

## ASEAN – JAPAN RELATIONS IN THE FIRST TWO DECADES OF THE 21ST CENTURY

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ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT
<b>Received:</b>	<b>11/3/2021</b>	ASEAN - Japan relations are one of the longest lasting relations in ASEAN's international relations network. On the basis of clarifying the forming factors, the article aims to analyze in depth the status of ASEAN - Japan relations in the first two decades of the twenty - first century, in order to evaluate the impacts of this relationship on the world, the region and Japan as well as future development prospects. The study uses the historical method to assess the evolution of the ASEAN - Japan relationship over the period, the logical method to evaluate the characteristics and impacts of this relationship, together with methods of statistics, analysis, comparison, and synthesis... Research results show that ASEAN - Japan relationship in the early years of the twenty-first century is a positive partnership, taking place in economy, political security, culture, human resource development, and solving global problems. The promotion of ASEAN - Japan cooperation brings benefits to not only the region but also Vietnam and is the basis for the development of a peaceful, stable and developed ASEAN.
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## QUAN HỆ ASEAN – NHẬT BẢN HAI THẬP NIÊN ĐẦU THẾ KỈ XXI

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO		TÓM TẮT
<b>Ngày nhận bài:</b>	<b>11/3/2021</b>	Quan hệ ASEAN – Nhật Bản là một trong những quan hệ lâu dài nhất trong mạng lưới quan hệ quốc tế của ASEAN. Trên cơ sở làm rõ những nhân tố hình thành, bài báo nhằm đi sâu phân tích thực trạng quan hệ ASEAN – Nhật Bản hai thập niên đầu thế kỉ XXI, từ đó, đánh giá về những tác động của mối quan hệ này đối với thế giới, khu vực và Nhật Bản cũng như triển vọng phát triển trong tương lai. Bài viết sử dụng phương pháp lịch sử thông qua việc xem xét sự tiến triển mối quan hệ ASEAN - Nhật Bản qua các thời kì, phương pháp logic nhằm nhận định, đánh giá về đặc điểm, tác động của mối quan hệ này cùng với việc sử dụng các phương pháp thống kê, phân tích, so sánh, tổng hợp... Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy quan hệ ASEAN – Nhật Bản trong những năm đầu thế kỷ XXI là mối quan hệ đối tác tích cực, diễn ra trên các lĩnh vực kinh tế, an ninh chính trị, văn hóa, phát triển nguồn nhân lực, giải quyết các vấn đề toàn cầu. Việc thúc đẩy quan hệ hợp tác ASEAN – Nhật Bản không chỉ là lợi ích của khu vực mà còn là lợi ích của Việt Nam và là cơ sở cho sự phát triển một ASEAN hòa bình, ổn định và phát triển.
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## 1. Introduction

ASEAN - Japan relationship is the relationship between Southeast Asian countries with a big country in Northeast Asia - Japan. This relationship has attracted the attention of leaders and scholars in Vietnam and abroad in many different fields such as economics, politics and security and socioculture. Vu Van Ha [1] clarified the nature, characteristics and development trends of three subjects (China, ASEAN and Japan) in the new context, assessed the impact of their relationship on Vietnam, and proposed policy solutions to Vietnam's bilateral and multilateral relations with the above-mentioned subjects. Vu Hien [2] analyzed the development of the ASEAN-Japan cooperation mechanism, thereby assessing the characteristics and role of this mechanism. Next, Nguyen Thanh Long [3] presented the cooperative relationship between ASEAN and the dialogue countries at different scales and levels, thereby affirming that in the coming time, ASEAN and other dialogue parties should further strengthen their efforts to bring economic-trade cooperation to a new level, a stage of substantive and more effective development in order to create favorable conditions for goods of ASEAN and other countries. Besides, in the economic field, Le Hoang Anh [4] clarified the effects of the Comprehensive Economic Agreement (AJCEP) on trade, investment and labor cooperation between ASEAN and Japan. In [5], Japan's Global Forum analyzed the challenges that Japan and ASEAN faced in the new era and predicted the development trend of this relationship. However, these studies only mention a certain number of aspects, have not gone into the comprehensive relationship between ASEAN and Japan in all of economic, political, cultural and social fields in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Therefore, on the basis of inheriting the work of previous authors, in this article, the author goes into deep solving a common research problem on ASEAN-Japan relations in the early 21st century, from which to draw important lessons for Vietnam in its current reform and regional integration.

## 2. Research method

This research uses the historical method and the logical method as the main research methods to present the process of formation and development of problems by typical events, dividing the development stage by historical milestones over time, thereby drawing generalized conclusions.

With historical methods, this study provides a comprehensive overview of the development process of ASEAN-Japan relations in the early twenty-first century through events, developments and its main results, clarifying conditions and features development and manifestation of the relationship. With the logic method, the relations of ASEAN and Japan are considered and studied in a general form, in order to assess the impacts and prospects of ASEAN-Japan relations, from there, draw important lessons learned for Vietnam in the country building work. In addition, the methods of statistics, synthesis and analysis are also applied to the article to have a more general view.

## 3. Results and discussion

### 3.1. Factors affecting ASEAN-Japan relations in the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century

#### 3.1.1. ASEAN - Japan relations at the end of the twentieth century

ASEAN and Japan established their first informal relationship in 1973 and were formalized in March 1977 with the establishment of the ASEAN-Japan Forum. Since then, the relationship between the two sides has grown in breadth and depth in many fields, positively contributing to peace and stability in Southeast Asia and Asia-Pacific.

*In term of economy*, since the 90s of last century, economic relations between ASEAN - Japan have taken place diversely in the fields of investment, trade and development aid. With the implementation of the export-oriented industrialization strategy, ASEAN has become an attractive investment destination for Japan. Japanese investment in ASEAN countries in the

1990s focused mainly on machinery manufacturing industries such as automobiles, motorcycles, household electrical appliances, electronic components, and semiconductors. In trade, Japan is an important trading partner of ASEAN, the proportion of processed goods, light industrial goods and manufacturing technology in ASEAN's export value to Japan has gradually increased. Increase, in volume, which creates conditions for ASEAN to penetrate and have a foothold in the Japanese market. Along with that, in terms of development aid, Japan considers ASEAN an important area in its Official Development Assistance (ODA) policy. From March 1981 to March 1987, Japanese investment more than doubled with a value of US \$ 14.324 billion [6, p.111].

*In term of politics – security*, after the Cold War, countries in Southeast Asia have to deal with many threats and challenges to traditional and non-traditional security. For the mutual benefit, Japan and ASEAN both find it necessary to have deeper coordination activities in the security field. Therefore, ASEAN has actively taken the initiative to form a regional security mechanism by proposing the establishment of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) to discuss political security issues in the region. The establishment of ARF not only creates opportunities for ASEAN and Japan to contribute to peace, stability and mutual understanding among countries in the Asia-Pacific region, but also facilitates ASEAN to take a leadership role in mapping out practices and mechanisms for maintaining security in the region [7, p.58].

*In term of culture*, cultural exchanges between ASEAN and Japan took place from the late 70s of the twentieth century after the Fukuda doctrine was announced. With Japan's policy of strengthening comprehensive relations with ASEAN in the 1990s, cultural cooperation and exchange between the two sides has been strengthened and strengthened. Through the ASEAN Cultural Fund, the ASEAN - Japan Exchange Project and the Asia Center under the Japan Foundation... many activities to enhance understanding between the two sides have been carried out such as cultural exchange activities, staff exchange, intellectual exchange, and conservation of important cultural assets. This has practical significance because mutual understanding is an important factor that contributes to strengthening the relationship between the two sides.

It can be seen that the economic, political and cultural relationship that took place deeply in the late twentieth century is an important basis for the development of ASEAN - Japan relations in the new century.

### 3.1.2. Regional and international context after Cold War

#### *International context*

The international context in the early twenty-first century has seen many changes, affecting the ASEAN-Japan relationship. *Firstly*, the end of the Cold War associated with the collapse of the Ianta bipolar order created fundamental changes in the international relations landscape in general and the Asia-Pacific region in particular in the decade 90. Peace and development are the main trends in international relations, at the same time, the strong development of the scientific and technological revolution together with the trend of multi-polarization and globalization has created opportunities conducive to progression in international relations life. *Secondly*, after the Cold War, although world peace was strengthened, conflicts, civil wars and disputes still took place tense in many parts of the world such as Africa, Middle East, Central Asia... with the problems of Israel - Palestine, Syria, Iran nuclear... That threatens the stability and security of almost every nation in the world. In addition, other uncertainties such as terrorism, national extremism, separatism, arms smuggling problems, territorial sea disputes and international crime are also increasing in the world [8, p.101].

#### *Regional context*

The Asia-Pacific region in general and Southeast Asia in particular have also had great changes. *Firstly*, resolving the Cambodian issue ended the tense confrontation between ASEAN and the group of Indochina countries. After decades of being divided into two rival groups, Southeast Asian countries all want peace and stability for economic construction and

development. The Paris peace agreement on Cambodia was signed in October 1991, opening a great opportunity for real peace in the region. In July 1992 Vietnam and Laos signed a friendly agreement and cooperation in Southeast Asia (TCA), paving the way for joining ASEAN in 1995 and 1997. Also in 1997, Myanmar joined ASEAN. With Cambodia becoming the 10th member on April 30, 1999, the image of ASEAN including all countries in Southeast Asia as in the 1967 Bangkok declaration came true, marking a significant development of this organization in the 1990s. *Secondly*, besides the basic advantages, the regional situation after Cold War also contains significant challenges in the field of political security as well as economics. In terms of political security, threats and challenges emerge from the changing relationship and strategic balance among regional powers. The United States and the Soviet Union ended their military presence in the Philippines and Vietnam created a "Power Gap" for other powers, especially China and Japan, to increase their influence in the region. Along with that, in terms of economy, compared to the world, by the early 1990s, most ASEAN countries were still at a relatively low economic starting point. Due to the impact of the regionalization trend, the world's major economic links were likely to become closed markets, causing disadvantages for economies that are closely dependent on markets like ASEAN countries. Meanwhile, China, India with abundant labor and resources and a series of transition economies in Eastern Europe have become formidable opponents of ASEAN countries in attracting foreign investment.

Faced with new changes in the regional and world situation, ASEAN countries found their existence and development inseparable from the relationship with countries outside the region, thus strengthening the relations with countries such as Australia, Canada, Korea, the US, New Zealand. At the same time, on the basis of a common foreign policy, ASEAN as well as member countries in particular continue to strengthen relations with Japan - a partner ASEAN's critically important and a factor influencing regional political security.

### *3.1.3. Cooperation needs of ASEAN and Japan*

For ASEAN, expanding cooperation with Japan, ASEAN will take advantage of development opportunities in economy, politics, culture and society. About economy, after the Cold War, the trend of economic development has become a priority for all countries. Therefore, it can be said that economics is an important driving force to promote ASEAN's participation in the East Asian cooperation process despite doubts about political security. Politically, Japan is a big neighbor, influencing the security situation of ASEAN, especially after the Cold War. Therefore, promoting relations with Japan, ASEAN not only avoids external security pressures but also creates a favorable peaceful environment to be able to build and develop, thereby enhancing ASEAN's position in the region and around the world.

For Japan, cooperation with ASEAN is completely suitable for the development of Japan because ASEAN is not only a geographically favorable area (not too far from Japan) but also in terms of labor potential and resources. Therefore, Japan considers its relationship with ASEAN a breakthrough to expand its influence in Asia - Pacific as well as around the world. The Japanese Foreign Aid Charter (ODA) in the early 1990s of the twentieth century affirmed that "Southeast Asia is one of the priority areas" [1, p.199]. Asean is a solid springboard for Japan to become a major regional political country, as Japanese researchers say: "To become a regional leader and play a global role, Japan needs to developing special relations with ASEAN countries" [2].

Thus, in the current context, with strong economic development, Southeast Asia is becoming a region of strategic importance to the world powers, including Japan. Therefore, strengthening ASEAN-Japan relations in the current context also brings many benefits and is a reasonable choice in terms of policies of both sides.

### ***3.2. Situation of ASEAN-Japan relations in the first two decades of the 21st century***

In the first two decades of the 21st century, ASEAN-Japan relations took place deeply and strongly in all fields of economy, politics, security, culture, education...

#### ***3.2.1. Economic relations***

Joint Declaration on Comprehensive Economic Partnership ASEAN - Japan (AJCEP) was adopted at the ASEAN-Japan Summit in Phnom Penh in November 2002, towards economic cooperation in the areas of trade and investment, science - technology, human resource development and tourism. Then, at the ASEAN - Japan Summit in Bali in October 2003, the two sides signed "Framework for Comprehensive Economic Partnership between ASEAN - Japan". In 2005, the two sides started negotiations to form the ASEAN - Japan Free Trade Area (AJFTA). Accordingly, the AJFTA were completed in 2012 for Japan and 6 ASEAN countries and by 2017 for new ASEAN members. The formation of AJFTA is assessed as "a positive response of Japan to the formation of the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area, while also demonstrating ASEAN's balance policy in relation to the two platforms. the largest economy in the region" [3, pp.28-36]. The Agreement on economic partnership between ASEAN member countries and Japan, referred to as the Comprehensive Economic Partnership (AJCEP), signed in April 2008 marked an important development step in ASEAN - Japan relations and was the basis for the formation of the ASEAN - Japan free trade area. The Agreement has contributed to further strengthening economic relations between ASEAN and Japan and creating a larger and more efficient market, along with greater opportunities for the region.

#### ***Trade***

According to 2000 data, the bilateral trade between ASEAN and Japan reached 129 billion USD, in 2002 reached 107 billion USD, accounting for 14.2% of the total 750 billion USD of Japan's total foreign trade in the year, just behind the US (3.4%), ahead of the EU (13.9%) and China (13.5%) [1, p.217]. Countries like Indonesia, followed by Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand are major Japanese exporters in ASEAN. The export products with the highest growth rate are organic compounds, plastics, semi-automatic electronic components, electric measuring devices, auto parts... As for imports, partners having the strongest growth in the Japanese market among ASEAN countries include the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia. The main products imported from Japan are petroleum, natural gas, office machinery, garment...

The turnover of bilateral trade between Japan and ASEAN in 2007 - 2008 increased sharply by 22.1%, respectively, from 173.1 billion USD to 214.4 billion USD. Export turnover of ASEAN to Japan increased 22.8% from 85.1 billion USD in 2007 to 104.5 billion USD in 2008. Import and export turnover to ASEAN from Japan during the period also increased from 87.9 billion USD to 106.8 billion USD, equivalent to an increase of 21.5% [9, p.25]. By 2013, bilateral trade between Japan and ASEAN reached 229 billion USD compared to 2000. Japan is ASEAN's third largest importer and exporter after China and the EU. Among ASEAN countries, Japan is currently the largest trading partner of Thailand (67.6 billion USD), Indonesia (52.6 billion USD) and Malaysia (46.8 billion USD). In addition, more than 32.5% of products made by Japanese companies operating in ASEAN are consumed within ASEAN, making Japan the leading supplier of products in ASEAN. Exports of ASEAN goods to Japan reached (turnover value of 117.7 billion USD, of which Indonesia (32.2 billion USD), Malaysia (29.6 billion USD) and Thailand (22.5 billion USD) were the three largest exporters in ASEAN to Japan. Most of the products exported to Japan are semi-finished products, spare parts (accounting for 66% of total export value). Japan export to ASEAN mostly machinery and transport equipment. In particular, ASEAN consumes nearly 80% of re-exported vehicle products and 85% of bus products exported from Japan to Asia in general, of which Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia were the largest import markets [4, pp.22 - 23]. Japan is currently ASEAN's fourth largest trading partner with two-way trade in 2018 reaching 231.7 billion USD [10].

*Investment*

Japan has been the main investor of ASEAN for many years. Japanese companies have invested heavily in and established car and electronics manufacturing facilities in Thailand and Vietnam. Especially after the AJCEP was signed and took effect, many Japanese enterprises began to expand their supply networks to countries such as Laos and Cambodia to take the advantages of cheap fuel and labor such as the expansion of regional supply networks, in response to treaty origin conditions.

Among the top 10 investors accounting for more than 70% of FDI inflows into ASEAN, Japan has always been in the leading position for many years. In 2011, it was 9 billion USD, equivalent to 10% of the total FDI inflows into ASEAN. In 2012, it was 23 billion USD equivalent to 21% and in 2013 it was 22 billion USD, accounting for 19%. In 2014, Japan's FDI into ASEAN also ranked first with 15 billion USD (accounting for 19.8%), and in 2015 it was 17 billion USD (accounting for 14.5%). Nearly 50% of Japan's investment flows into ASEAN mainly concentrated in the manufacturing sector, up from \$ 6.9 billion in 2014 to \$ 8.4 billion in 2015 [6, p.25]. In 2018, Japan's direct investment in ASEAN reached 21 billion USD, making it the third largest FDI investor in ASEAN [10].

Thus, after more than 10 years of taking effect, the positive effects of the AJCEP have brought many good results for the cooperation relationship between ASEAN and Japan, as stated by Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi during the 2002 meeting in Singapore on the initiative on a comprehensive cooperation framework between ASEAN and Japan, the foundation of the ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership: *"I believe Japan relations - ASEAN has reached a new level of maturity and understanding. In the twenty-first century, as sincere and open partners, Japan and ASEAN will strengthen cooperation under a basic concept of "working together, moving forward" [4, p.29].*

*3.2.2. Political - diplomacy and security relations**About politics - diplomacy*

In the speech *"Japan and ASEAN - A Sincere and Open Partnership"* read in Singapore on January 14, 2002, Prime Minister Koizumi wished: *"Japan and ASEAN countries have more understanding, trust each other more and build a more peaceful and prosperous region"*. In order to realize that aspiration, according to Mr. Koizumi, both efforts must be made including: (1) Carry out domestic reforms together towards prosperity; (2) Continue and strengthen cooperation for the sake of stability; (3) Implement the Japan-ASEAN comprehensive economic cooperation initiative; (4) Convene the East Asia high-level meeting; (5) Strengthening Japan-ASEAN security cooperation including transnational issues such as terrorism; (6) Expand East Asian cooperation based on Japan and ASEAN relations [11].

In just five years in power (2000-2005), Prime Minister Koizumi made seven diplomatic visits and conducted eight talks with ASEAN leaders. The result was a series of documents signed by both sides during that time. The Tokyo Declaration on *"A dynamic and enduring ASEAN-Japan partnership in the new millennium"* together with the *"ASEAN - Japan Action Plan"* at the ASEAN - Japan Summit held in December 2003 in Tokyo was important moves to promote cooperation between the two sides. At the ASEAN-Japan Summit held on November 18, 2011 in Bali (Indonesia), the leaders of the two sides issued a joint statement on strengthening the ASEAN-Japan strategic partnership for prosperity and implement the ASEAN - Japan Action Plan for the period 2011 – 2015 [1].

In January 2020, Minister of Foreign Affairs Motegi delivered a speech on the ASEAN Policy in Jakarta proposing three joint journeys of action between Japan and ASEAN: *"Together for creating people"*, *"Together building bodies institutions"* and *"accumulate our wisdom"*. The special ASEAN + 3 Summit on the Covid-19 response was held via a teleconference in April. Prime Minister Abe stated that his support for ASEAN countries is

based on three pillars, including the establishment of Japan - ASEAN Center on Public Health Emergency and New Disease [12].

On the regional and international level, ASEAN and Japan also have many similarities. In a joint statement at the 10th ASEAN - Japan Summit (1/2007), the two sides expressed their views calling on North Korea to dismantle its nuclear weapons and nuclear programs, and implement Resolution 1695 and 1718 of the United Nations Security Council on this matter. Like China, Japan supports ASEAN's role in cooperation mechanisms such as ARF, ASEAN +3, East Asia Cooperation... Rizal Sukma - Deputy Director of Center for International Strategic Studies (Indonesia) commented on the ASEAN-Japan relationship: "This is a good and effective relationship over the past three decades. It is no exaggeration to say that the ASEAN-Japan relationship has become the closest and deepest in ASEAN's external relations with other partners" [5, p.33].

*About security*

Over the past years, the assurance of regional peace and security of ASEAN countries has been implemented through mechanisms such as: The Declaration of Southeast Asia as a Zone of Peace, Free and Neutral (ZOPFAN) in 1971; The Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) in 1976; The 1995 Southeast Asia Regional Nuclear Weapons Treaty; Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) 2002. In addition, the ASEAN and Japan dialogue relations have also been implemented through mechanisms including summits, ministerial conferences and associations. meeting of senior officials and experts, ASEAN regional open dialogue and cooperation frameworks such as ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN +3, East Asia Summit (EAS) and Conference ASEAN Defense Minister (ADMM +) [2].

Japan entered into the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation with Southeast Asia in July 2004 in Jakarta. Accordingly, Japan and ASEAN will respect each other's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. At the ASEAN-Japan Summit in November 2004, ASEAN - Japan also adopted the Joint Declaration on Cooperation to Combat Terrorism in response to the threat of terrorism in the region and around the world. In the area of maritime security cooperation, Japan has contributed to the organization of a seminar to establish the ASEAN maritime forum in September 2007 in Batam, Indonesia. The first, second and third ASEAN Maritime Forum were held in July 2010 in Indonesia, in August 2011 in Thailand and in October 2012 in Manila (Philippines).

In the issue of sovereignty disputes in the South China Sea between ASEAN countries and China, Japan has shown increasing special interest in an effort to end the tensions. Firstly, the prolonged tensions in the South China Sea are likely to lead to a larger conflict and disrupt sea traffic there. This especially has a negative impact on Japan's economic security because the East Sea is an important national sea route that prefers Japanese goods to major markets such as the European market and the markets of Southeast Asian countries. Second, Japan is also concerned that, after gaining sovereignty over most of the islands in the South China Sea, it is more likely that China will adopt such tactics to the East China Sea, where the South China Sea takes place sovereignty dispute between Japan and China. The tensions over maritime sovereignty are likely to cause a diplomatic and security crisis in relations between the Chinese and Japanese governments. Because of these concerns, Japan has shown great efforts in resolving the South China Sea disputes between China and ASEAN countries through multilateral forums. The Japanese government has repeatedly expressed concern over China's threat of hegemony at sea at ASEAN meetings and the Tokyo government has been candidly supporting countries claiming sovereignty in the South China Sea calling for preservation. peace and security in the region.

Thus, it can be seen that, in addition to increasingly close economic cooperation, Japan and ASEAN are also promoting further security and defense relations in the changing international context.

### 3.2.3. Culture and education relations

#### *Culture*

Cultural relations between ASEAN and Japan have been accelerated by bilateral efforts. Japanese Prime Ministers such as Obuchi and Koizumi have affirmed the need to strengthen Japan-ASEAN relations, including in the cultural sector.

In 2003, at the initiative of Prime Minister Koizumi, ASEAN and Japan launched the program "*Meeting Japan - ASEAN*" with the main content of cultural exchange activities organized in Japan and ASEAN countries. Japan has paid special attention to young people, future leaders, through the initiation of many cooperation activities with ASEAN youth. At the Second East Asia Summit held at CEBU (Philippines) in January 2007, Prime Minister Shio Abe proposed the initiative "*Japan - East Asia Student and Youth Exchange Program*". The initiative with a total budget of 315 million USD, funded by the ASEAN - Japan Integration Fund (JAIF), was implemented in 5 years. Accordingly, each year, 6,000 young people from ASEAN and the member countries participating in the East Asia summit are invited to visit Japan. As of 2013, JENESYS brought more than 14,000 young people from ASEAN to Japan and about 700 Japanese teenagers have visited ASEAN member countries to foster friendship and mutual understanding. Following this success, during his visit to Indonesia in January 2013, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe continued to announce the Japan - East Asia Student and Youth Exchange Program 2.0 (JENIESYS). The program was started and implemented from March 2013 to March 2015. There were about 30,000 young people in the region including 10 ASEAN countries and 4 countries namely Timo Leste, India, New Zealand and Australia, of which 10,000 young people from ASEAN had the opportunity to visit and experience studying in Japan. About 600 young Japanese also went to ASEAN countries. After the completion of JENESYS 2.0, the JENESYS 2015 program was launched in April 2015. Approximately 1,800 people from ASEAN countries and Japan participated in this program to promote trust and mutual understanding, from there, creating the foundation for a sustainable Japan-ASEAN friendship. By March 2016, JENESYS 2016 with the theme "Strengthening Pacific Economic Partnership" was officially launched with Japanese contributions amounting to 979.56 million yen (equivalent to 8.6 million dollars). The program has brought about 2,360 youth (including about 2,000 people resigning from the ASEAN member states) to Japan [1].

On December 20, 2016, on the 3rd anniversary of the ASEAN-Japan Summit (2013-2016), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan held a meeting with the Ambassadors of ASEAN countries. At this meeting, Japanese Deputy Foreign Minister Kentaro Sonoura expressed his wish to promote cultural exchanges, people-to-people exchanges, and deepen ASEAN-Japan relations through the WA cultural cooperation project which was launched by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during the ASEAN-Japan Summit. The project is implemented by the Asian International Exchange Fund with two main pillars, the two programs "Japanese Language Partnership" and "Bilateral Cultural and Artistic Exchange".

"Japanese language partner dispatch" is a program that brings Japanese people to training institutions, high schools of ASEAN countries to teach Japanese language and cultural exchanges and activities with local people. Currently, ASEAN has about 1 million students and students studying Japanese. This program has helped students have the opportunity to talk with the Japanese, and access to Japanese culture. There are more than 500 Japanese people working on this job and is expected to increase to more than 3,000 by 2020. Meanwhile, the program "Bilateral exchange of culture and arts" is also being carried out many types from music, painting, traditional arts, to movies, sports [13].

#### *Education*

Education has always been a top priority in Japan's ASEAN policy. As a country with high quality and prestigious education in the world, in recent years, Japan has been one of the largest grant aid countries for the education and training sector of many ASEAN member countries.



The cooperation in education and training between the two sides has developed in many forms. Every year, the Japanese government spends thousands of scholarships to study in Japan for students, and graduate students from ASEAN countries. In addition, the Government of Japan also provides many scholarships on education for institutes, schools and many scientists of ASEAN countries through exchange and cooperation funds, financial funds of Japan. such as the Japan Foundation (JF), the Japan Study Promotion Fund (JSPS), the Toyota Foundation ... In Vietnam, since 2007, Japan has helped to train 500 doctors under 20,000 doctoral program of Government of Vietnam within 10 years. In 2008, Deputy Prime Minister - Minister of Education and Training of Vietnam Nguyen Thien Nhan and Mr. Komura Masahico - Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan signed two notes of exchange to receive the scholarship project for human resource development. (JDS scholarship for short), provided by the Japanese government without a refund to Vietnam in the fiscal year 2009 and the following three years. This program aimed to facilitate postgraduate students in 5 fields including: economic law, business administration, agriculture, rural development and information technology. By the end of June 2019, there were about 370,000 Vietnamese people residing in Japan, of whom about 80,000 were students [14].

### **3.3. Impacts and prospects of ASEAN-Japan relations**

#### *3.3.1. Impacts of ASEAN- Japan relations*

##### *For ASEAN and Japan*

*Firstly*, the development of ASEAN - Japan relations is an opportunity for countries to take advantage of international resources for economic development. Although there are still disagreements and disputes, the two sides still need to cooperate to jointly develop the region's economy.

*Secondly*, in the context of increasingly complex developments in the world and the region, terrorism issues and increasing Chinese influence, strengthening cooperation in security areas between ASEAN and Japan has contributed to maintaining peace and stability in the region and the world, besides, it also creates conditions for countries to have favorable conditions for socio-economic development.

*Thirdly*, the relationship in the field of culture - education helps the people of the two countries to have a better understanding of each other in many fields such as history, culture ... on the basis of that, expanding exchanges at many levels. These activities go from bilateral, to multilateral, organizing exchange programs, introducing cultural heritages of countries, traditional cultures ..., through which to promote cultures between countries.

*Fourthly*, contribute to enhancing the position of each party in the international arena. It is the tendencies of peace, increasing relations with many forms of intertwining international relations that have created favorable conditions for countries in the region to build and develop international relations.

ASEAN-Japan relations create favorable conditions for a stable, peaceful and secure regional environment that is an attractive place to attract foreign investment capital with an abundant labor potential market, abundant natural resources and preferential policies for investors ... This is also a favorable condition for countries in the region to introduce open foreign policies for mutual development cooperation.

##### *For East Asia*

ASEAN - Japan relationship is a diversified, multidimensional relationship that has a significant impact on regional international relations.

*First of all*, the achievements in ASEAN-Japan relations have had a positive impact on the peaceful development and shared prosperity of the whole East Asia region in all fields of economy, politics, security, defense, culture and education; thereby, contributing to the region's socio-economic development, improving people's lives, narrowing the development gap among countries in the region.

*Secondly*, in the context of increasing terrorism in East Asia, the strengthening cooperation between ASEAN and Japan has contributed to making the countries in the region better understand the willingness to come together, at the same time, creating conditions for countries to participate in regional political life.

### 3.3.2. Prospects for the development of ASEAN - Japan relations

In the coming years, ASEAN - Japan relations will develop according to the main trend of increasing cooperation, co-existence and development. The bilateral relationship has progressed positively on all levels, with priority given to economic cooperation. Politically, there cannot be a turning point or major upheaval in ASEAN-Japan relations because ASEAN countries still have certain doubts about Japan when the US-Japan alliance is being strengthened, along with those limitations due to the political and economic diversity of ASEAN countries

Today, Southeast Asia in particular and Asia - Pacific in general is an increasingly important geopolitical - economic region. Therefore, in the coming period, the ASEAN-Japan relationship will develop in the direction of becoming deeper and more comprehensive, and will become one of the key relationships in the region. The increase in ASEAN-Japan relations not only creates opportunities for peace and stability for the region, but can also increase the sensitivity of international relations in the region, especially relations between major countries (such as US - Japan, China - Japan) and ASEAN relations with other partners. Therefore, Japan and ASEAN need to quickly have strategic policies with a long-term orientation to maximize each other's great potentials, at the same time, creating new turning points in the relationship. It is necessary to skillfully handle the increasingly complex relationships above, especially in relations with the US and China. Only then can the ASEAN-Japan relations have great significance for a long-term, shared prosperity for the whole region.

## 4. Conclusion

ASEAN - Japan relations in the first two decades of the 21st century have brought about great achievements in cooperation for both sides in all fields of economy, politics, culture - education, security and defense. Japan is one of the factors promoting economic development of ASEAN countries, contributing to ensuring regional security and peace. And ASEAN has been an important partner of Japan due to not only its geopolitical position, but also the self-transformation and self-development of this group of countries to become an organization having an important voice in international affairs. Commenting on this issue, Deputy Director of Center for International Strategic Studies (Indonesia) - Rizal Sukma said: *“This is a good and effective relationship over the past three decades. It is no exaggeration to say that the ASEAN-Japan relationship has become the closest and deepest in ASEAN's external relations with other partners”* [5, p.33]. The great achievements of ASEAN in relations with Japan have become invaluable lessons for countries and regional organizations including developing countries in relations with developed countries. Currently, ASEAN has favorable conditions to develop and enhance its position, while also facing challenges from inside and outside, especially from the two major powers - US and China. In the context of the current complicated Covid epidemic, the fact that neither ASEAN nor Japan can master the technology of vaccine production and dependence on supplies from the US and China is also a significant challenge. The problem for ASEAN and Japan is to seek effective solutions to take advantage of potentials, limit negativity, enhance mutual trust, towards a peaceful and sustainable relationship in the coming decades.

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