

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

By Marco ZAPPA*

Overview

As members of the G7 group, Italy and Japan are today among the world's largest economies and most industrialized countries. Aware of their long history of interactions, dating well before the two countries emerged as modern nation-states in the late 19th century, they share several commonalities with regards to their respective postwar institutional and economic development.

First, both have been key US allies in their respective regions, hosting, for instance, US military bases on their national territories. Second, both countries still uphold their postwar constitutional arrangements (and will do so probably for a few more years, despite reinterpretations and revisionist legislation) that nominally bar governments from military resurgence. Third, after exhibiting extraordinary economic growth rates for two decades, from the 1960s to the 1980s, they have established themselves as economic powerhouses and export giants. Fourth, despite frequent leadership reshuffles, both countries have long been ruled by conservative parties (the Christian democrats in Italy until the early 1990s, and the Liberal democrats in Japan, until 2009 and then from 2012 to the present day), which have pursued long-term strategies and contributed to laying the foundation of political and business relations since the early 1950s. Despite rarely producing any relevant benefit for the two national

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economies or, by and large, for third countries' development initiatives,¹ this effort has nevertheless resulted in a strong fascination for the other country's culture, resulting in the popularity of the study of Japanese and Italian and in a thriving cultural exchange. Finally, as important powers, they are in search of new diplomatic arrangements, particularly concerning trade, comprehensive security and transcontinental connectivity.

Against this backdrop, in this chapter, transformations of Italy-Japan relations will be put in the context of an evolving international situation, with particular attention to the developments recorded in the last three decades. The crisis of American unipolarity and current climate emergency have, in fact, created new opportunities for multilateral cooperation, though the current pandemic seems to have put several possibilities on hold.

History of relations

Despite the existence of five century-old cultural exchanges, official state-to-state relations between Italy and Japan were established only in 1866, with the conclusion of the Treaty of Friendship and Trade between the Kingdom of Italy and the Empire of Japan. The following year, the first Italian minister plenipotentiary, Vittorio Sallier de La Tour, installed the Italian legation in the open port of Yokohama.² Against this backdrop, dozens of Italian entrepreneurs had started traveling to Japan to purchase silkworm eggs, in the face of a deadly silkworm epidemic between the 1840s and 1870s, which severely hit the European sericulture industry.³

Italy came to be perceived rather positively by the new Japanese ruling class, which emerged after the demise of the Tokugawa shogunate. A year after the Imperial Restoration, Sallier de La Tour was received at the Imperial palace. In 1881, the new emperor visited Prince Tommaso of Savoy, on board the Italian frigate Vettor Pisani,

¹ Recent Japanese investments in strategic industries and leading manufacturers in the railways and automotive sectors, such as Ansaldo STS and Magneti Marelli, are nonetheless worth mentioning.

² See for further details Laura Monaco (1965) "Relazioni Di Sallier de La Tour, Primo Inviato Italiano in Giappone (9 Giugno 1867 - 15 Gennaio 1869) (First Italian Envoy to Japan Sallier de La Tour's Reports)", *Il Giappone*, 5.

³ Claudio Zanier (2008) *I Setaioli Italiani in Asia. Imprenditori Della Seta in Asia Centrale (1859-1871) (The Italian "Setaioli" in Asia. Silk Entrepreneurs in Central Asia (1859-1871))*, Padova: CLEUP. Tessa Morris-Suzuki (1992) "Sericulture and the Origins of Japanese Industrialization," *Technology and Culture*, 33(1).

anchored in Yokohama.⁴ Meanwhile, in 1873, the first Japanese embassy to the US and Europe, led by viscount Tomomi Iwakura and aimed at revising the unequal treaties, traveled to Italy, laying the foundations for future diplomatic and cultural cooperation. That year, a Japanese consulate opened in Venice and, in November, the city's Scuola Superiore di Commercio (Business school), which later became Ca' Foscari University, inaugurated its first Japanese language course, with Yōsaku Yoshida, former interpreter to Alessandro Fé D'Ostiani, Italian plenipotentiary to Japan, as lecturer.⁵ The image of Italy conveyed by some of the Iwakura Mission's records is that of a relatively underdeveloped country, if compared to other continental European nations, particularly with regards to literacy, and its people's lack of "industriousness." Nevertheless, the mission's envoys were impressed by the beauty of Italian art, architecture, cultural heritage and crafts, as they visited, among others, Venice, Florence, Rome and Naples.⁶

In the early 20th century, however, Italian shipyards and assembly plants would become a key supplier of naval and military technology to Japan. Clearer strategic convergences emerged in the 1930s, after the Japanese occupation of northeastern China and the Mussolini government's (1922-1943) backing of the Japanese proposal to equalize naval armaments limitations with the other European powers, at the Second London Naval Disarmament Conference, in 1935-36.⁷ Tokyo would then declare its neutrality toward Italy's move into Ethiopia. Against this backdrop, following the intensification of military operations in China and in the Pacific, the Japanese government commissioned from Fiat, Italy's largest vehicle and aircraft manufacturer,

⁴ Marisa Di Russo (2003) "Un Principe Di Casa Savoia e Un Diplomatico Del Regno d'Italia Conquistano La Corte Meiji (Meiji Court Fascination with a Savoy Prince and a Kingdom of Italy's Diplomat)," in Alberizzi et al. (ed.), *Atti Del XXVI Convegno Di Studi Sul Giappone (Aistugia, Torino 26-28 Settembre 2002)*, Venice: Cartotecnica Veneziana Editrice. Carlo Edoardo Pozzi (2020) "Chū Itaria Nihon tokumei zenken kōshi Nabeshima Naohiro to nich-i kankei shi ni okeru sono yakuwari (1880-1882) (Japan's Plenipotentiary to Italy Nabeshima Naohiro and His Role in the History of Italy-Japan Relations (1880-1882))," *Studi Italici* 70.

⁵ Adriana Boscaro (2008) "Docenti Giapponesi in Laguna (Japanese Teachers in the Venice Lagoon)," in Rosa Caroli (ed.), *1868: Italia Giappone: Intrecci Culturali (1868: Italy Japan: Cultural Entanglements)*, Venezia: Cafoscarina, pp. 28-30.

⁶ F. G. Notehelfer, Igor R. Saveliev, and W. F. Vande Walle (2004) "An Extraordinary Odyssey: The Iwakura Embassy Translated," *Monumenta Nipponica* 59(1), p. 109.

⁷ Mario Scalise (2003) "Le Relazioni Politiche, Economiche e Culturali Tra l'Italia e Il Giappone Nella Prima Metà Del Novecento (Political, Economic and Cultural Relations between Italy and Japan in the First Half of the Twentieth Century)," in Adolfo Tamburello (ed.), *Italia-Giappone: 450 Anni*, Roma: Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, p. 142.

72 bombers and a thousand trucks, purchased by the government of Manchukuo, the puppet government installed by the Japanese military in northeastern China, in 1932.⁸

Since the 1920s, spectacular propaganda acts, such as the Rome-Tokyo air race (Raid Roma-Tokyo), completed in 1920 and supported by nationalist activists and right-wing intellectuals, had contributed to the establishment of a positive image of Japan in Italy.⁹ In the intellectual climate under fascism, this trend was consolidated. One fascist newsreel, dated from 1940, defined the Japanese as the “Romans of the Far East” and praised their attempt to bring a “New Order” to Asia, in sharp contrast with chaotic and disorderly China, whose leader, Chiang Kai-shek, was backed by “formidable English, American and French interests.”¹⁰

In 1937, Italy joined Japan and Germany in signing the Anti-Comintern Pact, to strengthen their cooperation against the Soviet Union. Finally, with the conclusion of the 1940 Tripartite Pact, the wartime alliance between Rome, Berlin and Tokyo emerged, to last until September 1943, when Italy signed an armistice with the Allied Powers and declared war on Japan, marking the end of its alliance with the Axis.

Despite sharing a similar postwar trajectory under US partial (Italy) or total (Japan) military occupation, official relations between Rome and Tokyo were restored in 1951, with the entry into force of the San Francisco Treaty. In 1954, Italy and Japan signed a cultural cooperation agreement, aimed at promoting mutual knowledge and understanding, pledging to promote cultural exchanges through the translation of literary works, exchanges and research cooperation between universities and through the establishment of cultural institutions (the Italian Institute of Culture and the Japanese Institute of Culture, which opened in 1959 and 1962, respectively, in Tokyo and Rome).¹¹ Ministry-level exchanges followed suit. In 1955, Foreign Minister

⁸ Scalise (2003), “Le Relazioni”, p. 143.

⁹ Hiromi Fujioka (2011) “Shimoi Harukichi to Itaria-Fashizumu: Danunzio, Mussorīni, Nihon (Shimoi Harukichi and Italian Fascism: On His Relation with D’Annunzio, Mussolini and Japanese Society),” *Fukuoka Kokusai Daigaku Kiyō*, 25, pp. 57-58.

¹⁰ Istituto Luce Cinecittà (2018) *Il Giappone Alla Guida Dell’Asia Tra Tradizione e Modernità (Japan at the Helm of Asia, between Tradition and Modernity)*, Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vy4-9NobyO4> (Accessed 11 August 2022).

¹¹ Nello Puorto (2003) “Diario Diplomatico Italia-Giappone 1954-2000 (Italy-Japan Diplomatic Diary 1954-2000),” in Adolfo Tamburello (ed.), *Italia-Giappone: 450 Anni (Italy-Japan: 450 Years)*, Roma: Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente, pp. 178-179.

Gaetano Martino led the first ever diplomatic mission in Italy's diplomatic history to East Asia, visiting, among the others, Thailand, Hong Kong and Japan.¹² Japanese Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda would become the first Japanese postwar leader to visit Italy and the Vatican, in 1962, two years before the opening of the first Tokyo Olympic Games, in 1964.¹³

At the diplomatic level, relations remained cordial, despite chronic trade tensions between Japan and the European Economic Community (EEC), in an era characterized by the boom of cheap Japanese tech, vehicles and naval exports to Europe. The first Italian prime minister to visit Japan was Giulio Andreotti, in 1973, against the backdrop of US-EEC-Japan negotiations on enhanced cooperation in international cooperation, trade, manufacturing and technology in the wake of global energy and political crises.¹⁴ In March 1982, Sandro Pertini became the first Italian head of state to set foot in Japan after the Second World War. A hugely popular former anti-fascist combatant, Pertini met with Emperor Hirohito, praising Japan for its technological advances and postwar reconstruction.¹⁵

Political relations

Postwar diplomatic exchanges between Italy and Japan have centered on the promotion of cultural exchanges, trade and bilateral investments. Parliamentary exchanges have been regular, particularly since the mid-1990s, and promoted by "Friends of Japan" and "Friends of Italy" members of parliament associations on both ends who have been active, among others, in organizing fund-raising and solidarity events, when natural

¹² Incom (1955) "Viaggio in Giappone di S.E. Gaetano Martino, Ministro degli Affari Esteri (Official Visit to Japan by H.E. Gaetano Martino, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy)," *Archivio Storico Luce*, Available at: <https://patrimonio.archivioluca.com/luce-web/detail/IL3000087056/1/viaggio-giappone-s-e-gaetano-martino-ministro-degli-affari-esteri.html> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

¹³ See Il Giappone (1962) "Notiziario Giappone-Italia (News: Italy-Japan)," *Il Giappone* 2 (4).

¹⁴ Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale (ISPI) (1973) *Annuario Di Politica Internazionale (International Politics Yearbook 1973)*, Bari: Edizioni Dedalo, p. 25.

¹⁵ Nello Puorto (2003) "Diario Diplomatico Italia-Giappone 1954-2000 (Italy-Japan Diplomatic Diary 1954-2000)," in Adolfo Tamburello (ed.), *Italia-Giappone: 450 Anni (Italy-Japan: 450 Years)*, Roma: Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, p. 180-181.

disasters hit the countries in the last decade, and promoting business forums.¹⁶ Despite such friendly ties and enhanced cooperation on a limited range of issues, strategically, however, policymakers on both ends do not seem to perceive the other country as an “essential” ally, given the regional focus of the respective foreign policies. However, emerging multipolar arrangements have favored strengthening ties, for example in the security sector.¹⁷

After Rome’s accession to the G7 financial group in 1986, however, bilateral exchanges have increased, resulting in high-level visits for preliminary meetings.¹⁸ Yet Italian prime ministers’ visits have, on the contrary, been rather sporadic. Prime Minister Romano Prodi’s 1997 visit was the first in almost a decade after those of Amintore Fanfani (1987) and Ciriaco De Mita (1989).¹⁹ In this phase, the Japan-backed UN Security Council reform issue emerged as a divisive topic in the bilateral relations, with Tokyo seeking multilateral support on its accession as a permanent member, along with Germany, and Italy defending a more moderate position that opted for a more democratic and inclusive solution.²⁰ An important political moment came in early 2000, when the Massimo D’Alema’s government, in a move that was unenthusiastically received in Tokyo, announced the normalization of diplomatic relations with North Korea, a country with a long-standing dispute with Japan over the abduction of

¹⁶ Chamber of Deputies of Italy (2013) *Incontro Con Una Delegazione Della Dieta Giapponese (Meeting with a Japanese Diet Delegation)*, Available at: http://documenti.camera.it/leg17/dossier/Testi/ES0091.htm#_Toc369190275 (Accessed 11 August 2022). Città di Venezia (2019) “Japan Week in Venice: tavola rotonda a Ca’ Farsetti tra sindaco Brugnaro, ambasciatori e l’Associazione Parlamentari Amici del Giappone (Japan Week in Venice: Rondtable at the City Hall between Mayor Brugnaro, Ambassadors and the Friends of Japan Parliamentary Association),” *Citta di Venezia Live*. Available at: <https://live.comune.venezia.it/it/tavola-rotonda-italia-giappone-venezia-4-settembre-2019> (Accessed 11 August 2022).

¹⁷ Author’s interview with an Italian diplomat, 3 August 2021.

¹⁸ Prime ministers Tsutomu Hata, Keizō Obuchi and Yoshirō Mori visited Italy in 1994, 1999 and 2000, respectively. More details at MOFA (2000) “Summary of Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori’s Visit to G8 Countries”, May 10, 2000. Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/economy/summit/2000/pmv/summary.html> (Accessed 11 August 2022).

¹⁹ Nello Puerto (2003) “Diario Diplomatico Italia-Giappone 1954-2000 (Italy-Japan Diplomatic Diary 1954-2000),” in Adolfo Tamburello (ed.), *Italia-Giappone: 450 Anni (Italy-Japan: 450 Years)*, Roma: Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente, p. 190.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 190.

Japanese nationals in the 1970s and 1980s (*rachi mondai*).²¹ Concomitantly, tensions emerged over Japanese authorities' reticence regarding Rome's request for extradition of Delfo Zorzi, an entrepreneur and former neo-fascist activist with Japanese citizenship, convicted of terrorism and manslaughter for a 1969 bomb attack in Milan, in 2001 (cleared in 2014).²²

Later, in 2001, a new US value-based involvement in Central Asia and the Middle East provided the background for Italy-Japan diplomatic relations to enter a new stage. In the aftermath of the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York, in September 2001, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, who in July had presided the infamous G8 summit in Genoa, and Prime Minister Junichirō Koizumi pledged to cooperate with Washington on the fight against global terror.²³ However, it was only in 2012, with the return to power of the LDP and Shinzō Abe, that bilateral relations gained strength. Certainly, in his second stint as Japan's prime minister, Abe managed an activist turn to his country's foreign policy.

In 2014, Abe visited Italy twice, in June and October. He met with Prime Minister Matteo Renzi and discussed various issues, ranging from bilateral trade, to the international situation in the Asia-Pacific region. On this issue, specifically, Abe sought Rome's support in Japan's standing territorial dispute with the People's Republic of China, over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands.²⁴ He then traveled again to Milan, host city of the 10th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). The two meetings were crucial to preparing the Milan Expo 2015, laying the foundations of the 150th anniversary of Italy-Japan

²¹ Stratfor Global Intelligence Unit (2000) *Italy Brings North Korea out of Isolation*, Retrieved from: <https://web.archive.org/web/20000925074103/http://atimes.com/koreas/BA07Dg01.html> (Accessed 12 August 2022). Nello Puorto (2003) "Diario Diplomatico Italia-Giappone 1954-2000 (Italy-Japan Diplomatic Diary 1954-2000)," in Adolfo Tamburello (ed.), *Italia-Giappone: 450 Anni (Italy-Japan: 450 Years)*, Roma: Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, p. 192.

²² Paolo Foschini (2001) "Zorzi in Giappone Dal '70: Ora Rischia l'extradizione (Zorzi in Japan since 1970: Now He Could Be Extradited)," *Corriere Della Sera*, p. 6. Retrieved from: <https://archivio.corriere.it> (Accessed 12 August 2022).

²³ Asahi Shimbun (2001) "Koizumi Shushō 'Tsuyoi Ikidoori' Nichi-i Denwa Kaidan de Berurusukōni-Shi Ni Setsumei (Prime Minister Koizumi Expresses 'Strong Indignation' and Explains Japan's Position During Talk with Berlusconi)," *Asahi Shimbun*, p. 4. Retrieved from <https://database.asahi.com/> (Accessed 12 August 2022).

²⁴ On the dispute, Sino-Japanese competition and the role of Europe in the two countries' geoeconomic strategies, see Giulio Pugliese and Aurelio Insisa (2017) *Sino-Japanese Power Politics: Might, Money and Minds*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 84-88.

relations, in 2016. Media reports described the friendly atmosphere of the bilateral meetings between the two leaders, who reportedly joked on the topics of cars (Renzi mentioned that he used a Toyota when he served as mayor of Florence) and food (the Italian prime minister promised Abe a Milan-style beef cutlet).²⁵ Renzi then reciprocated the visit in August 2015, to promote bilateral relations, citing the positive image Italy enjoys with the Japanese public and the conspicuous trade volume between the two countries, and defend his cabinet's reforms.²⁶ He visited Japan one last time before stepping down, in May 2016, to attend the Ise-Shima G7 summit.

Furthermore, in 2016, the two countries celebrated the 150th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. On this occasion, Italy's major newspaper, *Corriere della Sera*, hosted the letters of the countries' foreign ministers, Paolo Gentiloni and Fumio Kishida. Besides reminding of the numerous political and cultural events scheduled in both countries that year, the letters cite common experiences and opportunities to be faced in coming years, particularly with regard to fighting terrorism and contributing to global peace and stability.²⁷ Kishida, particularly, welcomed the entry into force of an agreement on the security of information, signed by the two countries in 2015.²⁸ Kishida further stressed the enormous potential of bilateral

²⁵ Giulia Pompili (2014) *Vertice Asem, basta che all'Italia non resti solo il gelato (Asem Summit, Italy Should Not Be Left With Gelato, Only)*, Available at: <https://www.ilfoglio.it/articoli/2014/10/16/news/vertice-aseam-basta-che-allitalia-non-resti-solo-il-gelato-77583/> (Accessed 11 August 2022). Paolo Salom (2014) "Abe Arriva a Roma per Cercare Alleati Anti-Cina (Abe Arrives in Rome to Find Allies Against China)," *Corriere Della Sera*, p. 16. Retrieved from: <https://archivio.corriere.it> (Accessed 12 August 2022).

²⁶ ANSA (2015) *Renzi in Giappone, voler bene a Italia significa non spararle (Renzi in Japan, 'To Love Italy Does Not Mean To Blast It)*, Available at: http://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/politica/2015/08/02/renzi-arrivato-in-giapponedomani-incontra-imperatore-e-abe_fc2d7ede-7af5-493c-8f4d-a928fb225d74.html (Accessed 5 March 2022).

²⁷ Paolo Gentiloni (2016) "Sfide Economiche Che Ci Accomunano (Our Common Economic Challenges)," *Corriere Della Sera*, sec. Letters and comments, p. 38. Retrieved from: <https://archivio.corriere.it> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

²⁸ The document establishes standards and procedures for the protection of classified information between the two governments, in an attempt to boost security and intelligence ties with European countries. More details at MOFA (2015) "Agreement between the Government of Japan and the Government of Italy on the Security of Information," Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000140793.pdf> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

collaboration in critical sectors, such as military technology and equipment transfer.²⁹

The March 2018 general elections in Italy brought the populist and anti-establishment Five Star Movement and Northern League to power and led to the formation of a new coalition government. With the aim to “take back control” over national sovereignty, the new cabinet adopted an adversarial approach to multilateral frameworks and traditional alliances, promoting ties with Russia and, more importantly, with China.³⁰ In March 2019, the Italian government signed a Memorandum of Understanding with China on the Belt and Road Initiative, as the first G7 nation to endorse the BRI³¹. Clearly, this startled Japanese authorities and required Italian envoys to highlight the agreement’s importance for Eurasian connectivity and Italy’s economic growth, non-binding and non-contradictory nature, and compliance with EU guidelines on sustainability and market access.³²

Nevertheless, since 2018, strategic convergences between Japan and Italy on the Mediterranean, North Africa and the Horn of Africa, on the one hand, and in the Asia-Pacific region, on the other, could be observed.³³ Particularly, upon Mario Draghi’s appointment as leader of a “national unity” executive, in February 2021, Rome has reoriented its foreign policy again toward Europeanism and Atlanticism.³⁴ Consequently, the EU’s adoption of a “Strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,” in April 2021, has pushed Italy into embracing a new strategic view of the Asia-Pacific

²⁹ Fumio Kishida (2016) “Collaborare Alla Pace e Alla Stabilità (Let Us Cooperate For Peace and Stability),” *Corriere Della Sera*, sec. Letters and comments, p. 39. Retrieved from: <https://archivio.corriere.it> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

³⁰ Fabrizio Coticchia (2021) “A Sovereignist Revolution? Italy’s Foreign Policy under the ‘Yellow-Green’ Government,” *Comparative European Politics* 19 (6), p. 752.

³¹ Simone Dossi (2020) “Italy-China Relations and the Belt and Road Initiative. The Need for a Long-Term Vision,” *Italian Political Science* 15 (1), p. 68.

³² Author’s interview with an Italian diplomat, August 2021.

³³ See for instance Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale (ISPI) (2018) *Med2018 - Special Dialogue with Taro Kono*, Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eL5_9KT4Hu0 (Accessed 11 August 2022). See also Embassy of Italy in Tokyo (2021) *Indo-Pacifico e nuovi scenari geopolitici: Italia, India e Giappone (The Indo-Pacific and New Geopolitical Scenarios: Italy, India and Japan)*, Available at: https://ambtokyo.esteri.it/ambasciata_tokyo/it/chi-siamo/dall-ambasciata/l-indo-pacifico-e-i-nuovi-scenari.html (Accessed 5 March 2022).

³⁴ Teresa Coratella and Varvelli Arturo (2021) *Rome’s Moment: Draghi, Multilateralism, and Italy’s New Strategy*, Available at: <https://ecfr.eu/publication/romes-moment-draghi-multilateralism-and-italys-new-strategy/> (Accessed 11 August 2022).

region, consistent with the interests in this region of the US, Japan and other EU member states, such as France, Germany and the Netherlands. Finally, in January 2022, the Italian government published a specific document titled “The Italian Contribution to the EU Strategy for the Indo-Pacific,” pledging to step up efforts in trade, connectivity, environmental protection, digital and human security and defense.³⁵ Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in late February 2022 has presented both Italy and Japan with new challenges whereby they could enhance their cooperation. During a May 2022 official visit to Italy, Japanese Prime Minister Kishida, elected in October 2021, and Draghi pledged unity against Russia’s aggression against Ukraine and vowed to maintain a “rule-based international order” in the Indo-Pacific. Recognizing the “excellent” state of Japan-Italy bilateral relations, Draghi also thanked Japan for its readiness to redirect its liquefied natural gas (LNG) shipments to Europe in the wake of Russia’s retaliations against EU sanctions. The two leaders also denounced North Korea’s most recent ballistic tests.³⁶

Security and military relations

National Constitutions on both sides bar, in principle, the two countries from re-establishing themselves as military powers with capabilities to intervene in armed conflicts abroad.³⁷ However, in practice, as major US allies in their respective regions, since the early 2000s, both Rome and Tokyo have supported the US-led multinational military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Italy has actively contributed to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan and the Ancient Babylon missions in Iraq, providing more than 32,250 soldiers in total on both fronts, and to the “coalition of the willing” against the Islamic State, in 2014, with approximately 1,500

³⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy (2022) *The Italian Contribution to the EU Strategy for the Indo-Pacific*, Available at: https://www.esteri.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/THE_ITALIAN_CONTRIBUTION_TO_THE_EU_STRATEGY_FOR_THE_INDO_PACIFIC.pdf. (Accessed 11 August 2022).

³⁶ ANSA (2022) *Ucraina, Draghi: “Giappone e Italia impegnate per la tregua” - Politica (Ukraine, Draghi: “Japan and Italy at Work for a Ceasefire” – Politics*, Available at: http://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/politica/2022/05/03/draghi-incontra-primo-ministro-giappone-kishida_af2cbe97-1cb9-4849-a706-43d4f544a10a.html (Accessed 11 August 2022).

³⁷ Article 11 of the Constitution of the Italian Republic (1948) and Article 9 of the Constitution of the State of Japan (1947).

soldiers.³⁸

Despite the passage of special legislation allowing the dispatch of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) in non-combat roles in Afghanistan and Iraq, in 2001, Japan has acted indirectly in support of its ally in the Middle East and Central Asia.³⁹

Despite having appointed defense attachés to their respective embassies for decades,⁴⁰ high-level talks between Rome and Tokyo on a wide range of security issues, including North Korea, were inaugurated only in May 2007, after the Japanese Parliament approved the upgrade of the Japan's Defense Agency into a ministry earlier that year.⁴¹ Given its EU membership, since 2019, Italy has participated in the EU-Japan Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), aimed at boosting connectivity and security ties between Tokyo and Brussels across Eurasia, Africa and the Indo-Pacific region.⁴² Such multilateral agreements came after a number of Italy-Japan bilateral security and intelligence agreements were signed (see also above).

In 2012, during a diplomatic visit to Japan, Italy's Ministry of Defense, Gen. Giampaolo Di Paola, meeting with his counterpart Satoshi Morimoto, signed a "Statement of Intent," pledging to enhance bilateral cooperation between Italy and

³⁸ Data on Italy's military deployment in the Middle East and Afghanistan are available at Italian Army (n.d.) *ISAF: Contributo Nazionale (ISAF: Italy's contribution)*, Available at: http://www.esercito.difesa.it/operazioni/operazioni_oltremare/Pagine/ISAF-Contributo-Nazionale.aspx (Accessed 5 March 2022). Italian Army (n.d.) *Iraq - Antica Babilonia (Iraq – Operation Ancient Babylon)*, Available at: http://www.esercito.difesa.it/operazioni/operazioni_oltremare/Pagine/Iraq-Antica-Babilonia.aspx (Accessed 5 March 2022). After a NATO Defense Ministry meeting in February 2021, Italy was assigned the lead of the NATO Mission in Iraq (NMI) from February 2022. See Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) (2021) "L'Italia nella missione Nato in Iraq (Italy in the NATO Mission in Iraq)," *IAI.it*, Available at: <https://www.iai.it/it/news/litalia-nella-missione-nato-iraq> (Accessed 5 March 2022) and Ministry of Defense of Italy (2015) *National Contribute Operation Prima Parthica*, Available at: https://www.difesa.it/EN/Operations/InternationalOperations/Prima_Parthica/Pagine/National_contribute.aspx (Accessed 15 September 2021).

³⁹ See John P. Tuman, Jonathan R. Strand, and Majid Shirali (2017) "Foreign Policy Alignment with The War on Terror: The Case of Japan's Foreign Aid Program," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 17(3).

⁴⁰ Ministry of Defense of Japan (2021) *Bōei Chūzaikan No Haken Jōkyō (Current Situation of the Defense Officials Posted Abroad)*, Available at: https://www.mod.go.jp/j/publication/shiritai/chuzaikan/pdf/haken_jyoukyou.pdf (Accessed 11 August 2022). Embassy of Italy in Tokyo (2021) *Gli Uffici (Our Offices)*, Available at: https://ambtokyo.esteri.it/ambasciata_tokyo/it/chi-siamo/gli-uffici.html (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁴¹ Ministry of Defense of Japan (2007) *Kyūma bōei daijin no itaria hōmon (Defense Minister Kyūma's Visit to Italy)*, Available at: https://warp.da.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/11591426/www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/exchange/area/2007/20070503_ita-j.html (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁴² Axel Berkofsky (2021) "The EU-Japan Strategic Partnership Agreement: Getting Down to Work, Finally?," *ISPI Online*, Available at: <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publicazione/eu-japan-strategic-partnership-agreement-getting-down-work-finally-29509> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

Japan in the field of international security, particularly concerning anti-piracy operations and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.⁴³ This event reflected changes observed in Japan's security posture since the release of the 2010 National Defense Program Guidelines⁴⁴ and Japan's SDF proactive engagement in peacekeeping and anti-piracy operations in the Horn of Africa.⁴⁵

As a follow-up to the 2012 agreement, in July 2014, against the backdrop of Prime Minister Abe's reforms in the security sector, Italy's Chief of the Defense Staff Admiral Luigi Binelli Mantelli visited Japan, laying the foundation of actual bilateral cooperation in cybersecurity, space and missile defense, and training and exchanges between special military units.⁴⁶ Particularly, Tokyo appeared keen to acquire strategic knowledge from Rome on the Middle East and North Africa, a year after the In Amenas hostage crisis (Algeria), which had resulted in the killing of 10 Japanese nationals.⁴⁷ That year, Tokyo also committed to supporting NATO/EU counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, off the coast of Somalia. Between late 2014 and early 2015, a series of drills and exchanges involving the Italian Navy destroyer Andrea Doria and the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Forces (JMSDF) 6th patrol unit command took place off the Gulf

⁴³ Ministry of Defense of Italy (2012) *Visita del Ministro Di Paola in Giappone (Defense Minister Di Paola's visit to Japan)*, Available at: https://www.difesa.it/Il_Ministro/Eventi/Pagine/VisitadelMinistroDiPaolainGiappone.aspx (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁴⁴ Ken Jimbo (2012) "Japan's National Defense Planning for the New Security Environment: The 2010 National Defense Program Guidelines," *DTP Policy Briefs*, Policy Brief 3, pp. 3-5.

⁴⁵ In 2011, the Japan Self-Defense Forces had opened their first base abroad since the end of the Second World War, in Djibouti. With the launch of the UN peacekeeping mission to South Sudan (UNMISS), the scope of Japanese military operation in the area was further expanded. Neil Melvin (2019) "The Foreign Military Presence in the Horn of Africa Region," *SIPRI Background Paper*, pp. 10-11.

⁴⁶ Stefano Carrer (2014) "Il Capo di Stato Maggiore Difesa: "Più cooperazione Italia-Giappone per la sicurezza di tutti (More Cooperation Between Italy and Japan for Everyone's Security)", *Il Sole 24 Ore*, Available at: <http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/notizie/2014-07-18/il-capo-stato-maggiore-difesa-piu-cooperazione-italia-giappone-la-sicurezza-tutti-111135.shtml?uuiid=ABGGp7bB> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁴⁷ The Japan Times (2013) *Japan's Toll Highest in Hostage Crisis*, Available at: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/01/25/national/japans-toll-highest-in-hostage-crisis/> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

of Aden.⁴⁸ The aim of this operation, a historical first for the JMSDF,⁴⁹ was to promote cooperation and capacity building within the framework of the EU's Operation Atalanta (EUNAVFOR), aimed at countering piracy in a key area for global trade networks.⁵⁰

Japan's new security legislation, passed in 2015, enhanced actual security cooperation with the US and allies in multinational peacekeeping efforts.⁵¹ Against this backdrop, during a ministry-level meeting in Japan, in May 2017, Tokyo and Rome signed an agreement on the transfer of defense equipment and technology, finally ratified by the Italian Parliament in January 2019.⁵² As a follow-up to the agreement, in April 2022, Minister of Defense Lorenzo Guerini visited Japan to oversee the signing of a Technical Arrangement between the Italian Air Force (ITAF) and the Japanese Aerial Self-Defense Forces (ASDF), which will provide ASDF pilots training opportunities at the International Flight Training School in Lecce-Galatina, southeastern Italy.⁵³ This agreement can be interpreted as additional evidence of Italy's aforementioned proactive engagement in the Asia-Pacific region under Draghi's leadership, which, along its discursive emphasis on freedom, democracy, rule-based order and governance of the commons, seems to have a distinctive "neo-mercantilist" rationale, in light of growing

⁴⁸ Italian Navy (2014) *EU Naval Force Flagship Andrea Doria Conducts Counter-Piracy Exercise with Japanese Warship JS Takanami in the Gulf of Aden*, Available at: <https://www.marina.difesa.it/EN/Conosciamoci/notizie/Pagine/doriaeunavfor.aspx>. (Accessed 12 August 2022).

⁴⁹ MOFA (2014) *Nichi-EU kaizoku taishō kyōdō kunren (Japan-EU Anti-Piracy Joint Naval Drills)*, Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/release/press4_001341.html (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁵⁰ Italian Navy (2015) *ITS Doria in the Gulf of Aden in Cooperation With the Chinese, Japanese and Korean Navies to Guarantee Safety at Sea*, Available at: <https://www.marina.difesa.it/EN/Conosciamoci/notizie/Pagine/doriacooperation.aspx> (Accessed 5 March 2022). After the conclusion of the EU-Japan Strategic Partnership Agreement, in 2019, such instances of EU-Japan naval cooperation have been regularized. A case in point is the joint EU-Japan naval exercise in the Gulf of Aden, organized in October 2020, with the participation of JMSDF destroyer Ōnami. See European External Action Service (EEAS) (2020) *EU-Japan Joint Naval Exercise*, Available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/japan/86483/eu-japan-joint-naval-exercise_en (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁵¹ Andrew L. Oros (2017) *Japan's Security Renaissance: New Policies and Politics for the Twenty-First Century*, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 76-78.

⁵² Ministry of Defense of Italy (2017) *Italy-Japan: Stronger Cooperation in the Defence Sector*, Available at: https://www.difesa.it/EN/Primo_Piano/Pagine/jp.aspx (Accessed 5 March 2022). Chamber of Deputies of Italy (2018) *Accordo Con Il Governo Del Giappone Concernente Il Trasferimento Di Equipaggiamenti e Di Tecnologia Di Difesa (Agreement with the Government of Japan on Defense Equipment and Technology Transfers)*, Available at: http://documenti.camera.it/leg18/dossier/pdf/VQ1391.pdf?_1631457722493 (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁵³ Minister of Defense of Italy (2022) *Il Ministro Guerini in Giappone Incontra Il Ministro Kishi (Minister Guerini in Japan Meets Minister Kishi)*, Available at: http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:https://www.difesa.it/Primo_Piano/Pagine/Giappone.aspx. (Accessed 11 August 2022).

demand for military procurement and capacity building in the Asia-Pacific.⁵⁴

Contemporary economic relations

As members of the G7 group and organizations such as the OECD, Italy and Japan are among the world's largest economies and most industrialized countries. Despite having received generous economic aid from the US in the aftermath of the Second World War, neither of them has received official aid from the other. However, Japan has offered economic aid to Italy and Europe after natural disasters or, more recently, war. For instance, in 2009, Tokyo donated 64 million euros to build a new earthquake-proof gymnasium and shelter and a concert hall in L'Aquila, in the aftermath of a devastating earthquake that hit the Italian city.⁵⁵ More recently, in response to a request by US President Joe Biden amidst rising tensions between Russia and Ukraine in early February 2022, the Japanese government announced the diversion of cargoes with hundreds of thousands of tons of LNG to Europe, in an attempt to hedge against potential cutoffs of the gas supply from Russia.⁵⁶ Ever since, Italy, once dependent on Russian LNG for 40% of its total demand, has cut its reliance on Russian gas imports by 15%. During Kishida's May 2022 visit to Italy, Prime Minister Mario Draghi officially recognized Japan's role in assisting Italy and the EU during the first weeks of the conflict in Ukraine.⁵⁷

Both being manufacturing and export-oriented economies, Japan and Italy share several similarities in their trade behavior. Italy is the world's 10th largest exporter and

⁵⁴ Giulio Pugliese (2022) "The European Union's Security Intervention in the Indo-Pacific: Between Multilateralism and Mercantile Interests," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*.

⁵⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Itaria kiso dēta (Italy: Basic Data)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/italy/data.html> (Accessed 12 August 2022).

⁵⁶ It might be worth noting that until early 2022 Europe depended for almost 40% of its total gas supply on imports from Russia. Japan, the world's second largest LNG consumer, relies on imports of LNG from Russia only for 8% of its total. See Yuka Obayashi and Marwa Rashad (2022) *Japan to Divert LNG to Europe amid Russia-Ukraine Tension*, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/japan-diverting-lng-europe-some-already-route-industry-minister-2022-02-09/> (Accessed 12 August 2022). Juntaro Arai (2022) *EU Seeks Extra LNG from Japan, Hedging against Russia Cutoff*, Available at: <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Ukraine-war/EU-seeks-extra-LNG-from-Japan-hedging-against-Russia-cutoff> (Accessed 12 August 2022).

⁵⁷ Reuters (2022) *Italy's Draghi Thanks Japan for Redirecting Gas Cargoes to Europe*, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/italys-draghi-thanks-japan-redirecting-gas-cargoes-europe-2022-05-04/> (Accessed 12 August 2022).

depends on world markets for 60% of its GDP.⁵⁸ Japan, instead, is the world's 4th largest exporter, but its economy is relatively less dependent on exports (38%). Manufactured goods constitute the majority of the two countries' overseas sales, though, since 2015, Japan has increased its service export quotas. Excluding China, both countries' trade patterns are regionally oriented. In addition to being Japan's largest supplier of imports and second largest market, China has in fact emerged as Italy's third largest supplier, after Germany and France.⁵⁹

Traditionally, Japan has adopted protectionist trade policies on a series of items which are key to Italian exports, such as foodstuff, alcoholic beverages and leather goods.⁶⁰ This notwithstanding, Italy has been benefiting from a trade surplus with Japan over the last decade. Trade relations have been favored by both public and private activism since the 1980s, as detailed below.

The Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) operates in Italy from its national headquarters in Milan, in coordination with the major general trading companies (*sōgō shōsha*), such as Mitsubishi Corp., and Italian and Japanese institutions in the country. On the Japanese end, the Italian Chamber of Commerce in Japan, the Italy-Japan Foundation, the Embassy of Italy, through the Institute Trade Agency (ITA-ICE), are the main actors supporting Italian entrepreneurs seeking business opportunities in Japan.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit the global economy in 2020 and 2021, a positive trend had been particularly encouraged by the conclusion and entry into force of the Japan-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), resulting in the immediate or gradual lift of several trade tariffs on nearly all EU exports to Japan. Italian exports to

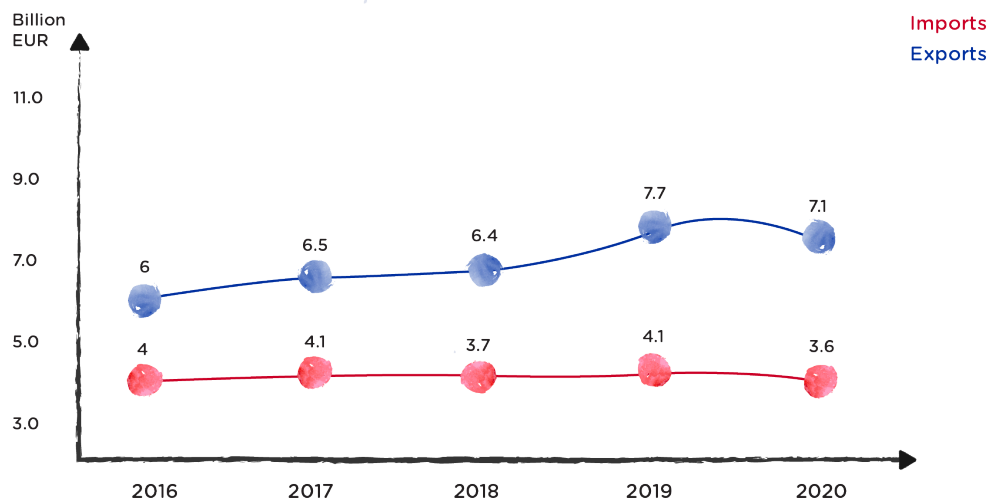
⁵⁸ Santander Trade (2021) *Italian Foreign Trade in Figures*, Available at: https://santandertrade.com/en/portal/analyse-markets/italy/foreign-trade-in-figures#classification_by_country (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁵⁹ Santander Trade (2021) *Japanese Foreign Trade in Figures*, Available at: <https://santandertrade.com/en/portal/analyse-markets/japan/foreign-trade-in-figures> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁶⁰ Embassy of Italy in Japan and Directorate General for Country Promotion (2022) *Info Mercati Esteri: Giappone (Foreign Markets Updates: Japan)*, p. 23, Available at: https://www.infomercatiesteri.it/public/ime/schede-sintesi/r_126_giappone.pdf (Accessed 12 August 2022).

Japan in 2019 rose to a total of 7.7 billion euros, up by 19% from the previous year.⁶¹ Instead, imports from Japan have remained stable, except for 2019, when they recorded a three-year high, at 4.1 billion euros. Major export items from Italy are tobacco derivatives and substitutes (ex. electronic cigarettes), pharmaceutical products, clothing and leather goods, vehicles, food and industrial machinery. Conversely, major Japanese export items to Italy are concentrated in the machinery and vehicles sectors.⁶²

Italy’s trade with Japan in billion euros



Source: International Trade Center/Trade Map

Despite being perceived as a risk-prone investment destination for a number of “locational disadvantages,” including the poor state of its infrastructure, conflictual labor relations and an uncertain political and economic environment, Italy has attracted the interest of Japanese investors since the early 1960s.⁶³ Large manufacturers in the food, apparel and motor vehicle sectors, such as Ajinomoto, YKK and Honda have been pioneers of the Italian market, establishing joint ventures and subsidiaries throughout

⁶¹ Trade Map (n.d) *Italy-Japan Exports*, Available at: https://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx?nvpm=1%7c381%7c%7c392%7c%7cTOTAL%7c%7c%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c2%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1 (Accessed 12 August 2022).

⁶² Trade Map (n.d) *Italy-Japan Imports*, Available at: https://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx?nvpm=1%7c381%7c%7c392%7c%7cTOTAL%7c%7c%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1 (Accessed 12 August 2022).

⁶³ Corrado Molteni (1996) “Japanese Manufacturing Investment in Italy” in James Darby (ed.) *Japan and the European Periphery*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 146.

the 1960s and the 1980s. Their relative success, though, has not been enough to cause a major change in the perception of Italy in the Japanese business world. Amidst a massive growth of Japanese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the mid-1980s, Japan's most competitive industries of the time (electronics and motor vehicles) have *de facto* neglected Italy. Thus, Japanese investments to Italy have concentrated in "traditional" sectors, such as machinery, chemicals and household electric appliances.⁶⁴ Recent developments point however to a gradual change. Since the early 2000s, Japanese operators such as Denso (car parts), Sumitomo Electric (automotive, industrial tools), Kagome (food), NTT Data (ICT), Muji (retail), Mitsubishi (food), Hitachi (railway systems and car batteries) and Calsonic Kansei (automotive, exhaust systems) have invested in Italy through direct investments, joint-ventures and mergers and acquisitions. An increase in Japanese FDI has been observed since 2015, after the acquisition of the majority share in Ansaldo STS, a railway system company, part of the Italian state-owned Finmeccanica/Leonardo group, and subsequent acquisitions of stakes in companies in the railways and car making sectors.⁶⁵ The acquisition of Magneti Marelli, a former Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA) group company, by Calsonic Kansei, completed in 2019, for 6.2 billion euros, represents one of the largest capital investments by a Japanese company in Italy. According to the Japanese government's estimates, Japanese total investments in Italy amount to 585 billion yen (4.5 billion euros), versus a mere 1 billion euros invested, as of 2019, in Japan by Italian companies, mostly in the manufacturing (food, beverages and tobacco, and machinery) and services (wholesale and retail, car repair) sectors.⁶⁶

A promising sector in bilateral economic exchanges is that of defense equipment and technologies. In the context of an increase in Italy's military equipment sales, in the

⁶⁴ Ibidem, pp. 138–39.

⁶⁵ Fabio Savelli (2016) "Hitachi Con Fiamm: Intesa Italia-Giappone Nelle Batterie Auto (Hitachi and Fiamm: Italy-Japan Agreement on Car Batteries)," *Corriere Della Sera*, p. 36. Retrieved from: <https://archivio.corriere.it> (Accessed 12 August 2022).

⁶⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Itaria kiso dēta (Italy: Basic Data)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/italy/data.html> (Accessed 5 March 2022). Due to discontinued reporting, data on Italian FDI to Japan have been retrieved in *Ambasciata d'Italia in Giappone and Direzione Generale per la Promozione del Sistema Paese (2015) Info Mercati Esteri: Giappone (Foreign Markets Updates: Japan)*, Available at: https://consosaka.esteri.it/consolato_osaka/resource/doc/2015/08/info_mercati_esteri_-_giappone.pdf (Accessed 12 August 2022).

2015-2016 period,⁶⁷ authorized transfers of military equipment from Italy to Japan amounted to 300.8 million euros in 2015 only, more than twenty times the total value of transfers to Italy's Asian major client, South Korea.⁶⁸ Japan is Italy's third largest client of defense equipment (particularly 12,7-mm-and-above caliber weapons and ammunition, bombs and missiles, aircraft, and software) in Asia, after South Korea and Indonesia. During the above-mentioned high-level meetings in April and May 2022, the need for Italy-Japan cooperation in the defense sector has been stressed. In particular, Rome, a partner in the Tempest program along with the UK and Sweden,⁶⁹ has expressed interest in the possibility of joining the development of Japan's next-generation F-X fighter jet, through its state-controlled aerospace and defense company Leonardo.⁷⁰

However, these exchanges remain relatively marginal in both countries' total trade accounts. In its historical data on Italian foreign trade, the Italian Institute of Statistics further stresses the fact that Japan absorbs only 1.3-1.6% of the total volume of Italian exports, versus Germany's 12%, France's 10.5% and the US' 9.6%. In Asia, China is the largest importer of Italian goods, accounting for 3% of Italian exports.⁷¹

In addition to trade, tourism is certainly one of the major sources of capital inflow to Italy from Japan. Japanese tourism to Italy grew to an unprecedented rate

⁶⁷ Chamber of Deputies of Italy (2021) *Relazione Sulle Operazioni Autorizzate e Svolte per Il Controllo Dell'esportazione, Importazione e Transito Dei Materiali Di Armamento, Riferita All'anno 2020 (Report on the Authorized Operations Carried Out on the Export, Import and Transit Control of Arms, As Per 2020)*, p. 2, Available at: <http://documenti.camera.it/leg18/dossier/pdf/DI0370.pdf> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁶⁸ Ibidem, p. 4.

⁶⁹ Tom Kington (2022) *Tempest Program, Russian Invasion Drive Growth in Italy's Defense Budget*, Available at: <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2022/07/26/tempest-program-russian-invasion-drives-growth-in-italys-defense-budget/> (Accessed 12 August 2022)

⁷⁰ Marco Battaglia (2022) *Tempest globale. Roma, Londra e Tokyo progettano il caccia del futuro (Global Tempest: Rome, London and Tokyo Design Tomorrow's Fighter Jet)*, Available at: <https://formiche.net/2022/07/tempest-globale-roma-londra-e-tokyo-progettano-il-caccia-del-futuro/> (Accessed 12 August 2022)

⁷¹ MAECI (2022) *Info Mercati Esteri, Tabella 5A: Principali Paesi Destinatarie Delle Esportazioni Esportazioni (Foreign Markets Update: Table 5A: Major Export Partners)*, Available at: https://www.infomercatiesteri.it/public/osservatorio/interscambio-commerciale-mondo/Tabella%205A%20-%20Principali%20Paesi%20destinatari%20delle%20esportazioni_1639733643.pdf (Accessed 11 August 2022).

throughout the 1980s and reached its peak in 1997, at 2.17 million tourists.⁷² Despite restaurant scams exposed by the Japanese press in recent years,⁷³ Italy remains a popular destination for Japanese nationals traveling to Europe. According to statistics published by the Italian Tourism Agency, in 2019, with a total number of Japanese tourists amounting to 1.13 million, the total expense for accommodation and goods and services was 913 million euros, slightly decreasing from the previous year (949 million euros).⁷⁴ On average, Japanese tourists (a third of which is composed of senior couples aged 60 and above) spend around 6 days in Italy, mostly between art and cultural-historical centers like Rome, Florence and Venice, and Italy's economic and trade hub of Milan.⁷⁵ In addition to Japanese tour operators, essential guides to Italy with useful information for Japanese travelers are prepared by the Italian Embassy in Tokyo, the Italian Consulate in Osaka and the Italian Chamber of Commerce in Japan and available online.⁷⁶ On the other hand, a record 162,769 Italian tourists visited Japan in 2019, up by almost 3 times the number recorded a decade earlier, and up by more than 4.5 times the number in 2003, of 35,900 tourists,⁷⁷ signaling a growing interest toward the country. Travel restrictions enacted due to the COVID-19 pandemic have inevitably caused a dramatic reduction of the number of Japanese tourists entering Italy in 2020 and 2021 and, consequently, their total contribution to the Italian economy has

⁷² Justin McCurry (2009) *Japanese Tourist Turns down Free Holiday Offered by Italy as Apology*, Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jul/31/japanese-tourists-italy> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁷³ Ibidem.

⁷⁴ Embassy of Italy in Japan and Directorate General for Country Promotion (2022) *Info Mercati Esteri: Giappone, Scheda Turismo (Foreign Markets Update: Japan: Tourism)*, Available at: https://www.infomercatiesteri.it/public/ime/schede-turismo/r_126_giappone_turismo.pdf (Accessed 12 August 2022).

⁷⁵ Ibidem.

⁷⁶ Italian Chamber of Commerce in Japan (2021) *A Useful Guide for Traveling to Italy from Japan*, Available at: <https://iccj.or.jp/a-useful-guide-for-traveling-to-italy-from-japan%e3%80%90updates-by-29th-january-2021%e3%80%91/> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁷⁷ JNTO (2021) *2021 nen Hōnichi Gaikyakusū (Sōsū) (Foreign Tourists Visiting Japan in 2021 (Total))*, Available at: https://www.jnto.go.jp/jpn/statistics/since2003_visitor_arrivals.pdf (Accessed 5 March 2022).

decreased by nearly 90%.⁷⁸

Cultural and people-to-people relations

Records of cultural relations between Italy and Japan go back seven centuries, well before the two countries' emergence as modern nation-states.⁷⁹ The first person in Italy to hear of a land called "Zipangu" (probably from the Chinese for Japan, *ribenguo*), was a prison inmate and writer known as Rustichello, a native of Pisa, Tuscany, in the mid-1290s. Taken prisoner, he ended up sharing his cell with a Venetian merchant, who went by the name of Marco Polo, who recounted of having heard of an "island to the East" of China, which was rich in "gold" and "red pearls," at the court of Yuan ruler Kublai.⁸⁰ The manuscripts of Marco Polo's *Travels* rose to immense popularity across medieval Europe and informed the continent's elites' imagined geography of Asia. Nearly two centuries after the first manuscript of the *Travels* saw the light, explorer Christopher Columbus, a native of Genoa, infamously believed he had reached "Zipangu" after setting foot on the island of the Caribbean which would then become known as Hispaniola/Cuba.⁸¹ In later centuries, Italian Jesuit missionaries Organtino Gnechi Soldo and Alessandro Valignano enriched their contemporaries' knowledge of distant Japan.⁸² The latter is credited with organizing the first of two embassies of Japan's warrior aristocracy to Europe, between 1584 and 1590. The second such mission, the 1613 Keichō Embassy, led by Tsunenaga Hasekura, is commemorated in a

⁷⁸ Embassy of Italy in Japan and Directorate General for Country Promotion (2022) *Info Mercati Esteri: Giappone, Scheda Turismo (Foreign Markets Update: Japan: Tourism)*, Available at: https://www.infomercatiesteri.it/public/ime/schede-turismo/r_126_giappone_turismo.pdf. (Accessed 12 August 2022).

⁷⁹ For a discussion of Italy's path toward becoming a modern nation-state, see John Agnew (2017) "Working the Margins: The Geopolitical Marking of Italian National Identity," *Carte Italiane*, 2 (11).

⁸⁰ Marco Polo (1982) *Il Milione (The Travels of Marco Polo)*, Rome: L'Unità - Editori Riuniti, ch. 155, Available at: <https://it.wikisource.org/wiki/Milione/155> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁸¹ For a detailed analysis, please see Adolfo Tamburello (2003) "La leggendarietà del Giappone (The Myths Around Japan)" in Adolfo Tamburello (ed.) *Italia-Giappone: 450 anni (Italy-Japan: 450 Years)*, vol. 1, Roma: Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, pp. 13–15.

⁸² See M. Antoni J. Üçerler (2003) "Alessandro Valignano: Man, Missionary, and Writer," *Renaissance Studies*, 17 (3) and Satoru Obara (2003) "Gli Insegnamenti e Le Opere Del Valignano (Valignano's Teachings and Works)," in Piero Corradini (ed.), *2001 Italia in Giappone: Atti Del Convegno Internazionale "Cinquecento Anni Di Rapporti Culturali Tra Italia e Giappone" (2001 Italy and Japan: Proceedings of the International Symposium "Five Hundred Years of Cultural Relations between Italy and Japan)* Roma: Dimensione Stampa.

fresco in the Sala of the Corazzieri, in the *Quirinale*, the official residence of the president of the Italian Republic.⁸³

As a result of these century-long exchanges, today there is a “consistent capital of mutual sympathy” and fascination between the two countries.⁸⁴ As of 2019, nearly 15,000 Japanese nationals reside in Italy, as opposed to barely 5,000 Italians in Japan.⁸⁵ Direct flights between the two countries, operated by Japan Airlines (JAL), All Nippon (ANA) and Alitalia, were regular during the weeks before the COVID-19 epidemic, with departures from Italy’s major hubs of Milan Malpensa, Rome Fiumicino and Venice Marco Polo and arrivals at the major hubs of the archipelago, namely Tokyo Haneda, Tokyo Narita and Kansai International. After peaking in the late 1990s, Japanese tourism to Italy has remained rather stable in the last two decades, at 1 million tourists, reflecting major economic and demographic trends of contemporary Japan.⁸⁶ Contrastingly, particularly because of a slight depreciation of the yen begun in 2013 and the success of the Japanese pavilion at the Milan Expo in 2015, Japan rose to be one of the most popular tourist destinations for Italy, with 163,000 Italians visiting in 2019.⁸⁷

As previously illustrated, cultural exchanges between Italy and Japan have been constant throughout the 20th century, constituting the cornerstone of post-war cooperation in many diverse fields, ranging from art and architecture, to science and

⁸³ It is worth noting that the two embassies took place in an era of mounting pressure against Christian communities and, particularly, on Christian *daimyō* (warlords) in the archipelago. According to some, the bans and ensuing persecutions of Christians were justified not only by Japanese rulers’ fears of Spanish and Portuguese conquest but also by evidence that the activities of Christian missionaries were often associated with that of Southern European traders, who purchased Japanese slaves in the archipelago and then sold them across Asia. Coincidentally, trading in slaves was also the activity of Florence-born merchants, Antonio and Francesco Carletti, who visited Japan in the 1590s. See on this Thomas Nelson (2004) “Slavery in Medieval Japan,” *Monumenta Nipponica*, 59(4). Giuseppe Tucci (1951) “Japanese Ambassadors as Roman Patricians,” *East and West*, 2(2), pp. 65–71. Fosco Maraini (2003) “La Scoperta Del Giappone in Italia (Italy’s Discovery of Japan),” in Adolfo Tamburello (ed.), *Italia-Giappone: 450 anni (Italy-Japan: 450 years)*, vol. 1, Roma: Istituto italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente.

⁸⁴ Author’s interview with an Italian diplomat, August 2021.

⁸⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2021) *Itaria kiso dēta (Italy: Basic Data)*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/italy/data.html> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁸⁶ The last available figure in 2019 is of 1.3 million. Embassy of Italy in Japan and Directorate General for Country Promotion (2022), “*Info Mercati Esteri: Giappone, Scheda Turismo*” (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Italy, July 29, 2022*), https://www.infomercatiesteri.it/public/ime/schede-turismo/r_126_giappone_turismo.pdf. (Accessed 12 August 2022).

⁸⁷ JNTO (2020) *Itaria No Kiso Dēta (Italy: Basic Data)*, Available at: https://www.jnto.go.jp/jpn/inbound_market/market_basic_italy.pdf (Accessed 5 March 2022).

technology.⁸⁸ Today, Japanese cuisine and youth culture (particularly anime and manga) enjoy considerable popularity in Italy.⁸⁹ A recent Dentsū survey showed that Italy ranked number 10 in the list of the most Japan-friendly countries in the world (first among the Europeans).⁹⁰ On top of this, the Japan Foundation promotes the study of Japanese language and culture, while Japanese studies curricula, encompassing the study of Japanese linguistics and philology, translation, literature, arts, philosophy, history and society, economy and international relations, is available in 16 public and private universities, with Ca' Foscari University Venice, University of Napoli "L'Orientale" and University of Rome "La Sapienza" as the country's major research centers in the field.⁹¹ Furthermore, since the early 1970s, an Italian Association for Japanese studies has been active in the field of the promotion of academic exchange with Japan and expert knowledge production and dissemination through annual conferences and publications.⁹²

Jointly organized large-scale events, such as the 1995-96 "Japan in Italy," organized in the aftermath of Emperor Akihito's visit to Italy, in September 1993, and "2001. Italy in Japan" served the two country's aim to foster mutual understanding and

⁸⁸ Since 1954, the two countries have sponsored bilateral cultural exchanges engaging actors in both the public and the private sectors. Historical and cultural heritage in Italy and the Vatican have been at the center of Japanese interest for Italy. In the early 1990s, Japanese broadcaster Nippon TV invested 4.2 million dollars in the restoration of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. In 1988, research cooperation schemes in cutting-hedge fields, such as advanced medicine, cancer treatment, space science and renewable energies, was initiated. See The New York Times (1990) *Nippon TV and Vatican*, Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/03/29/arts/nippon-tv-and-vatican.html> (Accessed 5 March 2022). MAECI (2021) *Executive Programme of Cooperation in the Field of Science and Technology between the Government of Italy and the Government of Japan for the Years 2021-2023*, Available at: https://www.esteri.it/mae/resource/doc/2021/01/pe_signed_italy_japan_s_38_t_protocol_2021_2023.pdf (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁸⁹ Clarida Salvadori (2009) "Il Sol Levante Lungo Il Tevere (The Rising Sun on the Tevere)," *Corriere Della Sera*, Roma edition, p. 16, Retrieved from: <https://archivio.corriere.it> (Accessed 5 March 2022). Valerio Brera (2021) *Per la prima volta in Italia il libro più venduto è un manga. L'editrice Bovini: «Ora non si torna indietro» - L'intervista (Interview: For the First Time in Italy, The Top Selling Book is a Manga. Bovini (Publisher): "There Is No Way Back Now")*, Available at: <https://www.open.online/2021/09/06/fumetti-manga-one-piece-libro-piu-venduto-italia-intervista-a-claudia-bovini-star-comics/> (Accessed 12 August 2022).

⁹⁰ Kei Nakasato (2019) *Nihon No Koto Ga Suki Na Kuni Wa Fuete Iru? 'Nihon Fan' o Saguru (Have Japan-Loving Countries Increased? Researching 'Japan Fans')*, Available at: <https://dentsu-ho.com/articles/6770> (Accessed 12 August 2022).

⁹¹ Istituto Giapponese di Cultura in Roma (2021) *Università e Istituti Di Ricerca per Gli Studi Giapponesi (Universities and Research Institutes for Japanese Studies)*, Available at: <https://jfroma.it/biblioteca/universita-italiane/> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁹² AISTUGIA (n.d.) *Associazione e Organi (The Association and Members)*, Available at: <https://www.aistugia.it/index.php/associazione/associazione-organi> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

knowledge.⁹³ This latter event particularly, a 15-month long cultural exhibition centered on the display of Italian art, fashion, design and classical music in 120 locations across the archipelago, required, according to media reports of the time, a joint public-private 40 billion lira (today's 20 million euros) worth investment, aimed at "a Renaissance in Japan-Italy relations."⁹⁴ However successful, the event attracted criticism from Italian art historians and curators, who lamented the "ransack" of national museums.⁹⁵

The 2005 Aichi Expo was another key event consolidating Italy's reputation in Japan. With its 3,500,000 visitors, the Italian pavilion emerged as the most popular of the whole expo.⁹⁶ In fact, a recent NHK survey ranked Italy as the 7th most popular foreign country among the Japanese, following Canada but ahead of Germany,⁹⁷ seemingly contributing to the popularity of the Italian language. A key role in this is being played by the Institute of Italian Culture (IIC) in Tokyo, teaching Italian language to an average of 7,000 students, who are attending courses on a yearly basis.⁹⁸ Moreover, the Institute, which is one of the most "liked" foreign institutions on Facebook in Japan, with nearly 70,000 followers, has acted as a catalyst for Japanese students looking for study opportunities in Italy, organizing events in collaboration with

⁹³ Fondazione Italia Giappone (n.d.) Giappone in Italia 95/96 (Japan in Italy 95/96), Available at: <https://www.italiagiappone.it/1995.html> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁹⁴ This effort was coordinated by a newly established Foundation, the Italy-Japan Foundation (Inichizaidan) and a special committee created within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy, after the conclusion of a memorandum of understanding between the Italian and Japanese governments, in 1999, strongly supported by Ambassador Umberto Vattani, then secretary general of the foreign ministry. See Raffaella Polato (2001) "Cultura e Affari, Il 'Sistema Italia' Sbarca a Tokio (Culture and Business, The 'Italy System' Lands in Tokyo)," *Corriere Della Sera*, p. 9. Fondazione Italia Giappone (n.d.) *Umberto Vattani*, Available at: <https://www.italiagiappone.it/vattani.html> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁹⁵ Pierluigi Panza (2001) "L'Italia è Troppo Generosa Con i Suoi Capolavori (Italy is Too Generous With Its Masterpieces)," *Corriere Della Sera*, sec. Lettere e Commenti, p. 37.

⁹⁶ Fondazione Italia Giappone (n.d.) *Expo 2005 Di Aichi (The 2005 Aichi Expo)*, Available at: <https://www.italiagiappone.it/expo2005.html> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

⁹⁷ NHK (2018) "*Nihonjin No Ishiki*" *Chōsa* (2018) *Kekka No Gaiyō (Outline of the Results of the 2018 Opinion Survey: "What the Japanese Think")*, p. 20, Available at: https://www.nhk.or.jp/bunken/research/yonon/pdf/20190107_1.pdf (Accessed 12 August 2022).

⁹⁸ Dario Fertilio (2009) "Giappone, Scelta per 500 Mila (Japan, Top Choice for 500 Thousand Students)," *Corriere Della Sera*, p. 11. Retrieved from: <https://archivio.corriere.it> (Accessed 12 August 2022).

Italian universities and sponsoring a dedicated website.⁹⁹

Despite some positive developments, however, media coverage of Japan in Italy and vice versa seems circumscribed to international political or sports events, and natural disasters. Often, it seems to reinforce stereotypes (though relatively positive) and, particularly with regards to the Italian coverage of Japan, exoticism. Major news outlets such as national broadcaster Rai, or newspapers such as *Il Corriere della Sera* and *La Repubblica*, have Beijing-based correspondents who occasionally cover Japan. Other minor newspapers such as *Il manifesto* and *Il Foglio* offer regular in-depth analysis, though they do not have correspondents in Japan. Oppositely, the *Yomiuri* is the only Japanese newspaper maintaining a correspondence office in Rome.

Conclusion and recommendations

This chapter has attempted to shed light on the nature and extent of bilateral ties between Italy and Japan since the 1950s, with special attention to their evolution in the 21st century. It has tried to do so by providing an in-depth analysis of the cultural, economic, political and military relations against the backdrop of a 7-century long history of interactions. The results might be summarized as follows.

First, political ties between Tokyo and Rome are stable and friendly and strengthened by the widespread popularity of several aspects of Japanese culture in Italy and of an overall positive image enjoyed by Italy among the Japanese public. This, especially since the early 2010s, has likely contributed to enhancing economic ties along the lines of a mutually beneficial partnership. Particularly, massive Japanese investment in key sectors of the Italian economy, such as railway technology development and car parts manufacturing, demonstrated that Italy is not perceived as it was in the 1980s, as a risky investment destination. Instead, it is recognized that some of its companies possess skills and know-how that can contribute to maintaining Japanese multinational operators', such as Hitachi's, technological hedge in key sectors of the world economy, like infrastructure and logistics, against emerging competitors in

⁹⁹ It has been noted that, in addition to traditional sectors such as music and art, in recent years, "non-traditional" sectors, such as engineering and medicine, particularly in universities offering degrees in English, have been attractive to Japanese students. Author's interview with Paolo Calvetti, former director of the IIC, July 2021.

Asia and the world, while maintaining jobs in Italy or supporting their creation. Furthermore, since the entry into force of the Japan-EU EPA, in 2019, Italian food, beverage, apparel and tobacco products exporters' quota has been on the rise, benefiting Italy's manufacturing sector, before the nationwide COVID-19 related lockdowns and industrial production halts. There are however, structural limitations to further development of economic ties, including the decrease of Japanese demand for foreign goods and decline in capital outflows in the aftermath of the current global pandemic crisis.¹⁰⁰

Second, bilateral diplomacy is likely to revolve more distinctively, in the next few years, around security issues. Since late February 2022, an EU-Japan strategic alignment and coordination in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Moscow's economic retaliatory measures against the EU have been observed. In addition, as one of the major actors in the Mediterranean basin, Italy possesses key strategic insights and resources regarding North Africa and the Middle East, increasingly important regions for Japan's diplomacy, particularly after the 2013 and 2015 hostage crises. Considering these facts, the 2015 and 2017 agreements on the security of information and military technology, combined with domestic transformations pushed forward by the second Abe administration, point in the direction of enhanced military and security cooperation in international theaters. One model area for this cooperation is currently the Horn of Africa, where Japan already supports the EU's joint anti-piracy operation and UN-led peacekeeping activities, based on the 2019 Japan-EU Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA). Consequently, broader military exchanges between European countries and Japan, combined with growing military tensions in the Asia-Pacific, will possibly continue to have an impact on EU member states' industrial strategies and be a driver for Italian private and public firms operating in the security and military sectors. In this sense, Leonardo's existing cooperative agreements with Mitsubishi Heavy Industries on the Tempest program and possible collaboration in the Japanese FX-fighter program deserve attention.

In light of the above, some recommendations are presented hereafter. As shown

¹⁰⁰ The Japan Times (2021) *Japan's Capital Spending Extends Declines as Firms Tighten Purse Strings*, Available at: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2021/06/01/business/economy-business/capital-expenditure-first-quarter/> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

above, since the mid-1990s, a series of cultural events organized on a frequent basis in both Italy and Japan have helped to promote and publicize mutual knowledge. Meanwhile, there has been an increase in Japan-related research output and academic knowledge production. Despite all this, Japan scholars have been involved only marginally in the public debate and in policy counseling. Given Rome's recent, EU-driven, emphasis on the Asia-Pacific region and growing cooperation with Tokyo on a series of key issues as illustrated above, the creation of specific fora aimed at enhancing dialogues between scholars and policymakers on relevant issues related to Italy-Japan and, more broadly, Italy's future role in the Asia-Pacific, needs to be supported by both government and public universities. Major private Italian think-tanks, such as IAI and ISPI, already provide relevant information and analysis on such topics, but, given the relevance of the Asia-Pacific in current world affairs and the region's economic appeal to many business actors, increased participation in knowledge production and communication by public research centers and institutes with solid expertise on Japanese studies and established ties with local businesses and authorities at the national, regional and city levels is desirable. Specialists' engagement with policymakers and the broader public must start from an improved involvement of Japan scholars in Italy's major media outlets and broadcasters. In the long run, such a constructive relation might lead to a progressive de-orientalization of the popular knowledge available on Japan, while making specialist knowledge more widely accessible.¹⁰¹

Besides, apart from nurturing industrial relations and increasing security cooperation, given each other's geophysical vulnerabilities and recent pledges to combat global warming and promote environmentally sustainable growth by the two governments, Rome and Tokyo should work together to build a mutually beneficial partnership in relevant areas such as climate change mitigation and adaptation and disaster preparedness, circular economy and decarbonization. For instance, Italy's advance in recycling and reuse of raw materials and eco-innovation can be a model for Japanese policymakers striving to find solutions to the country's emerging waste

¹⁰¹ Particularly, the author has produced this piece of recommendation inspired by the conversation with Paolo Calvetti, July 2021.

problem, through national initiatives and international cooperation.¹⁰² Furthermore, both countries' research and development capabilities in renewable energies and low-carbon technologies might also be beneficial in terms of international cooperation in third countries and, particularly, in emerging regions, such as Southeast Asia, where environmental problems are affecting the livelihood of millions of people and EU-Japan cooperation is already underway.¹⁰³

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¹⁰² On Italy's circular economy, see: Roberto Morabito (2019) *2° Rapporto Sull'economia Circolare in Italia: Stato Dell'economia Circolare in Italia Sulla Base Del Piano Europeo per l'economia Circolare (2nd Report on the Circular Economy in Italy Based on the European Plan for Circular Economy)*, Available at: <https://www.enea.it/it/Stampa/File/PresentazioneRobertoMorabitoEnea.pdf> (Accessed 5 March 2022). On Japan's circular economy and sustainability strategies, please refer to the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan (METI) (2020) *Circular Economy Vision 2020 Compiled*, Available at: https://www.meti.go.jp/english/press/2020/0522_003.html (Accessed 5 March 2022). World Economic Forum (2021) *Japan Launches Circular Economy Collaboration with World Economic Forum*, Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/press/2021/03/japan-launches-circular-economy-collaboration-with-world-economic-forum/> (Accessed 5 March 2022).

¹⁰³ Marco Zappa (2021) *A "Post-Carbon" Diplomacy? Japan's Southeast Asia Conundrum*, Available at: <https://www.twai.it/journal/tnote-101/> (Accessed 15 August 2022).

- Available at: http://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/politica/2022/05/03/draghi-incontra-primo-ministro-giappone-kishida_af2cbe97-1cb9-4849-a706-43d4f544a10a.html (Accessed 11 August 2022).
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