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Developing the EU-Japan Strategic Partnership

An analysis of European Union member
states' relations with Japan

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Spain-Japan relations: From mutual indifference toward an emerging strategic partnership

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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 Tanenashi (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%20Defensa%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 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.

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 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.

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).

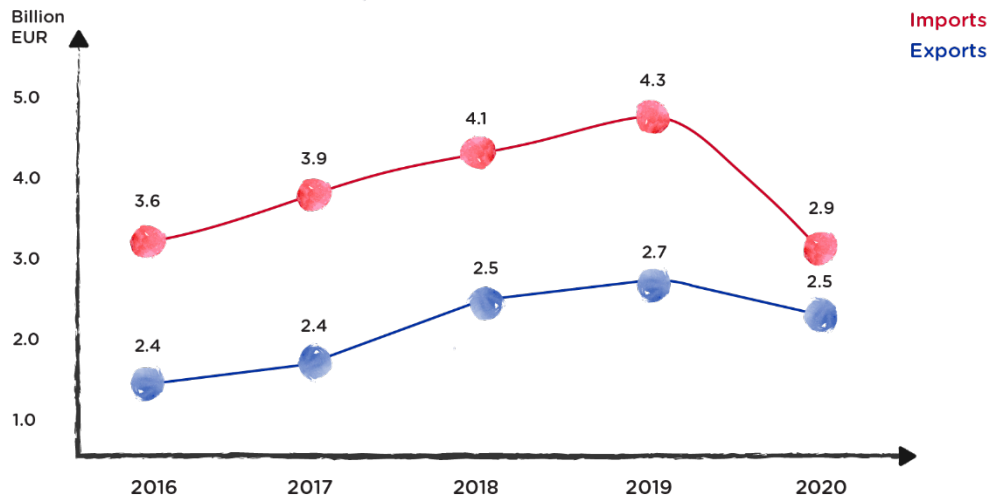
⁷⁵ ICEX (2021) *Japón. Relaciones bilaterales (Japan. Bilateral Relations)*, Available at: <https://www.icex.es/icex/es/navegacion-principal/todos-nuestros-servicios/informacion-de-mercados/paises/navegacion-principal/el-pais/relaciones-bilaterales/index.html?idPais=JP#5> (Accessed 7 September 2021). 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: 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://datainvex.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://datainvex.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 Jensana Taneshashi (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 Jensana Taneshashi (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 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 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. 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-exterior/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-ateriza-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) *Corresponsalías (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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