairs with Sweden.¹¹ In the 1930s, local Swedes in Tokyo donated a combined 400,000 Swedish kronor (around 160 times the value of a typical annual income for manufacturing workers in Sweden, in the early 1930s)¹² to the Swedish government, which bought a large swath of land in Roppongi, Tokyo, where the Swedish mission was relocated.¹³ Because of a sale in the late 1980s, the embassy grounds are no longer as large as they used to be, but the embassy continues to play an important role as a point of contact for Swedes who live in Japan and Japanese who are interested in Sweden. The grounds have gone through tough times even after the 1980s sale, as Swedish government agencies in the early 2010s could not agree between themselves on rental conditions.¹⁴

In 1957, the two diplomatic missions in Stockholm and Tokyo were upgraded to

⁹ Dag Klingstedt (2019) *Gadelius – ett Svenskt Handelshus i Japan (Gadelius – a Swedish Trading House in Japan)*, Available at: <https://www.foretagskallan.se/foretagskallan-nyheter/lektionsmaterial/gadelius-ett-svenskt-handelshus-i-japan/> (Accessed 10 August 2021).

¹⁰ Sveriges statskalender (2020) *Kungl. Maj:ts Beskickningar till Främmande Makter (His Majesty's Diplomatic Missions to Foreign Powers)*, Available at: <http://runeberg.org/statskal/1905/0125.html> (Accessed 19 August 2021).

¹¹ Japanska ambassaden i Sverige (2019) *Japan-Sverige Relationer (Japan-Sweden Relations)*, Available at: https://www.se.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_sv/japan_sverige.html (Accessed 8 December 2021).

¹² Erik Bengtsson and Svante Prado (2018) "The Rise of the Middle Class: The Income Gap between Salaried Employees in Sweden, 1830-1935," *Lund Papers in Economic History*, no. 186, p. 10

¹³ Gunilla Lindberg-Wada (2002) *Stipendiestiftelsen för Studier av Japanskt Samhällsliv 1992-2002 (The Scholarship Foundation for the Study of Japanese Society 1992-2002)*, p. 3, Available at: <https://www.japanstiftelsen.se/wp-content/uploads/Japanstiftelsen-1992-2002.pdf> (Accessed 19 August 2021).

¹⁴ Bo Dankis, Edvard Fleetwood and Mats Hellström (2012) *DN Debatt 'Rädda Ambassaden i Tokyo' (Save the Embassy in Tokyo)*, Available at: <https://www.dn.se/debatt/radda-ambassaden-i-tokyo/> (Accessed 23 August 2021).

embassy status.¹⁵ Nobuhiko Yoshitake has described the image of Sweden in the early postwar years in Japan as one of a peaceful and neutral country, which Japan ought to emulate.¹⁶ This image is visible, for example, in Socialist Party lawmaker Kei Hoashi's 1949 remarks that as a nation having suffered from nuclear bombardment, Japan should reject military power and follow a path like "Sweden and Switzerland."¹⁷ The early Swedish image of Japan was likewise affected by the atomic bombing but went through a transformation as Japan gained economic clout. Likely owing partly to Japan's low profile in geopolitics and Sweden's policy of neutrality during the Cold War, bilateral relations in the postwar period were focused on trade and cultural exchange, much like in the prewar period. In this vein, Sweden and Japan have held regular economic consultations in Stockholm and Tokyo since the 1970s. These offer an opportunity for broad exchange on topics of mutual interest, as per the Japanese embassy in Stockholm.¹⁸ During this time, as interest in Japan's economic role grew and Japan looked with great interest at Sweden's welfare state, exchanges of official visits, for example the state visit of the King of Sweden Carl XVI Gustaf in 1980, became more common.¹⁹ Since the end of the Cold War, connections between the two countries have increased further, with, for example, first ever prime ministerial visits, as detailed in the next section.

¹⁵ Japanska ambassaden i Sverige (2019) *Japan-Sverige Relationer (Japan-Sweden Relations)*, Available at: https://www.se.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_sv/japan_sverige.html (Accessed 8 December 2021).

¹⁶ 吉武信彦 (2000) 日本・北欧政治関係の史的展開 ―日本からみた北欧―. 『地域政策研究』 (高崎経済大学地域政策学会) 第3巻 第1 . p. 29, Available at: <http://www1.tcue.ac.jp/home1/c-gakkai/kikanshi/ronbun3-1/yoshitake.pdf> (Accessed 8 December 2021). (Yoshitake Nobuhiko (2000) "A Political Dialogue Between Japan and the Nordic Countries – Japanese Views" *Regional Policy Studies* (Takasaki City University of Economics Regional Policy Studies Association) 3(1), p. 29).

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 29.

¹⁸ Japanska ambassaden i Sverige (2019) *Japan-Sverige Relationer (Japan-Sweden Relations)*, Available at: https://www.se.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_sv/japan_sverige.html (Accessed 8 December 2021).

¹⁹ Gabriel Jonsson (2018) "Nya Böcker om Korea och Japan (New Books about Korea and Japan)," *Orientaliska Studier*, 154, p. 113, reviewing Bert Edström (2018) *Sverige-Japan: 150 år av vänskap och samarbete (Sweden-Japan: 150 Years of Friendship and Cooperation)*, Sweden-Japan Foundation: Stockholm.

Political relations – Moderate but growing

Sweden and Japan enjoy stable and friendly political relations. Aside from the two embassies in Stockholm and Tokyo, Sweden has honorary consulates in Kobe and Fukuoka,²⁰ and Japan has two honorary consuls in Gothenburg and Malmö.²¹ Relations between the parliaments are structured around two friendship associations. The Sweden-Japan Parliamentary Association was founded in 1992²² and, as of December 2021, has 55 members.²³ The corresponding organization in the National Diet, the Japan-Sweden Parliamentary Friendship Association, has 37 members as of October 2021, around half the number of members of the corresponding associations promoting relations with France, Germany, and the UK.²⁴

Since the early 2000s until today, the two countries have seen a moderate level of bilateral visits from heads of state and government. Two Japanese prime ministers have visited Sweden: Junichirō Koizumi, as the first sitting prime minister, in 2006, and Shinzō Abe, in 2017. Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson visited Japan in 2004 and his successor, Fredrik Reinfeldt, in 2008.²⁵ Testament to the developing security

²⁰ Sveriges ambassad, Tokyo, Japan (2021) *Tokyo, Japan*, Available at: <https://www.swedenabroad.se/sv/utlandsmyndigheter/japan-tokyo/> (Accessed 22 August 2021).

²¹ Embassy of Japan in Sweden (2021) 名誉総領事館. 在スウェーデン日本大使館 (*Honorary Consulates – Embassy of Japan in Sweden*), Available at: <https://www.se.emb-japan.go.jp/nihongo/dantai.html> (Accessed 14 July 2021).

²² Sweden-Japan Foundation (2021) Associations & Societies, Available at: <https://swedenjapan.se/sweden-japan-network/associations-societies/> (Accessed 16 December 2021).

²³ Author's correspondence with Ms. Boriana Åberg, Member of the Swedish Parliament and Vice Chair of the Sweden-Japan Parliamentary Association of the Swedish Parliament (December 2021).

²⁴ Author's correspondence with the office of Mr. Eto Seishiro, Member of the House of Representatives of Japan and Chairman of the Japan-Sweden Parliamentary Friendship Association of the National Diet of Japan (October 2021).

²⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019) スウェーデン王国 (*Kingdom of Sweden*), Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/sweden/data.html#section5> (Accessed 8 July 2021). The first ever Swedish prime minister to visit Japan was Ingvar Carlsson in 1991. For more details, please see Bert Edström (1996) "Japan and Sweden: Two Countries Far Apart" in James Darby (ed.) *Japan and the European Periphery*, London: Palgrave MacMillan, p. 197.

relations between Japan and European countries, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson met in June 2022, on the sidelines of the NATO Summit in Spain. The leaders restated their commitment to shared values and deepened cooperation.²⁶ Visits from the heads of state, particularly from the Swedish side, have been more frequent. The state visit by the King of Sweden in 1980 was the first by a Swedish monarch in Japan.²⁷ He has since visited the country in official and unofficial capacities over 10 times, with the last state visit conducted in 2007. In 2016, the King was a participant in and in 2018 led delegations of Swedish industry and government agencies to Tokyo.²⁸ Former Emperor Akihito has also been in Sweden multiple times, as Crown Prince and as Emperor. He conducted two state visits to Sweden: one in 2000, the first by a Japanese monarch, and one in 2007.²⁹

On the ministerial level, focusing on the fields of foreign affairs, trade and economy, there have been a number of visits in the past 10 years. Japanese Foreign Minister Tarō Kōno visited Sweden once during this time, when he was in Stockholm, for the Stockholm Initiative on Nuclear Disarmament, in 2019. Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt visited Tokyo in February 2014, with another visit from his successor after the change of government, Margot Wallström, in December of the same year.³⁰ During the King's visit to Japan in 2018, the Swedish government was

²⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2022) 日・スウェーデン首脳会談. (*Japan-Sweden Leaders' Summit*), Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/erp/we/se/shin6_000027.html (Accessed 8 July 2022).

²⁷ Sveriges Kungahuset (2022) *Statsbesök 1974-2022 (State Visits 1974-2022)*, Available at: <https://www.kungahuset.se/sveriges-monarki/statsbesok-och-officiella-besok#h-Statsbesok19742021> (Accessed 8 July 2022).

²⁸ Kungliga ingenjörsvetenskapsakademien (2016) *Kung Carl XVI Gustaf besöker Japan med IVA (King Carl XVI Gustaf Visits Japan with IVA)*, Available at: <https://www.iva.se/publicerat/kung-carl-xvi-gustaf-besoker-japan-med-iva> (Accessed 8 July 2022). Regeringskansliet (2018) *Kungaparet på officiellt besök till Japan (The royal family on official visit to Japan)*, Available at: <https://www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2018/03/kungaparet-pa-officiellt-besok-till-japan/> (Accessed 8 July 2022).

²⁹ Sveriges Kungahuset (2022) *Statsbesök 1974-2022 (State Visits 1974-2022)*, Available at: <https://www.kungahuset.se/sveriges-monarki/statsbesok-och-officiella-besok#h-Statsbesok19742021> (Accessed 8 July 2022).

³⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019) スウェーデン王国. (*Kingdom of Sweden*), Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/sweden/data.html#section5> (Accessed 8 July 2021).

represented by Energy and Government Coordination Minister Ibrahim Baylan and EU Affairs and Trade Minister Ann Linde.³¹ Swedish Minister of Enterprise Mikael Damberg visited in 2015 and Minister of Trade Ewa Björling in 2013.³² From Japan, Economic Revitalization Minister Toshimitsu Motegi visited Sweden in 2018. In addition to these visits, Sweden has sent ministers for international development, infrastructure, social affairs, education, agriculture, and employment; Japan has sent the ministers for reconstruction, gender equality, education (twice), vice minister of economy, vice minister of defense, parliamentary vice minister of foreign affairs and of economy. The countries have exchanged vice foreign ministers, with two visits from the Japanese side and two visits from the Swedish side, as of December 2021.³³

While relations between the countries are indeed generally cordial, there are a few areas of potential disagreement. One such area is human rights, where the Swedish Foreign Ministry, in its latest country report on the situation in Japan, highlighted, for example, that the UN Committee on Torture has criticized Japan's long pre-trial detentions.³⁴ The report also pointed to the existence of capital punishment, trafficking, sexual harassment and violence, and discrimination of various forms.³⁵ These questions

³¹ Regeringskansliet (2018) *Program för Besöket till Japan 22-25 April 2018 (Agenda for the Visit to Japan 22-25 April 2018)*, Available at: <https://www.regeringen.se/artiklar/2018/04/program-for-besoket-till-japan-2225-april-2018/> (Accessed 13 July 2021).

³² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019) スウェーデン王国 (*Kingdom of Sweden*), Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/sweden/data.html#section5> (Accessed 8 July 2021).

³³ Ibidem. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) リュードベリ・スウェーデン外務副大臣による鈴木外務副大臣表敬 (*Courtesy Visit by State Secretary Rydberg to Vice Foreign Minister Suzuki*), Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/erp/we/se/page4_005460.html (Accessed 9 December 2021).

³⁴ The Committee against Torture has also criticized Sweden on the point of pre-trial detention, for example in its report from December 2021: Committee against Torture (2021) *Concluding Observations on the Eighth Periodic Report of Sweden*, p. 4, Available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G21/381/20/PDF/G2138120.pdf?OpenElement> (Accessed 8 July 2022).

³⁵ Utrikesdepartementet (2018) *Japan – Mänskliga Rättigheter, Demokrati och Rättsstatens Principer: Situationen per den 31 December 2018 (Japan - Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law: Situation as of December 31 2018)*, pp. 1-2, Available at: <https://www.regeringen.se/4a72e4/contentassets/37af1c5df41348a79ca140ae11ceaf80/japan---manskliga-rattigheter-demokrati-och-rattsstatens-principer-2019.pdf> (Accessed 9 December 2021).

are, however, typically not issues of high dignity in official, everyday bilateral exchanges in the relationship.

Sweden and Japan have a number of bilateral agreements. In 2019, the two countries signed an agreement on social security to harmonize their pension and social systems. This is aimed at reducing bureaucracy pertaining to social systems when working and qualifying for pensions in the other country and allowing easier retainment of the same pension payments after going back to the country of origin.³⁶ In the same year, the countries signed a Working Holiday Agreement. This lets people under the age of 30 obtain a one-year visa for holiday purposes, which allows the holder to take a job in Japan or Sweden to support the stay.³⁷ Furthermore, Sweden and Japan have a Cooperation Agreement on Science and Technology from 1999;³⁸ an agreement to avoid double taxation since 1983, which was amended in 2014;³⁹ and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Defense from 2013, affirming a commitment to shared values and establishing a bilateral dialogue on defense issues.⁴⁰

Exchanges on defense issues are on a moderate level, as suggested in the review of bilateral visits above. Both countries do, however, have defense attachés stationed in their respective embassies, and the Swedish defense minister has met with the Japanese

³⁶ Socialdepartementet (2021) *Socialförsäkringsavtal mellan Sverige och Japan (Social Insurance Agreement between Sweden and Japan)*, Available at: <https://www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2021/05/socialforsakringsavtal-mellan-sverige-och-japan/> (Accessed 14 July 2021).

³⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2019) 日・スウェーデン・ワーキング・ホリデー協定の署名 (*Japan-Sweden Working Holiday Agreement Signed*), Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/release/press4_007741.html (Accessed 14 July 2021).

³⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2018) 日・スウェーデン科学技術協力 (*Japan-Sweden Science and Technology Cooperation*), Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/technology/nikoku/ja_swe.html (Accessed 7 December 2021).

³⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2014) 日・スウェーデン租税条約改正議定書の発効 (*Japan-Sweden Amended Taxation Agreement in Force*), Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/release/press4_001231.html (Accessed 8 December 2021).

⁴⁰ Embassy of Japan in Sweden (2013) 日・スウェーデン防衛交流覚書の署名 (*Japan-Sweden Defense Dialogue Agreement Signed*), Available at: https://www.se.emb-japan.go.jp/nihongo/activity_131220.html (Accessed 7 December 2021).

vice minister of defense on three occasions recently (the Munich Security Conference in 2016 and 2019, a visit to Sweden in 2018). These discussions have focused on military technology exchange and future defense cooperation, suggesting a potential increase in focus on defense issues in future relations.⁴¹ Such a development would offer opportunities for Sweden's large defense industry. The country's premier equipment and aircraft producer, SAAB, currently offers stealth equipment and weapons systems on the Japanese market. The company has been involved in supporting maritime surveillance systems in Japan, an expanding area of interest, given the territorial dispute in the East China Sea.⁴²

Economic and commercial relations – Booming tech investments, stable trade

There are several Swedish companies with operations in Japan and Japanese businesses present in Sweden. Some of the larger Swedish enterprises are IKEA, with some 12 stores in Japan,⁴³ clothing store H&M, heat transfer producer Alfa Laval, and mobile infrastructure giant Ericsson. Between 2007-2021, Volvo Group owned Japanese truck manufacturer UD Trucks, a company that was subsequently sold to Isuzu, following the

⁴¹ Ministry of Defense of Japan (2019)第55回ミュンヘン安全保障会議 (M S C) *55th Munich Security Conference*), Available at: <https://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/exchange/dialogue/munich/munich55/index.html> (Accessed 22 August 2021). Ministry of Defense of Japan (2018) 山本防衛副大臣のスウェーデン訪問(*Visit of Vice Defense Minister Yamamoto to Sweden*), Available at: https://warp.da.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/11591426/www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/exchange/area/2018/20180118_swe-j.html (Accessed 22 August 2021). Ministry of Defense of Japan (2016) 第52回ミュンヘン安全保障会議 (M S C) (*52th Munich Security Conference*), Available at: <https://warp.da.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/11646449/www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/exchange/dialogue/munich/munich52/index.html> (Accessed 22 August 2021).

⁴² SAAB (2021) *SAAB Japan*, Available at: <https://www.saab.com/markets/japan> (Accessed 23 August 2021).

⁴³ IKEA (2021) お近くのイケアストア (*IKEA Stores Nearby*), Available at: <https://www.ikea.com/jp/ja/stores/> (Accessed 23 August 2021).

initiation of a strategic alliance between Volvo and Isuzu.⁴⁴ Some companies with Swedish origin can look back at a long presence in Japan: trading house Gadelius, for example, was founded as the Japan branch of a Swedish company in 1907, in Yokohama. It is now operated out of Japan, assisting in bringing foreign products into the country.⁴⁵ Prominent Japanese companies with a presence in Sweden include Uniqlo, which opened its first store in Stockholm in 2018; JFC Europe, which opened its Scandinavia branch in Stockholm in 2012;⁴⁶ and Komatsu Forest, an originally Swedish forest machine manufacturer that was acquired by Komatsu in 2004.⁴⁷

Independent membership organizations that support businesses are the Swedish Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Japan, which was founded in 1992,⁴⁸ and the Stockholm-based Japanese Businessmen's Club, started in 1981.⁴⁹ Business Sweden is a half-public, half-privately financed organization that gives guidance to Swedish companies aiming to invest in or operate in other countries. It occupies an office within the grounds of the Embassy of Sweden in Tokyo, making up the embassy's de facto commercial and trade promotion office. The Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) had an office in Stockholm from 2011, which was subsequently closed. In its place, the organization currently stations a correspondent in Stockholm, affiliated with

⁴⁴ UD Trucks (2020) ボルボ・グループといすゞ、戦略的提携に関する基本契約を締結 (*Volvo Group and Isuzu Sign Agreement on Strategic Alliance*), Available at: <https://www.udtrucks.com/japan/news-and-stories/press-releases/ud-press-release-on-oct-30> (Accessed 23 August 2021).

⁴⁵ Gadelius (2021) 沿革 (*History*), Available at: <https://www.gadelius.com/company/story.html> (Accessed 23 August 2021).

⁴⁶ JFC Europe (2021) *Historia* (*History*), Available at: <https://www.jfc.eu/sv/om-oss/historia/> (Accessed 23 August 2021).

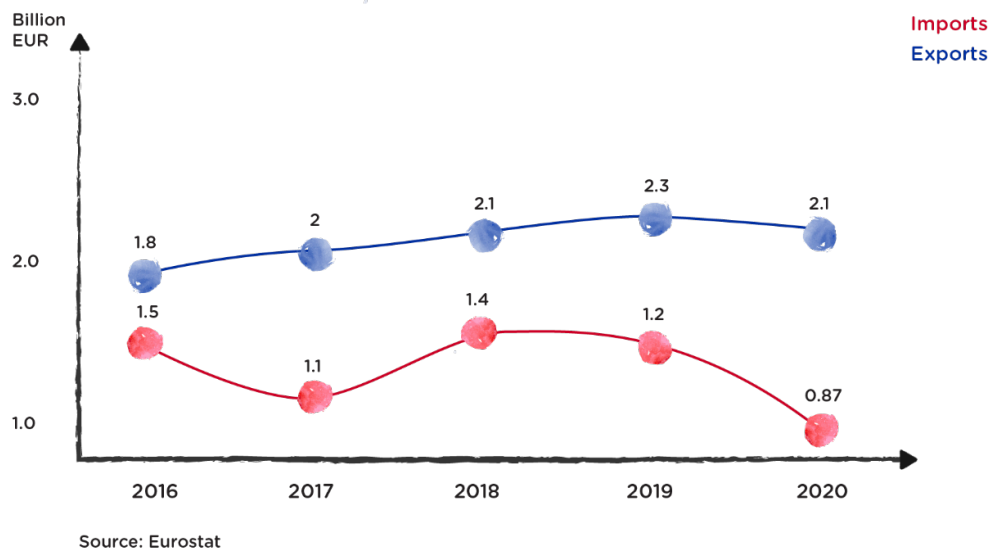
⁴⁷ Komatsu (2021) *About Komatsu*, Available at: <https://www.komatsuforest.com/about-us> (Accessed 23 August 2021).

⁴⁸ The Swedish Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Japan (2019) *About the SCCJ*, Available at: <https://www.sccj.org/about-sccj> (Accessed 16 August 2021).

⁴⁹ Japanese Businessmen's Club (2014) ストックホルム日本商工会 / Japanese Businessmen's Clubのホームページへようこそ! (*Welcome to the Japanese Businessmen's Club Website!*) Available at: <http://www.japan.se/> (Accessed 16 August 2021).

the JETRO London Office. The JETRO Correspondent handles local market evaluations and gives support to Japanese businesses looking to establish themselves in Sweden and to those wanting to invest in Japan.⁵⁰

Sweden's trade with Japan in billion euros



Japan-Sweden exports and imports have steadily grown in recent years. In 2019, Japan exported goods to Sweden at a total value of almost 1.5 billion dollars, with Swedish exports to Japan in the same year almost hitting the 2.9 billion dollars mark. This means Sweden holds a trade surplus vis-à-vis Japan, one which has existed since before Sweden joined the EU, in 1995, and which has grown constantly since then.⁵¹ In 2010, the numbers were around 1.8 billion dollars of Japanese exports to Sweden and around 2.1 billion dollars of Swedish exports to Japan.⁵² In 2015, the same numbers were just over 1.3 billion dollars of Japanese exports to Sweden and almost 1.9 billion

⁵⁰ Author's correspondence with JETRO's Stockholm Correspondent (August 2021).

⁵¹ World Bank (n.d.) *Japan Product Exports and Imports to Sweden 2019*, Available at: <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/JPN/Year/2019/TradeFlow/EXPIMP/Partner/SWE/Product/all-groups> (Accessed 11 August 2021).

⁵² World Bank (n.d.) *Japan Product Exports and Imports to Sweden 2010*, Available at: <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/JPN/Year/2010/TradeFlow/EXPIMP/Partner/SWE/Product/all-groups> (Accessed 11 August 2021).

dollars in the other direction.⁵³

Like the rest of the Nordic and Baltic countries, Sweden has made efforts in the last 20 years to establish itself as a leader in the information technology sector. This position has also become evident in Sweden's economic relationship with Japan, with several significant investments from Japanese companies, starting in 2015. A report from Innovation Lab Asia, Nordic Ninja VC and Copenhagen Capacity, on Japanese investments in the Nordics and Baltics, shows that Estonia and Finland dominate the scene, with a total of 16 and 20 investments respectively, between 2013 and 2020. Sweden, however, was also the destination of nine Japanese investors, comparable with Denmark (eight) and Norway (six).⁵⁴ The most important investors in Sweden were Softbank's Vision Fund, the world's largest tech-focused venture capital fund, which put a total of 20 million dollars in solar cell company Exeger, in 2019, over two investment rounds;⁵⁵ NordicNinja VC, a joint venture between the Japan Bank for International Cooperation, IG Partners and Lithuanian BaltCap, which invested in autonomous and electric truck company Einride, in 2019; advertising company Dentsu, which acquired a 95% stake in analytics firm Outfox Intelligence, in 2017; and Fujitsu, which bought IT service provider Symfoni Software, in 2016.⁵⁶ The weight of the Nordic tech sector has supported a development where Japan has increasingly invested more in Sweden, than Sweden in Japan.

While Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows from Japan to Sweden fluctuated

⁵³ World Bank (n.d.) *Japan product exports and imports to Sweden 2015*, Available at: <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/JPN/Year/2015/TradeFlow/EXPIMP/Partner/SWE/Product/all-groups> (Accessed 11 August 2021).

⁵⁴ Peter Johansen, Lisa Mallner, Claes Mikko Nilsen, Tomosaku Sohara and Oliver Hall (2020) *Japanese Investments – Expanding to the Nordics*, pp. 5-6, Available at: https://innovationlabasia.dk/wp-content/uploads/ILA-Investor-report_JAPAN_Dec_2020.pdf (Accessed 8 July 2022).

⁵⁵ UKTN (2021) *Softbank-Backed Exeger Pulls in £27M Funding to Launch Revolutionary Self-Charging Wireless Devices*, Available at: <https://www.uktech.news/news/softbank-backed-exeger-pulls-in-27m-funding-to-launch-revolutionary-self-charging-wireless-devices-20210511> (Accessed 14 August 2021).

⁵⁶ Peter Johansen, Lisa Mallner, Claes Mikko Nilsen, Tomosaku Sohara and Oliver Hall (2019) *Japanese Investments – Expanding to the Nordics*, pp. 12-14, Available at: https://innovationlabasia.dk/wp-content/uploads/ILA-Investor-report_JAPAN_Dec_2020.pdf (Accessed 8 July 2022).

between 130 million and 1 billion dollars, between 2016 and 2019, FDI flows from Sweden to Japan were relatively constant, ranging between 215 and 380 million dollars from 2015 to 2018, followed by a negative flow of 162 million dollars, in 2019.⁵⁷

It is not only the IT sector that has been driving Japanese FDI to Sweden in the last couple of years, as Japanese businesses have stepped up their presence in Sweden overall. In 2018, Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal Corporation acquired Swedish steelmaker Ovako.⁵⁸ Likewise, in 2018, Hitachi announced it would buy a majority share of Swiss-Swedish ABB's ABB Power Grids, giving birth to Hitachi ABB Power Grids.⁵⁹ The deal was closed in 2019 and, in 2021, the company, 80% owned by Hitachi, was renamed Hitachi Energy.⁶⁰ In 2018, the large Japanese trading house Marubeni announced an MoU with Northvolt, a Swedish lithium ion battery manufacturer, to plan and build large factories in northern Sweden, among other

⁵⁷ There are certain discrepancies between the data reported by Sweden and Japan to the OECD. Different from Sweden, Japan reports a positive inward flow of 141.5 in 2019, a negative inward flow of -87.4 in 2016, and one of -273.6 in 2015. Furthermore, Japan reports its outward flow in 2015 to be 2479.2. Japan's numbers available at JETRO (<https://www.jetro.go.jp/world/japan/stats/fdi>) also show a slight difference in relation to those Japan has reported to the OECD but not a major one. Sweden's numbers (reported in SEK) available at Statistics Sweden (<https://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/sq/118527>) largely correspond to those Sweden has reported to the OECD. OECD (n.d.) *FDI Statistics by Partner Country and Industry*, Available at: https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=FDI_CTRY_IND_SUMM# (Accessed 12 December 2021). To reach the data, enter Japan or Sweden Reporting Country, and the other country into Partner Country.

⁵⁸ Ovako (2021) *Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal Corporation Have Closed the Acquisition of Ovako*, Available at: https://investors.ovako.com/index.php?p=press&s=detail&afw_id=1584640&afw_lang=en (Accessed 20 August 2021).

⁵⁹ Direkt (2018) *Klart: ABB Säljer Kraftdivisionen till Hitachi (ABB sells Power Grid division to Hitachi)*, Available at: <https://www.privataaffarer.se/klart-abb-saljer-kraftdivisionen-till-hitachi/> (Accessed 20 August 2021).

⁶⁰ Sonal Patel (2021) *Hitachi ABB Power Grids Will Change Name to "Hitachi Energy" to Mark Business Evolution*, Available at: <https://www.powermag.com/hitachi-abb-power-grids-will-change-name-to-hitachi-energy-to-mark-business-evolution/> (Accessed 20 August 2021).

places.⁶¹ The question of whether Marubeni would directly invest in the company was left unaddressed at the time, but the partnership is of interest, given Japan's effort to compete with China on lithium ion batteries.⁶² With the signing of the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement, trade and investment is likely to keep increasing between Sweden and Japan.

Tourist exchanges between Japan and Sweden are also on the rise, according to the World Tourism Organization's 2020 Yearbook, although the number of Swedes going to Japan sees a steadier increase than the number of Japanese going to Sweden. The latter number, measured by non-resident tourist arrivals in all types of accommodations, was at 46,004 in 2018, up from 42,949 in 2014.⁶³ In the same time period, Japan reported 53,822 non-resident Swedish arrivals at national borders, a greater absolute number, in spite of Japan's population being almost 13 times larger than that of Sweden.⁶⁴ This number was up from 40,125 in 2014.⁶⁵ Swedish arrivals in Japan made up a market share of 0.17% in 2018.⁶⁶ This can be compared with a 0.09% share both for Finnish and Danish arrivals, 0.69% for German arrivals, 1.07% for UK arrivals and 0.96% for French arrivals in Japan.⁶⁷ As a share of the Swedish population, Swedish arrivals are at about the level of UK arrivals as a share of the UK population.⁶⁸

⁶¹ Marubeni (2018) スウェーデンNorthvolt ABとのリチウムイオン電池事業に関する覚書締結について (*MOU with Swedish Northvolt AB on Lithium Ion Batteries*), Available at: <https://www.marubeni.com/jp/news/2018/release/00018.html> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

⁶² Neil Newman (2020) *Battery Wars: is Japan About to Beat China in Race for the Energy Game Changer of the Decade?*, Available at: <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/opinion/article/3114451/battery-wars-japan-about-beat-china-race-energy-game-changer> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

⁶³ World Tourism Organization (2020) *Yearbook of Tourism Statistics, Data 2014-108, 2020 Edition*. UNWTO, Madrid, p. 840, Available at: <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/book/10.18111/9789284421442> (Accessed 10 December 2021).

⁶⁴ Ibidem, p. 454.

⁶⁵ Ibidem, p. 454.

⁶⁶ Ibidem, p. 454.

⁶⁷ Ibidem, pp. 453-454.

⁶⁸ Ibidem, p. 454.

Cultural and academic relations and perceptions of Japan

As elsewhere, the world-wide boom of Japanese video games and particularly manga and anime has become a major source of Japanese soft power in Sweden. This general interest in Japan among young people can be observed in the number of students of the East Asian languages taught at Stockholm University (Chinese, Japanese, Korean), where Japanese has continuously held the top spot. The number of registered students in the first semester of the Bachelor of Arts (BA) program has been between 89 and 162 in the years 2011-2021, seeing a slight downward trend but from high levels.⁶⁹ In 2020 and 2021, Korean overtook Japanese in the number of applicants (2020) and the number of students registered (2021),⁷⁰ in line with a general rise in interest in Korean at Stockholm University. The sharp increase in Korean language students in 2020-2021, however, is likely partly due to the fact that all classes moved online, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing students from all over the country to participate more easily.⁷¹ Given that, among Swedish universities, Korean is only taught in Stockholm, such a development is indeed likely to bring about a rise in enrollment from the rest of the country. It is also possible to major in Japanese at Dalarna University,⁷² the University of Gothenburg⁷³ and Lund University.⁷⁴

In Japan, one can major in Swedish at Osaka University's Department of

⁶⁹ Author's correspondence with the Department of Asian, Middle Eastern and Turkish Studies, Stockholm University (August 2021).

⁷⁰ Ibidem.

⁷¹ Ibidem.

⁷² Högskolan Dalarna (2021) *Japanska. Högskolan Dalarna (Japanese. Dalarna University)*, Available at: <https://www.du.se/Japanska> (Accessed 13 December 2021).

⁷³ Göteborgs Universitet (2021) *Japanska. Göteborgs Universitet (Japanese. University of Gothenburg)*, Available at: <https://www.gu.se/sprak/japanska> (Accessed 13 December 2021).

⁷⁴ Lunds Universitet (2021) *Japanska. Lunds universitet (Japanese. Lund University)*, Available at: <https://www.sol.lu.se/japanska/> (Accessed 13 December 2021).

Foreign Language Studies,⁷⁵ which takes in around 20 students per year as Swedish majors. In 2021, the department had a general admissions acceptance rate of 53% for the Swedish major, with Danish at 61%, French at 56% and German at 55%.⁷⁶ In the special admissions category, where the candidate's personal suitability to the program is combined with knowledge tests, there were six applicants to the Swedish major (2 accepted) compared to zero, four and two for Danish, French and German respectively. It is a trend over the last couple of years that Swedish major applicant numbers in the special admissions category hover above other languages or among the top at Osaka University.⁷⁷ Tokai University also has a BA program in Nordic Studies, where Swedish is taught.⁷⁸

Japan-oriented social science researchers in Sweden tend to have a strong focus on Japan's international relations and the Japanese economy. The former milieu has, for a time, been particularly concentrated at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs' (UI) Asia Program, whereas the latter has a strong base at the European Institute of Japanese Studies (EIJS) at the Stockholm School of Economics, and at the University of Gothenburg. The monthly Stockholm Seminar on Japan has been jointly organized since 2009, by EIJS; UI's Asia Program; Stockholm University's Department of Asian, Middle Eastern and Turkish Studies; and the Swedish Defense University, focusing on a broad set of issues, pertaining to politics, economy and social issues.⁷⁹ The academic focus on Sweden in Japan is less concentrated in specific institutes and is

⁷⁵ 大阪大学外国語学部スウェーデン語専攻 (2017)大阪大学外国語学部スウェーデン語専攻 (*Osaka University Department of Foreign Languages, Swedish Major*), Available at: <http://www.sfs.osaka-u.ac.jp/user/swedish/index.html> (Accessed 18 August 2021).

⁷⁶ 大阪大学 (2021) 令和3年度 大阪大学入学者数等調 (学部学生) (*Reiwa year 3 Osaka University Matriculation Statistics (Bachelor students)*) Available at: https://www.osaka-u.ac.jp/ja/admissions/files/20211001_number.pdf/@@download/file. (Accessed 13 December 2021).

⁷⁷ Author's correspondence with the Graduate School of Language and Culture, Osaka University (September 2021).

⁷⁸ Tokai University (2021) 北欧学科 (*Nordic Studies Department*), Available at: <https://www.u-tokai.ac.jp/ud-cultural-and-social-studies/dpt-nordic-studies/> (Accessed 18 August 2021).

⁷⁹ Swedish Institute of International Affairs (2021) "Asia" *Swedish Institute of International Affairs*, Available at: <https://www.ui.se/english/research/asia/> (Accessed 18 August 2021).

also rather conducted within traditional disciplines, as opposed to area studies. This is likely because of the greater prominence in international academia of Asian/Japan Studies than (social science-oriented) Nordic/Sweden Studies, although the previously mentioned Tokai University's Department of Nordic Studies brings together cultural and social scientists and linguists, in a similar fashion.⁸⁰

The focus of research often being on political, economic and social issues relating to Japan – suggesting, perhaps, a more general interest in Japan's politics, economy and society in Sweden – contrasts slightly with the established image of Japan, which has changed much from the 1980s, when it was talked about worldwide as “number one.”⁸¹ The main feature of media reports on Japan in Sweden is simple scarcity: the country receives attention periodically around elections of significance (the 2009 change of government was a case in point), natural disasters and when there are new reports out on the country's shrinking population. The result of such scarcity in reporting, and the disproportionate amount of extraordinary events and developments highlighted in the scarce reporting that exists, arguably contributes to an image of Japan in Sweden as different and odd, a classic orientalist image.

There is a certain interest among organizations like UI, which straddles academia and the think tank world, and the Institute for Security and Development Policy in Stockholm, in the increasing geopolitical significance given to Japan. This effort has arguably gained momentum among policymakers and researchers in Sweden as China has accumulated increased negative attention in Western countries. As in many other countries in Europe, China has long been seen positively in Sweden; it has primarily been viewed as a business partner and lucrative market. This picture has changed radically, with 85% of participating Swedes holding very or somewhat unfavorable views of the country in a 2020 Pew Research Poll, the highest unfavorable

⁸⁰ 東海大学 (2021) 東海大学 教員・研究者ガイド (*Tokai University List of Teachers and Researchers*), Available at: <https://www.u-tokai.ac.jp/facultyguide/tag/department/dpt-nordic-studies/> (Accessed 19 August 2021).

⁸¹ Ezra Vogel popularized this term in his seminal 1979 book, arguing that the West at the time of writing had lessons to learn from Japan. Ezra Vogel (1979) *Japan as Number One: Lessons for America*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. viii.

views in all countries surveyed after, indeed, Japan (86%).⁸² While polls on Swedish attitudes toward Japan are scarce, this shift toward a sharply negative view of China is likely to have played a role in the increased attention paid to a Japan that seeks to play the role of countering China on the world stage.

As the vibrant research scene might suggest, there are several funding sources available for Swedes and Swedish residents who want to conduct research on and in Japan. Some important funders are the Scholarship Foundation for Studies of Japanese Society (*Stipendiestiftelsen för studier av japanskt samhällsliv*), the Sweden-Japan Foundation and the Scandinavia-Japan Sasakawa Foundation. The first was founded in 1992 to stimulate Swedish contacts with Japan, after the Swedish government sale of half the grounds of the Swedish embassy in Roppongi, Tokyo, in 1987, yielding around 1.2 billion kronor, or 189 million dollars.⁸³ The foundation gives scholarships to (Swedish) researchers, students, journalists and artisans, for periods of 1-12 weeks, to gather empirical material and conduct projects in Japan.⁸⁴ The Sweden-Japan Foundation was founded in 1971, deriving its scholarship program funding from donations from Swedish industry, among others ABB, Astra Zeneca and Ericsson. The program aims to support studies, research and internships in Japan – primarily focused on engineering, natural sciences, economics, law, medicine and commerce – and is available to all students and young researchers at Swedish universities.⁸⁵

The Scandinavia-Japan Sasakawa Foundation (SJSF) was founded through a grant from the Nippon Foundation, in 1985, and aims to enhance friendly relations between the Nordic countries and Japan. Since 2019, with funding from the Nippon

⁸² Laura Silver, Kat Devlin, Christine, Huang (2020) *Unfavorable Views of China Reach Historic Highs in Many Countries*, Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/10/06/unfavorable-views-of-china-reach-historic-highs-in-many-countries/> (Accessed 23 August 2021).

⁸³ Gunilla Lindberg-Wada (2002) *Stipendiestiftelsen för Studier av Japanskt Samhällsliv 1992-2002 (The Scholarship Foundation for the Study of Japanese Society 1992-2002)*, p. 3, Available at: <https://www.japanstiftelsen.se/wp-content/uploads/Japanstiftelsen-1992-2002.pdf> (Accessed 19 August 2021).

⁸⁴ Stipendiestiftelsen för Studier av Japanskt Samhällsliv (2021) *Frågor och Svar (Questions and answers)*, Available at: <https://www.japanstiftelsen.se/fragor-svar/> (Accessed 19 August 2021).

⁸⁵ Sweden-Japan Foundation (2021) *SJF Scholarships*, Available at: <https://swedenjapan.se/sjf-scholarships/> (Accessed 19 August 2021).

Foundation, the SJSF runs scholarships for masters and PhD students to conduct fieldwork and a program for Nordic universities to establish lectureships in contemporary Japanese Studies.⁸⁶ Additionally, the Japan Society for the Promotion of Sciences (JSPS) has a number of scholarships of varying lengths for researchers who are Swedish citizens, where nomination and/or selection is carried out by the Swedish government agency the Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education, STINT, and Sweden's innovation agency Vinnova. JSPS also runs a Stockholm office to enhance academic exchange between Japan and the Nordic countries.⁸⁷

Several Memoranda of Understanding exist between Swedish and Japanese universities, for example, an MoU, signed in 2019, which established an International Engineering Science Consortium between KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Osaka University and six other universities around the world.⁸⁸ As another example of bilateral, official research cooperation, Sweden's National Space Agency has a cooperation agreement with its Japanese counterpart, JAXA, to support a project that examines one of Jupiter's moons.⁸⁹

The lack of a direct flight between Sweden and Japan has hampered long-haul travel and affected academic exchange. All Nippon Airways (ANA) was set to open such a flight between Stockholm Arlanda Airport and Haneda Airport in Tokyo, in June 2020. This was, however, postponed due to the pandemic and has yet to receive a new

⁸⁶ Scandinavia-Japan Sasakawa Foundation (2021) *Grant Program for the Study of Contemporary Japan in the Nordic Countries*, Available at: <https://sjsf.se/japanese-studies-grants/> (Accessed 19 August 2021).

⁸⁷ JSPS Stockholm (2021) *Message and Mission*, Available at: <https://www.jsps-sto.com/about-us/message-mission/> (Accessed 19 August 2021).

⁸⁸ Osaka University (2021) *International Science Consortium*, Available at: <https://www.es.osaka-u.ac.jp/en/students-academics/international-exchange/international-engineering-science-consortium/index.html> (Accessed 4 January 2022).

⁸⁹ Rymdstyrelsen (2018) *Sverige Och Japan Skriver nytt Samarbetsavtal för Instrument på Projektet Juice Som ska Utforska Jupiters Isiga Månar (Sweden and Japan Sign new Cooperation Agreement on Project Juice to Explore Jupiter's Moons)*, Available at: <https://www.rymdstyrelsen.se/nyheter/2018/sverige-och-japan-skriver-nytt-samarbetsavtal/> (Accessed 20 August 2021).

official start date.⁹⁰

Conclusions and recommendations

Sweden-Japan relations are stable and multifaceted. They are underpinned by long political ties on many levels; trade and economic exchanges, supported by politically independent actors, with long-term experience in the other country; mutual interest by students in the other country, accentuated by great interest among Swedish university students in learning about Japan and the Japanese language; and by touristic and academic exchange. The two countries had little to do with each other before 1868, save seafarers who primarily traveled with the Dutch to Japan. This resulted in poor and often outdated knowledge of Japan in Sweden, and the longevity in influence in Sweden of seminal works like Thunberg's 18th century travel report.

The modern history of Sweden's presence in Japan – political and diplomatic history, as well as economic and cultural history – is anchored in the embassy grounds and building, the purchase of which was supported by Japan-based Swedish industry. The grounds have shrunk through sales since the 1980s. However, parts of those dividends have been reinvested in scholarships for the study of Japan in Sweden and the embassy remains a central gathering point for all types of Sweden-Japan exchange in Japan. As the grounds have become pawns in conflicts over financing within the Swedish government offices in the past, it is imperative that any further sale or change to Sweden's presence in Japan is accompanied by appropriate measures to ensure that a physical place for exchange still exists in Tokyo, supported by the Swedish government. This becomes even more important for bilateral relations, as Japan is increasingly seen as an important actor in geopolitics and international trade. As relations grow ever closer and as the EU increasingly becomes the primary European partner with which Japan conducts exchanges on the international scene, it is important for Japan too to support its official presence in Sweden (as in other EU member states), to keep itself abreast of developments not just in Brussels but in national capitals and beyond.

Political relations between the two countries have matured along with this

⁹⁰ All Nippon Airways (2021) *Stockholm*新規就航 [北欧] (*New Route - Scandinavia*), Available at: <https://www.ana.co.jp/en/jp/international/promotions/hnd-arn/> (Accessed January 2022).

physical presence. As in the rest of Europe, increased attention has been given to relations with Japan as a tool to counter Chinese influence and supporting free trade and open markets. Official prime ministerial visits between Sweden and Japan are still rather rare, but minister-level visits and visits by vice ministers have been numerous in the past 10-15 years. Furthermore, the countries' royal families have long-standing ties that have the potential to support popular interest in the other country among ordinary citizens and the efforts of the other country's industry to make commercial inroads.

The imperative to uphold and strengthen political relations holds true in the economic sphere as well: the two countries have made efforts to negotiate an ambitious EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement, and Japanese investments in Sweden have risen, largely owing to Sweden's increased prominence in the IT sector. To keep supporting this development, the Swedish government ought to ensure that government agencies like those described in this chapter keep operating in Japan, and that organizations like the Swedish Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Japan are supported in their efforts to assist in bilateral commercial exchanges.

Furthermore, as the international trend to talk about "universal" and "shared" values between states deepens, there is a need for both governments to hold frank dialogue between themselves on the meaning of values. This should entail discussing how similarities but indeed also inevitable differences between governments can be leveraged to face up to real challenges in international politics, such as climate change, great power rivalry, inequality, migration and pandemics. If Sweden and Japan, and indeed the EU and Japan, can add meaning to slogans supporting freedom and democracy that effects material change for those less well off, that would not only "sell" well but also have a real impact on people's livelihoods.

Countering a relative disinterest in the political and socio-economic aspects of Japan in Sweden is an important task, where cultural relations and the people-to-people sphere offer ample opportunities. Japanese cultural exports, like anime, video games and pop music are a driving force for hundreds of young Swedes choosing every year to study the Japanese language at universities. This goes for Japan as well, albeit in different cultural areas and with a smaller student body than the Japanese-studying Swedes. A general de-exoticization and deorientalization of Japan in Sweden could lead

more people to commit themselves to understanding the country for what it is, which would advance social science and bilateral relations: a country that, like any other, harbors a multitude of contradictions, social struggles and opportunities for political, economic and cultural exchanges across borders. This is also valid for the Japanese image of Sweden and of Europe. The pandemic has shown how many European countries have failed to protect their population from disease, while, as of January 2022, many Asian countries have been more successful. This turning of the tables in relation to an international hierarchy where European countries still today enjoy implicit recognition as “leaders” in politics, economics and culture highlights how they too ought to be de-exoticized and understood as countries with their own problems, problems that are usually highly recognizable around the world. The Swedish government’s effort in later years to support research of China in Sweden could, if not in form, at least in ambition, be a model for official Swedish and Japanese support of such nuanced images of the other country. A more multifaceted understanding of the “Self” and of “Others” should be attempted by Swedes and Japanese, not only for the benefit of prosperous and peaceful bilateral ties but for international relations that are better equipped to address international challenges.

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