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The EU-Japan Relationship: From Economic to Political?

Supervisor
Ch. Prof. Stéphanie Novak

First Assistant supervisor
Ch. Prof. Rosa Caroli

Second Assistant supervisor
Ch. Prof. Marco Zappa

Graduand
Angela Della Coletta
848317

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ABSTRACT

In questa tesi ho voluto analizzare le relazioni tra Unione Europea e Giappone in ambito economico e politico, allo scopo di *valutare se le interazioni tra questi due paesi potessero considerarsi sviluppate ed efficaci dal punto di vista politico tanto quanto da quello economico*. È bene precisare sin dal principio che con l'espressione 'relazioni economiche' si intendono quelle inerenti agli scambi commerciali tra le parti mentre il termine 'politico' indica quella parte delle relazioni focalizzata sulla promozione di valori e principi internazionali (democrazia, diritti umani, etc.). A questo proposito, molti studiosi sembrano considerare le relazioni tra Giappone e Unione Europea come prevalentemente focalizzate sul lato economico, che è stato anche ritenuto motivo di iniziale avvicinamento tra gli attori (per esempio: Gilson, 2020; Hosoi, 2019; Pacheco Pardo, 2009; Reiterer, 2004;). Per verificare (o smentire) questa posizione, che ha quindi costituito il punto di partenza di questa tesi, sono stati presi in considerazione diversi aspetti delle relazioni tra UE e Giappone:

- Analisi dello sviluppo storico, per valutare il possibile impatto di determinati eventi.
- Analisi di elementi che possono aver influenzato la direzione in cui le relazioni tra le parti si sono evolute: ruolo di terze parti (in questo caso gli Stati Uniti); il modo in cui gli attori si percepiscono reciprocamente; il potere normativo dell'Europa e l'influenza che può aver avuto negli scambi con altri paesi; analisi del fenomeno di path dependency e se le relazioni tra Unione Europea e Giappone ne siano influenzate.
- Analisi di due accordi recenti (Accordo di Partenariato Economico e Partenariato Strategico) per valutare se dei passi avanti siano stati fatti oppure no rispetto agli accordi considerati nella parte storica.

Le fonti e i concetti principali per ciascuna di queste tematiche sono stati riassunti nella rassegna degli studi che costituisce il primo capitolo.

L'analisi storica, a cui è dedicato il secondo capitolo, parte dal Secondo Dopoguerra per giungere fino agli inizi degli anni Duemila. Lo sviluppo del capitolo segue l'evolversi

delle relazioni tra i due paesi, inizialmente focalizzati sulla propria ricostruzione postbellica, per poi, durante gli anni Cinquanta, considerare la possibilità di stabilire delle relazione economiche: l'Europa (in particolare i paesi dell'Europa Occidentale) pressata dalla comparsa di questo nuovo concorrente, e il Giappone per il crescente interesse del governo e delle industrie nelle opportunità offerte dal mercato Europeo. Nel caso giapponese era stato decisivo (come si vedrà più nel dettaglio nel terzo capitolo) l'intervento statunitense che, occupandosi della sicurezza del paese, permetterà al Giappone di sviluppare una strategia che concentrava tutte le risorse verso lo sviluppo economico, elementi che si possono ritrovare anche nella 'Yoshida Doctrine', dal nome del Primo Ministro che la implementò proprio negli anni Cinquanta. Il ventennio dagli anni Sessanta agli anni Ottanta sarà caratterizzato non solo dalle dispute economiche, che dimostreranno la non integrazione dell'economia giapponese nonostante l'ammissione nell'OCSE (1964), ma anche da un primo tentativo di dialogo politico da parte del Giappone, dapprima con singoli stati membri per poi arrivare alla creazione della prima delegazione Europea in Giappone e dei Summit tra Giappone e l'allora Comunità Europea. Gli anni Ottanta, dominati da conflitti commerciali e incomprensioni, vedono, tuttavia, il Giappone abbracciare un'interazione trilaterale che include Giappone – USA – Comunità Economica Europea. I cambiamenti a livello geopolitico del 1989 e gli sforzi compiuti per evolvere questa relazione, non cambieranno il fatto che le interazioni sia a livello politico che di sicurezza tra i due attori resteranno per lo più marginali; nonostante tutto, nel 1991 la 'The Hague Declaration' rappresenterà un tentativo di istituzionalizzare questa relazione e supportare e promuovere valori fondamentali come democrazia, diritti umani, stato di diritto, etc. Riguardo la reale efficacia di questa iniziativa, molti studiosi hanno espresso le proprie critiche, sottolineando come, a parte codificare e istituzionalizzare questa relazione, non molto sia stato raggiunto. Ciononostante, dieci anni dopo, sia il Giappone che la Comunità Europea decideranno di adottare il 'Ten-Year Action Plan', un piano onnicomprensivo che avrebbe dovuto dare nuovo impeto alla relazione fra gli attori: come per la Dichiarazione del 1991, però, anche questo piano si rivelerà inefficace, risultando poco più di una lista di problemi da affrontare, priva di un chiaro programma e trascurata da entrambe le parti, nonostante le iniziative prese nel corso degli anni dal Giappone per implementare il dialogo politico con l'Europa.

Come anticipato, il terzo capitolo è stato dedicato all'analisi di possibili elementi influenti nelle relazioni tra Unione Europea e Giappone, cominciando dal ruolo degli Stati Uniti: introdotti nel secondo capitolo, hanno sottoposto il Giappone all'Occupazione Alleata che democratizzerà il paese, imponendo una Costituzione di stampo pacifista. Incaricandosi della gestione della sicurezza, gli USA faranno sì che il Giappone possa concentrare le proprie risorse su una crescita economica che attirerà l'attenzione dell'Europa Occidentale. Per questo gli USA manterranno un ruolo di rilevanza agli occhi del Giappone, nonostante i crescenti scambi con l'Europa e il declino americano in termini di soft power, oscurando e rendendo non necessaria la presenza di ulteriori partner che rappresentassero i valori Occidentali. Un'analisi delle percezioni reciproche tra Unione Europea e Giappone, invece, conferma l'immagine di due partner che nonostante frequenti interazioni economiche, tentativi di dialogo politico e valori condivisi, continuano a guardarsi con diffidenza e sospetto, a dare priorità ad altri attori e a non sfruttare le occasioni di dialogo – come i summit – se non per rafforzare il proprio status a livello internazionale. In particolare, l'Europa non sembra riuscire a cambiare la propria percezione e il proprio ruolo agli occhi delle principali potenze asiatiche (Cina e Giappone), che ancora la considerano un mero partner economico, debole ed internamente diviso, e non coinvolto attivamente se non attraverso l'ASEM. L'immagine europea a livello internazionale è plasmata anche attorno al suo agire per mezzo del cosiddetto potere normativo, legato alla diffusione di idee e principi e contrapposto a un tipo di potere che usa incentivi materiali o forza fisica, perché efficace attraverso la propria legittimità, persuasione anche attraverso esempi virtuosi. Tuttavia, l'Europa, sia nei confronti di Russia e Cina, che nel caso del contrasto alla pena di morte in Giappone, ha dimostrato un eccessiva concentrazione nei confronti di quest'aspetto, trascurando una corretta interpretazione della posizione della propria controparte. A rendere più difficoltose le interazioni fra gli attori può essere anche il fenomeno di path dependency, secondo cui le determinate circostanze che danno vita ad un processo tendono a influenzare la futura evoluzione del processo stesso, in questo caso le relazioni tra Unione Europea e Giappone; concetti come quelli di contingenza delle condizioni originarie, vincoli creati da condizioni che tendono a ripetersi e rafforzarsi, verranno analizzati nel corso del capitolo in relazione ad un fenomeno ancora molto dibattuto e di difficile definizione. Processi influenzati da path dependency possono creare dei momenti di

impasse che rendono difficile ad una relazione – o ad un altro processo – cambiare la direzione già presa e potrebbe essere proprio una delle problematiche che sta interessando le relazioni tra UE e Giappone, come si cercherà di valutare nel quarto capitolo.

Il Quarto e penultimo capitolo è dedicato all'analisi di due recenti accordi che hanno interessato gli attori in questione: l'accordo di partenariato strategico e quello di partenariato economico. Dopo una prima sezione introduttiva, verrà spiegato come la scadenza del decennale Action Plan del 2001, nonostante la dubbia efficacia di quest'ultimo, abbia spinto sia il Giappone che l'UE a pianificare una nuova iniziativa che lo sostituisse e desse nuovo impulso alla cooperazione con il Giappone che continuava ad intrattenere importanti relazioni bilaterali con singoli stati sul territorio europeo, tra cui Francia, Germania, Russia e Regno Unito, la cui uscita dall'Unione Europea ha creato non poca incertezza. Ciò porterà all'inizio delle negoziazioni di uno dei più ampi accordi economici sul libero scambio mai conclusi (Economic Partnership Agreement o EPA), accompagnato da un accordo strategico (Strategic Partnership Agreement o SPA), introdotto nel secondo round di negoziazioni, con cui entrambe le parti si impegnano a promuovere e difendere i valori internazionali (democrazia, diritti umani, stato di diritto e libertà fondamentali), e che nel 2020 era applicato provvisoriamente ma non entrato in vigore per requisiti di ratifica riguardanti non solo il Giappone ma anche singoli stati membri dell'Unione.

Le critiche, tuttavia, non hanno tardato ad arrivare per entrambi gli accordi. Già durante la fase di negoziazione, la possibilità di una clausola che unisse i due accordi condizionando l'esecuzione dell'accordo economico al rispetto di quello strategico, aveva sollevato il netto rifiuto del Giappone che aveva percepito questa richiesta da parte europea come un'interferenza illegittima, mostrando un'Europa ancora assorbita dal proprio agire da potere normativo e dimentica della posizione del suo interlocutore. Inoltre, le premesse fondanti dell'accordo strategico, risalenti all'istituzionalizzazione del 1991, sono legate ad un contesto che è cambiato inesorabilmente e che, nonostante le intenzioni, non trova in questi nuovi accordi un rinnovato impulso, bensì il perpetrarsi di iniziative deludenti la cui istituzionalizzazione non fa che raggruppare politiche esistenti, senza un programma definito. È stato anche sottolineato come l'accordo economico, oltre

a focalizzarsi su problemi che si trascinano da decenni – smentendo quindi l'idea che le dispute economiche si siano concluse negli anni Ottanta –, non offra soluzioni 'complete' ma necessiterà di accordi a parte per determinati argomenti; inoltre, lo sbilanciamento economico nei confronti della Cina non fa che inasprire i contrasti e mostrare ancora una volta le difficoltà europee nell'elaborare una strategia unitaria, in questo caso quando si tratta dell'Asia. Per quanto riguarda l'accordo strategico, come era già capitato all'Action Plan, ci si trova davanti ad un'iniziativa solo vagamente definita, troppo ampia, che lascia seri dubbi sulle capacità delle parti riguardo ad un'effettiva implementazione: infatti, da un lato il Giappone sembra ancora percepire il ruolo Europeo in ambito di sicurezza con scetticismo, preoccupata dalle pressioni provenienti dal Nord Corea e dalla Cina, e dall'altro l'Europa ancora fatica a cambiare la propria percezione di un contesto asiatico guidato unicamente dalla Cina.

Per questi motivi, che saranno riassunti nella conclusione offerta nell'ultimo capitolo, le relazioni tra Unione Europea e Giappone non solo non possono considerarsi efficaci sul piano politico, dando più l'impressione di due partner che faticano a comunicare in questo aspetto, ma ancora mostrano di non aver trovato soluzione ai vecchi contrasti risalenti agli anni Sessanta.

INTRODUCTION

International relations between the European Union (at the time European Communities) and Japan began around the 1950s, triggered by economic interests (Gilson, 2020) in the aftermath of the Second World War, between the urgency of reconstruction and the necessity of rebuilding diplomatic interactions (Tōgō, 2010). Both were afflicted by the destruction and low standards of living that followed the devastation of World War II; Europe was dealing with the consequences of been intensely fought over and Japan with the outcomes of a surrender (Lowe, 2000) that would have led to the years of occupation and imposition of democracy by the SCAP (Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers) of General Douglas MacArthur. This circumstance, that would have transformed Japan in the eyes of the US from enemy to Asian ally (Caroli and Gatti, 2004), will reverberate through the web of international interaction until reaching the relations with Europe. The overwhelming presence of the US would have partly obscured and partly made unnecessary to look for other Western Partners, namely Europe (Frattolillo, 2013). In reality, Japan had held Europe in high regard, associating it with ideals of progress, a model to look up to in terms of ideology, philosophy, culture, politics and economics; unfortunately, after World War I, this image changed significantly, shrinking in the eyes of Japan when compared to the icon of capitalism embodied by the US (Stegewerns, 2000). The relationship between the European Community and Japan would have really come into focus in 1970s, with Japan's remarkable endeavour to rise from the ashes, and the achievement of the shift from those products that characterised its exports since the 1930s, to automobiles, consumer electronics, machine tools and higher value goods (Hardy, 2013). From the 1950s to the 1980s, under the conservative political system of the reign of Emperor Hirohito, and as a junior partner of the US in the years of the Cold War, Japan was rapidly growing demographically, becoming the second largest economy worldwide (De Prado, 2017). With regard to Europe, the structural shifts were more complex, involving not only economic development, but also institutional changes as the European bodies came into existence: for example, after the EEC (European Economic Community) Treaty, in 1958, aided by the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) rounds, the tariffs between European countries progressive reduced. Europe was gradually setting its own ambitious goals (Hardy, 2013).

After the trading disputes and economic frictions, and relationship imbalances and asymmetries in the years from 1959 to 1991, during the 1990s Japan found itself in a period of stagnation both demographic and economic, simultaneously having to deal with a political system in turbulence and the raising of other powers in the fluid system of the post-Cold War years (De Prado, 2017). However, the 1990s also brought a political milestone with The Hague Declaration of 1991 (or Joint Declaration), which assessed some common values that will frequently appear in the history of this relationship: freedom, democracy, rule of law and human rights. Since 18 July 1991 (Gilson, 2020), for many participants and observers of this relation, a new chapter was starting (Gilson, 2000). Japanese euphoria for the end of Cold War was shining through the hopeful rhetoric for a deepening of economic, political and security cooperation (Berkofsky, 2007). This political step would have been followed by the 10-year Action Plan of 2001 whose expiration – even though surrounded by critics concerning its debatable effectiveness – left the EU and Japan in the need for a substitute initiative fostering cooperation (Gilson, 2020). With this purpose shared by the parties, at the 20th EU-Japan Summit in Brussels, on the 28 May 2011 (Tambou and Nakanishi, 2020), the leaders decided to begin parallel negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and a binding agreement including political global and multisectoral cooperation (Council of the European Union, 2011). The agreements that will result from the negotiations, would have been the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) and the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), respectively showcasing the ambitious commitment on one side to a massive Free Trade Agreement covering more than the 30% of the world GDP (Angelescu, 2017), and a political agreement through which the parties claimed their role as alleged 'guardians of universal values' (Abe, 2019).

Bendiek and Kramer wrote '… the older and more consolidated the cooperative trade and development relations between the EU (and its respective Member States) and its partners are, the more difficult it is for the EU-27 to give fundamentally new directions or priorities to these existing relations when they are rhetorically upgraded to the 'strategic' level' (2010, p. 459). It was this phrase that prompted me to want to analyze the relations between these two actors at the opposite poles of Eurasia, to use the words of Danks (2019, p. 13). The relationship between the European Union and Japan, still overlooked if

compared to other relations at international level, brought together two actors with completely different backgrounds, belonging to completely different regions and still united in the promotion of similar values in different contexts, both with their peculiar approach to democracy, law and past history. The recent EPA and SPA represent important steps, as abovementioned, and apparently show Japan and the EU as fully committed to a deeper interaction not only at the economic level but also at political level, even though skepticism still surrounds the agreements.

As written in Keck, Vanoverbeke and Waldenberger, it might be useful to look at the history of relations to acquire valuable insight in planning and negotiating new regulatory frameworks, by looking at which strategies ended up being successful and which ones failed. However, it needs to be taken into consideration the difficulty in finding documentation precisely on the EU-Japan interactions (2013). In fact, even though Japan has been often associated with the EC/EU since the 1970s and is recognized as a major economy player at international level, EU's debating tends to neglect it. The reasons can be identified mainly in the EU's focus on its own skills of crisis-solving and because of the consistent presence of trade problems with Japan; furthermore, recently attention towards Japan has been relocated within the broader framework of interactions with Asia (Gilson, 2000). Enriching the insight on this topic might provide valuable material to complement the existing research, to record how Japan was perceived and scrutinized by Europe (and vice versa) and to shed light on the EU foreign policy evolution, overcoming and changing approaches, and its influence on internal market and external trade (Keck, Vanoverbeke and Waldenberger, 2013). Ponjaert, as well, points out the importance for direct dialogue, between Tōkyō and the European institutions, of trying to understand pressing issues at the origin of the dialogue itself, when trying to identify expectations which prompt both partners to meaningfully engage with each other (2007).

Hence, I decided to analyse the evolution of Japan-EU economic and political relationship, not to find new international strategies but to compose a picture that could showcase how the focus changed in the interactions between the parties – from economic and trade frictions to political cooperation – and which factors might have played a role in this journey. In particular, the main question of the thesis will be: *is the EU-Japan's*

relationship as political as it is economic? As it has been introduced in this pages, economic issues and interactions prevailed for twenty years, still attracting attention and resources to date - which is why the EPA has been partly criticized for focusing on old trading problems. But when it comes to international values and principles, e.g. fundamental freedoms, democracy, human rights and rule of law, their interaction seems unfocused, vague, never truly effective nor properly implemented, although highly institutionalized and including regular meetings. It is important to clarify the use of the terms 'economic' and 'political': the former, even though potentially influenced by the political sphere, is referred throughout the dissertation to the commercial relations and trading-related disputes and issues; the latter concerns more the promotion and implementation of the abovementioned international principles, that are shared by both Japan and the European Union. In trying to answer the question, I decided to take a closer look into the history of the relation between the parties, in particular what could have been turning points in a possible change of focus for the economic disputes of the 80s-60s, with the democratic awakening of the 90s following the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Together with this, I wanted to look deeper into the complexity of this relation, influenced not only by historical events and circumstances, but also by the intervention of third parties (namely the U.S. in this case), the potential role of European normative power, and the dependence on specific aspects of this relationship's path. This more comprehensive approach, might be considered as lacking with regard to focus and order, but in my opinion was better reflecting the intricate web of elements tightly connected and exerting impact on the relations between actors at international level. Having identified this type of analysis of the relations between Japan and the European Union, as the least explored, I decided to direct my thesis in this direction in an attempt to convey the complexity of these exchanges and to assess where the actors stand in their development process: for this reason, two recent agreements signed both in 2018, one focused on economic relations and one on political cooperation, will be taken into consideration and analysed as case study in evaluating whether Japan and the European Union can be considered effective partners on a political level as well as on an economic level or if they are still at the stage of declarations and mere rhetoric exercise. More

detailed information about methodologies and sources will be presented in a designated paragraph at the end of the literature review.

Chapter 1
ABOUT THE EU-JAPAN RELATIOSHIP: A LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Introducing the Main Question of the Research

The relations between Japan and the European Union have lasted for more than fifty years, a period marked by historical events that affected these interactions, as well as several turning points that defined their path and still today are studied, scrutinised, taken inspiration from and exerting influence over the most recent steps there parts are engaged in.

Having introduced the main question in the previous pages, this first chapter will include a review of some of the most relevant sources and studies, with the aim of investigating the various aspects of the EU-Japan relationship; in doing so, the sources will be organised according to the themes of each chapter, starting from a chronological examination of relevant turning points. In such manner will be built an adequate foundation for examining which elements might have influenced the relations: mutual perceptions of the parts, which mechanisms of communication have been implemented, the role of third parties, such as other countries, the importance and possible consequences of path dependence. Furthermore, the normative power approach may add an interesting portion to the analysis of the role of the European Union in the international setting, and in the promotion of the European world view. Given the complexity of the topic, a theoretical introduction will be included for both the concepts abovementioned. In the end, this digression will be focused back on the reality of the EU-Japan relations, specifically on two agreement entered into force only the last couple of years, the SPA and EPA, in a full circle of analysis that will try to identify traces of the impact of path dependence and to assess the main features in the current status of this bilateral interaction. A summarizing conclusion will be offered as the final chapter of this dissertation.

The main question arose from a statement by Bendiek and Kramer, who wrote: '… the older and more consolidated the cooperative trade and development relations between the

EU (and its respective Member States) and its partners are, the more difficult it is for the EU-27 to give fundamentally new directions or priorities to these existing relations when they are rhetorically upgraded to the 'strategic' level' (p. 459). Bendiek and Kramer point out with this statement that often 'strategic partnerships' – like the one that Japan and the EU have recently established – only serve as bundle devices for existing policies and guidelines, while is uncommon that they might actually offer new impetus (2010). Gilson corroborates this argumentation saying that, with regard to Japan-EU relations, the parties have built their current strategic partnership agreement on a basis that has locked both Japan and the European Union into a structural and normative 'path dependency', making it difficult for the negotiators to move forward (Gilson, 2016). Concerning the expression 'path dependency', Mahoney gives a useful clarification, explaining how this concept is originated by Organisational Theory about human behaviour: as a matter of fact, it is illustrated how patterns of behaviour persist even after significant changes in the external environment, specifically referring to historical sequences whose contingent events set into motion institutional patterns with deterministic properties (2000), and are investigated by scholars in the light of different perspectives and ideas.

These statements led me to investigate what is the path along which EU-Japan relations were consolidated and what were the conditions and basis they were built upon in the first place. As will be later explained, many scholars identified economic relations as the predominant part of the EU – Japan relations, if not the element solely responsible for sparking interest between the two side, posing the question *if these interactions translated equally well on the political level or they remained a rhetorical exercise*. Consequently, this dissertation will analyse the evolution of economic and political relations between what is now the European Union and Japan, and will try to answer this precise question.

Something deeply embedded in a behaviour (in this case in a relationship), because of its connection with the conditions that created the behaviour to begin with, could exert a significant amount of influence, to the point that Manners notices how structures and norms stem precisely from embedded 'conception of the normal' and can influence shaping of strategic goals as well (Manners in Diez 2013a, p. 195). As Morii points out: 'In international relations, states are often considered as purposive and rational actors,

and their behaviour is explained by material and tangible gains. This is true for the existing literature on summitry… However, states also seek recognition and respect… In other words, non-material gains also need to be examined in order to explain state behaviour' (2015, p.416). These statements, led me to consider several points which will articulate the analysis throughout this dissertation: which events might have determined the path in the development of EU – Japan interactions? What kind of pattern or behaviour it might have enhanced? What is the role of Europe's normative power in the unfolding of these relations? And, finally, which conclusions can be drawn by the analysis of two of the most recent agreements, the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) and the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA)?

1.2 Presenting the Sources

1.2.1 The Evolution of EU-Japan Relations

The first part of this literature review will present the sources analysing the evolution of the EU – Japan relations, from the years after World War II to the 2000s, in particular 2011, the year of the 20th summit in Brussels. A central contribution to this part of the review will be provided especially by the works of César de Prado and Julie Gilson, in particular her book, *EU-Japan Relations and the Crisis of Multilateralism*, which provides a thorough examination of the context of this relationship, of the role of the parts as international actors and the evolution of their cooperation across the decades (2020). The importance of looking at the development of this bilateral relation throughout the years, emerges from the research of several authors. About this topic, Vanoverbeke and Ponjaert argued that, over the last fifty years, Europe has periodically shown interest in East Asia, an inconsistent history of Europe's engagement showcased by the uneven development of the ASEM process; the two sides actually have developed alongside parallel historical paths, to the point that the respective context and purpose of regional development make them suitable for side by side comparison. Nonetheless, both sides differ from each other in numerous ways (Vanoverbeke and Ponjaert, 2007).

Many authors agree with identifying in the 1950s the first turning point, the one that marked the beginning of this relations, in particular 1959 (De Prado, 2014; De Prado,

2017; Lai, Holland and Kelly, 2019; Tambou and Nakanishi, 2020), when Japan established diplomatic relations with the European Communities, by having the then Japan's Prime Minister (Nobusuke Kishi Ed.) visit Brussels and accrediting Japan's ambassador to Belgium and the European Communities (De Prado, 2017; Lai, Holland and Kelly, 2019). Despite the undeniable importance of this step, it should not be assumed that this event has made the unfolding of the relation between what Hatwell will call 'natural strategic partners' (2007, p. 21), effortless and free of obstacles. More than one scholar have pointed out the difficulties from the very beginning. Tambou and Nakanishi, in their book based on an e-conference about the EU-Japan relations, show the distance between the two partners: the authors mention how, even though the first ambassador to the European Communities (EC) dates back to 1959, the first EC delegation to Japan was not created until 1974; moreover, at this stage the economic relations were in Japan's favour, while the European Communities' Commission and Parliament were asking in vain to open Japan's market to European actors. In general, the years from 1959 to 1991 when the interactions between the two parts will start to converge, are described as a period of imbalanced and asymmetrical interests, in which both European states and Japan were still focusing on post-war reconstruction (Tambou and Nakanishi, 2020). This point will be restated in detail by Gilson, as well: indeed, she describes how, on one hand, Tōkyō was still bind to Washington decisions, because of its close reciprocal interactions with the US, which ensured a separation between Japan and the neighbouring states in its own region, and made the progress with the emerging European Communities slower; on the other hand, Europe was devoting itself to recover its war-torn economy and restoring peace, which included Germany's rehabilitation (Gilson, 2016; Gilson, 2020). The difficulties of this period are confirmed by De Prado: he explains how the years between 1960s and 1980s was characterized by economic frictions (also in Hatwell, 2007) and a slow emerging political interaction, even though there is no such thing as a common strategy yet, except for Japan interacting with individual European states and through its OECD membership (De Prado, 2017). This suggests an issue that the EU is still facing to this day: the division given by different points of view and positions of its own member states, which can make agreements and institutional process at international level significantly slower and more difficult, to the point of struggling to reach a univocal stance against international challenges. Hosoi gives a clear description of the events of

those years, especially underlining the issue of trade imbalances on Japanese side, that will become politicized during the 1970s and will lead to further intensification of trade frictions due to Japan's protectionist market (2019).

From de Prado's words clearly appears the difference between a slow political engagement and an economic situation already developing. In fact, during the 1960s Japan's exports will shift to machinery, finished and semi-finished product turning Japan current account into positive balance and creating tensions with Europe especially over car imports. The increasing friction is well represented by the first important bilateral negotiation in 1971, regarding a possible agreement between European Community and Japan to replace the existing arrangements and restrictions at the level of individual member states. The failure was determined not only by the inclusion of a safeguard clause but also because both states wanted to sustain the same economic growth of the 1950s-60s. Nevertheless, a step forward was reached with the establishment of permanent missions in Brussels and Tōkyō, regular High-level consultations, and ministerial visits (Keck, Vanoverbeke and Waldenberger, 2013).

However, the incipient political dialogue of 1980s, exemplified by the first ministerial meeting in 1984 (De Prado, 2017), did not stop the increasing criticism from both the EC and the US for Japan's trade practices. Keck, Vanoverbeke and Waldenberger will identify the most difficult period with the years 1970s-1990s (2013). We can clearly see how authors identify in different ways but still between 1950s and 1990s (some even during the 1940s), a first period of diplomatic relations confused, troubled and standoffish.

If scholars seem to agree that the period between the 1940s and 1990s was challenging for the EU-Japan relations because of several reasons, included the presence and agency of the US, in the same way it seems they agree in indicating other two turning point in this relation: the 1991 Joint Declaration on the relations between the EC and Japan, and the 2001 Action Plan for EU-Japan Cooperation. Even though the impact of these events is debatable depending on the analysis of the various scholars, the dates are often mentioned as something that shaped the path of the EU-Japan relations. First of all is important to define the specific aspects of the context that will lead to the signing of the 1991 Joint Declaration. For instance, Abbasi explains how during the 1980s the frictions

due to imbalances in trading and European difficulties in accessing the market, embraced a more constructive interaction, as well (Abbasi, 2002). Söderberg, although stating that the mutual interest of the parties was still lukewarm throughout the decade preceding the Hague Declaration, still identifies elements of innovation such as the pressure from Europe to open up the Japanese market and the increasing of bilateral contacts alongside the idea of a broader cooperative relationship, with Japan looking for a new role within the international community. "However", warned Söderberg, "only with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War was this process ready to take off" (Söderberg, 2012, p. 254). Gilson takes into further consideration the historical events of those years when the trade concerns were matching political interests: indeed, in the late 1980s (in particular 1989 Ed.), took place both the fall of the Berlin Wall and the wake of the so called 'Velvet Revolutions', two events which marked the apparent triumph of democracy and the recognition from the Japanese government of the need to engage in the emerging markets of Eastern Europe and, most of all, to engage with the political mechanism of the European bloc, beside intensifying the dialogue about security and the promotion of freedom from fear and want (Gilson, 2016).

This is the background against which the 1991 Joint Declaration (or Hague Declaration) was signed, during the first summit at The Hague in July (De Prado, 2017; Nuttall 1996). The month of the first summit is not always indicated in a univocal way: some sources say June 1991, other say July of the same year. In this case the month indicated by the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, i.e. July 1991, has been chosen as a reliable reference. This moment is seen as a proper beginning of bilateral relations between Europe and Japan (Balme and Bridges, 2008; Ponjaert, 2007), an event that gave a new significance to the course of this relation (Hosoya, 2012), to the point of outlining towards the following century (Fukuda and Van Miert, 1994). The aims of this Declaration were mainly to enhance the overall bilateral interaction (De Prado, 2017; Hosoya, 2012; Tambou and Nakanishi, 2020) and widen the scope of the EU-Japan relationship, towards a more equal exchange that would be able to include the facing of global issues: not only those strong, yet contentious, economic interests (Balme and Bridges, 2008) but also start developing strategic interest, setting a pathway that would be subsequently strengthened (Gilson, 2020). In the light of this intent, the Declaration

established a series of common principles and objectives (Abbasi, 2002) and, in addition, provided a consultation framework of annual summits between the EU and Japan, a structure consolidated by the 1995 European Strategy on EU and Japan and extended by the ten-year Action Plan for EU-Japan cooperation (Abbasi, 2002). According to Hosoya, the parts wanted also to be recognised as 'legitimate dialogue partners': in fact, Deputy Foreign Minister of Japan, Hiroshi Fukuda, in his speech introduced by Minister of State and Member of European Commission, Karel Van Miert, says how since July 1991, authorities on both parts stated, 'the need for a permanent dialogue between the Union and Japan' (1994, p. 3), especially that Japan was the one striving for expanding its relations, beyond the pre-existing trade, and for this reason took the initiative to propose such a partnership in the Japan-Europe Joint Declaration. It was also Japan to formulate the idea of an ASEAN Regional Forum, given the momentum regarding political and security field (Fukuda and Van Miert, 1994).

However, drawing from many scholars in the field, harsh criticism emerges with regard to this Declaration. Hosoya states clearly that beyond the noble intentions of both parts, the reality was as disappointing as the reluctant promotion of insignificant programs can be (2012). Abbasi notices how with the collapse of the Soviet Union (December 1991 Ed.) the EU decided to play a more active role in the transition of Central Asia towards market economies and democratic societies (Abbasi, 2002). A Europe always looking for new partners is also observed by Balme and Bridges: they illustrate how, even though the presence of the United States was still lingering in Japanese policy making, the steady progress in institutionalising the relations with Europe have been an important component in building Japan self-assuredness and encouraging it to engage in the international stage. However, the EU has also become increasingly interested both in India and China, partly at the expense of Japan (Balme and Bridges, 2008), as confirmed by Hosoya, explaining how China's rapid growth since the mid-1990s, motivated the EU to develop a strategic partnership with the country and in the same years Japan was eager once again to strengthen its cooperation with the United States under President Bush (presumably George H. W. Bush, mandate 1989-1993, Ed.). Once again it is given the impression of two countries drifting apart from each other in this relation, not really been able to surpass

the level of institutional rhetoric, which will be one of the points of further analysis of this dissertation.

Before proceeding with the review, it is worth noticing some positive aspects, that show the importance of the Declaration beyond the unfulfilled expectations. When the Joint Declaration was conceived, many East Asian partners of Japan were still in the middle of the challenging nation building process, so it was not possible to establish a cooperation between Europe and the entire East-Asian region. Nonetheless, the principles of the Joint Declaration are designed to be extended past the bilateral basis of the EU-Japan relation. Moreover, the Declaration represented a serious attempt to define the future role to a wider world, establishing an institutional framework in which Japan could have helped ensuring a more stable international environment (Owada, 2001).

As previously said, 2001 is indicated by many authors as one of the EU-Japan relations turning points, together with 1991 and 2011, the year in which it was decided to start the negotiations for both the Strategic Partnership Agreement and the Economic Partnership Agreement (Bacon, Mayer and Nakamura, 2015; De Prado, 2017; Frattolillo, 2013; Tambou and Nakanishi, 2020). The situation ten years after the Joint Declaration was still critical: in the field of multilateral trade, despite all rhetoric, the EU-Japan cooperation seemed far from liberalisation, partly because Europe's qualms in the direction to give to the process of liberalisation itself, and partly because liberalisation was in contrast with Japan's societal values and priorities making it reluctant to expose to market forces. For these reasons, the short-time progress in the EU-Japan cooperation might be modest (Labhom, 2001). Moreover, despite the Joint Declaration of 1991, the European Commission was still noticing those practices of discrimination and restriction in the market (Tambou and Nakanishi, 2020). So, what kind of progress were made with the new Action Plan? The Action Plan of December 2001 mark the further institutionalisation of the EU-Japan Relations (Bacon, Mayer and Nakamura, 2015; Gilson, 2016) and the mutual interest reflects the history of cooperation and tension, through both informal and institutionalised interactions, besides the need to deal with contemporary global challenge, thus demonstrating the attempt to shape more explicitly a common future.

The Action Plan substantiated and re-emphasised the formulation of the strategic partnership that was first implied by The Hague Declaration, recognised the institutional changes within Europe and Asia Pacific, and, in addressing global issues, included East Asian security and secure energy supply. Moreover, in 2001 the term 'strategic partnership' is applied for the first time to EU-Japan relations and will then be used in numerous official documents within Europe and Japan (Gilson, 2016). Hatwell contributes to the importance of this plan saying that the 2001 Action Plan is at the core of the wide range of subject that make the EU-Japan a comprehensive relationship, and it is characterised by extreme flexibility (2007); Tsuruoka adds that the EU-Japan Action Plan was already recognising the presence of 'untapped potential' (2013), that 'untapped potential' that will be one of the reasons for the negotiation of the EU-Japan SPA.

How did the parties arrive to this relevant step? Bacon, Mayer and Nakamura interestingly acknowledge in their analysis the evolution of Japanese politics, as well: they explain how the arrival of Koizumi Jun'ichirō in April 2001, already marked a significant political change because of his neo-liberal economic policy of deregulation, confronting the central bureaucracy and powerful members of his party, with regard to this policy area. Nonetheless, when it comes to Japanese foreign policy he adjusted to the stance of the central bureaucracy. At the ninth EU-Japan summit in 2000, the two sides declared a 'Decade of Japan-Europe Co-operation', starting from the following year. The intention was to convert the partnership into coordinated policies and concrete actions, with an 'Action Plan for EU-Japan Cooperation: Shaping Our Common Future', adopted at the 2001 summit (Bacon, Mayer and Nakamura, 2015). The Action Plan was formulated and adopted by both parts with four main objectives: 1) promoting peace and security; 2) further strengthening of the economic and trade partnership; 3) coping with global and societal challenges; 4) bringing together people and cultures (Bacon, Mayer and Nakamura, 2015; Berkofsky, 2007; De Prado, 2017). Obviously, these include arms control, disarmament as well as human rights, democracy and stability and, in this way, it reflects the changes within the partnership itself and the new roles that the EU and Japan have shaped for themselves in the post-Cold War international political scene (Reiterer, 2004). In fact, The 2001 Joint Action Plan, represents an example of security cooperation between EU and Japan, addressing the first areas of mutual support, i.e. the role of the

UN, the elimination of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), and the protection of human rights (Pejsova, 2015).

However, even though the '10-years Action Plan' markes a shift closer to cooperative and political rhetorics (Rothacher, 2013), its effectiveness is still debated. Bertoldi argues that trade and exchange rate retained a central role in the relationship (2013). In addition, Reiterer gives a particularly interesting contribution illustrating how, according to him, Japan and the EU should have brought to life this Decade of Cooperation initiated by the 2001 Summit and its Action Plan: firstly, they should not abandon the consultation and cooperation on foreign policy issues, as they have begun to see an increase in security cooperation both with Japan's engagement in Kosovo and the role played by the EU in the Korean Peninsula; they have intensified joint diplomatic efforts in difficult areas, i.e. Sri Lanka, Aceh and Afghanistan. Thus, it can be said that a security policy is developing. Secondly, even if economic cooperation keeps being the core of EU-Japan partnership, and it is considered a strength of both parts, they need to learn that economic power alone is not enough: cooperation is in the interests of EU as much as Japan, otherwise sustainable development will not be achievable. Joint efforts are essential to modernise the WTO and to strengthen multilateralism (Reiterer, 2004).

Therefore, despite the strong rhetoric and intentions, many authors find the effectiveness of the Action Plan, questionable at best. Indeed, Gilson, clearly encapsulates the main problem, explaining how the Action Plan, which had an 'over-packed agenda of promises' (p. 94), resulted in the development of a civilian power being set aside (2020). Berkofsky furtherly explained this point when writing that 'the Action Plan suffered from a lack of focus, and sought to tackle too many issues and areas without sufficient resources or adequate instruments' (2012, pp. 265-266). Frattolillo wrote in 2013 that the theoretically ambitious project the EU-Japan Partnership has not always shown its effectiveness: after a decade (supposedly from the Action Plan considering the year in which the book was written Ed.), it is still noticeable the lack of a truly compelling political dialogue, beside a lack of expectations in the global role of the EU from a Japan that still consider Washington as its privileged interlocutor despite its declining soft power (Frattolillo, 2013). Moreover, with regard to the historical context, it is important to remember that

2001, the tenth anniversary of the Joint Declaration, is also the year of the 9/11 terrorist attack that changed the world (Hook, Gilson, Hughes and Dobson, 2012; Hosoya, 2012). This event largely obscured the Action Plan with the 'War on Terror' and led Japan to neglect the relations with the EU in favour of the alliance with the United States, with Prime minister Koizumi not sending adequate signals about the EU-Japan relationship (Hosoya, 2012). In other words, the most strategic goals of the plan were not progressing due to the lack of focus and capabilities, to the point that in 2011, at the 20th summit in Brussels, they were not upgraded yet (De Prado, 2017). So, as the decade prescribed by Action Plan came to a close, the overall impression was that the relation had not matured, but instead still needed further steps. Consequently, the decision was taken in 2011 to initiate the negotiations of both a Free Trade Agreement and a Strategic Partnership Agreement (Bacon, Mayer and Nakamura, 2015).

1.2.2 The Importance of the United States

After considering these important events, I decided to include in the third chapter of the thesis what I considered to be important elements because of their ability to influence and intertwine with the way the European Union and Japan face interactions and relationships with each other, starting with the unquestionable role played by the United States regarding the developing of the EC/EU-Japan relations, not only in terms of material support but also of perceptions and importance associated to this actor. The insight offered by Berkofsky retraces the role of the US since the 1940s, when after World War II the country imposed a democratic constitution on Japan, setting the scope and the limits of Japanese policies regarding defence and security. The US will support Japan's reconstruction as well. The 1940s-1950s mark an increase of economic and military power for the US that will continue throughout the 1960s with a growing influence on Japanese foreign and security policies. Consequently, Tōkyō relations with Europe will remain relatively insignificant. Not only the US was Japan's main point of reference, but also, considering that these are the years of Cold War (1947-1991 Ed.), Europe itself was in the weakened position of being ideologically and geographically divided, caught in the middle of a conflict, while still preoccupied with the reconstruction of Western Europe (Berkofsky, 2007). This may recall the issue previously mentioned of Europe having hard time when dealing with its own internal divisions.

Nonetheless, through the 1950s and 1960s, Japan's economic rise was observed with suspicion by the European Economic Community (EEC) and the UK, as Japanese industries turned into formidable competitors. With the US support and readiness to keep the market open for exports and thanks to the American military protection, Japan will quickly become capable of threatening both the US and European dominance. Only in the 1980s Japan will start making efforts to reduce its security and defence dependence (Berkofsky, 2007). De Prado as well writes about US-Japan relations during 1950s-1980s as characterized by the role of junior partner of Japan towards the US, even though since 1950s, Japan suffered from a foreign policy confused, unfocused and ineffective despite the focus on growth drivers and the strong security alliance with the US. The risk of US-Japan arrangement to drift away, made Japan feel the need for a grander and more coherent strategy. Consequently, since 1990s and during the years 2010-2020, Japan has expanded its security capabilities under US's oversight (De Prado, 2017); it is no coincidence that those are the years of the so-called Abenomics (start in December 2012 with Prime Minister Shinzō Abe election, Ed.), the massive programme of monetary and fiscal stimulation, and structural reforms which seeks to end economic stagnation: the objectives include the willingness for Japan to assume its role as international power, escaping the legacy of WWII, i.e. by overturning many US reforms imposed during the post-war occupation. Nonetheless, in the process of revising the constitution, Prime Minister Abe established a commission to evaluate scenarios in which Japan could support the US (*Beyond Abenomics: Japan's grand strategy*, 2013).

According to other authors Japan started showing a more proactive foreign policy attitude, even before Abenomics: between 2000 and 2004 Japan expressed its willingness to support the US military after the terrorist attack of September 2001 (Hook, Gilson, Hughes and Dobson 2012). Once again, Gilson corroborates the abovementioned information, illustrating how the fact that Japan was allied to the US during the Cold war allowed it to retain its 'peace constitution' and dedicate itself to its own economic development, since the handling of security matters was left mainly to outsiders. However, after the end of the Cold War, this status has been called out, not only by Japanese but also from American policy makers for allowing the use of US resources for protecting Japan and intensifying the debate over the Security Treaty itself. Consequently, in the

light of a changing relations with the United States and of new global concerns the Japanese government had turned more attention to its Asian neighbours, through the participation to regional forums (Gilson, 2000). Regarding the US, seems like it was considering Japan a threat to their global economic supremacy to the point of partly blaming it for the American slowdown of productivity growth in the 1980s (Keck, Vanoverbeke, Waldenberger, 2013). Despite these frictions, Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichirō (mandate from 2001 to 2006 Ed.) will deem US-Japan relations as exclusively important for Japan, neglecting the significance of the relations with the European Union, as other Japanese Prime Ministers have also done (Hosoya, 2012).

1.2.3 Mutual Perceptions

At this point, it is important to take into consideration an overview of their images and perceptions. The importance of mutual perception in influencing the choices of the actors involved in this relation could already be deduced when it was said that despite the declining soft power of the United States, the Japanese prime minister still considered them priority partners, partly to the detriment of Europe (Frattolillo, 2013), and when it was pointed out that Japan's societal values was making it reluctant to open up to market force (Labhom, 2001), a crucial tendency given the importance of the economic component of the EU-Japan interactions. Could it be that the image the parties had of a particular actor, influenced their choices in prioritizing one relation over another one? Isn't it true that the European Union became interested in Japan because it perceived it a dangerous competitor in the economic and trading sphere? The actors' own perception of reciprocal demands can be the base of role conceptions and expectations, as well as the disparity between perceptions of international commitment and the objectives of the parts' foreign policy can lead to critical situations, something that the EU have already experienced in its relations with Russia and China (Michalski and Nilsson, 2018). Moreover, since part of the actual dissertation will be dedicated to the examination of two agreements between the EU and Japan, it is worth to mention that perception can influence negotiations, too: the negotiator's (mis)perception or (mis)representation can alter the display of the actual win-sets of the parties and, subsequently the outcomes of a negotiation (Weinhardt and Moerland, 2017). As stated in the analysis of the EU as a mediator, the examination of perceptions can add an indispensable points of view to

investigate the EU's role (Elgström, et al., 2018). For these (and additional) reasons, this part of the literature review will be dedicated precisely to explore the sources and points of view on this topic, with many important explanations coming from Oliviero Frattolillo (2013).

Oliviero Frattolillo, in his book "Diplomacy in Japan-EU Relations from the Cold War to the Post-Bipolar Era" (2013) reiterates many times the importance to consider the mutual perceptions of the parties, alongside cultural elements as well as identities. As he stated: 'Attempting to analyse the historical dimension of Japan-Europe interactions from the perspective of international relations, the first problem regards the theoretical approach… the mainstream international relations theory fails to fully explain Japan's posture towards Europe during the Cold War era and afterwards…' (p. 11). It is highlighted many times over and over how international relations alone cannot fully explain the behaviour of both parties in the context of their interactions, thus leading to the necessity of expanding the scope of the research. It is mentioned how both Japan and the European Union were significantly influenced by mutual perceptions (and misperceptions). Given the importance of economic relations in this analysis a particularly fitting example is represented by Japan's fast economic growth: this phase gave the impression that Japan was willing to act unscrupulously in order to achieve economic development. Cultural elements (such as Japanese pragmatic nationalism, an intrinsic cultural element distinctive of its foreign politics), exerted their impact as well (Frattolillo, 2013).

It has been already illustrated how the role of the US was influencing EU-Japan relations and Frattolillo's analysis contributes with an interesting insight, explaining how the post-relations between Tōkyō and Washington, has conditioned Japan look for a low-profile diplomatic approach to Europe. The involvement with the US in the first place was influenced by the way the US constructed and projected its identity: instead of building it upon theoretical elements like the EU, the United States focused on a more practical social identity, linked to a 'productive partnership' that encouraged Japan to accept US involvement, making the engagement of another representative of western values (namely the EU) unnecessary. Consequently, Japan institutionalised EU's role as not exceeding the stage of dialogue, creating an expectations gap (a matter treated also by Bendiek and

Kramer, already in 2010), partly due to the fact that Japan invests its limited resources for external relations with the US and other Asian partners, partly due to the fact that the EU's role in key foreign issues was not fully understood and was challenged by the difficulties in defining common positions within European countries, once again (Frattolillo, 2013).

Identity discourse is also included in this consideration and defined as a constant element, accompanying especially Japan in its evolving challenge to face globalization, and one of the elements that most deeply affected the path of Japanese-European relations' diplomatic history, alongside with the structure of the international system and the pragmatic internationalism. So it can be stated that Japan-EU relations has also been based on their mutual perceptions; even before 1990s there has been several attempt to interact at a diplomatic level, but they were obscured by external variables and misperceptions (Frattolillo, 2013). Japan assumed different images in the eyes of Europe throughout the decades, depending on historical instances: from the 'peril' of 1960s, to the 'partner' during the 1980s and the 'participants' finally in 1990s. These images were consequently accompanied by mutual perceptions and the connection between European and Japanese experiences was used to legitimise Japan's political initiative in relation to Western countries, especially in a way that was not only focused around America (Frattolillo, 2013): indeed, until 'America's Japan' was the one moulding Japan's image and binding Japan to his own post-war history, there would have been little space for relations with Europe (Harootunian in Miyoshi and Harootunian, 1993). Moreover, when it comes to the process of identity building, Pejsova rightfully refers to Japan's conflicting historical narratives, an obstacles in the process of creating shared memories and in the perception of Japan as a reliable security actor in the eyes of the EU: this makes Japan the object of criticism from EU's member states for revisionist tendencies (Pejsova 2015). The importance of the identity discourse appears again as a significant component of the ASEM process (Frattolillo, 2013): established in 1996, represents the institutional embodiment of this interregional relationship and has almost exclusively been determined by conjunctural external factors, i.e. the Asian economic boom that brought active cooperation in 1996, contrary to 1997 Asia's deep financial crisis that generated pessimism and disinterest. This uneven development could be considered an evidence of

historical inconsistency in engagement with East Asia (Vanoverbeke and Ponjaert, 2007). Nonetheless, it became an important tool to strengthen multilateralism in the relations between the EU and Japan. That fact that the identity discourse is often the base of the performance of states in ASEM, it means that interaction within ASEM itself is strongly linked to the identity construction process, and in this way the Meeting helped reinforcing EU's social identity in relation to Asia and particularly to Japan (Frattolillo, 2013). However, concerning ASEM's environment and the matter of identity, Pacheco Pardo gives a striking insight: he argues that through ASEM, EU has built its own corporate and social identity, not only towards Asian countries but also towards China and Japan, specifically. At the same time, both those identities prevent the EU from being more engaged in East Asia's political affairs and influence Chinese and Japanese perception of the EU, making them reject deeper European political involvement in East Asia. For this reason, ASEM's inability to create trans-national links between the EU and East-Asia would imply that EU's identity is lacking a powerful institution (Pacheco Pardo, 2009).

With regard to Japan's perception of Europe, we can equally see an evolution. From Edström edited book, it is particularly noteworthy Stegewerns contribution with an analysis of the changes in Japan's image of Europe between the first and second World War. Apparently in prewar days Europe was associated to progressivism and attracted attention from many Japanese intellectuals, only to change their mind during and after the years of the 'The Great European War' that exposed Europe as conservative and imperialist, and the newly established Europe-dominated League of Nation was either ignored or rejected. On the contrary, when the US took East Asian stage as the new era economic superpower in 1921 most Japanese commentator reacted favourably, even though the US never became a symbol of civilization but more of capitalism and in part was considered Japan's only serious potential enemy. This, added to the fact that in 1924 the US Congress approved anti-Japanese legislation, briefly re-ignited Japanese interest in Europe, with the most amount of sympathy gained by the Communist model of the Soviet Union looked at as 'rational and idealistic' amongst the Taishō bummei hihyōka (Taisho era civilisation critics Ed.); however, even this model was eventually considered too heterogenous to receive continuous attention (Stegewerns, 2000). It is noteworthy that self-identities and perceptions can be defined at every stage of the relations process,

although this does not mean that perceptions and identities change constantly: actually, relations can constantly reinforce pre-existing self-identities and perceptions (Wendt, 1999 in Pacheco Pardo, 2009).

Finally I would like to point out an example of how images and relations intertwine through diplomatic strategies, addressing Żakowski's article about Japan's value-oriented diplomacy, which has been one of the foundations of Abe's administration. This particular diplomacy technique, promotes values such as democracy, free-market economy, human rights and rule of law, yet doubts remains whether Japan actually lives up to these expectations. The raising of these suspects led to the accusation of using this diplomacy tactic only as convenient but empty slogan. Abe's ideology is shared by the Foreign Minister, Asō Tarō, who explains how some values were inculcated into Japanese culture even before Meiji Restoration of 1868. However, a side-effect of this promotion of Western values by befriending democracies like the US, Australia, India, or EU, is that Japan enjoys a cheerful and warm image that allows it to possess a considerable amount of soft power. Nonetehless, even though the promotion of this values creates the impression of an idealistic approach, the fact that they are selectively applied if not totally omitted, depending on the country Japan is referring to, makes value-oriented diplomacy a more pragmatic activity to not jeopardize relations with strategically important countries. For this reason, even though Europe has become instrumental in providing credibility to Abe's Proactive Contribution to Peace, states interests are the foundations behind Tōkyō's value-oriented diplomacy, and this is why, for instance, respecting international law with the aim of containing China did not kept Japan from attempting a backstage deal with Russia on Northern Territories after Crimea annexation (Żakowski, 2019). In other words, Żakowski argues that value-oriented diplomacy showed a case of strategic and conscious use of self-image and of the interests of other countries, then adjusting the diplomatic activity at the best of its potential. Pejsova, as well, mentions the matter of public diplomacy as a battle of primary importance for Japanese policymakers: Tōkyō needs to persuade its own public to detach from the 'Pacifist Past', while, simultaneously, reassuring neighbouring country of its peaceful intentions to avoid exacerabating regional tensions (2015). As a link between international image and international interactions, Morii has analysed the EU-Japan annual bilateral summits: the

particular feature of these summits is that, even though they did not achieve much cooperation, they are highly institutionalised and unique to this particular relation since Japan does not hold summits with any other actor but the EU. Morii's conclusion is that this part of the relation serves the aim of giving each party respect and signals the respective international status: because of this each summit is heavily scripted to make sure to perform in a convincing way, reinforcing cooperation and international status (Morii, 2015).

1.2.4 Normative Power

The importance of reciprocal images and perceptions in relations between the EU and Japan can be linked to an element that has been analyzed by various scholars as related to the identity of the European Union, a concept that has been associated to European role and agency, including its relations with other countries: the EU as Normative Power. We'll see how scholars describe this concept, why it is important and giving an example of how it applies in actual relations between EU and Japan.

A precious explanation of the topic is given by Manners, in his article "The Concept of Normative Power in World Politics". He describes how this concept involves a normative justifications, opposed to material justifications that involves three different but strictly connected elements in its use: first of all, normative power should be seen as legitimate through a convincing and attractive justification and a cohesive promotion. For instance, principles in European relations draw upon certain instruments such as Charters, Declarations or Conventions, whose international consistence comes from a High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs. Second of all, Normative power should be perceived as persuasive in its actions, which involve persuasion and argumentation as much as the bestowal prestige or shame. Examples of this behaviour are constructive engagement, institutionalisation of relations and encouragement of dialogue, and the Union's action covers several practices and policies, particularly the encouragement of dialogue is EU's greatest strength when promoting principles. Finally, Normative power should encompass socialisation, partnership and ownership, in a process that overall nurtures domestic, transnational and international principles. Despite Europe's positive stances, its promotion of principles has not always been easy to judge: the EU has a

history and capacity for practicing normative power but seems like instead of using normative power in a more justifiable way and make some creative efforts, simply tended to follow patterns and practices of 'great powers' (Manners, 2009). The research benefits a precious contribution by Forsberg, who in the debate around Normative Power Europe, indicated five criteria's to identify normative power: having a normative identity, having normative interests, behaving in a normative way, using normative means of power and, of course, being able to achieve normative ends (Forsberg, 2011). Börzel and Risse identified different criteria, instead, focusing their framework on EU member states, acceding states and neighbourhood states, defining the norm as expectation of appropriate behaviour based on a given collective identity and the diffusion as the process to make ideas, policies and standards travel across time and space (Börzel and Risse, 2012).

Diez gives a different point of view, investigating normative power in the light of the concept of hegemony: he considers how hegemony includes both norms and interests, without starting from a pre-given set of norms and considering inconsistencies as part of normative power. In addition, hegemony expands the understanding of the actors and re-orientates the debate to reinstate a critical purpose. With regard to Europe, normative power has influenced the debate and presented Europe as pursuing normative aims (instead of material ones) through normative means, instead of military and economic means. Diez argued whether the idea of normative power belittles the component of 'power' and thus, should be replaced by the concept of hegemony, turning attention to EU foreign policy practices. The author suggests using a Gramscian conception of hegemony, which focuses more on the power of ideas and consensus rather than considering only brute force (Diez, 2013a). Diez's analysis, in particular this last part, seems to agree with Manner conception of normative power as ideational and linked to the spreading of principles and values. This aspect is reflected in EU's role as a security actor with regards to Japan: as opposed to the US, whose alliance with the Asian country is supposed to ensure Tōkyō's security in a more traditional way, the Union presents a softer image which allows it to be partly perceived as less threatening and less controversial (Pejsova, 2015).

Given this more theoretical introduction, it is essential to explain why the concept of 'Normative Power' should at least be named when speaking of the European Union and its international relations. A fundamental contribution comes from Anna Michalski in her video abstract for the article "Resistant to Change? The EU as a Normative Power and Its Troubled Relations with Russia and China" (Michalski and Nilsson, 2018). As stated in the video, the focus of the analysis is the EU's self-perception, international identity, and normative power and the way it constructed foreign policy actions and orientations. It is pointed out that EU's conception and attachment to its normative power prevented it from seeing the changed positions in the international order. To understand why the EU's view was so clouded because of how much it was trapped in its own conception, as Michalski explains, we always have to remind that the EU is not a traditional foreign actor, like a state, and because of this it is not motivated by interests in its foreign policy but rather by its own international identity and role, avoiding the issues of a national foreign policy of its member states. For this reason the EU held tightly to its conception as a normative power (Foreign Policy Analysis, 2018), a power that is ideational and connected to the spreading of certain values, as Diez (2013a) and Manners (2009) formerly mentioned.

Regarding specifically the relations between the EU and Japan, an example of Normative Power used to spread European values is represented by the case Capital punishment in Japan and how the EU tried to deploy its influence in promoting abolition of death penalty in the country. Obara was analysing this situation already in 2013, observing how Japan was still retaining the capital punishment (declared constitutional since 1948), although more and more countries abandoned it. The author explain why Japan is resisting and in its research took into consideration the importance of institutional constraints and framework, starting from the decision-making system and why for Europe is so difficult to exert influence on Japanese policies in Japan. The author observed that the lack of interest towards human rights connected with capital punishment came from the governmental approach to the issue of death penalty as a matter of criminal justice. Europe need to change its death-penalty campaigns also because of the Japanese stance about human rights: using human rights perspective will be perceived as an intervention in international affairs and will cause resistance; it is more important to find which institutional framework influenced the government (Obara, 2013). The same topic was

dealt with again, in 2021, by Bacon and Nakamura, and it shows how the problem was addressed by demonstrating that the death penalty was actually not as supported by public opinion as the government had tried to depict, and how in light of the Economic Partnership Agreement and Strategic Partnership Agreement signed in 2018, both parties need to reaffirm commitment to common values and principles (Bacon and Nakamura, 2021). This seems to confirm Michalski's theory that EU's attachment to normative power might prevent it from correctly reading its counterpart stance and the international changes and respond accordingly. On the contrary, Tsuruoka points out how Europe pervasively projects the image of the part which is always lecturing others (2016).

1.2.5 Path Dependency

After seeing how mutual perceptions and images affect the behaviour of the actors, and how normative power intertwines with EU's identity and the way its interactions with Japan unfold, I have chosen to analyse the concept of path dependency on the EU-Japan relations, in terms of conditions and events that might have influence the evolution of their mutual relationship.

Mahoney gives useful information about this theoretical concept, describing how it originated from organisational theory about human behaviour, explaining that patterns of conduct persist even after a significant change in the environment and referring to historical sequences in which contingent events set into motion institutional patterns with deterministic properties (Mahoney, 2000). With regard to this patterns, Gilson notices how a path can be analysed, by looking at self-reinforcing sequences characterized by long-term reproduction of a pattern: through this increasing return the pattern becomes embedded. However, this depict actors as doomed to reproduce always the same past legacies or that early events are nothing more but the result of contingency (Gilson, 2016). Vergne and Durand also give explanations on how this concept is about increasingly constraining processes difficult to escape (2010).

Already in 1999, path dependency was studied by Thelen in a way that was not separating institutional stability from institutional change and considered two ways of thinking: one from the literature on economics and technology, focused on trying to understand technological trajectories, and the one from 'new' institutional sociologists. According to

Thelen, both contained insights that sustained particular patterns of politics. With regard to this topic, the author noticed a particular feature, i.e. that politics is characterised by disagreement over goals and disparities in power, but the loser does not always disappear, and its adaptation may lead it to wait until more suitable conditions to rebound, or to work differently to pursue a goal. For this reason, in politics increasing return do not necessarily result in a permanent balance (Thelen, 1999). In agreement, contrary with traditional vision which associate path dependence with inertia and absence of change, Garud and Karnøe argued that novelty does not necessarily deny the past but can elaborate it and extend it following a certain direction in a sequence of unfolding events, making novelty a path dependent phenomenon as well (Garud and Karnøe, 2001). Djelic and Quack seemed to agree with this vision when stating that the concept of path dependency implies a stable and deterministic balance which, however, is deemed to last only temporarily, because at a certain point paths come to an end, and a new set of contingent events will lead to a reorientation. (Djelic and Quack, 2007). In Thelen's work is also considered that the historical institutional approach includes claims in which founding moments of institutional formations respond to changing environmental conditions constrained by past trajectories, but also claims in which institutional formations are sent along different paths, suggesting that institutions continue to evolve (Thelen, 1999).

All these ambiguities are, however, pointed out in the critics regarding this concept: again Vergne and Durand noticed how path dependence did not have a clear definition, and scholars were still skeptical about the empirical elements to support it; furthermore, this phenomenon might occur or not, due to unspecified conditions, and the outcome that it leads to are not always consistent. They also argued that path dependence cannot be considered a theory since it does not causally relate identified variables systematically, and the existing literature tended to merge together dependence as a process (the repeating of self-reinforcing mechanisms) and as a result (persistent specific properties). To respond to these uncertainties the authors developed a narrower definition that represents path dependence as a property of stochastic process (a process that gathers random variables defined by a common probability space, Ed.) and occurs under two specific conditions: contingency and self-reinforcement, causing lock-in in the absence of exogenous shock. In this way, the definition has greater theoretical and empirical value,

offering the necessary elements to distinguish path dependence from simple historical events (Vergne and Durand, 2010).

With regard to EU-Japan relations, Gilson finds the institutionalisation of 1991 hard to break away from to forge new partnerships, against the background which views institutions as 'carriers of history' and maintain through time those norms and cultural patterns already existing (a situation that seems to fall under the self-reinforcing definition). Consequently, according to Gilson, this may offer a useful starting point for explaining the apparent inertia and incremental change (Gilson, 2016), contrary to what others scholars have said, of path dependency not excluding novelty (Garud and Karnøe, 2001). Furthermore, the fact that the characteristics developed in sensitive period are persisting, can be interpreted as the proof that the architects of the EU-Japan relation are misreading the actors and setting (Marquis and Tilcsik, 2013 cited in Gilson, 2016). Moreover, Gilson interestingly notes that the path dependent trajectory may encompass certain 'conceptions of the normal', built at a foundational stage, leading to the reproduction of certain types of conduct which will then shape strategies and goals (Gilson, 2020). These 'conceptions of the normal' are shaped by normative power, which can, therefore, be identified (once again) by how it affects the interpretation of what behaviour is considered appropriate by other actors (Diez in Manners, 2006). It could be argued that Japan-EU relation might be heavily influenced by the historical circumstances that brought them together, for example thinking about the fluctuating perception that Japan had of Europe and how the changes were linked to particular historical events, and, on the other side, how Europe was attracted to Japan because of the sudden economic growth that was made achievable by US's protection taking care of Japan's security.

1.2.6 The EU-Japan Strategic and Economic Partnership Agreements

In the previous paragraphs we have tried to paint, through various sources and authors, an exhaustive picture that would show the complexity of the relations between the European Union and Japan, both from the point of view of historical events and interactions over time, and from the point of view of mutual perception and mechanisms that may have influenced its evolution, identity and paths of progression. As an attempt to assess where the relations between the European Union and Japan might be in recent

years, in terms of economic and political relations, a more detailed look will be taken into two agreements that have lately attracted a significant amount of attention: the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), a more comprehensive free trade agreement, and the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), a political agreement through which Tōkyō and Brussels will become promoters of international values such as democracy, rule of law, fundamental freedoms and human rights. As they are often treated together, sources regarding both agreement will be analysed in this part, for the purpose of recreating an image of EU-Japan relations as complete as possible. The European Union and Japan have strived for deeper political interaction since 1991, and then in 2001 and 2011, with the beginning of the negotiations for SPA and EPA: therefore, the aim will be to evaluate if progresses has been made and what are the main critics through the references taken into consideration. As stated by Gilson: 'Sitting alongside negotiations for an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), this SPA represents an attempt to reignite bilateral relations between these two global powerhouses' (2016, p. 2).

With regard to Europe, the European Security Strategy (ESS) had already committed the EU to the pursuit of foreign policy goals through multilateralism and through the partnerships with key actors, which are referred to as strategic partners. According to the vision of the ESS there are three types of strategic partners: the first category included partnerships deemed as 'irreplaceable', namely the one with the United States, whose foundations were strengthened by cultural affinities and the bond through NATO. The second category was represented by the relation with Russia, because of its major influence in matters like security and prosperity. Finally the third category included a group of states which the EU was seeking to develop a strategic relationship with, including Japan. Nevertheless, already in 2010, EU's strategic partnerships were raising some doubts regarding their effectiveness: in these partnerships, the EU was including global issues and was also promoting an idea of responsible power as an incentive for emerging countries to take responsibility. However, if evaluating the efficacy in term of turning the EU in the hub of international coalition, promoting solutions to world problems, then the partnerships did not meet the expectations; this could be a symptom of how, perhaps, the Union should take smaller steps and build multilateral dimension gradually through bilateral relations (Bulut et al, 2010).

When it comes to EU-Japan relations, these two actors spent decades trying to normalize their trade links and enhancing their interactions. The efforts culminated in July 2017, when political leaders agreed to EPA and SPA to promote cooperation on different issues reinforced by fundamental values of democracy, rule of law and human rights. The first few years of negotiations were difficult and lacking in progress, mostly because of the actors international status or by diplomatic path dependency as analysed by Gilson; despite the obstacles, there were more reasons to start a cooperation than to prevent it. Consequently the 6th of July 2017, the President of the European Council and European Commission, and the Prime Minister of Japan reached an agreement 'in principle' to finalize SPA and EPA, highlighting the potential to face a new type of strategic partnership recapturing shared values, as well, even though the real convergence on values and ideals would have need a long time to fully mature (De Prado, 2017).

As explained by Jochheim and Soutullo in a European Parliament fact sheets on East Asia, the EU-Japan SPA covers political dialogue and cooperation on policy matters as well as regional and global challenges, while the EPA contains dispositions regarding both trade of goods and services and promoting bilateral investment (2019). Hosoi stated that the only interests that Japanese society has towards Europe are economics and for this reason there is much less coverage of the strategic partnership. Nonetheless, sharing the fundamental values promoted by the SPA is important, given the challenges that the international order has to face, and since these values are at the core of Japanese diplomacy. Therefore, It is crucial for Japan to reconfirm its commitment to the fundamental values of 1991 The Hague Declaration (Hosoi, 2019).

Regardless of the highly rhetoric aim of being guardians of human rights and having adopted one of the most comprehensive economic agreements, criticism needs to be taken into consideration, concerning the countries' situations as well as the agreements. First of all, Julie Gilson points out how the context that saw this contemporary partnership cementing, has significantly changed from the Joint Declaration of 1991, preventing the initial aim of a strategic partnership to work as planned. The very composition of the EU is unrecognisable, because of the changes to pursue the purpose of an 'even closer union' and develop different types of participation within the regional stage (Gilson, 2016),

whose diversities have many times challenged the EU's agency: on one hand, since the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s Europe experienced the fall of the communist regimes and the tragedy of Yugoslavia, (Baffi and Brengola, 2007); on the other hand, from the 1980s Japan has experienced over two decades of economic failure (Gilson, 2016), made even more challenging by the asset bubble burst of 1991, that opened a decade of recession and profound changes, including the ones of the political front. From this point of view, the so-called 'Lost Decade' marked a transition from a relatively isolated and sheltered developmental economy to a more open and competitive economy characterised by a deeper knowledge (Ponjaert, 2007). Gilson shows that, still in 2015, Japan was not considered a priority partner, and instead was housed within the ambiguous and unclarified notion of strategic partnership, locked by an earlier arrangement that does not mirror the changed structures of engagement at local and international level (Gilson, 2016). The difficulties and inconsistencies were also observed by Żakowski, who points out the discrepancy between the slogans of respecting universal values and the reality on domestic ground, a gap typical of the 'ideological flexibility' of Abe's administration that started exacerbating Japan's positive image among cultural and academic élites. This behaviour may result in undermined credibility of Japan as a reliable partner of the EU (Żakowski, 2019).

Furthermore, criticism is worth mentioning specifically concerning the EPA, too: Monjal writes that this agreement, although being the most important economic agreement signed by the EU and being very ambitious, it remained below the level of other EPAs signed by the EU with other countries. This happened not only because it is still necessitating parallel negotiations on specific topics and the procedural provisions are still not accepted by Japan, but also because the agreement itself cannot provide all guarantees of satisfaction. Indeed, even though now most economic agreements are backed by political agreement, this practice is not specific to the relations with Japan, weakening the question of the binding nature of the agreement (Monjal, 2020). In addition, the Japan-EU EPA has been criticised for being still too focused on old issues and consequently lacking innovation and competitiveness as well as being an agreement of modest scale, if compared with transatlantic trade (Suzuki, 2017).

Finally, one of the major sources of skepticism is the nature of the SPA itself: since the 2000s SPAs were generic labels used by the EU to describe a wide range of activities with ten of its significant partners, aiming to address global challenges and safeguarding EU's core interests and objectives. Nonetheless, these characteristics paired with the lack of focus and coordination of the EU, which sits at the core of many challenges faced by the Union in its relations, can easily explain why the consistent effectiveness of the agreement raises some doubts (Gilson, 2016; Berkofsky, 2012). Pejsova remarked this aspect even before the agreement was reached, saying that the EU needs like-minded partners to develop a robust foreign and security policy, but even though it has been Japan's Strategic Partner since 2003, the contour of this relationship remain vague and undefined. At the same time, it is described that Tōkyō as well views EU potential with skepticism, keeping it at the outskirts of its strategic planning (2015).

1.3 The methods and sources

As it can be observed, Julie Gilson undoubtedly appears as a consistent reference throughout the research, alongside De Prado, Berkofsky, Diez, Manners, and Frattolillo, with their clear and thorough analysis of several aspects of EU-Japan relationship, and Japanese authors Hosoya, Hosoi and Morii, who especially offered an interesting contribution investigating diplomacy and dialogue in this relation, in order to offer a picture as much exhaustive as possible. For the same reason and for the particular nature of events and elements analysed, different types of references have been included: books and academic articles will be referred to, offering interesting and useful insight, as well as video conferences and presentations. For the institutional quality of many episodes, official sources and/or statements and intervention might be included; in the same way, newspapers' articles might occasionally help giving a broader picture of the criticisms and perplexities about the more recent agreements and exploring the foundation of organisational theory and the concept of path dependence so that it will be possible to understand the possible motivation which led to certain decisions being taken.

Furthermore, for the sake of answering to the main question, the analysis have included a chapter of historical summarization, whose purpose is to give a contextualisation for further and deeper analysis: in particular, as it will be explained specific turning point

have been chosen in order to show the evolution of the relationship, from mainly focused on economic issues and frictions to seemingly willing to broaden the scope of its cooperation. A theoretical framework will be provided in the third chapter, and will consider the abovementioned elements US's role and its impact and interference with the relations between the EU and Japan, including their mutual perceptions – that will be subsequently analysed – as factor of influence in decision making and in the shaping of interactions between actors: in this regard, even though acknowledging the internal differences within the EU's own member states, it was not always possible to include the reciprocal stance between Japan and single European states, when describing the agreements, a part will be dedicated to delineate Japan's interactions with some European member states. Moreover, as a peculiar aspect of EU's role as an international actor, normative power will be examined, as well, given its connection with European spreading of values and principles. Finally, as case study, the recent Strategic Partnership Agreements and Economic Partnership Agreements have been included to assess whether the European Union and Japan manage to include effective political interactions in a relationship that has always been (and treated as) predominantly economic: therefore, given the scope of the two agreements, evaluating them in terms of backgrounds, content, negotiation and criticism, may allow a comparison with the starting point considered in the second chapter. Since 1950s many things have changed both at regional and international level, and this thesis intends to shed some light in the complex dynamics of a long bilateral relation analysing how two actors can adapt to the new challenges imposed by the last decades and, at the same time, preserving those core principles and shared values that still shapes international cooperation.

Chapter 2
THE EVOLUTION OF EUROPEAN UNION – JAPAN RELATIONS

2.1 Introducing the Chapter

In this chapter will be analysed the relations between Europe and Japan in their historical evolution starting from the end of WWII, through the conflicting years of the 1960-1980 until the 1990 and the first decade of the 2000. The purpose will be to assess whether the economic relations are as predominant as many scholars have written or if an efficient political relation was already developing. In this regard, will be taken into consideration the 1991 The Hague Declaration, as a turning point towards an institutionalisation of relations beyond the trading exchanges, and the Ten Year Action Plan of 2001, as a tool to give new impetus and momentum to the political relations among European Countries and Japan.

2.2 From the 1950s to the Divide of 1991 Joint Declaration

In 1991, the leaders from the EU and Japan started holding annual summits, the first of which was held in The Hague, in the Netherlands, where was signed a joint declaration to encourage the enhancement of the relationship between the two actors (De Prado, 2017). This document would be prominent as the 1991 The Hague Declaration (or Joint Declaration) between Japan and the European Community (which will later become the European Union) marking the decision of the parts "to intensify their dialogue and to strengthen their cooperation and partnership in order that the challenges of the future may be met" (MOFA 1991 in Hosoya 2012, p. 317). It is the 18 July and The Hague Declaration begins, with a preamble assessing the commons values of the parts and the base of the relationship, rooted in a "common attachment to freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights" (Joint Declaration on Relations between The European Community and its Member States and Japan, 1991 in Gilson 2020, p. 91). It is in this way, for many participants and observers, that began a new chapter in the history of Japan-EC relations (Gilson 2000). Berkofsky wrote that was one of the first results of the EU and Japan's efforts to intensify economic, political and security interactions, with its

hopeful rhetoric mirroring Japanese 'Europhoria' for the end of the Cold War: at this point Japan was wishing for a decade that could see the unravel of Euro – Japanese cooperation (Berkofsky, 2007, p. 10). But how did the parts arrive at this point in their evolution? What was the historical background against which this Declaration was signed? When did the relationship between the European Union and Japan start?

2.2.1 A Difficult Prologue after World War II

Historically, Europe and Asia interacted in the first place not as regions, but as states (Balme and Bridges, 2008): indeed, already in 1792, and again in 1804, Russia had tried unsuccessfully to establish trading relations with Japan, in addition to British; from the beginning of the nineteenth century, the arrival of British ships also led the government to reaffirm the policy of closure called *sakoku* in 1825. In 1844 the king of Holland, William II, sent a letter urging Japan to change its foreign policy, which would have happened in 1854 with the Kanagawa Treaty, following the arrival of Commodore Perry the previous year to present the requests of the US government to Japan (Caroli and Gatti, 2004). The aim was to pursue trade through missions and ventures, or as individuals realising colonial projects, and it is against this scenario that Japan tried to emulate Europeans' imperial ambitions, even though European presence in the area decreased as a response of growing US engagement caused by the deepening of the Cold War. Therefore, it could be said that Europe – Asia relations were initially established following European plans of expansion and conquest (Balme and Bridges, 2008). At the end of WWII, in 1945 the situation for both sides was critical: Japan had lost its colonial territories and other areas that were under its control, besides being devastated by wartime events. For these reasons, the country focused on economic reconstruction and re-establish relations with Asian countries; it was also in these years that Japan came under the strong influence of the United States because of the American Occupation of the country (Tōgō, 2010). It should be pointed out, however, that the tight bond that was created with Washington during postwar years, although providing military defense and, therefore, allowing Tōkyō to focus on its economic regrowth, at the same time limited Tōkyō's foreign policy decisions (Gilson, 2016). On the other hand, Europe was a victor only in appearance: in reality, in the same way as Japan, Europe lost all its Asian colonial possession and had to face domestic devastation, as well, setting the primary need to focus

on economic recovery (Tōgō, 2010). This, of course, included the necessity to ensure sustained peace and rehabilitate Germany by founding what would become today's European Union (Gilson, 2016). Because of this situation on both sides, postwar relations between Japan and Western Europe began with mutual disregard, slowly and cautiously aiming at reconciliation, or in worst cases with a sense of antipathy from Europe to Japan (Tōgō, 2010).

Albeit briefly, it is relevant to mention the impact of the Marshall Plan for aid to Europe. The acts that became known as the 'Marshall Plan' allowed the Congress to provide foreign aid to European countries after WWII. As part of the Truman doctrine against Communism, (Weissman, 2013). The Marshall plan consisted of a financing plan in favor of sixteen European countries, including Italy and Germany, with which to bind the governments that would benefit from it and create a market capable of buying American products (Baffi and Brengola, 2007). The immediate economic impacts of the Plan surged American exports and supported the recovery of European industry. Nonetheless, in the long run, the reliance on the Plan fostered an 'Americanization' of Western Europe and the American style free-market economy. On a political level, it helped restoring democracy and the balance of power in Europe, responding to the fear of Communism, but also contributing to start the Cold War with a monetary assistance that reinforce European divisions (Weissman, 2013).

The economic interest between the countries of Western Europe and Japan started to grow during the 1950s, and from that point on Japanese government and industries increasingly considered the possibility of market opportunities in Europe (Gilson, 2020). First of all, in 1951, the necessity for both Europe and Japan to resume normal diplomatic relations, will lead to a reconciliation process started by the San Francisco Peace Treaty, signed in September of that year by seven European countries that had fought the war with Japan. Although the reconciliating aim, Europe decided that someway the war score needed to be settled, and even though allied countries agreed to waive their right to reparation, Japan had to pay 4.5 million pounds to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in 1955, and the following year Japan offered spontaneously a 10 million dollar solatium to the Netherlands. Despite the fact that these decisions didn't completely settle war-related

issues, from the middle of the 1950s onwards economic matters became central for the two sides, especially the priority for Japan to be granted membership to major international economic institutions, such as the GATT (Tōgō, 2010). Since the re-establishment of economic relations with the countries of the EC, in the 1950s and 1960s, the MOFA (the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) has been in constant exchange – even though often in disagreement - with the two key economic ministries of METI (Ministry of Economy Trade and Industry) and MOF (Ministry of Finance). These ministries have been involved in the process of guiding the direction of Japan's trade towards the EC, especially the METI pressured over time domestic industries, both favouring and hindering trade relations with the EC (Hook, et al., 2005).

At the beginning of the 1950s, at the end of Allied Occupation in 1952 to be exact, Japan was finally able to regain its independence which allowed the country to resume its diplomatic relations with many European states; nonetheless, the predominance of the United States in each region, has essentially constituted an obstacle for the development of bilateral dialogue forum (Gilson, 2000). Therefore, during the year of Cold War, exchanges between the EU and Japan were fairly limited, partly because of Western Europe being heavily preoccupied with reconstruction, both at economic and social level, while still being divided and caught in between the deadlocks of Cold War geographically and ideologically (Berkofsky, 2007). In fact, Japan and the EC were mostly represented within academic literature and political speeches, as a mere component of a triangle of interests which included the United States, as well (Tsuruoka, 2006 in Gilson, 2020). Because of this depiction of a trilateral framework, inevitably kept Japan and the EU in the shadows of the US foreign policy and consequently the Japan-EU side of the triangle constantly appeared as weak. As will be later explained, was Prime Minister Ikeda, in 1962, to propose a 'three pillar theory' in order to integrate and balance US-EC-Japan interactions, making sure that the growing ties with the EC both at economic and political level would not endanger Japanese relations with the US (Gilson, 2020). It is true indeed that the historical context of the Cold War deeply influenced Japanese diplomacy in the postwar years, reflecting the decisions taken by then Prime Minister, Shigeru Yoshida, (mandate from 22 May 1946 to 24 May 1947, and from 15 October 1948 to 10 December 1954), whose homonymous doctrine followed three core principles:

I. Assign to the United States the majority of Japan's security.
II. Minimize defense efforts on Japan's side.
III. Allocate the available resources to the economic development (Kusunoki, 2020).

Japan's reliance on the United States did not prevent clashes and disputes between the two from happening, which sparked European suspicious towards Japan's products, in particular for the possible threats Japan represented for the textile industry: for this reason the UK, France and Germany through their governments strongly resisted Japanese membership to GATT. On Japan's side, the formation of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957, was witnessed with actual trepidation: Tōkyō was especially dubious of the possible effects deriving form the measure of the Common External Tariff on Japan's trade with Europe. However, in the end, Japan's short-term worries gave way to the possible benefits that could have been received from an integrated European area. Nonetheless, the actions of single member states materialized Tōkyō concerns, in terms of restrictions and limitations to Japanese products (Gilson, 2000): the fear of European protectionist bloc, already made Japanese 'hysteria' outbreak in response, leading to the request, during the 15th GATT meeting in Tōkyō (Rothacher, 1983, in Gilson, 2000) in 1959, to have the application of article 35 removed ("Non-application of the Agreement between Particular Contracting", The Text of The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, 1986, p. 52), in order to force parties to comply with GATT rules (Gilson, 2000).

Officially, 1959 is indicated as the beginning of the EU-Japan bilateral relations: in fact, that year Japan's Prime Minister (Nobusuke Kishi, mandate from 31 January 1957 to 19 July 1960, ed.) visited Brussels and accredited Japan's ambassador to Belgium, also as Japan's ambassador to the three European Communities (De Prado 2017; Lai, Holland and Kelly 2019). Still, the years from 1959 to 1991, saw the relations between European Communities and Japan being marked by an imbalanced and asymmetrical interest (Tambou and Nakanishi, 2020), to the point where it is widely acknowledged that Japan-Europe relations can be described as a 'history of economic friction'. As a matter of fact, the economic side of the relationship is the most developed, more than the political side, testified by the fact that among both academics and citizens there is a greater interest in economic relations (Hosoi, 2019, p. 297). Interestingly enough, referring to 1959 Gilson

notices how ‘at the time issues of ‘political’ nature dominated the agenda between Japan and Europe and provided the point of reference for Kishi’s trip, since the common views over particular political issues (such as Soviet actions) were found to be easier to achieve than more contentious trade squabbles’ (2000, p. 16). This will set a striking contrast with the later dominance of trade issues and the slow reintroduction of political matters around 1980s (Gilson, 2000).

2.2.2 From the 1960s to 1980s: Between Trade Conflicts and Emergent Dialogue

The economic frictions characterised the interactions between Europe and Japan, especially between the 1960s and 1980s, a relatively short period of time considering the long-term perspective of EU-Japan interactions (Hosoi, 2019). Since many scholars seem to agree on this statement, it is certainly worth to take a more detailed look at the events of those years. De Prado identifies this period of time as the first phase of the relationship between Japan and the EU, with the 1960s witnessing the beginning of the infamous economic tensions (2017); Gilson too describes how, during the 1960s, Japan’s exports began to overtake imports, influencing Japan’s perception as a threat, especially in the US (Gilson, 2000). In fact, the cause of EU – Japan economic frictions was identified in Japan’s remarkable economic growth that would have led to the necessity of consultations. In fact, during this decade the country underwent the so-called Jimmu-Boom, i.e. the beginning of the rapid economic development: in 1968, the impact of economic growth was visible in Japan’s Gross National Product (GNP) surpassing the one of West Germany, ranking second in the world, and meanwhile maintaining its trade surplus in relations with exchange with the EC (Hosoi, 2019). Meanwhile, despite a level of relationship that was still considered minimal between Japan and Europe, on 1 July 1960, Germany became the first European country to sign a European Trade Agreement with Japan, imitated by Benelux countries, later that year, while the French Government kept invoking article 35 of GATT. It should be pointed out, however, that, within the EEC, attempts were made to translate the whole question on a broader and more comprehensive European level, but without any success (Gilson, 2000). Nevertheless, Europe came to the conclusion that Japan was a serious market (Hosoi, 2019), and the concerns at economic level forced the two parts to frequent contacts between the respective governmental representatives and to intensified bilateral interactions during this decade,

alongside the participation to international forums attended also by Europeans – for example GATT and the UN – (Gilson, 2000).

At the same time, the 1960s marked the beginning of Japan's political dialogue with main Member States individually and through its membership in the OECD (De Prado, 2017), given that in 1964, when the Olympic Games were held in Tōkyō, and for the first time in Asia, Japan acceded to the organisation. The participation to the OECD should be seen as particularly important as one of the events that allowed Japan's full-scale participation in the international economic community and, in the context of the relations with Europe, it meant that Europe accepted Japan on an equal footing (Tōgō, 2010); nevertheless, as will be stated hereafter, this did not mean that Europe was already able to adopt a comprehensive strategy and different pacing within states as well as agreement with individual member states would have still happened. It is noteworthy that in the 1960s, then Prime Minister Ikeda also recognised the importance of the EEC (European Economic Community ed.) and the pacifist idea of European integration, while still understanding the relevance of the US-Japan alliance. Ikeda's theory of the so called 'three pillars' (or trilateral strategy), saw the EC, Japan and the United States as the three components of the Western Alliance whose weakest link was the one between Japan and the EC. For this reason, to strengthen the Western Alliance it was necessary, not only to make Japan economically and politically strong enough to be able to resist Communist attacks (whose ideology Japan prevented the spreading in Asia) but also to consolidate the Japan-EC relationship in order for it to be on a par with the one Japan had with the US (Hosoya, 2012). Gilson (2020) confirms that '… when individual Japanese leaders have been enthusiastic about Europe, relations between Japan and the EU have been enhanced. The administration of Prime Minister Ikeda …issued Japan's first 'EEC policy' in 1962' (pp. 87-88). Also, it was Prime Minister Ikeda that gained EC support for Japan to join the OECD, considering the EC as a potentially important ally. It should still be pointed out that until the end of 1970s Japan will prefer to manage trade and the majority of deals through bilateral relations with individual member states (Gilson, 2020): this approach occasionally created clashes with the EEC's attempt to address issues in a more comprehensive and unified 'European-wide way' (Gilson, 2000, p. 19).

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Japan kept outperforming the rest of the world on an economic level, primarily because of the successful conversion of the industrial structure towards the high-tech sectors, and because of the shift from a fixed to a floating exchange rate regime in the first half of the 1970s, guaranteeing itself a steady surplus (Keck, Vanoverbeke and Waldenberger, 2013). With regard to the EC, the relations can be summarized as cold and confrontational, due to the trade imbalances which made Japan the object of heavy criticism from the European side. It should be acknowledged, however, that the Japanese government attempted the strengthen the Western Alliance through the abovementioned three pillar theory (Hosoya, 2012).

The infamous frictions deriving from the economic disputes, dominated the 1970s, as well, also depending on the narrower scale and field of activity of the then European Community (Hatwell, 2007): as it has been already mentioned, the European countries continued to approach Japan in differentiated ways, depending on the individual agendas (Gilson, 2020). Indeed, initially there was a certain confidence on the European side that there were conditions favourable enough to address the heated matter of Japan's market entry obstacles, together with a possible Japan's commitment to liberalization, after joining the OECD. Nonetheless, Europe's assurance started fading as the end of the decade approached, not only because of Japan's ever-growing exports surpluses, but also for a change in attitude when it started exporting new types of goods (electrical, audio, machinery, etc.); moreover, Japan was still preventing imports to enter the market together with a frustrating combination of export-driven growth policies and protectionist tendencies. This behaviour clearly showed that Japan's economy was not integrated, disappointing its partners expectations (Keck, Vanoverbeke and Waldenbeger, 2013).

With regard to political discussion with the Japanese, there were not the means to face this kind of interaction yet. Before the mid-1970, Japan did not hold much political relevance in the eyes of Europe, partly because, besides its bilateral alliance with the United States, Japan seemed fairly political isolated compared to European states which could boast a multilateral political framework that included the NATO and EC. Moreover (as has been already mentioned), the bilateral relation between the two sides was outshined by the respective interactions with the US. In this context, even though Japan

engaged in discussion with Europeans through the G7 Economic Summit mechanism, it was only with the deterioration of East-West relations, towards the end of the decade, that Japan took in serious consideration the possibility of debating political problems not only with the US but also with the EC (Bridges, 1992). As Nuttal further explained: 'European Political Cooperation (EPC), the process by which the member-states … coordinated their foreign policies, was not established until 1970, and in its early years concentrated on issues nearer home … Although the Asia Working Group was set up in the early 1970s, it dealt mostly with the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and South-east Asia. Japan was rarely on the agenda' (1996, p. 105).

The political and economic aspects intertwined in the 1970s, because of the surge of Japanese exports, the trade imbalances between Japan and the EC became politicized (Bridges, 1992; Hosoi, 2019), after a mid-decade of sectoral disputes, bilateral export restrictions and antidumping mechanisms becoming more and more established (Bridges, 1992). The context in which this events took place, saw Japan requesting the lifting of European discriminatory measures, but the EC, instead, imposed trade restrictions and anti-dumping taxation on Japanese products, aiming to protect domestic industries. The quick politicization of trade imbalances happened specifically in 1976 when the Doko-led delegation, the group guided by Toshio Sohiko, President of the Japan Economic Organization Federation, came to visit Europe: at that time the amount of Japanese exports to the EU was twice the value of the imports from the EU, in addition to the fact that Japan's trade surplus had reached the established limit corresponding to 3 billion dollars. The Japanese government proposed some solutions to alleviate the frictions generating from the principles of free trade, but those solutions were based on Japanese trade practices, thus further triggering EC's frustration on this regard (Hosoi, 2019). Moreover, the EC was already experiencing a difficult moment: indeed, it is important to remember that the 1970s are also the years of the Arab-Isreali War that involved a higher pricing for oil and triggered the energetic crisis of 1973: in fact, many Islamic countries, thanks to the wealth of their oil fields, became the major world suppliers of this resource; however, during the 1950s and 1960s, Western buyers had set a disproportionately low price, which also benefited the European economy for its postwar economic boom. Consequently, with the Arab-Israeli war of Kippur, the situation inverted and, in an

attempt to economically ruin Western countries and prevent American assistance to Israel, Arab countries slowed down extracting activities, a choice that weighted significantly on Europe and America, to the point of a dramatic increase of unemployment and inflation (Baffi and Brengola, 2007). The economic slowdown caused by oil shocks ignited a pervasive sense of pessimism, worsening European awareness that it would not be possible to prevail in a competition against the Japanese, even though the Asian country was confronting the similar difficulties (Hosoi, 2019). The 1973 OPEC (Organization Petroluem Exporting Countries) crisis bring to the attention of both Europe and Japan that the reliance on Middle Eastern oil was putting them in a precarious situation, in the case of Japan even through the relationship with Washington. This because OPEC members took the decision to target the countries (United States, Canada, the UK, Japan and the Netherlands, in the first instance) that endorsed Israel during the Yom Kippur War (from 6 to 25 October, 1973, Ed.), by imposing an oil embargo. On the contrary, although the situation took Japan by surprise, given its pro-Arab stance (Licklider, 1988 in Gilson 2020), at the same time triggered an 'almost lightning-fast' response from the Japanese government, compared to usual Japanese standard: a diplomatic mission was quickly despatched to the Middle East 'in a successful attempt to secure Japan's exemption from the oil embargo on the other major industrialized powers, the pledging of new economic aid for the region, and even the willingness to defy the US's policy of non-cooperation with OPEC and the organization of a consumers' cartel' (Hook et al., 2005, p. 71). This crisis represented a turning point for Japan by demonstrating the necessity of a diversification of its energy policy to reduce the dangerous dependence from the Middle East, but most of all left a sense of US decline and the subsequent need for Japan to build and perform a more internationally independent role (Nester and Ampiah, 1989).

As it has been already mentioned, since the late 1970s, the rapid growth of industries and the invasion of the market (domestic in the first place, and then at global level) by innovative Japanese product, stimulated in the country the expansion of medium and small enterprises from both the industry of cars and electrical equipment. This growth resulted in these enterprises merging into associations of companies operating in close contact with the original company. This expanded the meaning of the Japanese term *keiretsu* (系列) : traditional *keiretsu* controlled financial, industrial and commercial

capital; the new ones referred to integrated production apparatuses for the manufacture of a concrete product. The new *keiretsu* were characterised by a high level of dynamism, allowing them to be included between the most successful Japanese enterprises' groups of the 1980s. This led to the emergence of small and medium-sized companies benefiting from the increased demand for new products, processes and technologies (Caroli and Gatti, 2004). The fact that during the 1980s, Japan's trade surplus with the EC was increasing even more, furtherly ignited trade frictions, a fact that, according to the EC, was caused by Japan protectionist market. This stemmed the EC desire for a slowing down of its own imports in conjunction with Japanese reduction of protectionism and an increase of their imports, showing the exacerbation of the EC's dissatisfaction and impatience, especially between October 1982 and April 1983. Therefore, discord and criticism towards Japan kept growing, mirroring the growth of the trade imbalance (Hosoi, 2019). The situation is clearly explained by Söderberg (2012) and even earlier by Gilson (2000), who underlined this change in European attitude towards Japan, represented by the pressure on Japan's market. Indeed, as written by Gilson, 'at the beginning of the 1980s Japanese imports from the EC still represented less than seven per cent of total imports, and most remained centered on raw materials' (2000, p. 29). For this reason, attempting to coordinate different national responses, the Council of Ministers, the European Parliament and the European Commission, decided to made statements on 2 May 1981, requesting the same limitations for the exports of Japanese cars that had already been applied by the US (Gilson, 2000). Nevertheless, what is considered the most famous episode of this period is the so-called 'Poitiers incident' in December 1980 (Gilson, 2000; Ponjaert, 2007). Ponjaert noticed that the ongoing dialogue between both partners, could be traced back over the past decades: during that time span, for example, a founding moment that heralded an intensification of EC-Japan dialogue was the Poitiers incident. This event is noteworthy because, the colliding domestic economic interest, intensified by the particular political circumstances in one of the EC Member States (namely France), encouraged Tōkyō to pressure for a stronger and direct interaction with the European Commission, which had implemented even more its role concerning trade liberalization (Ponjaert, 2007). The development following the first oil crisis, led to some form of economic stability until 1985, when Japanese economy entered a period of so

called *endaka* (円高, yen appreciation) recession. In this situation, the agreement concluded by the G7 countries (US, Canada, Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom, France and Italy) during February 1987, allowed a temporary stability of Japanese currency. In the moment of appreciation of yen, both the domestic consumption and the investment (national and abroad) increased drastically, affecting the penetration of the European and American market through the action of financial institutions (Caroli and Gatti, 2004).

In spite of the turbulent relations of these years, belongs to this decade the EC decision to create the first delegation to Japan: one of the reasons that led to this move in 1974 was to give the possibility to the European actors to be better informed on the country's situation, both from a political and economic point of view. Furthermore, was in this conflictual context, of imbalances and unfulfilled expectations for the EC Commission and the European Parliament, that the EC-Japan Summit was created (Tambou and Nakanishi, 2020). As written by Gilson: 'The decade of the 1980s for many commentators witnessed a renaissance in European Community endeavours' (2020, p. 43). As a matter of fact, were the decades between 1960s and 1980s that widened the objectives of possible bilateral relations (also facing issues like the Iranian crisis and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan), which were relying more and more on formal structures, but also witnessed the efforts toward the recognition of the actual existence of the EU-Japan dialogue (Gilson, 2020). Such a period of relaunch is especially represented by the new leadership of the European Commission embodied by Jacques Delors, alongside a growingly established European-level authority leading to the formulation of a 'multi-level polity': the multi-level governance, instead of challenging directly the sovereignty of the individual member states, patiently meld them into this kind of polity through the actions of their leaders and of numerous sub-national and supranational actors (Marks, Hooghe and Blank, 1996). The EU advanced its integration project, clarifying, at the same time, for third (non-EU) countries, e.g. Japan, its own nature as the foreign policy interlocutor that it was evolving into (Gilson, 2020).

Therefore, it is within the adversities of a decade still dominated by conflicting trade interests, that Tōkyō started to see an increasing involvement of the EC as a 'welcome

source of arbitration and rational conflict resolution' (p. 178) and searching for the institutions of the European Economic Community (Ponjaert, 2007). This could be connected with what has been said by Söderberg, even though she states that during the 1980s the two parties did not show an enthusiastic interest towards each other and encouraged the increase in high-level bilateral contacts, promoting more and more the idea of a broader cooperative relationship. This situation was facilitated by the Single European Act of 1986 that allowed the EC to have more of a single external face, besides the fact that Japan was researching a new role within the international community (Söderberg, 2012). The following year, in 1987, the European Commission and Japan's then Ministry of International Trade and Industry would have jointly set up a cooperation centre (De Prado, 2017).

Consequently, it would be interesting to have a wider look into EU-Japan cooperation, in a decade that could represent the strengthening of those diplomatic relations established during the 1970s (Tanaka, 2013). As Reiterer noticed, many Japanese companies invested in Western Europe in the 1980s to circumvent trade policy obstacles (i.e. local content rules or anti-dumping actions) and to exploit different nationals incentive regimes, and by investing in Europe Japanese companies began to take a political interest in the EU context (2004). However, the initial Japanese approach to Western Europe in 1979-1980 did not receive a proper follow up action and was not properly reciprocated. This is valid for example for the statements of then Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone at the 1983 Williamsburg Summit, concerning the 'indivisibility' of Western security, as well as Takeshita Noboru's attempt in 1988 towards the creation of the 'third pillar' of international cooperation. Nonetheless, throughout the decade, individual EC member state at first, and later the EC Commission itself became growingly interested in drawing Japan into a range of debates covering shared interests (Bridges, 1992, p. 235). Noteworthy, a field of cooperation that started getting some growth and momentum during the 1980s was the security one, the least developed within the EU-Japan interactions (Bridges, 1992). For Japan it is still a heated topic of discussion and was one of the main points of Abenomics grand strategy, particularly connected with Article 9 of Japanese Constitutions and the restrictions it sets in place on the use of military power (Anon., 2013). Because of the concern for security relationship with the US and for the

possible domestic reaction to such a delicate subject, the Japanese Defense Agency did not visit Europe until 1978, slowly developing a conversation around this matter during the 1980s through regular bilateral consultations with major West European countries and Japan. Eventually, Europe and Japan found themselves drawn to an area of security that represented a shared interest, namely arms control. For this reason, the 1987 Intermediate Nuclear Forces treaty, even though meant to principally concern the European context, ended up including the Asian one, as well, due to Japan (and China) insistence. This increasingly relaxed approach to security questions on Japan's side, reflected also in their role within the G7 and in the necessity to look into other fora attended by Europeans to discuss these issues (Bridges, 1992).

Overall, a conflicting vision of the decade can be found in many sources: Hosoya describes it as a moment dominated by trade conflicts and reciprocal misunderstanding (2012); the late (and end of) the 1980s, as well, is represented as a time of emergence of renewed mutual appeal both on the political level and with regard to the economic value (Gilson, 2020). It was at this point that Japan's political leaders began to embrace the idea of trilateralism, promoting stronger interactions between the US, the EEC and Japan itself (Berkofsky, 2007), alongside the preparation of EU-Japan summits, motivated by the stimulus that the process received by the EU-USA relations (Morii, 2015), and after holding their first ministerial meeting in 1984 (De Prado, 2017). However, because of Japanese problems at domestic level, these ministerial meetings were suspended from 1986 to 1990 (Bridges, 1992).

Particular attention is given by scholars to 1989, as a year that brought a fundamental change in geopolitical world order, a year of transition towards a more intensive dialogue and interaction between EU and Japan, whose starting point will be the Joint Declaration of 1991 (Fukuda and Van Miert, 1994). The crucial event which is often mentioned is the fall of the Berlin Wall which sparked not only a structural change in international relations but also the process of reunification of Europe, or at least a significant intermediary step on the way to a full European unification (Reiterer, 2004). In Europe, 1989 brought the fall of communist regimes in the satellite countries, while Gorbaciòv was still governing: initially, it was Poland to distance itself from Moscow, followed by Hungary, Bulgaria,

Czechoslovakia and Romania (Baffi and Brengola, 2007). This particular circumstance also stimulated a rethinking of security issues in Europe, when the former member states of the Soviet bloc started joining the West European organizations. In this situation, the Japanese government rapidly assisted European countries (e.g. Poland and Hungary) to realize the transition to a free-market economy. According to Söderberg, at this time the cooperation around security was not properly developed yet, and will be the Hague Declaration (or Joint Declaration) to pledge joint EU-Japan cooperation with regard to Central and Eastern Europe as well as with Asian countries (Söderberg, 2012). Moreover, the tragic events of 1989 compelled the Japanese to think seriously for the first time about Eastern Europe as the counterpart of Soviet Union: this led Japanese businesses and Japan, whose trade with Eastern Europe was already low to adopt a wait-and-see attitude, with the only exception of a car manufacturing joint venture in Hungary (Bridges, 1992).

2.2.3 The 1990s: A Time for Political Dialogue?

The changes brought by 1989 in the structure of international relations and the processes it set in motion represented and important intermediary step towards the complete European reunification, culminating with the signing of accession treaties by ten candidates countries in Athens on April 16, 2003. Meanwhile, for Japan, the 1990s fuelled growing interest for European integration, after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Eastern bloc, epitomized by the fall of the Berlin Wall. In particular, the introduction of the Single Market in 1992 was a remarkable development, even though it would take years for Japanese politicians and business community to convince themselves that the Single Market was not meant to be the 'Fortress of Europe' (Reiterer, 2004).

With regard to Europe, 1991 and 1992 marked several key events that clearly depicted this critical phase of European transformation. In 1991, after an attempted coup, Gorbachev was dismissed, Boris Yeltsin took his place banning the Communist Party, and shortly after the USSR was dissolved and replaced by Russian Federation. In Yugoslavia, between 1991 and 1992, Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia and Bosnia declared themselves autonomous, triggering the violent response of Serbian dictator Milosevic against Croatia and Bosnia that will require UN intervention in terms of economic

blockade; the same reaction will be prompted by Kosovo attempt to autonomy in 1998, causing NATO to become involved and bombard Belgrade and the Serbian part of the Yugoslav Federation (Baffi and Brengola, 2007).

For Japan, the situation wasn't easier to tackle. Japanese economy between the end of 1980s and the beginning of 1990s, was already carrying the signs of its great fragility. The main issue in the mid-nineties, was that banking institutions begin to suffer from the difficulty in recovering bank loans. Consequently, between 1998 and 1999, banks accumulate losses that only recapitalization and the support from the government can contain. Meanwhile, the recession affected families and businesses which were forced to reduce their staff, a choice with significant consequences both individually and at societal level; in addition, the problem of the aging of society was emerging. On a purely political level, the 1989 Lower Chamber elections ignited a phase of uncertainty and political tumultuousness due to the participation of only eight major parties and a multitude of minor parties that led to fragile coalitions and quick changes of government, reflected in the succession of four Prime Ministers from 1989 to 1993. This phase of political crisis, deeply connected to the skepticism of voters who had been hit by recession, was evident also during the 1993 Lower Chamber elections, when the governing coalitions were even more fragile, to the point that the mandate between 1993 and 1996 was chaired by three Prime Ministers. It is important to notice that this relatively short period determined an interruption in the Liberal Democrat era, with none of the respective Prime Minister coming from the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). Moreover, after the LDP underwent a new contraction in 1998, the coalition with the Democratic Party became an almost compulsory move (Caroli and Gatti, 2004).

In January 1990, the then Japanese Prime Minister, Toshiki Kaifu, visited the Berlin Wall after its fall and, in this occasion he also met with European Commission President, Jacques Delors: one of the purposes of this meeting was to discuss a possible Japanese contribution in the project of rebuilding the former Eastern Europe through the G24 process, a discussion that re-ignited and bolster the Japan-EU troika meetings (Gilson, 2020). This type of cooperation seems to confirm what Tsuruoka has expressed in his article *Japan-Europe Relationship: Toward a full Political and Security Partnership*: '…

it is inaccurate to describe the postwar Japan-Europe relationship as dominated by trade conflicts, as such period of … acrimonious economic relations lasted only about 20 years, from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s, representing less than a third of the whole postwar period' (p. 44). It is true that trade and economic connections still constitute the most significant pillar of this relationship, and this part will probably stay unchanged in the foreseeable future, yet during this period Europe and Japan had the possibility to cooperate on issues related to the political and security level, encouraged by the critical context of the Cold War (Tsuruoka, 2015): indeed, the collapse of the Soviet Union catalyzed change not only within EC's relations with the US but also within the ones between EC and Japan, making the initial attitude of reciprocal indifference with regard to the political cooperation more and more inappropriate in the new world order (Söderberg, 2012). Despite such stimulus and some efforts in the 1990s to upgrade the relationship, political and security interactions remained mostly marginal and *ad hoc* in Japan's plans for foreign and security policy: this happened also because, even though Japan and Europe wanted to expand their political and security activities, their areas of interest were still limited to their own geographic regions. Nevertheless, the 1991 The Hague Declaration between Japan and the European Community represented the first attempt to institutionalise their political relations (Tsuruoka, 2015).

As explained in Gilson (2020), the transformed Europe and the support received by Japan in its EC project, was crucial for the agenda toward the Hague Declaration of 1991: in particular on the political level, the Declaration will focus on giving support and enhance fundamental values like freedom, democracy, rule of law and human rights within international institutions (especially the UN), as well as providing coordination and cooperation in areas of mutual security concern, such as non-proliferation of nuclear and other weapons (Joint Declaration on Relations between the European Community and its Member States and Japan, 1991). As a matter of fact, in the 1990s both the EU and Japan had the opportunity to develop a more proactive mutual foreign policy, regarding whom Hosoya (2012) gives some key examples:

- On 8 March 1995, the Commission of the European Communities submitted the first paper concerning an overall strategy on Japan, entitled 'Europe and Japan:

The Next Step' (Commission of the European Communities, 1995 in Hosoya 2012). The paper recognize the changed Japan and EU, and their growing role in world politics and international communities, adopting more proactive stances and acknowledging to have many things in common and shared values, despite the still existing issues on accessing Japanese market (Hosoya, 2012).

- In the middle of the 1990s the EU proposed (with the particular endorsement of the EU's General Affairs Council) to establish the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM), marking an important step forward in inter-regionalism, and whose inaugural meeting was held in Bangkok, in March 1996 (Hosoya, 2012).

On the Japanese side, a central role was played by the then Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Hisashi Owada, who took part in the drafting process of what will be called The Hague Declaration, but that will also be known as 'the Owada initiative' because of his fundamental contribution (Owada, 2001 in Hosoya, 2012; Tanaka, 2013). Owada himself explains how was Japan that took the initiative to create a new framework for a more constructive cooperation between Japan and Europe in early 1990s, immediately after Prime Minister, Toshiki Kaifu, had visited Brussels. Nonetheless, Owada also points out that this relationship is characterised by a fundamental lacuna, still unfilled: the issue of creating a framework for a full-fledged relationship completely encompassing the totality of relations on the basis of a spirit of partnership. 'It was with this in mind that Japan propose to take a bold initiative to change the whole paradigm' (p. 17). The motivation behind this Japanese initiative was the desire on the part of Japan to strengthen the trilateral interaction within East Asia, Europe and North America, but most of all between Japan and Europe, as already said by former Prime Minister, Takeo Fukuda (Owada, 2001). However, a majority of Japanese officials and political leaders were not convinced about fully recognizing the strategic significance of the EC-Japan relationship, and trade conflicts kept overshadowing other issues until the end of the Cold War. This did not prevent Prime Minister Ikeda in the 1960s and Owada in the 1990s to argue to reinforce the strategic relationship between Japan and Western Europe, although the Japanese constitution and its pacifist inhibited the country from playing a larger strategic role in the years of the Cold War (Hosoya, 2012).

The Joint Declaration was followed, the next year, by the European Council Conclusion that welcomed the intensity of dialogue and recognised the Declaration as a foundation stone that provided the structure for other bilateral initiatives and will raise specific points that will resonate for the EPA and SPA, most importantly:

I. The main areas of interests were not aligned, with the EC focusing more on the trade imbalance and Japan was more oriented toward political issues. Hence, the commitment was not equal for both parts.
II. Both sides were characterised by very strong leaderships, a crucial aspect at a time when roles and responsibilities were not as clear-cut as they are today.
III. The Declaration demonstrated Japan's growing willingness to deal with 'Europe', and make sure that the Commission was involved where sectoral negotiations remained, in order to act on behalf of the member states (Gilson, 2020).

This post-Cold War product is identified by Ponjaert as the legal basis of the EU-Japan political relationship, signed at the first EC-Japan Summit in the Hague, on July 18, 1991 (Ponjaert, 2007). In the growing security dialogue, both bilateral and multilateral, we can also see Japan's increasing interest in global security and the wish to appear as responsible and non-threatening; there is also an obvious Japanese interest in European views on what is happening in Russia, after the fall of the Soviet Union, reciprocated by European interest about the Japanese views on the Siberian part of Russia, China and East Asia in general. Further developing of the security dialogue with Europe would have also helped Japan to enhance its own prestige, showing to other Western partners its new role of power with global concerns (Drifte, 1996).

With regard to the actual effectiveness of the Declaration, several authors expressed their criticism. Even though the Declaration represents a serious step toward a more defined and wider future role at global level, with an institutional framework that would have helped Japan to play its part in ensuring a stable international environment, and despite the structure designed for a future expansion of the Declaration itself beyond the interactions between Japan and the EU (Owada, 2001), it is still noteworthy to raise attention on some aspects. Already during the exchange of drafts, the writing proved difficult, with the Japanese government refusing suggestions on amendments regarding

the economic and trading part (especially the automobile exports from Japan) (Hatakeyama, 1996 in Tanaka, 2013). In general, although declaration underlines the EU and Japan's shared principles (i.e. democracy, rule of law, and the promotion of human rights), when it came to put theory into practice, the declaration did little more than codifying and institutionalizing a consultative framework, alongside an annual summit meeting between the Japanese Prime Minister and the Presidents of the European Commission Council (Berkofsky, 2007). The abovementioned paper concerning an overall strategy on Japan, submitted by the Commission of the European Communities, also expressed concerns on the political side of the relation, already in 1995: "… the political dimension of the relationship has to date been under-developed. This reduces the ability of both partners to achieve their aims. In practice it is not an option to concentrate on one area and neglect others. The EU will not improve its own image in Japan until it is seen to have political weight to match its position as an economic and technological power" (Commission of the European Communities,1995). Hosoya as well points out that the noble intentions and rhetoric clearly do not match the disappointing reality represented only by the reluctant promotion of insignificant programs (2012). The same thing happens in the context of Central Asia: since 1991, after the fall of the Soviet Union the EU chose to play a more active role with Central Asia and the transition toward market economies and democracy, realising the importance of this region, but leaving untapped the substantial potential of the region (Abbasi, 2002). Thus, the EU is always looking for new partners, as in the case of Japan where, despite the presence of the US, the EU steadily progressed, institutionalising the relations, increasing Japan's self-assuredness and also encouraging it to get more involved at international level. Nonetheless, the EU had developed interest in other countries, too, India and China, partly at the expense of Japan (Balme and Bridges, 2008). Indeed, Hosoya explained how China's rapid growth since the mid-1990s attracted the EU's willingness to develop a strategic partnership, while Japan was simultaneously eager to get closer to the United States and strengthen their cooperation, projecting the image of two countries bounded more by institutional rhetoric and still at a distance (2012).

2.3 The 2000s and the EU-Japan Action Plan

The Hague declaration had institutionalised the relations between the two, also through regular meeting covering several topics and promoting political dialogue, but both Japan and the EU confronted significant changes at the turn of the century (Söderberg, 2012).

The beginning the twenty-first century in Europe brought the enter into force of a new currency, the euro, in 2002, and the same year would have examined the requests of ten aspirants countries, mainly from the area of the current Eastern Europe. Anyway, many problems remained to be faced, for instance in terms of economic crisis, organized crime and international terrorism (Baffi and Brengola, 2007). The struggle to present a united front and the conflict in Balkan region, showed EU and its member states' limitation in preventing and facing the conflict, a situation that will repeat itself with regard to the US-led war in Iraq from 2003 (Nielson, 2013 and Shepherd, 2009 in Gilson, 2020). The security concerns regarding Japan highlighted the importance of civil participation in operations of peace support and included a focus on issues such as post-conflict reconstruction (Söderberg, 2012).

For Japan the start of the new century has proved the presence of a newly found proactivity in many areas of its international relations, especially with the advent of the Koizumi administration and after 11 September 2001 (Hook et al., 2005). In fact, the election of April 2001 saw the LDP, guided by the leadership of Koizumi Jun'ichirō, who supported a program of reforms, obtaining the majority in the Lower Chamber (majority confirmed once again in 2003), also thanks to the contribution of the conservative coalition he was a member of. Despite Koizumi willingness to proceed on the road of reforms, doubts and skepticism remained due to the struggle of the reform program to take off and regarding Koizumi's own ability to actually carry it out. The reforms concerned the financial system, the economy, the political and bureaucratic system whose official seemed to have retained their decision-making power even while yielding to marginal issues. The educational system was also included in the reform program, although the resistance of a clear conservative matrix emerged, characterised by a direction of closure and stiffening, alongside a marked selectivity (Caroli and Gatti, 2004). In general, Asia just managed to survive a period of financial crisis and managed to

establish, during the preceding decade, several types of forums for regional dialogue (for instance, ASEAN Regional Forum, Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation and ASEAN+3 which included China, Japan and South Korea). The emergence of China was changing the power balance in Asia, among neighbouring countries, with EU and Japan promoting inter-regional dialogue as well as cooperation at global level (such as through the UN's venue) to support sustainable development, peace and stability (Söderberg, 2012).

In this international situation, the EU and Japan decide to broaden the scope of their partnership and launch an initiative for a new decade of cooperation (Söderberg, 2012). Hence, during their 10th summit in Brussels in 2001, both sides decided to adopt a comprehensive Action Plan, including a wide range of goals organized through main objectives (De Prado, 2017). The intention was to give more impetus to a relationship, because of the parties' perception that the economic part was still disproportionately prominent compared to the other aspects that were still lagging behind (Hosoya, 2012). Already in January 2000 after participating the 9th Japan-EU Ministerial Meeting in Brussels (Tanaka, 2013), Foreign Minister, Yōhei Kōno, proposed a new initiative, a 'decade of Japan-EU cooperation' (p. 106), accompanied by a detailed 'action plan for EU-Japan cooperation' that would have been launched at the end of 2001 (and whose implementation would be reviewed early) on the occasion of the summit involving Prime Minister, Koizumi Jun'ichirō (Ueta, 2018). Thus the interactions between Japan and the EU and Japan throughout the 2000s were underpinned by the 2001 Action Plan for EU-Japan Cooperation, built on the declaration of 1991 to establish an ambitious ten-year programme to shape 'a common future'(p. 94). The ninth EU-Japan summit in Tōkyō on 19th July 2000 reflected the full spread of EU's growing competencies, through its representatives, and the shared desire to shape a comprehensive plan together with Japan (Gilson, 2020). The significant changes in the international environment were taken into consideration by the leaders that decided to translate the Japan-EU Partnership not only into coordinated policies but also in concrete actions (MOFA, 2000 in Tanaka, 2013). In this way the Action Plan gave momentum to the relationship and setting better basis for reviewing progress in the relationship (Hatwell, 2007).

As it has been already mentioned, the goals included in the Plan are numerous and are organized into four categories corresponding to main objectives:

1. Promoting peace and security.
2. Strengthening the economic and trade partnership utilising the dynamism of globalisation for the benefit of all.
3. Coping with global and societal challenges.
4. Bringing together people and cultures (MOFA, 2001 in Ueta, 2018).

The Action Plan also called for a growing cooperation in a number of areas including nuclear non-proliferation, conflict prevention, poverty alleviation, dealing with aging societies, education and environment. With regard to security, the 2001 plan basically codified bilateral initiatives that were already started in the 1990s, without identifying new issues or forms of cooperation, with the only exception of international terrorism. This may help explaining why the plan attracted very limited international attention. Nonetheless, some progress has been reached, for instance in the field of two-way direct investment, with a dedicated framework in 2004, joint participation into scientific research ITER project on energy (2005) and the signing of Japan-Euratom agreement. In 2003, Tōkyō and Brussels forecasted the possibility of a 'strategic partnership', but if the EU has made many widely publicised efforts in the last two or three years to implement a similar partnership with China, it has made far less effort in defining what this means for its relationship with Japan (Berkofsky, 2007). The development of a set of practical cooperative measures between the EU and Japan has undoubtedly strengthened bilateral relations and also reflecting the EU's significant effort to expand its presence in Asia in general (Hosoya, 2012).

Nevertheless, despite the ambitious purpose and some progress, harsh criticism needs to be considered, first of all, that beyond the diplomatic rhetoric and ceremony and the regular dialogue, no substantial progress was made with regard to the most strategic goals of the action plan, which was lacking in focus and capabilities (De Prado, 2017). This aspect seems to be confirmed by the fact that the areas included for bilateral initiatives were more than a hundred, ranging from peacekeeping to cultural exchanges, to the point that its detractors criticized the plan for being little more than a 'shopping list' of

unresolved international issues without a clear agenda (Berkofsky, 2007, p. 10). Berkofsky will write in 2012 that since 2001 only a few areas of joint international policies in global and regional politics and security were actually implemented, and that the EU itself referred to the outcomes of those envisioned policies as disappointing, acknowledging the structural problems of the document (Berkofsky, 2012). According to Hosoya, these issues combine with the fact that Prime Minister Koizumi did not give the right signal concerning the importance of the relations with the EU, still looking more inclined to consider the alliance with the US as exclusively important for Japan. Meanwhile, the EU's general approach, when regarding the relations with Asia, seemed ambiguous if not contradictory, for instance with regard to the promotion of human rights and democracy in conjunction with the implementation of its relationship with China. Moreover, the terrorist attack on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001, changed the international environment and made the fight against terrorism an absolute priority in EU-Japan joint civilian approach, too. This, of course, happened at the expense of the Action Plan itself (Hosoya, 2012) and of another occasion of implementation and actual deepening of a relation that was still carrying the signs of an older imbalance.

2.4 To Summarize

In this chapter it has been analysed the history of the relations between Europe and Japan starting from the aftermath of World War II until the first decade of the 2000s. To offer a recapitulation: after WWII, Europe and Japan were sharing a critical situation, made even heavier for Japan by the Allied Occupation (Tōgō, 2010); during the 1950s, mutual economic interest among Western Europe and Japan started to grow (Gilson, 2020), alongside the priority for Japan to enter international economic institutions, e.g. the GATT (Tōgō, 2010). The twenty years, between 1960s and 1980s could be described not only as a period of conflict on the economic level, but also of attempted dialogue even though misunderstanding and political negligence were still present (Hosoya, 2012). The crucial change brought by 1989 in the geopolitical world order (Fukuda and Van Miert, 1994) ignited the process for European integration (Reiterer, 2004) and new stimulus to upgrade the EU-Japan relationship, and through the 1991 The Hague Declaration the parties tried to institutionalised it for the first time (Tsuruoka, 2015), becoming a legal

basis for the EU-Japan interactions (Ponjaert, 2007). The Declaration sparked the initiative, in 2001, to a new attempt at broadening the scope of this relationship with a comprehensive Ten Year Action Plan (De Prado, 2007), although both the Declaration and the Plan left many doubts on their real effectiveness. What could be assessed through this first phase of historical analysis is that even though the trading and economic has been pivotal since the 1800s (Caroli and Gatti, 2004), and then slowly again during the 1950s (Gilson, 2020). An interesting observation could be that if European countries seemed predominantly interested in the trading issues, at least until 1989 and then the decade of 1990s, while Japan started looking for diplomatic relations, beside the economic ones, already since the end of the Allied Occupation in 1952 – although with many limitations – (Gilson, 2000), and then with the emblematic action of Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda in the 1960s (Gilson, 2020) and the 'Owada initiative', followed by the efforts of the Prime Ministers Toshiki Kaifu (mandate from 10 August 1989, to 5 November 1991), in the 1990s, and even earlier Takeo Fukuda (mandate from 24 December 1976, to 7 December 1978) (Owada, 2001). This could be a symptom of the fact that the US presence didn't made Japan feel as much urge for economic interactions as Europe, which did not reach the steep growth of Japan, but maybe made Japan feel the need for a political engagement beyond the one with the US and beyond its own region, from which Japan distanced itself as a result of the heavy US influence within the country (Gilson, 2016).

Chapter 3
ELEMENTS OF INFLUENCE IN BUILDING THE EU-JAPAN RELATIONSHIP

3.1 Introducing the Chapter

Following an historical overview on EU-Japan relationship, this chapter will be dedicated to the analysis of selected elements that may have influenced this relationship. First it will be analysed the role of the US given the particular influence that exerts on both the EU and Japan and on their mutual relations since the end of WWII; then, will be analysed the mutual perceptions of EU and Japan and the way they have shaped their relations. Normative Power will be later considered: as an ideational form of power, connected with the spreading of principles and norms, what has been its influence on the political side EU-Japan relations? Finally, Path Dependence will be studied, trying to understand if it has affected the EU-Japan stumbling political interactions.

3.2 The Role of the United States

When analysing the relationship between Japan and the EU, the role played by the United States within their interactions needs to be taken into consideration: the influence of the US affected the relationship not only because of the kind of support that it offered to Japan (especially with regard to security) but also in terms of perception at the international level. Gilson precisely expresses this situation when writing:

> 'The EU-Japan relationship exists against the background of, and because of, this modern history of complex interplay among key international players. Without understanding the origins of their respective relationships with the United States, for example, it would not be possible to comprehend much of their own bilateral pathway. In particular, the US-created norms of the Western liberal order and its institutional frames of reference are embedded within both Japan and the EU… Clearly, for both Japan and the EU a strong reliance on their respective alliances with the United States has shaped much of their contemporary history' (Gilson, 2020, p. 47).

This is particularly true in the case of Japan. In the post-war years, Western Europe was mainly concerned with reconstruction necessities at economic and social level, and Japan, which was enjoying the protection of the US, took it as its main foreign and economic policy partner, and whose economic and military power in the 1940s and 1950s, coupled with a bilateral military alliance, established in the 1960s; this situation led Tōkyō to neglect the possibilities of interaction with Europe, which was experiencing both ideological and geographical division in the years of Cold War (Berkofsky, 2007, p. 9). The relationship with the United States, after the defeat of WWII, was characterised by the Allied Occupation: when the tide of war began to turn in favor of the United States, a commission established in 1942 drew up a Plan for the occupation of Japan. In this way, when Tōkyō accepted to surrender unconditionally (15 August 1945), the US President, Harry Truman, nominated General Douglas MacArthur as head of the Supreme Command of the Allied Powers (or SCAP), with the purpose of demilitarize and democratize Japan. The occupation lasted from September 1945 to April 1952 and, during those years, the countries that won WWII established other monitoring organisations in addition to the SCAP but MacArthur was instructed to follow the orders coming from Washington, substantially leaving strategic choices and everyday interventions as prerogatives of the US. This period determined a change in the course of US's policy towards Japan: in fact, between 1946 and 1947, the Asian country went from being a defeated enemy to becoming the main ally of the United States in Asia with a shift known as the 'reverse course'(Caroli and Gatti, 2004, pp. 217-218). Another factor that influenced the American strategy towards Japan, was the rising of Communism: the growing power of communist faction made the US rethink the decision of make the Emperor abdicate, which could have played in favour of communism and chaos spreading in Japan, and made China replace Japan in the eyes of the US as major Asian enemy (Dower, 2000, pp. 328-329, p. 511), changing American mind about complete demilitarization of Japan and make it instead a Western outpost against Communism in Asia (Mykal, 2011, p. 38).

The American Occupation of Japan operated through directives that were imposed on the Japanese government, responsible for their application, in particular with regards to the granting of civil rights and democratic freedoms. However, by the will of the United

States itself, the evidence of very serious acts committed by the Japanese in some occupied territories during war years were not taken into considerations by the courts involved, in the first place of the 'Nanking massacre', in addition to the experiments that the Unit 731 conducted on human beings and the events related to the so-called 'Comfort Women'; moreover, the US government, with British support, opted for the non-prosecution of Emperor Hirohito, despite the protests. At the same time, the United States radically rewrote Japanese Constitution (whose new version will enter into force in 1947), giving it a markedly pacifist character (Caroli and Gatti, 2004, pp. 220-222). This particular aspect was represented by the famous article 9: 'Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized' (Hook et al., 2005, p. 508). It could be said that the events of the Allied Occupation set a conflicting approach to democracy, a democracy imposed from above, accompanied by censorship, that promoted pacifism in a new Constitution but did not punish war crimes. In 2013, Prime Minister Abe would have recalled the Occupation by saying: "… The seven subsequent years were the first and indeed the most profound disconnect and ordeal that Japan had ever experienced in its long history" (Caroli and Basosi, 2014, p.ix.). The most profound legacy of this censored democracy could be summarised in a quote from the Nippon Times: 'If the conception that government is something imposed upon the people by an outstanding god, great man, or leader is not rectified, democratic government is likely to be wrecked. … The way to express the gratitude of the Japanese people toward General MacArthur … is not to worship him as a god but to cast away the servile spirit and gain the self-respect that would not bow its head to anybody' (Dower, 1999, p. 406).

Against this background, the growing intensity of the Cold War in the late 1940s and 1950s, will deeply influence the character of the post-war settlement and the course of Japan's international relations (Hook et al., 2005, p. 90). It does not surprise what Gilson wrote in the 2000: 'For more than fifty years Japan's contacts with the outside world have been dominated by relations with the United States' (p. 1). Consequently, the role played

by the United States since the start of Europe-Japan interactions is undeniable, first of all by encouraging European states to open their market to Japanese products: in this way the US did not have to face the overpenetration from Japanese exports, and Japan would have had the opportunity to explore a new market, taking the distance from the excessive dependence from the United States, that were becoming more protectionist over time (Gilson, 2020, p. 87). The US encouragement was necessary given that already at the beginning of the 1950s, Europeans were suspicious of low-wage Japanese products, even more watching the increasing trade disputes between Japan and the US. In fact, amidst mounting European distrust of trading practices used by Japan, the US offered tariff concessions to the countries which would have agreed to accord the status of Most Favoured Nation (MFN) to Japan, beside acting as mediator between Japan and the European Union. This does not mean that the US actively assert the need for the two actors to deepen their relationship (Gilson, 2000, p. 17). On the other hand, Sugita notes how the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 produced an economic boom, in which the Unites States took part: the September of the following year, Ichiro Ishikawa, president of the Federation of Economic Organizations (*Keidanren*) publicly announced that the country should advance its military industry; subsequently, the Ministry of International Trade and Industry actively developed a plan for exports and technology growth through soliciting the US subsidies to support the munition production. The US in March 1952, not only allowed Japan to resume this part of its production, but also starting placing order already in the next two months (Sugita, 2016, pp. 132-133). It is of 1952 the US-Japan Security Treaty, as well: this treaty would have influenced the path of Japan's foreign policy decisions for the decades to follow, binding Tōkyō to Washington's decision to this day (Gilson, 2016), and foster even further the European impression that Japan does not consider the EU as much as it focuses on the US, especially when it comes to security and foreign policy matters (Tsuruoka, 2013, p. 2). The protection granted by this treaty, obviously played a significant role in the pursue of an economy-first strategy of action to integrate in the international political economy. The downside of the close relation with the US was to progressively distance Japan from its own region (Gilson, 2016).

The abovementioned Yoshida Doctrine, which guided Japan's strategy in the postwar period, already carried these elements, entrusting the US with most of Japan's security, minimizing Japan's efforts in terms of defense, in order to direct resources toward the economic development. As will be analysed hereafter, Japan expanded through time the scope of this Doctrine formed in the context of the Cold War (Kusunoki, 2020).

As a matter of fact, like other nations, Japan as well revolves and structures its foreign policy around necessities at security level. As Cooney explains, most of Japan's decisions regarding its foreign-policy agenda at global level have to respond to security needs within Northeast Asia. An example of this is represented by Prime Minister Jun'ichirō Koizumi's strategy (mandate from 26 April – 2001 to 26 September 2006, Ed.) in 'selling' the choice to help the United States in rebuilding Iraq: it was explained as functional in securing the United States' help in the case of threats from North Korea. However, Japan's main concern in the region remains China: the country poses the crucial question whether it should be considered as an aggressor to American power and, consequently to Japan as US' ally in Asia, or simply as a country peacefully developing its power and caring about its interest (Cooney, 2007, pp. 152-153).

Either way, Japan's security strategy and foreign policy were heavily influenced by the context of the Cold War. From 1970s, Japan's economic strength became a source of power, widening the interpretation of the Yoshida Doctrine in the sense that economic development contributes to peace and security globally through non-military means. Meanwhile, the security relations with the US are not constant, despite Japan remaining dependent on the deterrence leverage of the United States. Until the 1970s the US-Japan cooperation meant the good function of American bases in Japan, but, by the 1980s, the cooperation between the JSDF and US Forces Japan (USFJ) had evolved into the '[Japan-US] Alliance,' whose base is joint defense, a cooperation that will be confirmed in the second half of the 1990s and that still in the 2000s will lead to many accomplishments, despite the legal restrictions imposed to the JSDF. This evolution shows the expanding role of Japan within the Alliance and its conscious use of JSDF with the purpose of strengthening the security network shared with the US; at the same time, it was expanded the cooperation towards countries such as Australia and India, as included in the package

of the ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)’, as a response to the rise of China. This change in Japanese diplomacy, involving JSDF and the Japan-US Security Treaty as a deterrent alongside cooperation with countries that share fundamental values, further widen the scope of the Yoshida Doctrine through maintaining and expanding security cooperation and taking a proactive stance in international peace and security (Kusunoki, 2020). This turn in diplomacy evolution also seems to confirm Cooney’s statement that Japan’s global behaviour responds to defense needs, which still involves the role of the United States. In fact, the basic structure of self-defense enclosed within the US-Japan Alliance is still in place, keeping the core of security policy unchanged (Kusunoki, 2020).

The effects of the Alliance between Japan and the US also influenced the interactions with the EU and Japan’s identity building. Precisely under the US umbrella since the 1970s, the EU and Japanese officials and experts have pursued dialogue, sometimes translated into practical cooperation, and mainly with regard to non-military matter (Mykal, 2011 in De Prado, 2017, p. 444). Nonetheless, Mykal points out that through Ikeda’s ‘three pillar’ strategy (Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda, mandate from 19 July 1960 to 9 November 1964, Ed.), outlined in 1962, Japan would provide support for the free world (still in line with Yoshida doctrine’s ideals) and, at the same time, improve economic and political ties with Europe without jeopardizing the relationship with the US (2011, pp. 47-48). In fact, the majority of possible partners for Japan within Europe are also US allies through NATO: this reinforces the developing of trilateral cooperation, in which Japan-NATO cooperation would have occurred in the context of Japan-US cooperation; the same can be said for Japan-EU cooperation framed as intra-US allied (Tsuruoka, 2015, p.48). Nonetheless, European and American statesmen would have not implemented the triangular imagery until the mid-1970s, when was created the Trilateral Commission, and, despite encouraging trade interactions, the United States did not want to foster Japanese detour from a strictly pro-American policy. Therefore, Europe negligence and American opposition created the impression that Japanese politicians were the only ones interested in an improved cooperation with Europe (Mykal, 2011, pp. 47-48). Moreover, the benefits from the alliance, allowed Japan the keep the identity of a ‘peace-loving nation’, which will become widely embedded among the population, and

have Japanese leaders confidence, in a situation that will change only if one of the parts decides to dissolve the Alliance (Kusunoki, 2020).

As it has been already mentioned, in the 1980s, political relations between Japan and the EU were starting to intensify and, in fact, the process for EU-Japan summits was in preparation precisely in the late part of the decade. This process was fuelled by EU-US relations, that the EU felt the need to deepen in the changing international context following the end of the Cold War. For this reason the Transatlantic Declaration on EC-US Relations was concluded in 1990, institutionalizing bi-annual summit meetings. A month later, when it was discovered that the EU and the US were preparing the bilateral agreement, Japanese Deputy Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Hisashi Owada, took the initiative with 'A Proposal on New Initiatives for Strengthening Japan–EC Relations' (also called the Owada Proposal), a paper given to the Commission on 21 December 1990: this response was intended to move towards the establishment of political cooperation (Keck, Vanoverbeke and Waldenberger, 2013, p. 113), proposing to improve consultations and establish a Joint Declaration on EC-Japan relations, in line with Japan's will to have them at the same status of the EU-US ones, within the Transatlantic Declaration. Although the concession of equal treatment (Nuttall, 1996, p. 119).

In recent years, Japan's foreign policy has been greatly influenced by the programme of monetary and structural reforms that will become known as 'Abenomics', which attracted much attention after Prime Minister, Shinzō Abe (mandate from 26 December 2012 to 16 September 2020, Ed.), and the LDP regained power in 2012 (*Beyond Abenomics: Japan's grand strategy*, 2013). Abe's view, characterised by strong ideology and values, also played a part in the broadening of the Yoshida Doctrine (Kusunoki, 2020): through Abenomics emerges Abe's desire for Japan to escape the post-war constraints by overturning many reforms that the American occupation has imposed to Japan: this will allow the country to pursue more proactive foreign and security policies, counterbalancing China's growing influence through the establishment of a 'democratic diamond' that includes Australia and India alongside the US. This 'concert of democracies' is meant to protect maritime security, besides liberal democracy, market economics and human rights (*Beyond Abenomics: Japan's grand strategy*, 2013). This

was also confirmed by a Joint Statement regarding the future of US-Japan alliance towards the inclusion of common values to further cement the relationship: "Japan and the United States share a commitment to democracy, the rule of law, open societies, human rights, human security, and free and open markets; these values guide us in our joint efforts to address the global challenges of our time" (Armitage and Nye, 2012, p. 10). Following up this Joint Statement, seems like the US and Japan already identified in the region several chances of cooperation: Myanmar, Cambodia and Vietnam are considered as priorities for the advance of democratic reforms and human right. North Korea represents a particular case, with regard of human rights violations. Even though both the US and Japan are aware of these abuses, the former is more focused on the matter of denuclearization and the latter on the fate of Japanese citizens that had been abducted by North Korea (Armitage and Nye, 2012, p. 10). With regard to past events, Abenomics had to face the delicate situation posed by Japan's history, in terms of the risky contradiction in strengthening Japan by increasing the country's dependency on the power that imposed those values, and the restrictions that Japan is now objecting and trying to lift; simultaneously, former US prisoners in Japan have criticized the Abe administration's revisionist view on war. A prominent place in Abe's agenda, given the effect that can have on security and defense's matters, was obviously taken by the revision of Japanese constitution, in particular Article 9 which constraints the use of military force (*Beyond Abenomics: Japan's grand strategy*, 2013): Abe's argued, in the middle of protests, that such a revision would not be to get involved in wars, but to constitute a deterrent and to better defend allies under the United Nation's collective self-defense doctrine (Genser and Brignone, 2015).

3.3 An Analysis of Mutual Perceptions

The relations between the EU and Japan are to these days perceived as almost entirely based of trade and economy, internally influenced by memories of trade conflicts that might still affect the general perception of the relationship itself by the two sides (Tsuruoka, 2015, p. 44): for instance, many times the bilateralism and economy of the Yoshida doctrine led to a prioritization of trade issues over diplomatic relations (Frattolillo, 2013, p. 12). I decided to include in this chapter an overview of the mutual perceptions that Japan and the EU developed about each other over time: their influence

is clearly pointed out by Frattolillo when he notes that despite the declining soft power of the United States, Japan still considers it a priority partner, partly at the expenses of Europe (2013). Considering the fact that part of the dissertation will be dedicated to the analysis of two EU-Japan recent agreements, it is important to remember that perceptions can influence negotiations, as well. For this reason, the inclusion of parties' perceptions can add a significant piece in the evaluation of the EU's role as a mediator (Elgström et al., 2018), in this context not between two states, but we could consider it as a mediator between Japan and its own member States. As Weinhardt and Moerland wrote: '… the outcomes of negotiations… do not necessarily reflect actual win-sets, but more likely the negotiator's (mis)perceptions or (mis)representations thereof' (Weinhardt and Moerland, 2017, p. 1). In particular, the combination of an actor's conception of a suitable behaviour and its expectation towards other actors, both influence roles in terms of patterns of behaviour and can affect an actor's performance. However, this part of research is still often overlooked, leaving a blind spot in the literature (Elgström et al., 2018, p. 300). As the result of actors decisions, it is necessary to understand the history and background, as well as identities and values that generates certain perceptions of actors involved, to understand inter-subjective practices (Frattolillo, 2013). As a methodological note, the authors considered hereafter, tends to refer to the parties as 'Japan' or 'the EU', rarely specifying the specific origin of a certain perception, rather looking at the events and unfolding of the relationship between the EU and Japan to analyse what the mutual perceptions of the parties might be.

Starting from pre-World War II years, Japan associated Europe with progressivism, attracting attention from Japanese intellectuals. As Stegewerns himself writes: 'Up to the First World War Europe was the model civilization on which Japan was trying to pattern itself. The period following the opening-up of Japan springs to mind… as the most conspicuous example of Europeanization' (2000, p. 39). In fact, through the first decade of the twentieth first century, Europe remained an example to look up to when it came to ideological, philosophical, cultural, political and economic matters. Japanese view of Europe change considerably as a result of World War I and the reshuffling of international power that it brough. Europe was exposed as conservative and imperialist, and the newly-born Europe-led League of Nation was not well received neither, being ignored or

rejected. At the same time, in 1921, the US overwhelmingly attracted Japan's attention: despite never becoming the symbol of civilization as much as pre-war Europe, in the eyes of the Asian country the US were the superpower of the new economic era, taking the stage in the East Asian theatre through the Washington Conference. As a consequence, Europe's image and share in the eyes of Japanese intellectuals shrank. It is, also, pointed out that, even though the US became an icon of capitalism, many where still considering it the only serious potential threat for Japan, a vision that seemed rightfully motivated by the anti-Japanese legislation approved by the US Congress of 1924. The Communist model of the Soviet Union was, on the other hand, more appreciated for being 'rational and idealistic', but also too heterogeneous to be considered a potential ally. Yet, the increasing influence of socialism on Japanese intellectuals, which from mid-1920s applied it to international relations, alongside the growing strength of China, enabled some of them to view China as a possible equal partner and not only a strong neighbour (Stegewerns, 2000, pp. 52-53).

Frattolillo, as well, points out the influence that the role of US had on the relationship between the EU and Japan. His analysis explains that the interaction between Tōkyō and Washington were influenced in the first place on how the US projected its identity and built its perception in the eyes of Japan: instead of making use of theoretical elements (that might arguably be connected on a normative conception of power in the Union agency), the US took advantage of a more practical social identity and of a 'productive partnership' that encouraged Japan to accept US involvement, making it unnecessary to involve another representative of Western values and, subsequently conditioning Japan to restrain Europe to a low-profile diplomatic approach. For this reason, Japan institutionalised the EU's role as not exceeding the stage of dialogue, a decision that would have led to an expectations gap (Frattolillo, 2013), a condition that apparently occurs in Union's strategic partnership with other countries and within inter-regional strategy-based relationships in different parts of the world (Bendiek and Kramer, 2010, p. 472). This gap was also partly caused by the fact that Japan's limited resources were invested in the external relations towards the US, and partly because of the misunderstanding surrounding EU's role in foreign issues and the challenges stemming from the difficulties in defining common positions within its own member states

(Frattolillo, 2013), a situation that affected the perception of Europe as an internally divided (and weaker) actor.

Therefore, relations between Europe and Japan have often been conditioned by mutual perceptions and misperception, combined with other constraints, i.e. the ones posed by the already mentioned Yoshida Doctrine. These factors can reduce and stiffen any enthusiasm and willingness for diplomatic relations (Frattolillo, 2013), and it looks like economic interactions have triggered both parts in this sense. Indeed, an element that seems to appear consistently in the EU-Japan relations is the one of suspicion, both on Japan's side for the possible effects of the Common External Tariff on the trade between the two parties, and on European side for Japanese trading practices. Japan was worried to be excluded by the EU's 'trading club', calling for a review of Japanese Economic Diplomacy in response to European economic integration (Gilson, 2000). This feeling of suspect and mistrust might also be seen in Japan's reluctancy to open to market force (Labhom, 2001), a crucial tendency given the weight of the economic portion of the EU-Japan interactions. The negotiations for the SPA and EPA would have started in 2011 (Gilson, 2016) and years later perception of mutual indifference are still pervasive: Japanese perceive Europe as focused on internal issues and interactions with immediate neighbourhood, while only taking China into consideration, when it comes to European relations in Asia. On the other hand, Europe consider Japan as exclusively absorbed by its relationship with the US, especially on foreign and security policy matters. This state of affairs generate an 'expectation deficit' within the parties: being too ambitious may not be the best behavioural choice, but the lack of expectations cannot be considered as a good foundation for any type of relationship (Tsuruoka, 2013, p. 2). The influence of parties perceptions of a particular actor on their decision regarding the prioritization of one relationship over another, seems to explain European Union interest in Japan because of its perception of the Asian country as an economic threat and potential competitor. Moreover, the actors' own perceptions of reciprocal demands can serve as the foundation for role conceptions and expectations, and the disparity between perceptions of international commitment and the objectives of the parts' foreign policy can lead to critical situations, as the EU has seen in its relations with Russia and China (Michalski and Nilsson, 2018, p. 6).

The image of Japan as perceived by Europe has probably changed throughout the decades, also influenced by historical events: the 'perils' of 1960s (Frattolillo, 2013, p. 9) to the 1970s and 1980s, during which the perception of an impervious Japan remained essentially unaltered; it will be the interruption of the Japanese economic success, between the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, that will fundamentally change the appreciation for the country by Europe (Waldenberger, 2013, p.18-19). Before this change of heart, the annoyance of the EC toward Japanese people was well represented by an internal EC document that has been exposed by a British newspaper: in the document Japan was described as 'A country workaholics who live in what Westerners would regard as little more than rabbit hutches …' (Hardy, 2013, p. 34). Subsequently, it could be said that mutual perceptions of the parts might have occasionally obscured, with external variables and misunderstandings, potential opportunities of cooperation at diplomatic level; on the other side, it also gave a justification to Japan to look for political engagement with Western countries, beyond the interaction with the US (Frattolillo, 2013): as a matter of fact, the problem with the US was that its heavy moulding of Japan's image and the close bound to Japan's own post-war history of Occupation, was leaving little space for to get involved in a significant relationship with Europe (Harootunian, 1993, pp. 196-221).

The historical narratives could also influence the process of identity building as well as the security aspect of the relation: in this case it is Japan's conflicting historical narratives that may constitute an obstacle in the process of creating shared memories and even more when presenting itself as a reliable security actor towards the EU, whose member states may interpret this aspect as a symptom of revisionist tendencies. Since maintaining security is a strong interest for both Europe and Japan, it represents an important component of their relationship and it is equally affected by the images the actors projects. It has been previously stated that the EU and the US have different way to present their own agency and the security concept is not an exception: not only they can count on different approaches and capabilities, but the EU can also take advantage of a softer image, more focused on multilateralism, capacity building and rule of law, that might be perceived as less threatening and less controversial; instead, the US-Japan alliance, designed in a more traditional way, providing security to Japan, has to consider the

limitations imposed by China and other countries that oppose to the US presence in the region (Pejsova, 2015, p.3). Europe's softer image, not lecturing others but being humbler and more modest, might be fundamental in maintaining security cooperation in Asia and Europe (Tsuruoka, 2016, p. 43). On this subject, Japan 'proactive contribution to peace' allows it to maintain a peaceful image even when developing its international security profile. Nevertheless, it is mentioned that public diplomacy will be a key battle for Japanese policymakers: Tōkyō must persuade its own people to reject the 'Pacifist Past', while also assuring neighboring countries of its peaceful intentions in order to avoid exacerbating regional tensions (Pejsova, 2015, p. 2).

With regard to the parties' image, identity discourse appears as a constant element when dealing with Japan influencing diplomatic interactions and dialogue with other actors; in this case will be analysed mainly the ones with the EU. The importance of the identity discourse significantly participate to the process of ASEM (Frattolillo, 2013). Established in 1996, represents the institutionalization of interregional relationship that has been heavily influenced in its development by conjunctural events: for instance, in 1996, the Asian economic boom resulted in active cooperation, in contrast to Asia's deep financial crisis in 1997, which resulted in pessimism and disinterest. This inconsistency in engagement with East Asia could be interpreted as evidence of historical inconsistency (Vanoverbeke and Ponjaert, 2007, p. 97). Despite these discrepancies, the ASEM became an important tool for the strengthening of multilateralism in the relations between the EU and Japan, and often based the performance of its states on the identity discourse, showing its weight in the process of identity construction. In this way it also helped the EU to reinforce it social identity in the Asian context (Frattolillo, 2013). With regard to ASEM and the identity construction process, Pacheco Prado contributed to the analysis with a remarkable observation: he contends that through ASEM, the EU has developed a corporate and social identity, not only toward Asian countries in general, but also toward China and Japan in particular. Simultaneously, both identities prevent the EU from becoming more involved in East Asian political affairs, and influenced Chinese and Japanese perceptions of the EU, leading them to reject greater European political involvement in East Asia. As a result, it could be said that ASEM's inability to establish

trans-national links between the EU and East Asia would imply that the EU's identity lacks a powerful institution (Pacheco Pardo, 2009).

In this regard, the European Union-Japan bilateral summits constitutes another case of link between image and interactions: their particular feature is that they do not achieve much from the point of view of cooperation, but they are highly institutionalised and unique to the relation with the EU, since Japan does not hold bilateral summits with other countries. The aim is to give each part respect and signal the respective international status and for this reason the meeting are heavily scripted to make sure to perform convincingly and reinforce cooperation and international status. This shows the importance retained by the symbolic elements rather than what actually happens during the meeting (Morii, 2015). However, this way of managing bilateral meetings might raise some uncertainties on whether international cooperation between the EU and Japan is truly evolving and deepening or it is just a display of rhetoric.

Another example of how mutual images and perceptions are closely linked through diplomatic strategies is well showcased in Żakowski's article addressing value oriented diplomacy, a particular diplomacy technique based on the display of fundamental values like democracy, free-market economy, human rights and rule of law. Nonetheless, this particular diplomatic instruments that constituted the base of Abe's administration, still raises many doubts because of its particular use. Suspects and accusations says that value oriented diplomacy constitutes nothing more than a tactic or a convenient slogan. Since his first mandate in 2006-2007, Abe's ideology was shared by Foreign Minister, Asō Tarō, who explains how some values were inculcated into Japanese culture even before Meiji Restoration of 1868; the promotion of Western values through befriending democracies like the US, Australia, India or the EU, then led Japan to enjoy a cheerful image that allows it to maintain a considerable amount of soft power. However, the selective (if not totally absent) application of certain values, according to the country Japan is addressing, makes value-oriented diplomacy look like a more pragmatic activity use to not jeopardize relations with countries of strategic importance, rather than representing an idealistic approach. Consequently, it could be argued that the true foundation behind Tōkyō's diplomacy are states interests, which explains, for example, the Japanese decision to

attempt a backstage deal with Russia on Northern territories after Crimea annexation, although respecting international law with the purpose of containing China (Żakowski, 2019).

Pacheco Pardo uses the constructivist approach to show why the identity constructed by the EU is disliked both by China and Japan, preventing the EU from being relevant in East Asia hard political Affairs: constructivism draws attentions to the role of ideas and non-material interests in the shaping the international system and claiming that states create for themselves a corporate identity, which intrinsic and individual, and a social identity that defines an actor through social structures. Consequently, constructivism explains the behaviour of states not according to material interests. In the case of the EU its corporate identity is identified by the adherence to human rights, democracy and rule of law, and as we have seen identifies itself through bilateral dialogue both with China and Japan using a two-fold characterization. China is an emerging power aiming to exert influence in proportion to its growing power, but is also a country with different political values compared to the EU: hence, if the EU self-identifies as equal partner in terms to power and influence over world affairs, the aspects of political principles completely separates the two. On the other hand, in the case of Japan, the EU has constructed a social identity based on common political values and as equally power entity, sharing great responsibility in shaping the international system. But how is Europe perceived by its counterparts? China perceive the EU as a partner at political economic and cultural level though ASEM, but, although believing in the necessity of multilateral dialogue, it did not promote any measure in this direction. Japan, instead perceives the EU's role in ASEM as mainly economic, but thanks to their shared values they could easily find common positions on different issues; nonetheless, the EU is again perceived as not actively involved in regional security matters. Therefore, it seems that neither Beijing nor Tōkyō have strategically changed their perception of the EU in favour of a greater political role in East Asian issues, showing the Union's lack of political clout in East Asia (Pacheco Pardo, 2009).

3.4 Europe and the Normative Power

As it has been analysed, the importance of mutual perceptions and images within the relationship between the actors emerges in the process of identity construction. In this case, an element that has been analyzed by various scholars, as it relates to the identity of the European Union, as well as to its role and agency, including relations with other countries, is that of Europe as Normative Power. This concept will be analyzed in the following pages, with the intention of underlining its influence and effects, also in a case of practical application in the relationship with Japan. As Gilson wrote, with regard to normative power Europe: 'Regardless, of how this persona is conveyed, it is the way in which it is received that influences the ability to act coherently and with one authoritative voice on the world stage' (Gilson, 2020, p. 69).

The concept of normative power in the international context is not new: Duchêne, for instance, examined it drawing upon the notion of normative power of the EC as an *idée force*, (Manners, 2002, p. 239) and in its analysis, points out the ambiguities of the European Community's in the 1970s, wavering between the aim of the founding fathers '… to reconciling former enemies, creating equality…, spreading the area of peace, not only within the confines of the Community but also, at least in aspiration, with the outside world'(p. 6), and the '… strand of ambition for power from the very beginning in the European ideal' (p. 6). This second aspect took different forms over the course of time: from necessary means to cooperation with one superpower (the US) and to peace with the other (the Soviet Union), to a declaration of the need for counterbalancing powers as the foundation of equitable interdependence and impactful joint action. The necessity of narrower and concrete goals converged with the important experience, for the founding fathers, of the tension of the cold war and the awareness that '… the power of Russia in Europe could only be met by collective defence and the threat of Communism by an *idée force* with comparable energy' (p. 2). Duchêne defines, in particular, 1973 as the moment to use the new aspiration to build meaningful political association in Western Europe: the Community's interest is to domesticate relations between states, bringing a sense of common responsibility to international problems, spontaneously choosing 'democratic' and civil standards rather than the ones of armed camps and balances of power that largely gave impulse to the European Community itself. According to Duchêne, this also implied

that the Community will only realize its full potential if it remains true to what have become its inner characteristics (Duchêne, 1973, pp.7, 20).

A clear explanation of the concept of normative power and its role in world politics, is given by Manners (2009), who states how radical and fast transformations at global level, in terms of economy, society, environment, conflict and politics, invites to reflect more on the power of ideals. It is noteworthy how Manners himself identifies, as bearers of crucial changes, two years that has been already mentioned for their historic relevance: the 1989, year of the collapse of communism, and 2001, remembered for the tragic terrorists attacks. Manners analysis starts by defining normative power as 'ideational rather than material or physical. This means that its use involves normative justification rather than the use of material incentives or physical force' (p. 2). This type of approach to power implies rethinking the engagement into world politics: for example, the power of ideas have influenced the post-Cold War period in the moment of evolution from the European Community into the EU, helping create a Union whose concerns went beyond economic policies and material ways to express influence and power. In fact, the integration in normative power and normative justification can be progressively found in EU's relations: two examples are the ideas of 'sustainable development' and 'humanitarian intervention', coming from the UN system, based on treaties and practiced by the Union in its relations (Manners, 2009, p. 2).

Indeed, already in 2002, Manners wrote about the theme of normative power Europe by thinking beyond traditional conceptions of the EU's role at international level and considering the case of death penalty, that will be later analysed. In particular, he invites to reflect on the EU's role in international politics and to consider the ideational impact of the EU international identity and role as representing the normative power (Manners, 2002). He explains how this concept involves three elements, different yet closely related to one another: first of all, 'Normative power should be seen as legitimate in the principles being promoted. If normative justification is to be convincing or attractive, then the principles being promoted must be seen as legitimate, as well as being promoted in a coherent and consistent way' (p. 2). For this reason, principles in European relations refer to specific instruments, such as Charters, Declarations or Conventions, whose consistence

is granted by a High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs (Manners, 2009). Secondly, normative power should be viewed as convincing in its acts, a perception which include persuasion and argumentation as well as the conferral of prestige or shame. Constructive engagement, institutionalization of relations, and encouragement of dialogue are examples of this behavior, and the Union's action encompasses several practices and policies, with the fostering of dialogue being the EU's greatest strength when advocating principles. In Manners' words: 'This combination of EU actions marks a first step towards a sustainable peace strategy' (p. 3). Finally, normative power, through normative justification, should include in its impact socialization, partnership and ownership to result persuasive or appealing. This three parts constitute the processes of normative justification, fostering the support of international principles, even though the EU actual impact in the promotion of principles can be extraordinary difficult to judge: especially it is pointed out that the EU's application of normative power has more often followed patterns and practices of great powers, instead of making a creative effort towards a more justifiable use (Manners, 2009).

With regard to the debate about Normative Power Europe (NPE), a useful contribution arrives from Forseberg who recognizes the NPE as a concept widely popular between scholars in the analysis of EU's foreign policy and relations, even though its meaning is still debated. According to Forseberg, this is the reason why the discussion over whether the EU can be considered a normative power or not has never been completely fruitful nor constructive, and, subsequently, he proceeds to indicate the features that characterize a normative power. In doing so, he also enriched the debate with further analysis around this concept. Starting from Manners article of 2002, Forseberg reconstruct the concept of 'normative power' from the definition of these two terms, 'normative' and 'power'. With 'normative', in the first place, the 'norm' is defined 'as a principle of right action that can be approached from various ethical perspectives' (p. 1190) but also has the meaning of 'being normal'. However, it is interestingly pointed out that in international politics, dominated by realpolitik, acting 'normatively' has not been 'normal', so the notion that 'normative power' defines what is normal is not necessarily normative, in sense of embodying the principle of right action: with regard to Japan, for instance, 'normalizing' has traditionally meant transitioning from a civilian type of actor to what is conventionally

defined as a great power. The concept of 'power', as well, needs to be distinguished between the two English uses of power as ability to cause effects and power in the meaning of a powerful actor; this distinction is relevant in the sense that the concept of NPE seems to refer to the latter, but the definition of actor able to define what is normal seems closer to the former (Forseberg, 2011, pp. 1190-1191).

With regard to the features of normative power, Forseberg constantly refers to Manners (2002), pointing out what can be critical aspects in Manners' reasoning. The first feature identified is to have a Normative Identity, that Manners traces back to the EU's hybrid polity and treaty-based legal order, which seemed to be interpreted as inherently good and normative, as opposed to the Westphalian order, but this is a questionable conclusion. The second feature is to have Normative Interests, which are assumed to be different from the traditional or self-regarding ones, even though many times the EU has given more weight to its economic interests. The third feature is to behave according to Norms: the EU usually acts accordingly to international law, yet has also endorsed measures against the same international law, remarkably in occasion of the NATO air war against Serbia in 1999; moreover, despite fostering multilateralism, has also happened that the EU acted unilaterally. The fourth feature is to use normative means of power: in this case, even though the EU often exploits its economic leverage, many times normative means are applied, for example in negotiations with Russia. Finally, the fifth feature is identified as the ability to achieve normative ends, with regard to which it is difficult to point out substantial EU achievement: besides Manners' case of death penalty (Forseberg, 2011, p.1194), will be later explained that Michalski and Nilsson noted how difficult it was for the EU to achieve normative objectives in its relations with Russia and China (Foreign Policy Analysis, 2018). Different criteria has been pointed out, as well, with Börzel and Risse focusing on new member states, access candidate and neighbouring countries as a dependent variable in the process of spreading of EU's policies and institutions: in fact, the EU uses this type of incentives to induce institutional changes in countries that proposes themselves, and access candidate to the Union. In this way, the EU can pursue its own interests, acting as a gigantic socialisation catalyst, promoting rules, norms and practices that needs to be incorporated by member states, and also encouraging

competition among countries that desire a closer relationship with the Union itself (Börzel and Risse, 2012, pp. 4-7).

A new points of view in this analysis, encompasses the concept of hegemony, giving a new light to the investigation of normative power. Hegemony is interpreted as a concept including both norms and interests, alongside the inconsistencies that are, in this way, considered a part of normative power. What hegemony is expanding is the understanding of actors and the refocusing of debates to establish critical purposes. Within the scope of EU agency and role, normative power influenced the debate by presenting Europe as an actor that pursues normative aims instead of material ones, through normative tools instead of using military or economic means. Diez's argumentations revolves around the possibility that normative power might be belittling the concept of 'power', thus needing to be replaced by the concept of hegemony, whose Gramscian conception allows to consider not only brute force, but also the potential power brought by ideas and consensus (Diez, 2013a, p. 195). This conception seems to agree with the interpretation of normative power as ideational and bonded to the spreading of principles and values that Manners (2009) displayed in his article, an aspect of international relations that reflects in the perception of the EU's role as a security partner: as opposed to the US whose alliance with Japan is meant to provide Tōkyō's security in a traditional way, the Union presents a less threatening but also softer and, most importantly, less controversial image (Pejsova, 2015).

Important practical examples of the effect of normative power can be traced in EU's international relations. Its self-conception is based on deeply rooted narrative harking back to historical calamities and the necessity to forge a lasting peace between member states (Duchêne, 1973 in Michalski and Nilsson, 2018, p. 3), building since the 2000s a role conception that encompasses a vision of a rule-based international system founded on multilateralism, good governance, rule of law and human rights strengthened by the Eastern enlargement (Ferrero-Waldner, 2005 in Michalski and Nilsson, 2018, p. 3). This is noteworthy in terms of the EU's self-perception, international identity and the way it constructs foreign policy actions and orientations, particularly because of how EU's conception and attachment to its normative power prevented it from seeing the

transformations and changes at the international level. With regard to the relations between the EU and Russia, and the EU and China, this has led to an inadequate response to avoid crisis and potential problems: the Union should have foreseen that an agreement with Ukraine could have been interpreted by Russia as EU's will to move forward in the area of Eastern Europe, which would have intruded on Russia's traditional sphere of interest. Similarly, the EU did not understand China's unavailability in relation to EU's socialization ambitions, namely the insistence to improve protection of human rights and promote democratic practices. It could be said that these crisis stemmed because of the Union's inability to interpret the position of its own partners. To understand why the EU's view was so clouded because of how much it was trapped in its own conception, we must always remember that the EU is not a traditional foreign policy actor, that approaches foreign relations on the base of interest: the EU acts on the base of its international identity, which allowed it to circumvent the problems faced by member states' national foreign policy. In the case of China and Russia, it is also interesting to see how the role expectations of two antagonistic partners have a direct effect on role conception: cooperation will clearly happen on different principles from those of the liberal order and will, consequently, change the view that the West and its actors have of the liberal order. This makes the positions and dynamics between the actors crucial: in fact, in the case of Russia and China, the EU changed its position accordingly for each actor, behaving more like a normal foreign policy actor, without giving up its normative power. For this reason the EU is caught in the dilemma of what to do with its international identity, in order to interact with other actors in a more hostile environment (Foreign Policy Analysis, 2018).

In this respect, Michalski and Nilsson points out that EU's role is nonetheless characterised by inconsistencies (Michalski and Nilsson, 2018, p. 3), a statement that seems to agree with Forseberg's observations (2011): the mismatch often happens between what the Union claims to be and what it does, besides whether or not it possess enough 'stateness' to be a foreign policy actor (Michalski and Nilsson, 2018, p.3). For this reason, Risse suggested to interpret EU's targets, as civilian or normative power, as an attempt of identity building in the context of foreign policy, rather than a grand strategy in itself (Risse, 2012 in Michalski and Nilsson, 2018, p. 3). According to this interpretation, normative power is part of the effort to create the basis for a role

conception, even without a shared foreign policy identity and despite a bigger complexity in its foundation (Diez, 2005). One of the most interesting observations, it is precisely the one regarding the foundations of European integration: those have grown out of principles and norms belonging to the single member states of the Union, as well as from the adherence to the post-WWII liberal international order. The resulting condition is that repudiating EU's normative role conception, as a shared base of symbolic power, might undermine cohesion and credibility. This need for a careful balance between the joint effort to project ideational and material goals, and preservation of national identities, makes the EU's external identity much thinner than the one of a member state. Therefore, by separating the Union's roles at international and domestic level, it is possible to develop an analysis without denying member states' practices in foreign policy agency or the existence of national identities (Michalski and Nilsson, 2018).

3.4.1 The Case of Death Penalty in Japan

After expressing the complexity of normative power and what it can imply for European relations and role in terms of the EU-Japan relationship, one example of Normative Power used to spread European values is the case of capital punishment in Japan, and how the EU attempted to use its influence to promote the abolition of the death penalty, as stated in the introducing quote by Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission: "… The European Union is opposed to the use of capital punishment in all cases and under all circumstances and has consistently called for its universal abolition. That EU believes that… its abolition is essential to protect human dignity… The EU has on a number of occasions called on the Japanese authorities for a moratorium on the application of the death penalty, pending its complete legal abolition. This would bring Japan into line with the worldwide trend away from the death penalty" (European Union, 2010).

Before anything else, it is noteworthy to consider the different mechanisms of the functioning of normative power. Forseberg criticises Manners for not elaborating this aspect and to mention mechanisms that clash with the concept of normative power itself. In general, the evaluation of normative power mechanisms has been neglected by NPE

literature, that often leaves these mechanisms undistinguished or deploys more than one of them at the same time, for example in case of the Japanese death penalty. For this reason, Forseberg analysis proceeded with the identification of four mechanisms (pp. 1195-1198):

I. Persuasion, through the diffusion of information; it is easily associated to normative power and implies the use of rhetoric, personal and collective attraction, as well as capitalizing on pertinent knowledge.
II. Invocation of norms (or authorities) to which third parties have devoted themselves. This is particularly relevant in case of agreements, whose clauses can be invoked in case of violation.
III. Shaping the discourse can also be considered as a form of normative power, vehicle of indirect power and associated in Manners to the concept of 'cultural filter'.
IV. Finally, it is mentioned that normative power can be manifested through the power of example (Forseberg, 2011), that Manners called 'contagion', i.e. the unintentional diffusion of ideas from political actors, a mechanism that the EU applies in the context of regional integration (2002, p. 244). It is debatable if human rights spreading (like the abolition of capital punishment) is truly based on learning from the EU, and whether in its purest form it will be more appropriate to define it, for example, as 'influence', rather than 'power': in fact, it needs to be considered the difference when the country providing the example is in a more powerful position: it happened with the EU in defining terms and standards for countries that want to access its market (Forseberg, 2011, p. 1198).

It is also argued that these mechanisms of diffusion are less effective when they are applied beyond the European neighbourhood, for instance in the case of Asia, even more because the EU is not the only actor available for cooperation and integration: both WTO and its rules for free trade areas, and the comprehensive North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) – which has been re-negotiated in 2018 (Dangerfield, 2018) – including Canada, the US and Mexico, constitute alternatives to the EU's governance system that encompasses significant complexity with policy areas, and supranational institutions

which results in limiting the sovereignty of states. Nonetheless, although selectively and in different forms, it happened that European values has been adopted (Börzel and Risse, 2012, p. 16).

Even though it looks weaker compared to the transatlantic relationship or the transpacific relationships, the EU-Japan relationship is becoming more vital, especially if we consider the context in which the relationship is placed into: it is difficult for the EU to promote is foundational norms (e.g. democracy and human rights) in Asia without endangering its relationship with China. For this reason, Europe needs supporters to defend its core norms at international level. In this respect, Japan has embraced many of those norms, such as peace, democracy, liberty, the rule of law and human rights (Hosoya, 2012, p. 319), and, as Pacheco Pardo previously noted, the EU has partly built its social identity as sharing political principles with Japan (Pacheco Pardo, 2009). Despite, having many aspects in common, actually reaching an agreement to implement shared norms in joint declarations can be strenuous, and the universal abolition of death penalty gives a clear example of differing positions. This difference could be seen even after Shinzō Abe succeeded Koizumi, and Abe's Foreign Minister, Asō Tarō released the 'Arc of Freedom and Prosperity', a new diplomatic doctrine. Europe would have been a very important partner sharing basic values with Japan, alongside NATO, and with Eastern Europe supporting the new Japanese diplomatic strategy. However, a normative partnership – i.e. a cooperation in order to consolidate essential norms – between the EU and Japan will have to face the limits stemming from their different positions on certain areas like human rights and in this case death penalty (Hosoya, 2012, p. 319).

Already in 2013, Obara analysed Japan's resistance to European abolitionism and how the EU's institutions can approach the Japanese government. In particular, it is pointed out the significant constraints posed at institutional level. As a matter of fact, the Japanese decision-making system – which restricts leading actors to bureaucrats, business community and ruling party – is driven by selected élites, including pro-death penalty entrepreneurs, in the Ministry of Justice and Public Prosecutor's Office (Obara, 2013, pp. 33-34). Indeed, the relationship between the Japanese bureaucratic and political system has its uniqueness and complexity in the management power and legislative initiative of

the bureaucrats: in fact, in Japan, bills are generally the result of the officials' initiative. On the other hand, the organization at the top shows the influence of bureaucratic power, flanking a minister and one or more political undersecretaries with a bureaucratic undersecretary. This close link obviously affects the political landscape: since the LDP can boast many parliamentarians of bureaucratic origin, it has an advantage in the dynamics of political relations. We can therefore note an imbalance in the Japanese political system, which appears to be disadvantaged compared to the margin of maneuver and intervention that officials can use instead (Caroli and Gatti, 2004).

It is especially noteworthy the link between capital punishment and the cultural Japanese concept of *shinde wabiru* that the Minister of Justice, Mayumi Moriyama, established at a seminar in 2002 as an explanation for wide public support of death penalty. *Shinde wabiru* represents a specific Japanese view on the feeling of guilt according to which killing oneself is the way to make amend for one's crime (Japan Times, 2002 in Obara, 2013). The Japanese government, indeed, tends to proclaim that capital punishment is determined at domestic and cultural level, stating how *shinde wabiru* still collects Japanese public appreciation. In reality, the purpose of this claim is to make external pressures look like illegitimate intervention in an internal affair. The capital punishment system is tightly connected to the governmental approach, rather than to a weak human rights consciousness: the government claims that the issue should be left to the national criminal justice system, public climate, and the abovementioned Japanese culture on death and guilt. The EU needs to take these aspects into consideration when promoting the abolition of capital punishment, which is also one the criteria for being admitted as a member state; the UN as well has taken the initiative in the anti-death penalty campaign. Approaching Japan on this delicate topic, requires the EU institutions and activist groups to acknowledge Japan's peculiar institutional framework: in fact, the governments tends to perceive their campaigns as a single-sided European or international imposition (Obara, 2013, p.33), which would match the perception that Europe often projects of being the actor always lecturing and looking down on others (Tsuruoka, 2016, p. 43).

Recently, the same topic was analysed again by Bacon and Nakamura (2021), whose research will reveal, not only the problems already addressed by Obara (2013), but also a

different outcome when analysing the support of the Japanese population for death penalty. Bacon and Nakamura observe that, in the preamble of the 2018 Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), both the EU and Japan committed themselves to common values and principles, i.e. democracy, rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms (2021). Nevertheless, not only Tōkyō strongly opposed the request of a human rights clause bounding the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) to the SPA (Anon., 2014), but was still retaining death penalty in 2021. Yet, the authors state that despite the abolition of the death penalty is still unlikely in the near future, the Union succeeded in attempting to diffuse abolitionist norm to key actors in Japan by using direct and indirect methods of norm diffusion, namely socialization, persuasion and functional emulation. In this regard, it is interesting to notice how three types of rationality are related to norm diffusion: instrumental rationality or the logic of consequences, normative rationality or the logic of what is appropriate, and communicative rationality or the logic of arguing (Börzel and Risse, 2012 in Bacon and Nakamura, 2021). Bacon and Nakamura, then, associate instrumental rationality to functional emulation, communicative rationality to persuasion and normative rationality to socialization, i.e. the mechanism of internalizing certain norms as the 'right thing to do', developing the belief that said norm is substantially true or correct (2021). A significant role in socialization and persuasion will be played, in this case, by the results of a research conducted by Sato and Bacon (2015) that will cause the Japanese Federation of Bar Association (JFBA) to change its position with regard to the matter of death penalty, proving that the EU has successfully been involved in norm diffusion. Indeed, Sato and Bacon, through an opinion poll parallel to governmental one, show that the 80% of population marked as retentionist toward the capital punishment was, in reality hiding a way more complex scenario in which only a 27% of the Japanese were committed retentionist; the rest represented a variety of intermediate position that the original governmental poll was not meant to capture, including that the majority of the population itself not agreeing with the final decision on death penalty being based on public opinion surveys (2015).

To conclude, from Bacon and Nakamura (2021) seem to appear what Obara suggested many years prior: the Union needed to change its human rights stance and adapt its death penalty campaign to not cause resistance and finding which institutional framework had

to be addressed as influencing the government (2013, pp. 34-35). When referring to the EU as being a normative power there should be greater focus on what the EU does and rather than focusing only on what kind of actor the EU is (Bacon and Nakamura, 2021). This seems to agree with the statement according to which an EU attached solely on its normative power, might jeopardize its own ability to properly read contexts and readily respond (Foreign Policy Analysis, 2018).

3.5 The Impact of Path Dependency

After observing the influence mutual perceptions and images exerts in this relationship, and how they intertwine with the matter of EU and Japan's identity and the unfolding of their interactions, it might be useful to focus on the so called 'path dependency'. Even though the research on this concept shows criticism and disagreement regarding the approach to use – probably deriving from the many subfield divisions in the discipline (Bennett and Elman, 2006, p. 251) –, it could be noteworthy to analyse it in terms of how conditions and events might have influenced the establishment and evolution of EU-Japan relationship at political level. As stated by Pierson: '… specific patterns of timing and sequence matter; starting from similar conditions a range of social outcomes is often possible; large consequences may result from relatively 'small' or contingent events; particular courses of action, once introduced, can be virtually impossible to reverse; and consequently, political development is often punctuated by critical moments or junctures that shape the basic contours of social life' (2004, pp. 18-19, in Bennett and Elman, 2006).

With regard to the EU and Japan, there are scholars that argued how path dependence have a role in the evolution of this relationship. Surely their past history left a mark on their mutual perceptions and interactions: for instance the pacifist constitution that the LDP complains it was imposed by the occupying force in the aftermath of the defeat after WWII, could be considered an example of a framework that defined and limited the scope of the country's regional, global and security policy for decades (Berkofsky, 2007). But what is the place of path dependence in this relationship?

The concept of path dependency is undoubtedly characterized by several ambiguities. Vergne and Durand pointed out the lack of a clear definition and empirical elements to support it, which triggers scholars' skepticism; moreover, it is not specified how this

phenomenon occurs, when it occurs. They also observe that the absence of variables causally and systematically relating, prevent path dependency from being considered a proper theory, not to mention the tendency of existing literature to merge dependence as a process and as a result. A possible solution is offered in the form of a narrower definition, i.e. path dependency as a property of stochastic processes that occurs in the presence of contingency and self-reinforcement, which causes lock-in in the absence of external shocks (Vergne and Durand, 2010, p. 737). It is also important to remind what the literature about institutionalism points out: the other side of path dependency can be beneficial, through creating routine, certainty and trust in both economic and social exchanges (Pierson, 2000).

Despite the uncertainties that still surrounds this phenomenon, some recurring characteristics will be hereafter analysed. The concept of path dependency has already been discussed in regard to social sciences and Mahoney gave a useful theoretical insight: the patterns of conduct taken into consideration when analysing path dependency can persist, although the environment change drastically, in a series of historical sequences in which contingent events follow a consequential logic (Mahoney 2000, in Gilson, 2016). In Bennett and Elman, part of the analysis focuses precisely on the elements of contingency and constraints, as still subject of discussion and debate: the former implies that causal stary might be influenced by random, unaccounted elements; the latter operates in a way that tends to keep the actors on a certain path once it has been established (2006, p. 252). Mahoney, as well, includes in his broader approach a different reading of contingency as something unexpected within the context of the main theory under evaluation: he suggested that ‘Contingency refers to the inability of theory to predict or explain, either deterministically or probabilistically, the occurrence of a specific outcome. A contingent event is therefore an occurrence that was not expected to take place …’ (p. 513); consequently, an event is contingent when it falls outside the already existing scientific theory (Mahoney, 2000). In the same way constraints – a fundamental component in the interactions at level of international relations – are also surrounded by disagreement, with different understanding according to the author. In this regard, Bennett and Elman (2006) considered in their research the reading adopted by Pierson (2004), according to which ‘the crucial feature of a historical process that

generates path dependence is positive feedback (or self-reinforcement)' (p. 21). Self-reinforcement is taken into consideration by many scholars when examining the direction of a certain path: it is characterised by the establishment and long-term reiteration of a given institutional pattern, getting caught into what is called 'increasing returns', i.e. when a pattern becomes embedded, reinforcing more and more the reproduction of the original conditions. This gives the impression that international actors are inevitably led to the reproduction of the same past legacies or that early events are simply the result of contingencies (Mahoney, 2000 in Gilson, 2016).

Vergne and Durand also investigated the link between path dependence and increasingly constraining processes, although adding a different opinion to the debate. They pointed out the difficulty in escaping (as in the case of constraints) self-reinforcing mechanisms, and stated that even though path dependence is a property of a system not determined by a set of initial conditions (Goldstone, 1998 in Vergne and Durand, 2010), it could only be obtained when contingent events trigger self-reinforcing paths. Nonetheless it is important to consider the origin of these paths and the role of contingent events in their regards: indeed, those events exist at the origin of path dependent courses both to allow the possibility to pursue different paths and to make sure that what initiates the path is different from will be later reproduced (i.e. self-reinforcement) (Vergne and Durand, 2010).

Since the EU-Japan relationship is highly institutionalised, it is noteworthy to dwell on scholars considerations regarding path dependency in relation to institutions. In fact, path dependence might imply that changing track, once it has been started, can have significant costs for a country. Despite the presence of other choice occasions, the entrenchments of certain institutional arrangements can prevent a smooth reversal (Levi, 1997 in Pierson, 2004). In line with this connection between path dependence, institutions and economy, David, too, identified the distinctiveness of institutions and organizations with them being more rigid and less prone to passively adapt to the pressure of changing environments; this may lead to their members and directors to alter the external environment (David, 1994, pp. 217-219). Many other scholars seemed to agree on this inflexible nature of institutions in relations to path dependence. Like David, Thelen reaffirm that political

scientists have taken from the work of economists, who study technological trajectories, that technology like politics involves a part of agency and choice; yet, once chosen, a path can become locked in, embedding more and more into the adjustment of all relevant actors. However, in politics, contrary to the world of firms, disagreement over goals and disparities in power often happens, reinforced by the hand of institutions, as well (Thelen, 1999, p. 385). Indeed, from the point of view of historical institutionalists, institutions are preservative, drawing the emphasis on the fact that path dependence makes the cost of doing things differently almost always prohibitively high; at the same time, institution are used by existing leaders to harden their preferences. But, despite the continuity that institutions embodies, politics implies manipulation and leadership is about overturning constraints, which frames the failure of institutions (Rhodes, Binder and Rockman, 2006, p. xv). In fact, long periods of institutional continuity and reproduction, are believed to be interrupted only after critical junctures of radical change, giving political agency the possibility to redesign institutional structures. According to this logic, institutions are the legacy of path dependencies, including political compromises and victories, as well as massive failures which can be powerful catalyst for change (Merch and Olsen, 2006). Thelen, described how in politics losers not always disappear, rather adapt their strategy in terms of waiting for more suitable times to rebound or working differently to pursue a certain goal. For this reason, increasing return in politics does not necessarily imply a permanent balance (1999); rather this balance is deemed to last only temporarily until a new set of contingent events will lead to reorientation (Djelic and Quack, 2007). This opens the possibility for path dependence to not be associated solely with inertia and absence of change, but also to encompass novelty, allowing an elaboration of the past – instead of a complete denial – and an extension following sequences of unfolding events (Garud and Karnøe, 2001). However, it is stated by Hay that path dependence does not exclude moments of path-shaping during which the architecture of institutions as well ca be significantly reconfigured (Hay, 2006, pp. 56-74).

Having analysed the link between path dependence and institutions, it is noteworthy that Carlson (2001) observe a possible example of this phenomenon within Japanese policy, in particular the large gap in the funds between the LDP and the DPJ (Democratic Party of Japan ed.). Active from 1998 to 2016, and after being for long time the second party

of the country, the DPJ gained a stronger position in 2009 when it secured a striking, landslide victory against the LDP (Carlson, 2011), interrupting its uncontested supremacy for the first time since 1955. If the funding discrepancies could simply reflect the difficulties of funding a new party in Japan, at the same time the fundraising prowess of the LDP can be related to path dependence, i.e. benefits and advantages incurred by the LDP as the ruling party for the majority of the postwar years even after the end of the 1955 system and the reforms of 1994. Interestingly, the Japanese Communist Party, despite being one of the richest, only wins a small percentage of the seats on national elections and the LDP lost 2009 elections despite the financial advantage enjoyed in comparison to DPJ, showing the importance still held by electoral strength (Carlson, 2011).

With respect to the interactions with the Union, Gilson focuses on the institutionalization of the relationship through the 1991 Joint Declaration: she finds this circumstance hard to break away from to establish new partnerships against framework that considers institutions the 'carriers of history' and maintain existing norms and cultural patterns through time – a situation that seems to align with the concept of self-reinforcement. Gilson considers path dependency – and in particular 'imprinting' – as useful starting tool to explain the apparent inertia of institutions alongside the incremental change of the relationship. The undermining of the origins of the current partnership and the initial agreements with the expectations that they set in train made contemporary negotiations difficult, besides locking the relations between Japan and the EU into normative and structural path dependency (Gilson, 2016). These observations seem to corroborate previous analysis on the rigidity and continuity characterizing the nature of institutions, in opposition to political changes. Contrary to the statement of Vergne and Durand (2010), Marquis and Tilcsik suggest an interpretation through the concept of 'imprinting': this implies that many characteristics of an organization can be determined by environmental factors, and, subsequently, the originating phase can leave an enduring mark, which shapes organizational behaviors and results in the long run, even as external environmental conditions change (2013). This trajectory may also embed conceptions of the normal that has been imprinted at a foundational stage leading to reiteration and persistence of certain forms of behaviour, as well as the shaping of strategies and goals

(Manners in Diez, 2013a; Thelen and Steinmo, 1992). In the same way, path dependence can also engender learning through copying structures and behaviours under the pressure from other actors and institutions. These 'conceptions of the normal' are shaped by normative power, which can thus be identified by how it affects other actors' interpretations of what behavior is appropriate (Diez in Manners, 2006). It could be argued that the historical circumstances that brought the parties together heavily influenced their relationship – and subsequently triggered the unfolding of path dependence –, for example, thinking about Japan's fluctuating perception of Europe and how the changes were linked to specific historical events, and, on the other hand, how Europe was attracted to Japan because of the sudden economic growth made possible by the US's taking care of Japan's security.

3.6 To Summarise

In this chapter have been analysed possible elements of influence in the EU-Japan broadening relationship towards a more effective political engagement. Firstly, has been described the role of the US, showing the dominance it exerted, not only during the period of the Allied Occupation, but also in the following decades, claiming a priority role within Japanese relations with Western countries, and retaining its relevance even in terms of perceptions from the East Asian country although a decline in soft power (Frattolillo, 2013). On the contrary, the mutual perceptions between Japan and the EU are still pervaded by suspicion and indifference (Tsuruoka, 2013), projecting the image of two partners that, despite the will of both parties, are still at a distance and prioritizing other issues in the respective regions. In particular, Europe does not seem able to be actively involved with the two most important East Asian partners (i.e. China and Japan) if not through the ASEM and still maintaining a role which is mainly economic, even though sharing political values with Japan, with both China and Japan allegedly unwilling to upgrade the EU’s status in East Asia (Pacheco Pardo, 2009). European difficulties in defining common positions, also does not play in favour of its perception by other actors (Frattolillo, 2013), which see the EU as weaker and internally divided. Identity and image are concept also connected to Normative Power, described by Diez (2005) as the power of creating conceptions of the normal, and by Manners (2009) as ideational and non-material in purpose and means: the EU linked this type of power to its aim of being a

catalyst promoting rules, norms and practices (Börzel and Risse, 2012) within its own member states and beyond (Duchêne, 1973). It has been analysed its role briefly in the case of crisis of relations with Russia and China (Michalski and Nilsson, 2018), and in the case of death penalty in Japan. This showed how the EU was partly successful in promoting international values in Japan, but, most importantly the difficulties in adapting and changing its approach towards other actors and being too focused on its own promotion agency. Obstacles in changing are analysed also in the last part dedicated to path dependency: concepts as 'contingency', 'constraint', 'self-reinforcement' and 'imprinting', have being discussed in relation to a phenomenon of uncertain definition that causes lock-in in relationships (Vergne and Durand, 2010), and in which previous steps may induce future movements in keeping the same direction (Pierson, 2000, p. 252). Gilson in particular identifies the EU and Japan as rapped in a path dependent development that is not able to move away from the premises of the 1991 The Hague Declaration, in spite of the changes occurred to both actors (Gilson, 2016). Therefore, the answer to the question 'are this elements influencing the EU-Japan relationship development?', could be 'yes': alternative actors keeping the EU and Japan's focus away from each other, perceptions dominated by indifference and scarred by a past of economic disputes, the EU too absorbed by its identity as normative power to adapt and a path apparently locked on its first political agreement might have a negative impact on broadening relations beyond economic interactions.

Chapter 4
THE EU-JAPAN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT AND ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

4.1 Introducing the Chapter

The implicit strategic goal of Japan since the 1950s was to ensure that the country was thriving under its alliance with the United States, which recent evolution of power at a global level risked to make drift (Armitage and Nye, 2012). In 2009, Takashi Inoguchi wrote: 'In these times of great upheaval, Japan urgently needs to create and announce a grand strategy. Such a vision would help it to navigate between two kinds of difficulties for the next decades. One concerns the rapidly shifting configuration of forces and ideas in its vicinity and beyond. The other revolves around the robust mindset of its citizens that yearns for stability and continuity. The disharmony…is painfully clear. In developing a grand strategy, Japan would need to focus on its traditional strength while embracing changing global ideas and forces' (Inoguchi 2009,). The previous chapters attempted to portray the complex web that represents the relationship between the EU and Japan, a complexity displayed not only in terms of history and development of interactions overtime, but also from a much broader point of view of other element that might have influenced the relationship also in terms of identity of the actors and paths of progression. The purpose was to analyse the type of growth and advancement that preceeded two recent agreements and try to assess where the relations between the European Union and Japan might be in recent years. The Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) and Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) will be taken into consideration in this regard: the former is a more comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and the latter a political agreement through which Tōkyō and Brussels will become champions of global values such as democracy, the rule of law, fundamental freedoms, and human rights. Because they are frequently treated together, sources pertaining to both agreements will be examined in this section in order to analyse what these recent agreements portray of the status of the EU-Japan relationship: *has an effective 'political' agreement finally arrived?*

Since the Declaration of 1991, the Action Plan of 2001 and the beginning of EPA and SPA negotiations in 2011, the European Union and Japan have shown their desire to strive for deeper political interaction. There the question arises whether these new agreements could be considered steps in the direction of a more effective political cooperation or behind the rhetoric the economic interests are still dominant. As stated by Gilson: 'Sitting alongside negotiations for an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), this SPA represents an attempt to reignite bilateral relations between these two global powerhouses' (2016, p. 2).

4.2 Towards Two New Agreements: After the End of the Action Plan

When in April 2010, at the annual EU-Japan summit, the 2001 Action Plan was approaching its expiration date, it became clear to the parties that a replacement or a new programme for joint action was needed. The impression of 'renewal' during the summit, was deriving not only from the need of a substitute for the EU-Japan ten-year Action Plan: the Lisbon Treaty was offering new remit, enabling the creation of more coherent external action mechanisms and increasing the areas of foreign policy in which the EU could act 'as a single voice' (p. 60); furthermore, these were the years of a new government in Tōkyō under the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), which – as already pointed out – had swept aside, in 2009, the long dominance of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). The summit represented the occasion to pledge for greater cooperation in several areas, for instance the issues pertaining to climate change, the pursuance towards the ambitions of the G20 group and the WTO Doha Round and a further cooperation concerning customs, especially through the 2010 Mutual Recognition of the Authorised Economic Operators Programmes (Gilson, 2020, p. 110).

Approximately two years later, on 5 November 2012, during a summit meeting with Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council, and José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, Japanese Prime Minister, Yoshihiko Noda (mandate from 2 September, 2011, to 26 December, 2012, Ed.) expressed Japanese government intention to continue the cooperation with the EU, which was considered as a global partner that shared fundamental values such as democracy, freedom, the rule of law and human rights (Frattolillo, 2013, p. xii). Despite the difficulties, Japan-EU

relations occupy a special place in world politics. As written by Frattolillo: '… the EU is the largest economy in the world and Japan is the fourth after the EU, the United States and China. If the EU and Japan can successfully conclude a Free Trade Area (FTA), the two powers will be regarded as the rule-makers of the world economy' (p. xii). The interactions between the US and China seemed to be the centre of politics at global level (Frattolillo, 2013, p. xii): in fact, since the end of WWII, China has transformed the international order that was once shaped by the American-British leadership, forcing Japan to fully recognize the structural elements that are accelerating the trend toward America's diminished involvement in terms of international politics (Kusunoki, 2020). Nevertheless, the EU and Japan have shaped significant rules and norms of international society; however, they should clearly show their political will to consolidate those rules and norms by deepening the already existing cooperation (Frattolillo, 2013). Amongst other elements, it could be argued that China's economic and military revival throughout the 21st century, motivated Japan to establish a more comprehensive and substantive global strategy, whose renaissance could be exemplified, namely, by the publication of the National Security Strategy in December 2013. The pursuing of this target can be recognised by the proactive measures taken by the Japanese Government to establish and deepen strategic partnerships, with allies that has been overlooked. This has been realized through the diplomatic agenda undertaken by Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzō Abe, who, following his re-election in 2012, visited one quarter of world's countries, beside setting up and deepening strategic interaction with a group of global partners, a group to which the European Union has been officially added after 2018 (Danks, 2019, pp. 13-14).

As a matter of fact, the Japan led by Prime Minister Abe was willing to counterbalance the 20-year-long economic recession, the three years dominated by a diplomatic strategy controlled by the Democratic Party and the Fukushima nuclear disaster. Simultaneously, Japanese diplomacy under Abe has increased its emphasis on normative diplomacy, which recalls EU's diplomacy, and implies a power capable of inducing others to be persuaded into emulate a certain set of norms and become a normative ally. The EU's norms include freedom of expression, free trade, free movement, human rights respect, democracy, open and free markets, and gender equality. Japan's normative diplomacy emphasizes the rule of law, free trade, open seas navigation, human dignity, and human

rights, basing this strategy on its own experiences since 1945. Abegeopolitics was not less dominating: Abe used his network diplomacy to persuade unfriendly neighbours (China and Korea) to settle disputes, normalize bilateral relations, and stabilize East Asia and the Pacific. His preoccupation is, in fact, dictated by the necessity to persuade Japan's most important ally to normalize relations with those unfriendly neighbours, which how, despite Abe's initial success, Japan still has to face many challenges (Inoguchi, 2013).

It is important to mention Abe's agenda, due to its pervasiveness into a variety of different dissectors of Japan's agency, both in the national and international context. In this case, the context is once again security, a topic important as a state-actor at international level, and with regard both to history and to the new SPA. In foreign affairs, Abe use his domestic cushion to inaugurate the new doctrine of 'proactive pacifism' (Pekkanen and Pekkanen, 2015): this strategy, through both legislative changes and practical steps will allow Japan to raise its international security role while keeping a peaceful image (Pejsova, 2015, pp.1-2), already represents a clear and striking indication of Japan's course under Abe's leadership and, in 2014, incited simplistic and compartmentalized comments about Japan. However, it shines through how Japan is competently doing what it has always done historically: proactively hedging against all players in its own best interest. With regard to security, Abe has the possibility to go back to those topics that constituted the ideological centerpiece of its first administration, i.e. the official structures and constitutional interpretations concerning Japan's security, and, despite the domestic controversies, his signature concrete conservatism has made rapid progress, also thanks to the security-related changes that had been slowly placed during the years of several prior administrations. Still, the future of the disputes with China, fuelled by the country's territorial ambitions, raises many doubts from Southeast Asian leaders that look at Japan as a potential counterweight, given the greater preoccupation for China's assertiveness rather than for Japan past expansionism; Australia, as well, cemented its ties with the US and also bolstered its relationship with Japan. On the other hand, the North Korea Central News Agency (KCNA) warned Japan to desist from its hostility towards the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and admonished Tōkyō about transforming Japan into a military giant. This shows the opposition for Japan's proactive pacifism. (Pekkanen and Pekkanen, 2015, pp. 109-110, pp. 113-114).

Beside the heated debate around the mechanisms that investors should use when addressing disputes, Japanese opposition was emerging triggered by the competition with certain European products; furthermore, it needs to be considered the intricacy of the European ratification process, which could have caused delays (Angelescu, 2017).

Despite the Union's tendency to view this region primarily as an economic market, more attention should have been paid to the various security issues and political challenges that exist in the region. It was believed that, with regular dialogue at the level of senior officials, the EU will have come to better understand and grasp the region's political and strategic situation, as well as the implications for the international community's stability and security (Kawamura, 2007, p. 16). For instance, the 2016 European Union Global Strategy (EUGS), was generally welcomed by Japan, that wanted a stronger European foreign policy, precisely in light of a willingness to stay engaged as global player: the EUGS wanted to show a Union more prepared to be involved in security in Asia and, in general, to show a political approach more comprehensive and balanced, and, subsequently, the intention to go beyond the mere economic relations in Asia. Therefore, it could be argued that the EUGS reflect the EU's strategic priorities in its development policy, which is precisely what Japan is looking for in its own development policy; hence, the EU needs to define a concrete set of strategic goals paired with a way to achieve them based on the EUGS vision. The agenda was at that point including as its main item the FTA negotiations but expansion of the agenda was also considered (Tsuruoka, 2016, p. 43).

With regard to its foreign policy, the EU is trying to be more active in the East Asian context while looking for a balance between its long term ally, Japan, the growing power of China. The EU-Japan Action Plan of 2001 provided a framework for pursuing common goals and interests, in the challenge for repositioning themselves as actors after 1989 and with the willingness their foreign policy performance through institutional improvement; moreover, the EU needs to adapt its policies and update its perception avoiding the bias according to which China is the only driving force in the region and, therefore, neglecting Japan. On the Japanese side, is still needed a broadening of perspective beyond the long relationship with the US and starting to recognise the global importance of the EU.

Improvement needs to be found also in regard with a more coherent Japanese policy towards the EU and overcome the dubious perception about the EU's actual ability to act in external relations that brings Japan to still prefer bilateral agreements with member states. Finally, for far too long, the EU–Japan relationship has been perceived as not directly addressing Japan's core security interests. However, the discussion about the possibility of lifting the EU's arms embargo against China has changed this perception. As a result, Japan should begin to recognize that its relations with the EU affect its core security and foreign policy interests (Reiterer, 2006, pp. 346-347).

With the EU and its member states, the possibility of pursuing a trade deal with Japan was welcomed also given the proliferation of FTAs. Neverless, considering gains and losses from pursuing an agreement led to the emergence of the different views among member states:

- For France, Japan is the second most important trading partner in Asia and the most important Asian investor, and the deal accompanied a period of even closer ties between France and Japan since the mandate of François Hollande. This led to higher level 'two-plus-two' meetings of the foreign and defense ministers of both sides, making France, together with Germany, Japan's gateway to Europe, given the uncertainties about UK's position at the time. The approaching between France and Japan will continue even after President Emmanuel Macron's attempt to balance both relations with Japan and China at the same time including the pursue of FTAs in a broader strategy to deepen France's interactions with Japan (Gilson, 2020).
- Japan is also an important partner for Germany, whose bilateral trade value would have been increased by the EPA and the resulting increase in the bilateral market access. Danks (2018) observes that the agreement would have also advanced Prime Minister Abe's strategic ambitions, to revive Japan's economy.
- Another country that remains crucial for Japan is Russia: not only it is fundamental for Japan's energy supply, but also (and maybe most importantly) for Japan's attempt to ensure its stability in Russia's region. For this reason, Japan did not sanction Moscow following the Crimea annexation and did not expel

Russian diplomats after the poisoning of former Russian military intelligence officer, Sergei Skripal. For these reasons, Japan and Russia continue to strengthen economic relations and joint economic activities (pp. 39-40)

- The planned departure of the UK from the EU, triggered a significant uncertainty: during the preparation procedure for the EPA, the UK government was generally strongly supportive towards the deal, also because the common values of liberal democracy and free trade shared with Japan, to the point that the UK expressed the will to achieve a post-Brexit bilateral deal with Japan. As a matter of, Japan and the UK have a longstanding and well established bilateral relationship. During the debates, however, a number of British voices expressed their complaints with regard to the bureaucratic difficulties encountered within the European Union, and the troublesome process of reaching common grounds (Gilson, 2020, pp. 110-114).

4.3 The Agreements: Economic Partnership and Strategic Partnership

The 20th EU-Japan Summit took place in Brussels on the 28 May 2011(Tambou and Nakanishi, 2020, p. 20) and in the joint press statements that were released, there was a clear reference to the Year of Solidarity and so called 'Kizuna' (the bonds of friendship; in Japanese 絆, 'bonds between people', 'emotional ties', ed.), given that the Summit was occurring shortly after the Great East Japan Earthquake of 11 March 2011. The statement showcased how the leaders were sharing the will to begin parallel negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and a binding agreement including political global and multisectoral cooperation (Council of the European Union, 2011, p. 1). In reality at the beginning, Japan only wanted an FTA, and was the EU that requested a political framework agreement, starting parallel negotiations in April 2013 (Tambou and Nakanishi, 2020, p. 20). As said by Kawamura in its keynote address for the opening of the Annual Conference on EU Japan Relations, the first Japan-EU Strategic Dialogue on the East Asian Security Environment took place in 2005, and the international community was particularly interested in the political and economic evolution of East Asia, including China and the Korean Peninsula (Kawamura, 2007, p. 16). With regard to Tōkyō, FTAs were part of the country's agenda at regional level since November 2012, when Japan,

China and South Korea sponsored two sets of negotiations in Phnom Penh, that will potentially have long-term implications for Asia, in general. FTAs are always part of the conversation as a mean to drive structural reforms. In general, as one of the largest economy in the world, Japan is proactively involved in all the major and potentially transformative agreements in the region, following the logic of taking advantage, when and if it is possible, and this distinguish Abe's government from other powers with interests in the region, including the US, which has a lot depending from the TPP in the region (Pekkanen and Pekkanen, 2015, p. 117-118).

As Gilson wrote: 'A momentous event with global impact occurred on 1 February 2019. … tariff walls fell, as economies covering one-third of the world's gross domestic product … sought to establish a level playing field for mutual trade. It was the day when the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between Japan and the European Union (EU) came into force' (2020, p. 1). Both parties have signed the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) and the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) on 17 July 2018, and on 1 February 2019 the EPA entered into force, resulting in an increase of European and Japanese exports towards each other already in the first year of implementation (Tambou and Nakanishi, 2020, p. 20). On the other hand, the SPA has been provisionally applied for the most part, but has not yet entered into force because of the requirements not only needing the EU and Japan's ratification but also the ones coming from the Member States of the EU (Tambou and Nakanishi, 2020). Overall, the singing of the SPA should represent a boost in reviving this relationship, after years that left much to be desired and doubted: the combination of these two agreements could be the signal that the interactions between the two civilian powers at the opposite ends of Eurasia are at the verge of a major change (Danks, 2019, p. 13). With regard to the EPA, following the finalization of the negotiation process, President Juncker and Prime Minister Abe stated that 'The EU-Japan EPA is one of the most important and far-reaching economic agreements ever concluded by either the EU or Japan. … will create a large economic area… and will also open up huge trade and investment opportunities and help strengthen our economies and societies. The EPA will also enhance economic cooperation between Japan and the EU and strengthen our competitiveness as advanced, yet innovative economies' (Monjal, 2020, p. 91). However, it will be pointed out later on that in reality this agreement bears several

critics, precisely including the fact of being too focused on old issues (Suzuki, 2017, p. 875).

In formulating the EPA, consisting in twenty-one chapters of provisions, mirrored other agreements, in particular the one of the EU with Canada and South Korea, and the one between Japan and ASEAN. In the case of Canada, despite looking like a precursor for the agreement with Japan, it concerned a way lower amount of external trade toward Europe (only ten per cent of Canada external trade) and required individual ratification from the EU member states, since the agreement was based on mixed competencies, which probably influenced the decision of making the EU-Japan EPA an EU only agreement. With regard to the case of South Korea, it was one of the main catalysts for Japan to reach an agreement with Europe, besides being foreseen to open up new sectors to mutual trade, such as telecommunications while still enhancing trades in goods and services. Finally, the case of Japan and ASEAN represented the Japan's first FTA with a regional organisation and marked a significant repositioning of Japan within its own region, followed by calls for agreements with China and, more in general, for a use of FTA that allowed closer relationship with specific states (Gilson, 2020, pp. 120-121).

As Hatwell noticed, the term 'strategic partnership' officially entered into use in the EU discourse since the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS), this kind of partnership has been gradually developed by the Union and Japan since The Hague Declaration of 1991. In this understanding, a strategic partnership is conceived as a bilateral relationship that goes beyond the interactions at economic level and aims at developing a more comprehensive programme regarding its scope and the definition of core values (2007, pp. 22-23). Indeed, the ESS was already committing the EU in pursuing foreign policy goals through multilateralism and key actors referred to precisely as strategic partners. This strategy also identified three types of strategic partnership:

I. The first category included those partnerships considered 'irreplaceable', i.e. the one with the United States, whose foundations were strengthened by cultural similarities and by the bond through NATO.
II. The second category is dedicated to the relation with Russia, due to its undeniable influence with regard to security and prosperity issues.

III. Finally, was included a group of states with whom the EU was seeking to develop a strategic relationship with. Japan belongs to this third category, as well as, for instance, China, Canada, and India (Bulut, et al., 2010, p. 65).

This prioritization of relationships, seems to agree with those statement, included in the previous chapter, according to which indifference is still surrounding this relationship, whose actors neglect each other in favour of other countries (Tsuruoka, 2013, p. 2). In its partnership policy, the Union endowed strategic partnerships with a multilateral dimension through the incorporation of global issues into its summits, and, at the same time, promoting the notion of responsible power by making emerging powers taking a larger share of responsibility in the quest for maintaining peace and security at global level. Nonetheless, the EU's strategic partnerships were raising doubts concerning their actual effectiveness (Bulut, et al., 2010). Even more, in 2017, when an 'agreement in principle' was announced after four years of dialogue about a possible EPA, the reaction was not looking befitting for a massive trade agreement covering more than the 30% of world GDP and 40% of global trade, partly because of Washington news dominating the headlines and partly because still much work was needed during the negotiation stage.

Nakanishi wrote in 2020, that the Japan - EU Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) was signed in the form of a mixed agreement, since it included Japan, the EU and its Member States. Its legal basis can be identified in the Article 37 of the TEU (The Treaty on European Union, Ed.) and Article 212 (1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) (Tambou and Nakanishi, 2020). Here it is reported what they respectively state:

- 'The Union may conclude agreements with one or more States or international organisations in areas covered by this Chapter.' (Chapter 2: Specific Provisions on the Common Foreign and Security Policy, ed.) (Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union, 2007, p. 36).
- 'Without prejudice to the other provisions of the Treaties, and in particular Articles 208 to 211 (Development Cooperation, ed.), the Union shall carry out economic, financial and technical cooperation measures, including assistance, in particular financial assistance, with third countries other than developing countries. Such measures shall be consistent with the development policy of the

> Union and shall be carried out within the framework of the principles and objectives of its external action. The Union's operations and those of the Member States shall complement and reinforce each other' (Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, 2008, p. 142).

As explained by Jochheim and Soutullo, on one hand the EU-Japan SPA covers political dialogue and collaboration on policy matters as well as challenges at regional and global level; on the other hand, the EPA contains dispositions regarding both trade of goods and services and promoting bilateral investment (2019, p. 4). Unfortunately, according to Hosoi, despite this significant shifts in the relationship between Japan and Europe, Japanese society still does not hold a high level of interest toward the establishment of a cooperative relationship of the type of the SPA, preferring, instead, as Japanese newspapers report, the EPA which gathers considerable attention and media coverage, in particular the EPA items and schedules that will lead to the elimination of tariffs. The media attention concerning the SPA is considerably lower, also due to the fact that the information are limited with respect to the SPA. In general, with the exception of stakeholders directly involved and some academics and scholars, the public is not interested in the EU-Japan relations. Nonetheless, lack of interest does not mean that strengthening cooperation is irrelevant, and sharing the fundamental values promoted by and at the base of the SPA is crucial given the challenges that the parties has to face within the international order, even more because these are the same value at the base of Japanese diplomacy. Therefore, it is crucial that Japan decides to reconfirm its commitment to the fundamental values of The Hague Declaration of 1991 (Hosoi, 2019, p. 297). The European Union and Japan spent decades dedicating to the normalization of their trade exchanges and enhancing their interactions. As observed by De Prado, even though the commitment reached its climax in July 2017, when political leaders on both sides agreed to the Strategic and Economic Partnership Agreements, in order to promote cooperation on a range of issues reinforced by core international values, this does not change the fact that a real convergence on values and ideals will need a long time to fully mature (De Prado, 2017, p. 435).

4.4 About the Negotiation: Traces of Path Dependency, Normative Power and Old Perceptions

The first attempts towards the negotiation of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the EU and Japan already began in the decade of the 1970s, while the authority for foreign trade negotiations was being transferred to the EC (Hosoi, 2019). With regard to the 2018 EPA, in April 2010, during the 19th Japan-EU Summit, a joint high-level group was established – since the expiration date of the 2001 Action Plan was approaching – in order to identify opportunities for a comprehensive strengthening across all areas of the EU-Japan relations, alongside a joint examination addressing issues regarding shared interests (MOFA, 2010). Moreover, although the negotiations to initiate a strategic partnership would have started only in March 2013 (Pejsova, 2015), in the occasion of the 2010 summit would have been discussed some of the topics that the SPA will later include, for instance climate and the environment, and the promotion of peace and security (MOFA, 2010). However, not all the European countries agreed with the beginning of the FTA negotiations with Japan, and, according to EU diplomats, the genuine sympathy toward Japan on the occasion of the 'triple disasters' – i.e. a tsunami, an earthquake and the meltdown at the Fukushima power plant – influenced the positive decision regarding the negotiations (Ueta, 2018). Following the work of the joint high-level group, in May 2011 during the meeting of the EU-Japan summit also attended by the then Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan (mandate from 8 June 2010 to 2 September 2011), it was agreed to start the process for parallel negotiations: a broad FTA or EPA, side by side with a binding political agreement (MOFA, 2011).

In early stages of negotiations started in May 2011 the EU-Japan EPA was expected not only to ignite economic growth but also to support both actors in jointly set rules for global trade: in this regard, Japan requested a reduction of EU's tariffs on motorcars and electronic products and in exchange the EU asked Japan as well, to reduce tariffs and abolish non-tariff barriers on a series of products. This situation seems to agree with the statemen according to which the EPA is still too focused on old issues (Suzuki, 2017): indeed, it has been decades since the EU has opposed Japanese trade practices and tried to oppose them. July 2011 marked the beginning of the discussion between Japan and the

EU in order to determine the scope and ambitions of both negotiations, a preliminary phase that was concluded in April of the following year. On July 20, the European Commission submitted its proposal about the negotiating mandate to the Council, acquiring it for the Japan-EU EPA/FTA on 29 November 2012 thanks to a decision adopted by the Foreign Affair Council whose agenda is focused exclusively on trade issues. However, already in March 2013, difficulties on the international level forced the rescheduling of a summit meeting: the Japan–EU March summit was postponed to 19 November 2013, due to the Cyprus crisis, which required both EU Presidents to remain in Brussels. Instead of meeting in person, Barroso, Van Rompuy, and Abe spoke over the phone. One year later, an achievement assessment was provided by the Commission within the scope of its role, and underlined how Japan needed to present proofs of removing non-tariff barriers from the European perspective. With regard to the SPA, in the initial phase of the negotiation, it was addressed by Japan as 'political agreement', differently from the EU that preferred referring to it as a 'framework agreement' (p. 112): the term SPA was, indeed, provisionally introduced only in the second round of negotiations (Ueta, 2018), held in Brussels from July 3 to 5, 2013 (MOFA, 2020). The EEAS (European External Action Service) oversaw the process on the European side, with the senior official of the Asian Directorate serving as the EU's chief negotiator (Ueta, 2018). Ueta still has more.

With respect to the EU's reluctant move from a multilateral approach under the WTO from bilateral FTA, it is understood that the choice was dictated by three main reasons: the Doha Round lack of progress, the same choice made by other major members of the WTO (like China), and finally the Bush administration which under the Trade Promotion Authority of 2001, pursued FTA negotiations with Central America, Thailand, Korea and the Southern Africa Customs Union. For this reasons, states began to seek this type of agreements outside the WTO. But how did Japan enter the negotiation process? Japan's hesitant move toward FTA/EPAs is clearly showcased in the negotiations with countries of Latin America: in fact, Japan realized this shift after the EU had already moved toward the bilateral approach with Latin American actors; Japan was reacting gradually and prioritising bilateral relations on the Asia Pacific side earlier than the EU, but still found itself in a position of more passive reaction, joining negotiations with countries such as

Mexico and Chile later than the US and EU (Suzuki, 2015, in Suzuki, 2017). It is understandable that when it came to trade negotiations Japan gave priority to Asian Pacific countries because of the fundamental role they play for Japan in terms of supply chain and outlet market; for this reason, Japan have consistently provided Official Development Assistance since the 1960s. Since the first EPA signed with Singapore, which entered into force in November 2002, Japan started pursuing EPA/FTAs negotiations with both partners (Urata, 2009). Still, this shows how both the EU and Japan, in approaching this type of agreement, once again prioritized other countries despite their weight as economic actors.

In terms of negotiating position with regard to the EPA, Japan's position was concerned with the translation of European standards and measures, but a further complications was represented by the peculiar relationship with bureaucracy, as we have already seen for the matter of death penalty in Japan: indeed, the government's trade policy is managed by a number of agency which are under the Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), which are responsible for overall trade policy causing tensions and rivalries. An example of these situations is the response to China's proposal for an FTA with ASEAN: METI was pushing for a copycat version for Japan, while the MOFA wanted to include Australia, as well, trying to create an East Asia community. Nonetheless, Japan continued putting efforts in pursuing a 'normalcy' in the relations with the EU especially in the light of China's growing relevance and power at regional level (Gilson, 2020, p.116).

With regard to the SPA, a point of interested is represented by the issue of a human rights clause that could link the EPA with the SPA and that in case of violations of human rights as states in the SPA, the EPA would have been suspended. Even though the EU portrayed this condition as mutual and as a basic strategy to call for democratisation in emerging or developing countries, Tōkyō strongly opposed this move, arguing that such a clause was not required for the FTA with the United States, and that the EU was trying to apply a strategy used for developing countries to one the seven major industrial nations. The EU also explained that it was unlikely that the clause would be invoked against Japan – besides being said that the EU was insisting on this clause because it could have made it

easier to push it in a future FTA with China –, but at the same time it issues condemning statements towards capital punishment every time Japan executes a death-row inmate and in this situation, such a clause may exert tacit pressure on Japan for an abolitionist shift; moreover, since Tōkyō did not sign a strategic agreement in its trade liberalization deals with other actors, posing the clause may generate the opposition from the Cabinet Legislation Bureau, even if negotiations end up being accepted (Anon. 2014). This case could really encapsulate, many aspects that had been analysed with regard to normative power: the EU used a normative mean and the normative justification of spreading international principles and democracy though what Bacon and Nakamura (2021) identified with conditionality, i.e. utilising external incentives with the purpose of putting pressure and manipulate the cost-benefit calculations of actors; the idea of using normative means is identified by Forseberg (2011) as well, as one of the defining characteristics of a Normative Power. Nonetheless, the EU did not consider the position of Japan with regard to human rights, and how Japan considers external pressures on this topic as unsolicited interferences, a mistake that in case of negotiation might trigger suspicion, a perception that EU-Japan relations are already pervaded by. As Michalski and Nilsson (2018) already noticed, the EU's attachment to normative power might prevent it from correctly assessing counterpart's positions, in contrast with Diez (2013a) conception of normative power as hegemony, which involves the abilities to adjust and understand counterparts.

SPA negotiations were also troubled by a path dependency mechanism, set into motion the founding premises of current institutional relations between the EU and Japan, and that make difficult for the negotiators to move forward despite the consistent changes underwent by the parties and the reasons why they could represent an economic and political force. AS it has been said, the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 made Japan recognise the need to take advantage of emerging markets in Eastern Europe and engage with the European bloc also on the political level. Against this background the short Hague Declaration of 1991 was signed setting an institutional framework to guarantee continuity in dialogue and arrangements still in place today (e.g. annual summits). These provisions were re-emphasized in the 2001 Action Plan, that addressed 'new' global issues. The formulation of EPA and SPA needs to be understood in the light of these two

instruments, since they provided the institutional foundation for the EU-Japan interactions. However, the structures within which the actors interacted had inevitably changed since 2001: regions have become growingly more significant as units of economic activities and this brought a proliferation of FTAs; moreover, both Japan and the EU have changed in nature and composition: the EU has increased its membership and experienced institutional changes as well, in particular through the Lisbon Treaty, and Japan plummet into recession right after the signature of the 1991 Declaration, a situationed worsened by the so-called 'lost decade' (Gilson, 2016). It also noteworthy, what De Prado (2014) points out, that the agreement between the EU and South Korea enabled the EU to develop relations within the Asian market, making Japan feel pressured to agree to EPA and SPA under regional competition. Also, the Hague Declaration was signed at the end of the 'friendship era' between China and Japan. The EU pursuing of democracy, neo liberal market and human rights through normative power needs to be considered as well, since it is only apparently shared but in reality masks different approaches: the pursuit of opening economic spaces hides the real purpose of maximising self-interest (Gilson, 2016); on the other hand, democratisation conditioned future actions under the acceptance of certain mutual behaviour and expectations, setting out a normative agreement, whose negotiations have been used by Europe to push Japan towards an abolitionist turn (De Prado, 2014), besides the proposal for the already mentioned human rights clause (Anon., 2014). In the end, it seems like economic interest is still the strongest drive in this relations, where the EU still perceives Japan as an actor merely part of a list that had already prioritized other East Asian states, reiterating agreement after agreement an idea of strategic partnership without a precise meaning and that should be wiped clean from outdated features, such as normative frames, and structures (Gilson, 2016).

4.5 An analysis of critical points

The EPA and SPA represents two of the most important declarations of cooperation between the EU and Japan. These agreements frequently highlight the values and core principles shared by the EU and Japan, a potential sign that these agreements want to be more than rhetoric declarations of intent; nonetheless the parties still need to prove their ability to act as effective global powers and defend their shared political ideals. Thus, it

could be said that these agreement clearly show the parties' ambitions; the doubts remain when it comes to whether they have or not the necessary leverage to realize their political goals (Vargö, 2020, p. 1). For this reason, despite the clear willingness to expand the scope of their interactions, these agreements have attracted criticism and skepticism by many scholars for different reasons that will now be analysed.

First of all, amidst urgent global issues, it is fundamental to go beyond the simple agreement on declarations and calls for action. This objective require the populations to be informed of why certain measures are taken or agreement are signed, including the EPA and SPA, which also defined a framework for acting against unwanted international developments in a more objective and substantial way. However, are the EU and Japan committed to confront countries such as China, Russia, North Korea and partly – given the weight it has on their relationship – the US as well? The agreement seem to point in the direction of preserving dialogue and increased economic leverage rather than giving ultimatums. The implementation of the EPA and SPA is meant to provide an effective platform for both the EU and Japan to work as global powers: in the economic field the two sides have the means to positively influence the rules and norms of global trade through the leverage and size of their markets, but what about the SPA? Already during the post-war era the EU and Japan have claimed the role of beacons for democracy and positive international cooperation, and with this purpose in mind they set in place specific structures. Nevertheless, those same structures could potentially slow-down the decision making processes; because of this, the EU and Japan need to carefully avoid bureaucratic patterns and ensure that the frameworks evolves accordingly alongside the spirit of greater cooperation and developments (Vargö, 2020, pp. 3-5).

Some concernings have been expressed specifically addressing one of the agreements. Indeed, Monjal criticizes the EPA stating that despite being the most important economic agreement signed by the Union and carrying ambitious targets, it remains below the level of other EPA that the EU signed with other countries. This occurred not only because parallel negotiations on specific topics are still required, and the procedural provisions are still not accepted by Japan, but also because the agreement itself cannot provide all guarantees of fulfillment. Indeed, while most economic agreements are now backed by

political agreement, this practice is not unique to Japan-related relations, undermining the question of the agreement's binding nature (Monjal, 2020, p. 92). In addition, it has been pointed out that the EPA is still focused on old issues, for instance tariff reduction of motorcars, electronics and agricultural products, which, along with other factors, might have hindered Prime Minister's Abe intention to give a boost to Japanese economy and Japan's ability to play a leading role in outline trading rules at global level. Moreover, the fixation on older matters lead to a lack of innovation and competitiveness as well as reducing the scale of the agreement if compared with the transatlantic trade (Suzuki, 2017, p. 875). Moreover, the EPA is still suffering from a significant trade imbalance with China which is causing further frictions in economic relations: in general, the EU-Asian relationship has been criticised for being economically dominated, to the point where the EU has avoided speaking out against human rights and democracy issues in Asia. Overall, this reinforces the impression that, when it comes to Asia, the EU's complex and conflicting interests make it difficult for it to put together a coherent strategy; on the other hand, it appears that Asian countries do not recognize the EU's strategic importance, making it a declining power in Asia's eyes (Lai, Holland and Kelly, 2019).

The SPA as well, attracted a lot of doubts and skepticism, due to the nature of the agreement itself . Gilson points out that this type of agreements do not have a template, but have been used by the Union to encompass a broad range of activities with ten of the most significant state partners across the world: contrary to what it might be assumed these actors do not necessarily share with the Union economic behaviours, political values or security interests but are simply deemed as pivotal for addressing global disputes and safeguarding European interests (Gilson, 2016). It is remarked by Renard that the concept of strategic partnership itself remains ill-defined and it is still struggling to influence and mould a direction in international relations. Noteworthy, in 2010, an important process of reflection began at the EU level with the goal of solidifying existing strategic partnerships and transforming them into an effective tool of EU foreign policy: as mandate by the European Council in September 2010, High Representative, Catherine Ashton delivered internal reports addressing projections concerning the relations with six of the EU strategic partners: the US, China, Russia, India, Brazil and South Africa; furthermore, a mid-term review of the partnerships has been scheduled for 2012, and, despite the still

unclear modality of evaluation, it might be useful opportunity to assess the state of recent initiatives (Renard, 2012, p. 2). Berkofsky was already observing this problem with regard to the 2010 Action Plan: the lack of focus and the inability to select a limited number of key issues and areas to work on is also due to the fact that the EU needs to take into consideration twenty-seven member states' preferences and priorities when approaching cooperation with other countries, even if the Commission manage to lives up to the expectation to produce an agreement with a clear focus and a realistic agenda (Berkofsky, 2012, p. 266).

It is equally noteworthy, that as 'guardians of universal values' (as said by the then Prime Minister Shinzō Abe at the Connectivity forum in Brussels, in September 2019) it would be helpful to possess sufficient military power to back up such claims and as a deterrent against other by challenging those roles. Nevertheless, Japan is far from being accepted as having a global role with military backing, given both the restraints at constitutional level and in in terms of vocal domestic opinion that still in 2020 opposed the revision of article 9 of the Consttution and therefore is limiting the government's ambitions to act like a global power (Vargö, 2020). Moreover, from the point of view of security, Europe has been trying to develop a more robust common foreign and security strategy towards east Asia since 2012: it is essential, in any of the Union's attempt to prove its relevance for regional security, to partner with like-minded countries that share similar interests and principles. With this regard, democracy, the rule of law and human rights are the values that enhanced the special bond between Tōkyō and Brussels. Despite this premises, since Japan has been considered by the EU a strategic partner, in 2003, the contours and terms of this partnership remain vague: Tōkyō still views the EU as a security actor with skepticism, keeping it at the outskirts of its strategic thinking, even though they share values, positions and a similar understanding of the concept of security (Pejsova, 2015, pp. 2-3). It is also important to remember that Tōkyō needs to dedicate resources to addressing North Korea's missile threat and China's increasing assertiveness in the East China Sea, which is preventing almost every possibility of engagement in the area (Tsuruoka, 2018).

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation have been analysed the economic and political relationship between the EU and Japan, from the end of WWII to the recent years of the Economic and Strategic Partnership Agreements (respectively the EPA and SPA), through their mutual perceptions and the possible filter of Normative Power and Path Dependency. The purpose was to assess, whether after more than fifty years of EU-Japan relations, pervaded by economic disputes and trading frictions, the scope of the relationship has been broadened to include 'political interactions'. It is important to remember that the expression 'political interactions' meant a type of cooperation aimed at promoting the international principles of democracy, human rights, free trade, rule of law, etc.

The starting point, as briefly explained in the introduction, was that the parties, although active and engaged on the economic level and despite the high rhetoric level of their, were not as effectively involved when it came to international values and principles, with the 1991 The Hague Declaration and the 2001 Ten Year Action Plan, two significant political agreement in EU-Japan history, receiving critics for their doubtful and questionable outcomes. Conducting this research, I chose to analyse not only the historical development, but also to look more in the characteristics of the actors, their interactions and the ones with other parties, as well.

The conclusion of this study is that, according to elements taken into considerations, the EU and Japan cannot be considered effective, in the sense of having improved since The Hague Declarations. After a rough twenty years of economic disputes – a brief period compared to the longevity of this relationship (Hosoi, 2019), the brief 1991 Declaration represented a first attempt at institutionalise the political relations between the EU and Japan (Tsuruoka, 2015) and giving the parties an opportunity to proactively dedicate to the development of a mutual foreign policy (Hosoya, 2012), against the background of the transformations in the geopolitical world order between the late 1980s and the beginning of 1990s. Nevertheless, this would have become the earliest example of a series of disappointing agreements in which noble intentions and rhetoric do not match the underwhelming reality of two partners reluctantly promoting irrelevant programs (Hosoya, 2012), an example that will be followed by the 2001 Action Plan. This

comprehensive Plan that should have promoted peace, security economic partnership, global and social challenges, did not move beyond the stage of regular dialogue and no substantial progress was made (De Prado, 2017) but resulting in a 'shopping list' of unresolved international issues without a clear agenda (Berkofsky, 2007, p. 10). Will be crucial the role of the US, not only through the Allied Occupation but, more in general, through a presence that was leaving little room for other Western actors (Frattolillo, 2013). Even though Japan looked for the EU cooperation in several occasions, the EU internal divisions, its attention to China, tend to make Japan turning to the US despite its decline in soft power (Frattolillo, 2013), feeding into the mutual perception pervaded by indifference and suspicion (Tsuruoka, 2013). On the other side, neither China nor Japan showed the willingness to upgrade EU's status in Asia (Pacheco Pardo, 2009). With regard to Normative Power, the EU attached to it its aim to not simply articulate and achieve material goals but to transmit a vision, principle and values worldwide through the force of ideas, of an ideational power, that has been particularly associated to the pursuit to the spread of democracy, human rights and neoliberal market (Gilson, 2016). However, some emblematic cases show the downfall of this strategy: both in the case of Russia and China, illustrated by Michalski and Nilsson (2018), and the case of death penalty in Japan, described by Bacon and Nakamura (2021), the EU displayed a short-sided use of normative power without taking into consideration the individual positions of the counterparts, far away for the hegemonic conception of normative power which include adaptation and understanding of actors (Diez, 2013a). The repetition of unsuccessful agreements has been interpreted, particularly by Gilson (2016, 2020) as a symptom of a path dependent mechanism that does not allow the EU and Japan to move away from the disappointing premises set in place by the 1991 Hague Declaration, but instead perpetuating them into the new Strategic Partnership Agreement.

The Strategic Partnership Agreement, meant to back the Economic Partnership Agreement, covered political dialogue and collaboration (Jochheim and Soutullo, 2019) but it ended up surrounded by the same aura of skepticism and empty rhetoric: suffering from the label of 'strategic' that still does not come with a clear definition, and by a level of interest in this regard which is still lower compared to the EPA, the agreement should have had a human rights clause to back-up the Economic Agreement, condition that will

be refused by Japan as an interference (the same reason why Japan resisted the abolitionist turn) and because a linking clause between the EPA and the SPA to guarantee the adherence to the latter, is used by the EU with developing countries as well; Japan refusal of the clause lowers the guarantee of fulfilling the SPA. Moreover, Gilson identifies in the SPA the foundation premises of current institutional relations between the EU and Japan (Gilson, 2016): strategic partnerships and strategies often serve the sole purpose of bundling existing policies instead of offering new impetus (Bendiek and Kramer 2010).

As Bendiek and Kramer wrote: '… the older and more consolidated the cooperative trade and development relations between the EU (and its respective Member States) and its partners are, the more difficult it is for the EU-27 to give fundamentally new directions or priorities to these existing relations when they are rhetorically upgraded to the 'strategic' level' (p. 459). It truly seems like the existing relations between the EU and Japan did not display new direction: despite the noble intentions, the SPA appears as the latest reiteration of the same type of disappointing agreement, too unfocused, too ambitious, too ideational, rhetorical and without guarantees, feeding a distance that purely good intentions and principles cannot make shorter and leaving once again the spotlight to economic interactions still flawed and prone to frictions, like 1980s.

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