

Potential Still Untapped: Japanese Perceptions of the European Union as an Economic and Normative Power

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Abstract: *This article focuses on two of the three pillars of the 'EU through the Eyes of Asia' perceptions project, and analyzes the Japanese print media and elite interviews. We focus on two issues: the first of these is exasperation at the slow progress towards an EU-Japan Free Trade Agreement/Economic Partnership Agreement (FTA/EPA). This exasperation is clearest in the Japanese elite interviews, but the trade negotiations also feature significantly in discussions in the Japanese print media. The second issue is the consistent perception of the EU as a significant normative and diplomatic power, and a leader on human rights promotion, with this perception strongly evident in both the Japanese print media and elite interviews. Overall, the EU was perceived positively as a political actor; and, in a boost for post-Lisbon perceptions of the EU, High Representative Catherine Ashton had a generally high and somewhat positive profile in Japan. This came across more strongly in the print media rather than the elite interviews. In a much-quoted speech given in Japan in 2006, Commission President José Manuel Barroso talked of the untapped trade potential within EU-Japan relations, and the normative power of the EU and Japan. A focus on perceptions helps to inform us about the global importance of the EU and how this is being interpreted outside of Europe. To understand the European Union itself we need to have an external reflection in order to interpret its meaning. Through our study, we hope to highlight and communicate the fact that the Barroso perspective is shared by many within Japan.*

Keywords: *Economic Partnership Agreement, EU-Japan relations, normative power, sovereign debt crisis, untapped potential*

1. Introduction

This article focuses on two of the three pillars of the ‘EU through the Eyes of Asia-Pacific’ perceptions project, and analyzes the Japanese print media and elite interviews. A very high number of EU news items were identified in the study, suggesting that the EU has a significant profile within the Japanese print media. A majority of news items were economic in nature, with a particular focus on the sovereign debt crisis. This is somewhat predictable, and not particularly in need of analysis: the sovereign debt crisis was the dominant EU story in 2011–2012. Although it is worthwhile to have this empirically confirmed, it does not tell us anything especially interesting or insightful about perceptions of the EU in other countries. Rather this analysis considers two other distinctive and interesting issues that emerged from the research on Japan. The first of these is exasperation within Japan (and the EU) at the slow progress towards an EU-Japan Free Trade Agreement/Economic Partnership Agreement (FTA/EPA). This exasperation was most clearly expressed in the Japanese elite interviews, but the trade negotiations also featured significantly in discussions in the Japanese print media. The second issue is that the EU was consistently perceived to be a significant normative and diplomatic power, and a leader on human rights promotion—a perception that was strongly evident in both the Japanese media and elite interviews. The EU was perceived far more positively as a political rather than an economic actor, and, in a boost for post-Lisbon perceptions of the EU, High Representative Catherine Ashton had a generally high and somewhat positive profile in Japan, particularly in the print media.

In a much-quoted speech given in Japan in 2006, Commission President José Manuel Barroso talked of the untapped potential of EU-Japan relations (Barroso, 2006). From a European perspective, there appears to be a diminishing window within which these two substantial polities might separately or jointly make a significant contribution to international co-operation and global governance, a sense that an important opportunity is being lost. However, the issue is, ultimately, one of frame. Perhaps Barroso’s perspective is excessively ambitious, or exaggerates the potential of the relationship; perhaps we should instead be satisfied that the EU and Japan are each other’s seventh and third most important trade partners, respectively, and that some productive normative co-operation has been possible across a range of hard and soft security issues (as we shall see below).

This is why the perceptions project in general, and our analysis of perceptions of EU-Japan relations in particular is important, because it allows us to see how actors in Japan frame these issues, both in the Japanese media and in various elite domains within Japanese society. Conceptually, a focus on perceptions helps to inform us about the global importance of the EU and how this is being interpreted outside of Europe. To understand the European Union itself we need to have an external reflection in order to interpret its meaning (Holland, Chaban & Ryan, 2009, p. 2).

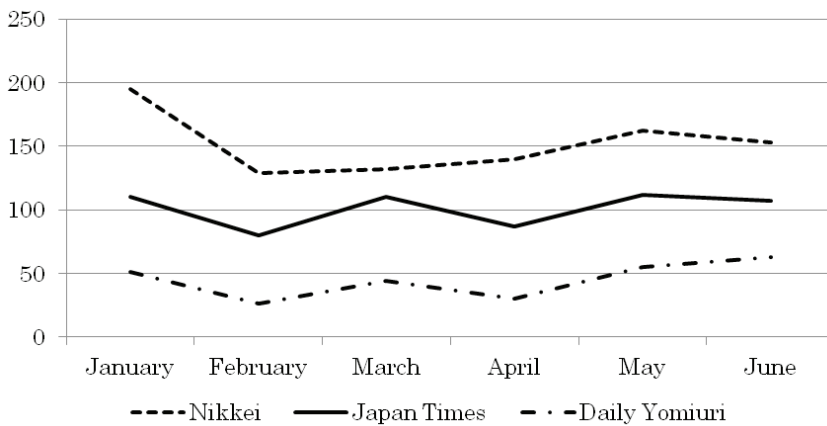
Through our study, we can see that the Barroso perspective is in fact shared by many within Japan. Although the EU-Japan relationship is perceived as important, and there is a belief that it will remain important, there is also a widely shared sense that significant potential is being left untapped, unfulfilled. While the various complicated reasons underpinning this are beyond the scope of a single article, the findings presented here can and do confirm that these perceptions also exist on the Japanese side. This presents a legitimate puzzle: namely, why is such potential for increased trade and for increased normative co-operation going unfulfilled, given the fact that this awareness of significant potential is widely shared on both sides. This study can itself contribute a valuable voice, and give momentum to successful negotiations and deeper co-operation between the two polities, by highlighting and communicating the fact of shared perceptions in a concrete and comprehensive fashion.

2. Methodology: Japanese media analysis and elite interviews

The project methodology involved the monitoring of three daily newspapers: the *Yomiuri Shimbun* (hereafter *Yomiuri*), the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* (hereafter *Nikkei*) and *The Japan Times* (hereafter *JT*). The *Yomiuri* was chosen as representative of popular and general newspapers written in Japanese. Its circulation in 2011 was around 10 million, which is the largest circulation for a daily newspaper in Japan (and possibly in the world) (*Yomiuri Shimbun*, 2012). The *Nikkei* was selected because it is the leading business newspaper in Japan, also written in Japanese (the full name translates roughly as ‘Japanese Economic Times’). With a circulation of about 3 million copies in 2010 for its morning edition alone, the *Nikkei* boasts the world’s largest circulation for a daily business newspaper (*Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 2010). The *JT* is the most popular main independent English-language daily newspaper in Japan and has a longer history than the other two published daily English-language newspapers.

A total of 1,786 news items were identified across the three media sources. This in itself is a highly encouraging number, suggesting that the EU does in fact have a significant profile within the Japanese print media. The number of items recorded was the highest for the 10-country study, and is significantly more than double the number of items identified in the previous analysis of the Japanese print media, which was conducted in 2006 (Toshiro, Fukui & Bain, 2007, pp. 104–144). Roughly one half (911) of the identified items came from the business newspaper, roughly one-third (606) came from the English-language daily, and the remaining 269 items came from the popular Japanese daily. As we can see in Figure 1 below, there was considerable consistency in the monthly trends across the three newspapers for the six months which were analyzed. The 3/11 ‘triple disaster’ (earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident) did not seem to have much impact on this study, with March generally ranked fourth out of the six months in terms of EU news items identified.

Figure 1. EU news items per month, all papers



With regard to the interview component of the project, 32 members of the Japanese elite were interviewed. Four societal cohorts were identified—business, politics, media and civil society—with eight people interviewed within each of these cohorts. Information was collected through individual standardized semi-structured, in-depth, face-to-face interviews that lasted for up to forty minutes. This technique is designed to be personal, flexible, respect privacy and status, and generate greater openness and trust between interviewer and interviewee. Interviewees were given the option of their comments either being anonymous or associated with them directly. This methodology utilizes open-ended responses—the pre-tested 18-question questionnaire featured only

two structured questions. Two versions of the questionnaire were employed—one for business, political and civil society respondents, and another slightly modified for media practitioners. The question order rotated depending on the flow of conversation.

The sampling strategy for the ‘elite’ interviews involved the selection of key informants in each location across the four designated sectors. The selected elite interviewees were identified from members of national parliaments, or equivalents, representing different political views. Media ‘elites’ were identified as the editors/news directors and lead reporters of reputable media outlets. Civil society members were representatives of various national and international non-governmental organizations. Business respondents were identified from members of national business round tables and other official business networks, as well as leading international traders.

3. Similarities and differences between print media and elite interview findings

The findings confirm that there was a significant correlation between the content of the print media and the views of the elite interviewees on the two issues highlighted—trade and normative power. The print media discussed trade and the FTA/EPA issue in some detail: a total of 191 articles on trade, and 122 articles on the FTA/EPA issue were found. Coverage of these issues in the print media tended to be neutral/positive, rather than negative. Overall, when all economic issues were discussed, 75 per cent of a total of 1,149 items were classified as neutral in journalistic tone. In the remainder of cases, when an evaluation was made, this was three times more likely to be negative than positive. However, if we look more specifically at just the data for trade and the FTA/EPA, in excess of 90 per cent of all such articles offered a neutral evaluation. In the remainder of cases, items were twice as likely to be evaluated positively as negatively in the trade sub-frame (12 to 6), and four times as likely to be evaluated positively rather than negatively in the FTA/EPA sub-frame (8 to 2). Thus, not only did trade and the FTA/EPA generate significant coverage, both were significantly more positively evaluated than economic issues in general.

If we turn to the external politics sub-frame, we can see a similar neutral/positive evaluative profile. We found a total of 296 articles within the external politics sub-frame, and roughly 80 per cent of these items were evaluated as neutral. Of the remaining 20 per cent, 42 were evaluated positively, and 19 negatively. In

other words, non-neutral items were more than twice as likely to be evaluated positively as negatively. In each of the cases of trade, FTA/EPA and external politics, a significant majority of items were neutrally reported, but where this was not the case, a positive evaluation was at least twice as likely as a negative evaluation.

Elite interviewees also identified the FTA/EPA issue as one of the most important issues for the relationship, but negativity and exasperation was more evident, especially within the business cohort. The significance of the EU as a diplomatic and normative actor also came through very clearly in the interviews, but with the elite interviewee responses being more strongly and consistently positive, both about the type of diplomatic/normative actor the EU is, and the type of actor that it could and should become.

So, we can say that the print media identify both trade and normative power as important, and that, overall, coverage of both issues tended to be neutral/positive. We can also say that elite interviewees consistently identified trade issues and the EU's normative power as highly significant, although the views expressed were critical with regard to trade, and complimentary with regard to normative power.

Of course, one explanation for this correlation between the content of the print media and the views of the elites could be that the elites simply consume the Japanese print media, and their views are shaped and influenced by its content. However, we found that although elites often did use Japanese media sources to find information about the EU, they were at least as likely to find this information from other sources. While some interviewees got their information from media sources within Japan, many more relied on media and non-media sources in other parts of the world. We categorized elite interviewees with regard to their sources of information about the EU in three ways: those who relied mostly on Japanese-language sources for their information (4/24), those who relied mostly on non-Japanese language sources for their information (12/24), and those who used a combination of both (8/24). Using this schematic, we can see that 20 out of 24 elite interviewees either relied mostly on non-Japanese sources or consulted both Japanese and non-Japanese sources, meaning that 5 out of 6 elite interviewees were using substantial information sources outside of Japan to frame their opinions of the EU.

This is a positive sign, in that it suggests that two of the elements we analyzed, the print media and elites, give the EU a significant profile. They are also positively inclined towards the EU, although, of course, more positive about

its trade and normative potential than its general economic profile at present. Equally importantly, elites have not arrived at this perception of the significance of the EU simply by consuming information from the Japanese media. Various other sources contribute to the elite perspective that the EU is significant, and that this potential is going largely unfulfilled. The perceptions evident in the Japanese print media and through elite interviews are similar, in that they identify trade and normative issues as important, and view them in a somewhat positive light. This suggests that both elites and those who almost exclusively consume the Japanese print media are using different sources of information to reach similarly positive conclusions about the EU.

4. EU-Japan relations: a brief overview of recent developments

By way of contextualization, a brief overview of recent developments in EU-Japan relations is provided, including a particular focus on the two issues that dominate our findings: prospects for an EU-Japan FTA/EPA, and the perception of the EU as a significant normative and diplomatic power. At the Ninth Japan-EU Summit in 2000, Japan and the EU jointly declared a “Decade of Japan-Europe Co-operation” to commence from 2001. Both parties affirmed their intention to translate the Japan-EU partnership into coordinated policies and concrete actions. An “Action Plan for EU-Japan Co-operation: Shaping Our Common Future” was adopted at the Tenth Japan-EU Summit in 2001. The Action Plan had four main objectives: promoting peace and security, strengthening the economic and trade partnership, coping with global and societal challenges, and bringing together people and cultures (EEAS, 2001). This Action Plan was intended to operate for ten years.

In 2012, the EU and Japan respectively accounted for 22.9 per cent and 8.3 per cent of world GDP (CIA World Factbook, 2012) and 16 per cent and 6 per cent of world trade (World Trade Organization, 2012). In the same year, the EU-27 countries imported 67 billion euros worth of goods from Japan and exported 48 billion euros worth to Japan (European Commission, 2012, p. 5). However, the domestic market in Japan is less open to imports than the EU market, with imports as a share of domestic demand reaching 17 per cent in the EU and only 6 per cent in Japan (Copenhagen Economics, 2009, p. 6). The bilateral trade relationship between the EU and Japan is important for both economies, although arguably more important for Japan. For the EU, Japan is ranked sixth among its import partners (4% of EU imports) and sixth among its export destinations (3.2% of EU

exports). Conversely, for Japan, the EU is ranked third most significant import partner (10% of imports) and also third most significant export partner (12% of exports), after the US and China (European Commission, 2012, pp. 5–6).

To mark the tenth anniversary of the Action Plan, an attempt was made in 2011 to inject fresh momentum into EU-Japan relations. In the Joint Press Statement issued after the May 2011 Summit, leaders agreed to start the process for parallel negotiations for:

- a deep and comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA)/Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), addressing all issues of shared interest to both sides including tariffs, non-tariff measures, services, investment, Intellectual Property Rights, competition and public procurement; and
- a binding agreement, covering political, global and other sectoral co-operation in a comprehensive manner, underpinned by their shared commitment to fundamental values and principles.

Summit leaders decided, to this end, that the two sides would start discussions with a view to defining the scope and level of ambition of both negotiations, with such scoping to be carried out as soon as possible (Council of the European Union, 2011).

Despite this agreement on a scoping exercise to determine the nature and extent of FTA/EPA negotiations, the scoping exercise got off to a slow start, and for a time it remained an open question as to whether it would be concluded before any 2012 summit (Falletti, 2011). There is, of course, a diplomatic imperative to demonstrate progress at annual summits, and sometimes also to demonstrate sufficient progress that summits can actually take place. It has always been possible that the scoping exercise would be symbolically concluded, while serious differences of opinion would remain which would carry over into the commencement of negotiations proper. On 31 May 2012, the European Commission announced that it had finally ended its ‘scoping exercise’ for a deep and comprehensive free trade agreement with Japan, but the 27 trade ministers, who met the same day in Brussels, did not give the Commission a mandate to open formal negotiations. Trade Commissioner Karel De Gucht noted at the time: “We are not there yet” (d’Imécourt, 2012). Eventually, the European Union decided to begin the negotiations at a meeting of its trade ministers in November 2012. These negotiations towards an EPA/FTA were formally launched in March 2013. However, the negotiations commenced on condition that the process could be suspended after a year if Japan refuses to eliminate a range of non-tariff trade barriers. EU Trade Commissioner Karel De Gucht has said he believes it will take three to four years to conclude the envisioned EPA (*The Japan Times*, 2013).

5. EU-Japan relations: significant untapped trade potential

Summit outcome documents issued by the two parties in the past decade have frequently referred to shared values, common security interests, and significant untapped trade potential. All of these observations are true, but there is an appreciation that the relationship is not developing at the pace that it should, with relations at best characterized as stable, and at worst as stagnant. There is also a sense in which EU-Japan trade relations are being eclipsed by increases in Japan's trade with ASEAN, China and South Korea, and in the EU's trade with China, Russia and Turkey. The fact that South Korea recently successfully concluded an FTA with the EU reinforces a suspicion that Japan has been sluggish in its FTA/multilateral trade diplomacy, and that this is hurting the more competitive, export-oriented sectors of Japanese business (Falletti, 2011).

Nevertheless, the EU-Japan relationship does have vast untapped economic potential. It is estimated that EU exports to Japan could increase by 23 per cent, or 14 billion euros, if tariffs were abolished. The largest gains from tariff dismantling would occur in agricultural and processed foods exports. However, EU exports could increase by almost 29 billion euros if the cost of non-tariff measures (NTMs) in Japan were reduced to the fullest possible extent. The largest trade gains from NTM reduction would occur in the chemicals (including pharmaceuticals) sector, followed by motor vehicles and medical equipment. It is also calculated that fairer access to public procurement opportunities could generate a further 2.6 billion euros for the EU (Copenhagen Economics, 2009). Conversely, Japan's exports to the EU would increase by nearly 30 per cent, or 25 billion euros, as a result of tariff dismantling in the EU, with by far the largest gains occurring in motor vehicle exports (16 billion euros). Japan's potential gains from maximum NTM reduction in the EU are estimated at 28 billion euros. Here the gains are also mostly generated in the motor vehicle sector, followed by chemicals and electronics goods (Copenhagen Economics, 2009, pp. 8–9).

From a European perspective, NTMs must be reduced to ensure that the EU gains from any trade agreements. However, tackling these NTMs poses a challenge for highly developed economies like Japan and the EU, which have extensive and sophisticated domestic regulatory regimes in place. First, tariffs are measurable whereas NTMs are harder to quantify; that makes negotiations less transparent. Second, tariffs are bilateral whereas reductions of NTMs are often multilateral; other countries may free-ride on the benefits of NTM reduction. Third, NTM reductions are difficult without domestic reforms, and

could entail domestic regulation issues that are not normally negotiated within a bilateral trade framework, or that could easily be circumvented through new domestic regulation (Copenhagen Economics, 2009, p. 13).

It will require strong political will and administrative creativity to come to an agreement on meaningful NTM reductions. The EU is not confident that in its weakened state the present Japanese governing coalition has the will or the capacity to push through the necessary reforms. As we saw earlier, the EU has been negotiating quite firmly, first by only agreeing to a scoping exercise last year, and then after the Commission announced that the scoping exercise was complete, stressing that there was some way to go before the Council of Ministers could recommend the opening of negotiations. There is also the question of economic priorities. It is becoming increasingly apparent that DG Trade prefers to focus on negotiating far-reaching FTAs with fast-growing emerging markets, such as India, Singapore, Malaysia or Indonesia (Falletti, 2011). Those markets offer better business opportunities in the long run to EU firms than a developed market like Japan, according to the Commission's paper *Global Europe*, adopted in 2006 (European Commission, 2006, p. 2).

It was hoped that the election of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) in 2009, and the enactment of the Lisbon Treaty, together with the looming ten-year anniversary of the Action Plan, would herald a fresh start and inject new life and momentum into the relationship. However, there has been a succession of negative developments on both sides. There has been a global recession which has affected both polities, allied to the sovereign debt crisis in Europe. In Japan the early optimism about the DPJ dissipated, culminating in the return to power of the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan in December 2012. Also, of course, the 3/11 triple disaster has impacted significantly on the resources and energy that Japan is able to devote to re-invigorating the partnership. From a negative perspective, then, neither Japan nor the EU views the other as an urgent priority, and presently there is no obvious reason to be optimistic that the current economic stalemate can be substantially ameliorated in the short- to medium-term. It has proved quite difficult simply to launch trade negotiations, and successful negotiations will also take significant time. As is illustrated below in more detail, economic issues dominate the discussion of EU-Japan relations in the Japanese print media, and trade negotiations feature prominently in the concerns of Japanese elites. The Japanese media focuses on the sovereign debt crisis, the implications of this crisis for Japan and for international trade, and the prospects for an EU-Japan FTA/EPA. The EU tends to be characterized in a negative way when economic issues are discussed in the media, and in elite interviews the business elite, in particular, was quick to characterize the relationship as stagnant.

5.1 Framing, state of the relationship and key issues

The media project methodology categorized EU news reports according to five frames—economy, politics, social affairs, environment, and development. The overall percentages by frame were as follows: economy (64%), politics (25%), social affairs (7%), environment (2.5%), and development (1.5%). There was an overarching consistency across the three newspapers. In every paper, the frames appeared in identical ranking order: economics generated the most items for all three papers, followed by politics, social affairs, and so on. Overall, there were roughly 2.5 times as many economic items as there were about politics, and the political and economic frames combined dominated the other categories: the combined percentage figure for the *Nikkei* was 9 per cent, for the *Yomiuri* 89.5 per cent, and for the *JT* 83 per cent. As a result of this dominance of these two frames, it is necessary to move to the sub-frame level of analysis for economics and politics in order to get a clearer sense of the content of the various EU-related items.

Six economic sub-frames were identified: business/finance, trade, industry, state of economy, agriculture and energy. The state of economy sub-frame accounted for the largest proportion (56%) of economic items, followed by the business/finance sub-frame and then trade, which accounted for 19.5 per cent and 16.5 per cent of the economic items respectively. Energy (5.5%), industry (1.5%) and agriculture (1%) were the least identified economic sub-frames. The main state of economy sub-frame issues discussed were the sovereign debt crisis, the state of the world economy, and the euro exchange rate. The main issues discussed within the business/finance sub-frame were investment and banking, while for trade these were the implications of the sovereign debt crisis for international trade and the potential for an FTA/EPA between Japan and the EU.

The EU-Japan relationship was consistently regarded as important by each of the four interview cohorts, each of which also anticipated that the relationship will remain important in the future. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not important at all and 5 is very important, respondents accorded the current significance of the EU an average rating of 3.8, rising to 3.9 in the future (see Fig. 2). Only the business cohort saw the relationship becoming less important in the future, and then only by a small margin. When asked to describe the current state of the EU-Japan relationship, three-quarters of respondents conceived of it as stable. The business cohort was again a significant outlier in viewing the relationship as stagnant, with one-half of respondents characterizing the relationship in this way (see Fig. 3).

Figure 2. Perceived importance of the EU currently and in the future

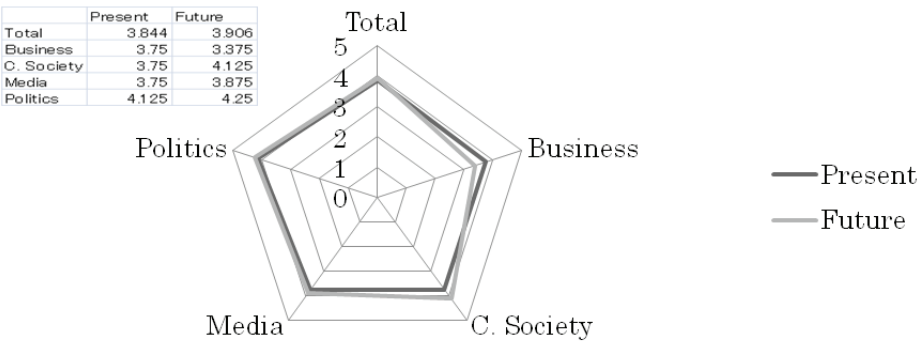
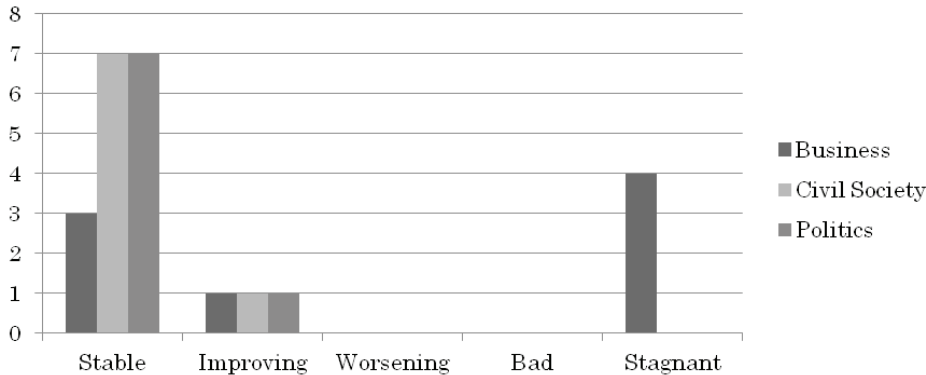


Figure 3. Current state of EU-Japan relations



Importantly, the two issues that elite respondents felt had the most direct impact on EU relations were the sovereign debt crisis and the prospects for an EU-Japan FTA/EPA. There was a widely held perception that the eurozone crisis is one of the main reasons why the value of the yen is so high, which in turn makes it difficult for Japan to recover economically. There was also again a widely held perception that Japan’s difficulties with regard to the successful conclusion of trade agreements are putting Japanese businesses at a competitive disadvantage.

When asked what issues should be kept in mind when Japan is developing trade or government policy towards the EU, the policy recommendations offered by interviewees were diverse, often contradictory and mostly general rather than concrete. Five interviewees felt that Japan should adopt a tough position in FTA/ EPA negotiations, whilst four felt that Japan should be more flexible, and not waste this important opportunity. Other individuals argued that Japan should alternatively push for a regional trade bloc, or join the TPP. The fact that there

was a rough balance between those that think Japan should be tougher, and those that think Japan should be more conciliatory in trade negotiations itself illustrates the difficulty of securing agreement. The fact that some individuals argued for trade possibilities other than those with the EU also suggests that there is a lack of clarity among Japanese elites over the way forward for Japanese trade policy in general, and EU-Japan trade relations in particular.

6. EU-Japan relations: significant untapped normative potential

As well as having significant untapped trade economic potential, the relationship is also perceived as having significant untapped normative and diplomatic power potential (Barroso, 2012). In his pioneering article on the normative power of the EU, Ian Manners (2002) argues that for the EU, normative power is grounded in ideas and norms, such as liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law. These ideas and norms serve as an agenda-setting example to other states; the EU seeks to diffuse these norms, and encourage other states to emulate it (Manners, 2002, pp. 238–242). For the purposes of this article, we will use the term normative power in a more general sense to refer to the character and attractiveness of these European ideas and norms, the diplomatic strategies deployed to promote and diffuse these ideas and norms, and the type of agenda that polities like the EU and Japan might adapt to implement these ideas and norms.

Across the three newspapers we found 300 articles which discussed the EU as a normative international political actor. These politics articles were more likely both to feature the EU as the main actor and to evaluate the EU more positively than were articles on economics. High Representative Ashton had a high profile in these articles, and, again, articles featuring Ashton were also more likely to feature the EU as the main actor, and to evaluate Ashton/the EU in a positive way. These 300 articles also referred to a highly impressive range of normative activities undertaken by the EU in a number of different countries and regions. During the period of the study, the EU rigorously applied conditionality-based human rights diplomacy to its dealings with potential members of the EU such as Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey, and to partnership countries such as Belarus and the Ukraine. The EU monitored elections in Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Southern Sudan, and Uganda, and criticized the human rights records of countries such as China, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan. The EU frequently applied diplomatic and human rights pressure in a number of “Arab Spring” countries,

such as Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Tunisia. The EU played a significant leadership role in non-proliferation diplomacy with Iran, actively contributed to the Middle East process, and dispensed disaster relief aid to Japan. Across all of these dimensions, and in all of these places, the significance of the EU as a normative actor was undeniable, and was strongly reflected in coverage of the EU in the Japanese print media.

This emphatic recognition of the EU as a normative actor was also evident in the elite interviews, in which significant numbers of interviewees categorized the EU as a great power in the normative and diplomatic domains. Interviewees also identified the EU as a leader, and argued that the EU's leadership role is most significant in the area of human rights. For all of these reasons, across both the media analysis and elite interviews, it is clear that in Japan the EU is considered to be a significant diplomatic and normative power.

Furthermore, over the last decade, Brussels and Tokyo have undertaken numerous successful joint normative initiatives, and established bilateral dialogue forums to deal with international non-proliferation, and hard and soft security issues. These have included:

- Agreeing to jointly promote the reform of the Conventional Weapons Protocol on anti-personnel landmines;
- Supporting the conclusion of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT);
- Signing an agreement on universal adherence to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty;
- Jointly supporting implementation of the principles and objectives for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament;
- Promoting the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and the abolition of anti-personnel landmines through joint support for the Ottawa Convention of 1997 and the November 2002 International Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation;
- Engaging in joint peacekeeping and peace-building initiatives;
- Holding European-Japanese seminars, training and workshops on post-conflict nation-building in Afghanistan, Cambodia, and a number of African countries;
- Holding regular joint training sessions for UN peacekeepers; engaging, since July 2002, in periodic consultations on terrorism and counter-terrorism co-operation;
- Joint efforts to support the economic and social development of the

Palestinian people, through Japan's contribution to the EU's PEGASE mechanism;

- Co-operation on security, reintegration, and development assistance in Afghanistan, including the establishment of a police training centre;
- Close co-operation on counter-piracy for the safety of maritime navigation off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden;
- Joint promotion of Tajikistan-Afghanistan border management and cross-border co-operation in 2011/2012.¹

However, although this list is quite impressive, critics would still argue that there has been no defining project or projects commensurate with the resources both polities could potentially deploy, separately or jointly, in support of a genuinely comprehensive normative power agenda.

Here, again, from a negative perspective there is a sense that continued drift, commensurate with the slow relative decline of both polities, is the most likely scenario, unless decisive diplomatic initiatives are taken.

6.1 Politics: international focus, positive perceptions, and centrality

Turning to the political frame, in the media the EU was perceived to be a more significant international political actor than a domestic one, was evaluated in a more positive light than when described in economics items, and was more likely to feature as the main actor. In contrast, the EU had a low profile as an environmental and development actor.

The politics-focused EU media stories were divided between internal and external aspects with the latter constituting two-thirds (66%) of the political coverage, with the remaining third (34%) covering internal EU political issues. Thus there was a significantly greater focus on the EU as an international political actor, rather than on political issues within the EU.

With regard to the external politics focus, the most important topics were the Libyan conflict (61 items), EU-Japan relations (36 items), China (21 item) and the capture of the alleged war criminal General Ratko Mladić (20 items). Other significant issues included the protests and political crackdown in Syria (14 items), and the mediation of the Israel/Palestine problem (11 items). Human rights diplomacy with Belarus (8 items), and Myanmar (6 items) also featured

¹ This list is drawn from Berkofsky, 2007. These initiatives were not referred to during our research project, as they pre-date it, but they nevertheless illustrate the actuality of and the potential for greater co-operation between the EU and Japan.

quite prominently, as did the ongoing Iranian nuclear impasse (17 items). Another consistent concern was the elections in Turkey, Turkey's apparent drift away from the EU, and the implications of this for EU enlargement (9 items). Finally, of course, there were numerous articles relating to EU-Japan relations in the context of the triple disaster, and ongoing negotiations concerning an FTA/EPA between the EU and Japan.

It should be noted that in all three newspapers, the EU did not feature prominently as an environmental actor (just 44 items) or a development actor (only 26 items). This is a sobering finding for those who believe the EU to be a significant environmental and development actor, and like to imagine that it is widely recognized as being so. It would seem that there is a very significant gap here between the EU's self-image as an environmental or development global leader, and the way that it is portrayed or represented in the Japanese print media. This low profile is even more apparent in the Japanese-language print media.

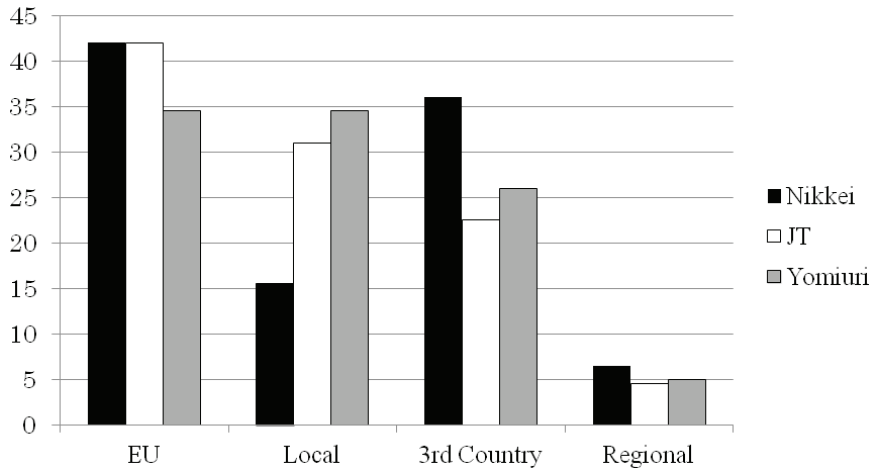
All news items reporting the EU were analyzed to determine the evaluation of the EU that they contained: neutral, positive or negative. As can be seen, all three of the monitored newspapers consistently evaluated the EU neutrally, with 76.5 per cent of all EU-related news items containing no explicit bias (with 8.5% being positive and 15% carrying negative evaluation).

Where reporting was not neutral in tone, negative evaluations were more common than positive ones, with a two-to-one ratio overall. However, it should be stressed that positivity and negativity were not equally distributed across the news frames. Importantly, items within the economic frame were nearly three times as likely to generate a negative rather than a positive evaluation, whilst those within the political frame were more than twice as likely to generate a positive rather than negative evaluation. This is an understandable finding. Many of the economic items, of course, focused on the sovereign debt crisis, and we can expect a reasonable proportion of these to be negative. So, to summarize, neutral evaluations dominated, but where bias was detected, the EU was consistently evaluated in a more negative manner in the economic frame, and in a more positive manner in the politics frame.

With regard to the focus of domesticity in the EU news items, across all newspapers, the 'EU' focus was the greatest, accounting for 41 per cent of the EU-related news items, indicating that the Japanese print media were primarily focusing on events within the EU itself, especially on the sovereign debt crisis. There was some variation between the economic and political frames, however, with the former displaying a greater emphasis on events occurring within the

EU, whilst in the politics frame there was a greater concern with events taking place outside the EU. Both the *JT* and the *Yomiuri* had a greater relative focus on the EU as a third country actor, with the third country focus accounting for 31 and 26 per cent of EU-related news items, respectively, in those newspapers. In the *Nikkei*, by contrast, the third country focus only accounted for 15.5 per cent of EU-related news items.

Figure 4. Focus of domesticity by paper, %



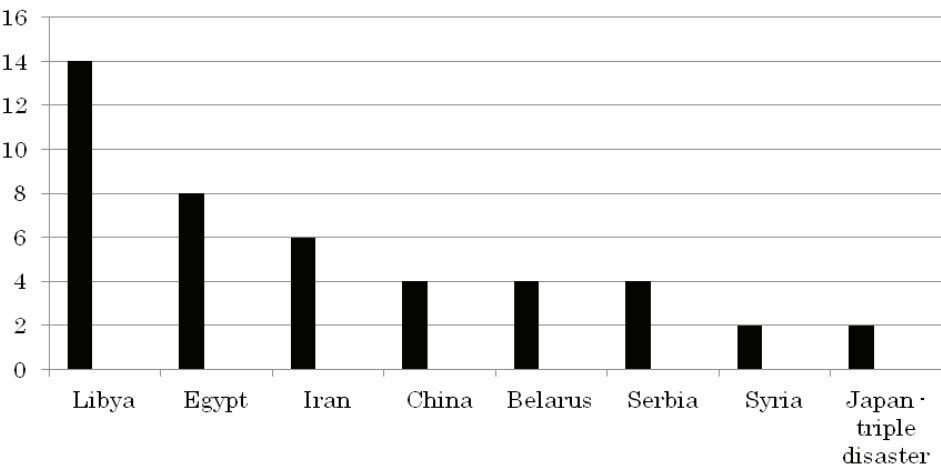
There was also a significant degree of consistency concerning centrality. Aggregating the data from each of the three sources, ‘minor’ was the dominant representation (45.5%), ‘major’ was the second most popular representation (35.5%), and references to the EU as a ‘secondary’ actor were the least common (19%). As we might expect, in absolute terms most of the items where the EU is identified as the main actor fall in the economic frame (reflecting the fact that the economic frame accounted for nearly two-thirds of all EU-related news items in the study). In pro rata terms, however, we find that in the two Japanese-language newspapers the EU is significantly more likely to be identified as the main actor in political rather than economic items. In the *Nikkei*, while politics items account for 18 per cent of all articles, 29 per cent of the articles in which the EU is identified as the main actor in the *Nikkei* fall within the political frame. The figures for the *Yomiuri* were 43.5 and 51 per cent, respectively.

6.2 High Representative Ashton: high visibility and positive evaluation

The research also considered who were the visible faces representing the EU in the news media. European Central Bank President Jean-Claude Trichet was the most visible with 90 mentions (reflecting again the high profile of the sovereign debt crisis), roughly twice as many as that for the next most prominent individual. High Representative Ashton (50 mentions) and Commission President Barroso (46 mentions) were the next highest-ranked figures, with Herman Van-Rompuy, the new President of the European Council, meriting 25 mentions, and Eurogroup Chief Jean-Claude Juncker 18. The fact that Baroness Ashton attracted significant attention is encouraging, and something of a pleasant surprise, given that her profile was typically quite modest in most of the other countries studied as part of this project.

Ashton was seen to be active in connection with a number of high-profile issues around the world. She was mentioned several times in connection with the Libyan conflict, with human rights diplomacy in Egypt, and nuclear diplomacy with Iran. She also made statements and/or engaged in human rights diplomacy with a number of countries including China, Belarus, Serbia, Taiwan, Thailand/ Cambodia, Bahrain, Syria, and Tunisia. In terms of degree of centrality, the EU was significantly more likely to be the main actor in items which mentioned Ashton. Overall, the EU was the main actor in 35.5 per cent of articles, but in articles that mentioned Ashton, this figure rose to 48 per cent. Interestingly, this trend was more pronounced in the Japanese-language newspapers than in the *JT*.

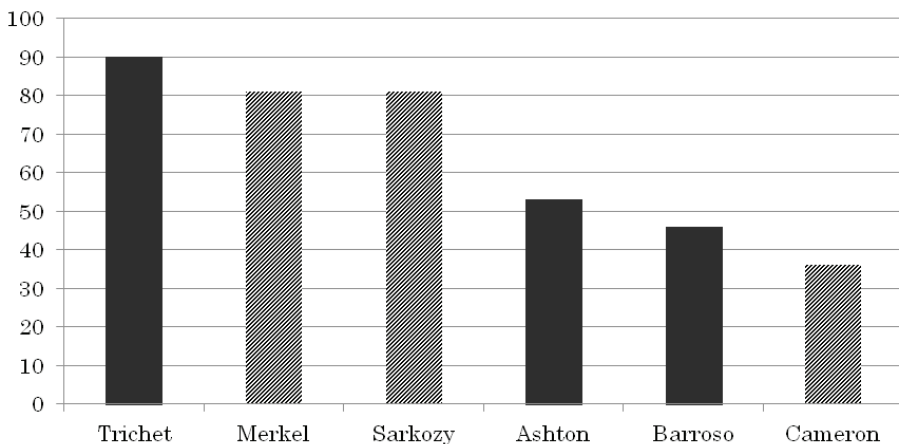
Figure 5. International issues HR Ashton was mentioned in connection with



With regard to items in which the EU and Ashton were mentioned, the evaluation was positive, something of a contrast to the general findings where the EU was twice as likely to receive a negative rather than a positive evaluation (and for items in the economic frame, the EU was three times as likely to receive a negative rather than a positive evaluation). Overall, 22 per cent of items which mentioned Ashton produced a positive evaluation, as opposed to 16 per cent which produced a negative one. Thus, items which featured the EU and Ashton were evaluated positively overall and significantly more positively than items that fell within the economic frame. Baroness Ashton, whether she knows it or not, has achieved a reasonably high and somewhat positive profile in the Japanese print media.

In terms of EU Member State leader visibility, the top rankings were taken by leaders of the traditional ‘Big Three’ of Britain, France, and Germany, and the ‘Five’ countries hit the most by the euro sovereign debt crisis (Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, and Spain). In this case, however, Merkel and Sarkozy, the leaders of the ‘Big Two’ were significantly more prominent than Cameron or the leaders of the aforementioned Five. This is mainly because the leaders of the Big Three, and the Big Two in particular, had been highly active across a range of issues, not only the debt crisis. It was also partly because there were changes of leadership in several of the Five. In terms of EU visibility, it is worth pointing out that if we merge the lists of EU institutional representatives and those of the EU Member States, Trichet leads, Ashton ranks fourth, and Barroso fifth, with all three mentioned more than Cameron. (While noting, of course, the news items selected for this dataset are all EU-related.)

Figure 6. Visibility of EU and Member State officials, merged



6.3 Elite opinion and EU normative power

To conclude on a positive note, the findings reported in this final section show that elite interviewees associated the EU with human rights and integration, overwhelmingly perceived the EU to be a great power, and considered the EU to be a substantial economic, diplomatic and normative power. Many considered the EU to be a leader in the domain of human rights, and suggested a number of joint initiatives that the EU and Japan could pursue together in the future.

When elite respondents were asked which three thoughts came to their minds when thinking about the EU, the most common images were: integration and community, the EU’s commitment to human rights and democracy, and the sovereign debt crisis. This is encouraging because it shows that despite the understandable focus on the sovereign debt crisis, substantial numbers of respondents continued to associate the EU even more with different, more normative and positive issues. When asked if they thought that the EU was a great power, 28 of 32 respondents replied positively; two-thirds felt that the EU was a great economic power. One-third also felt that the EU was a normative power and another third considered it a diplomatic power. In contrast, only two respondents felt that that the EU was a military power. We might have anticipated these findings with respect to economic and military power, but the fact that Japanese elites clearly recognized the EU as a normative and diplomatic power is welcome news. This supports the finding, noted earlier in this article, that the Japanese print media also frequently conceives of, and portrays the EU as a significant normative and diplomatic actor. Some specifics are shown in Figures 7 to 9.

Figure 7. Three spontaneous images of the EU

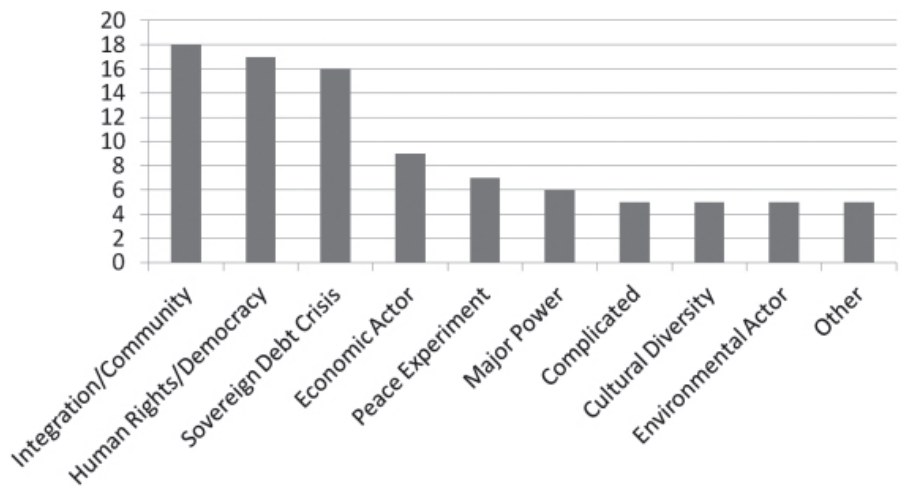


Figure 8. Is the EU a 'great power'?

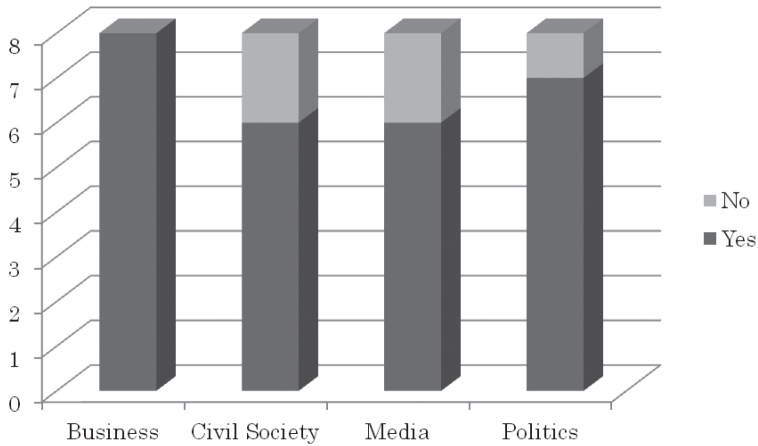
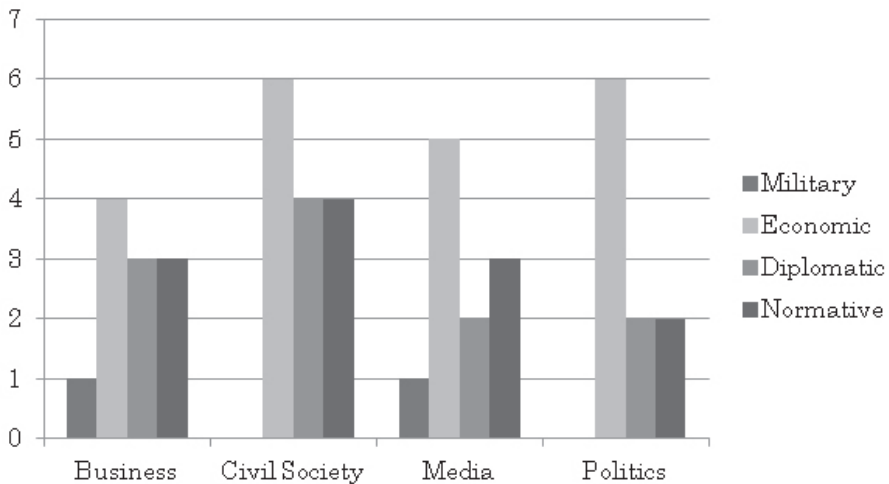
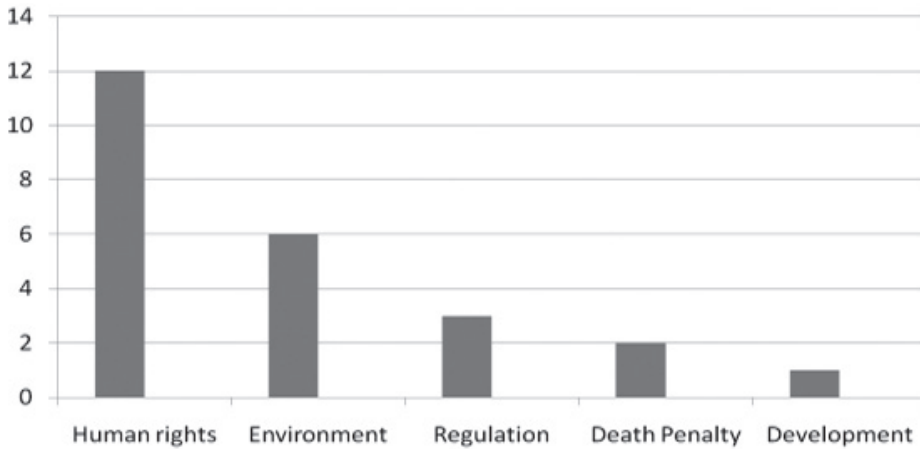


Figure 9. What type of 'great power'? Overall



When asked whether they considered the EU a leader in international politics, just over one-half of respondents felt that this was the case. What is more, there was a perception that when it does lead, the EU acts on issues that are most closely associated with normative power, such as human rights and the environment. The fact that the EU was also identified as a leader as well as a great power in the normative domain is further evidence of the EU's strong normative profile in Japan. As mentioned before, the EU was not often portrayed as an environmental or development leader in the Japanese print media, so it is interesting to note that the EU was recognized as an environmental leader by a substantial number of elite interviewees.

Figure 10. Which issues does the EU lead on?



Although, as shown above, elite opinion on trade issues was more critical and mixed, a number of interviewees suggested joint initiatives that could form part of the basis for a more substantial shared normative power agenda. With regard to the definition of normative power developed above, it was argued that there were a number of ways in which the EU acts as a role model for Japan. Japan should strive to emulate EU human rights standards in general, and more specifically should redouble its efforts to abolish the death penalty. It was also argued that Japan should de-regulate along the lines of the EU model, and embrace ISO standards. With regard to the development of civilian power initiatives, three interviewees argued for joint renewable energy initiatives. It was also suggested that Japan should be more proactive in general on conflict prevention, bringing it more in line with EU strategy, and more proactive in particular with regard to the case of Somalia, where it was suggested that the EU and Japan should expand their anti-piracy co-operation to land operations. It was also suggested that in the realm of post-conflict peacebuilding, the EU and Japan should develop a joint initiative on Security Sector Reform. Finally, it was argued that Japan should co-operate more with the EU on space programmes. We can therefore see that the notion of untapped diplomatic and normative potential suggested by Barroso had strong support among many of the elite interviewees.

7. Conclusion: overview of core findings

To conclude, we can see that the EU has a high profile in the Japanese print media, and that trade and normative issues feature prominently in this high profile. The EU's general economic profile is more likely to be evaluated negatively, and significant numbers of businessmen feel that the relationship is stagnant and possibly even in decline. Against this, however, we can say that trade ties between the two polities are significant—the EU and Japan are each other's seventh and third most important trade partners, respectively. There is vast untapped potential in the relationship, and it is possible that the scoping exercise will prove to be a productive stepping stone to an FTA/EPA. The Japanese media do not evaluate trade and FTA/EPA issues as negatively as general economic issues, and the EU-Japan relationship is seen as important and stable by most elite interviewees.

There is a positive perception of the EU as a normative international political actor. Roughly 300 newspaper articles refer to this normative definition of the EU's identity and influence. Articles on politics are more likely to feature the EU as the main actor, and are more likely to feature a positive evaluation of the EU. High Representative Ashton has a significant profile, and is also evaluated positively. The EU is identified as being active across a range of different normative activities in a variety of different countries and regions. The EU's high profile as a normative actor is undeniable, and comes through strongly in the print media. This finding is strongly reinforced in the elite interviews. Human rights and democracy promotion is one of the images most commonly associated with the EU, this association being more common than the association with the sovereign debt crisis. The EU is widely acknowledged as a normative and diplomatic great power, and as a leader on human rights issues. We can therefore say that there is a strong and recurring positive perception of the EU as a normative power in both the print media and elite interviews. To this we can add an impressive list of normative projects and initiatives prosecuted jointly by the EU and Japan.

Perhaps we should be satisfied with this state of affairs, and celebrate the fact that the relations between the EU and Japan are stronger than most international relationships around the world. And yet, for all the fact that relations are seen as stable and important, there is a nagging sense that relations could be significantly better than they already are, that important opportunities for trade and normative co-operation are being missed. It is clear that this view, most provocatively advanced by Barroso, is not an isolated, marginal, exaggerated and unrealistic

perspective. It is a perspective shared by those that highlight the trade significance and the normative identity of the EU so prominently in Japanese newspapers. It is a perspective shared by most of our elite interviewees, who are alternatively frustrated at missed economic opportunities, or hopeful that there can be greater normative co-operation in the future. In short, it is not unrealistic to imagine that relations could and should be better. The evidence therefore confirms that there is a legitimate puzzle here. The puzzle is that there is so much potential for increased trade and potential for increased normative co-operation going unfulfilled, despite the fact that this perception of such significant potential is so widely shared on both sides. The perceptions methodology adopted in this analysis allows us to recognize this important fact, and can hopefully serve as a platform from which to enhance relations between the EU and Japan.

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