

Varieties of regional economic integration and labor internationalism: The case of Japanese trade unions in comparison

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Abstract

This article examines whether Japanese trade unions have developed greater levels of international cooperation as a result of increased regional integration, i.e. economic partnerships with Asian counterparts in the 2000s. Labor rights at the regional level or resources that allow workers to organize are absent in the Japanese case; therefore, its analysis enriches understanding of the impact of those elements on labor internationalism in varieties of international regional integration. Economic partnership agreements were found not to be an incentive for building relations among Japanese and fellow international trade unions. Instead, cooperation was found to be contingent on already established ties. The article also demonstrates a growing interest among Japanese and other trade unions in responding to regional projects of the East Asian Community and Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).

Keywords

East Asia, economic partnership agreements, Japanese trade unions, labor internationalism, opposition to liberalization, regional economic integration

Introduction

Trade union responses to market interdependence have been widely studied. The majority of contributions to the debate predict that market integration will trigger competition among trade unions and preclude cooperation (Ebbinghaus and Visser, 1996; Keller, 1997; Koch-Baumgarten, 1999; Martin and Ross, 2001; Meardi, 2002; Streeck, 1998, 1999; Visser, 1998). The examples of European integration (Erne, 2008) and the North

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American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (Kay, 2005) illustrate an opposite trend, however.

There is certain confusion in the literature regarding the role of market integration and political measures in motivating trade unions to cooperate internationally. This confusion is not because scholars lack analytic acuity but because of the complexity of the integration process itself. For instance, Gajewska (2009) in her cumulative causal explanation points to how market forces primarily encourage and deepen cooperation rather than induce a logic of competition. One of the mechanisms that facilitated cooperation among European trade unions was a socialization process that developed incrementally over time thanks to legal and material resources that fostered contacts. Kay (2005, 2011) argues that legal measures in the form of international workers' rights provided trade unions with conditions and incentives to cooperate internationally in the case of North American integration. While one can see political measures as intervening variables, it is difficult to isolate the effect of individual factors because of their overlap.

The case of market integration between North and Southeast Asian countries is distinct because Asian institutional and political dimensions are very thin in comparison to those of other regions (Jones and Smith, 2007; Kaminska and Visser, 2011). Extending the research to trade unions in East Asia promises a theoretical contribution to understanding of how the political dimensions of integration – or lack thereof – condition societal responses. An independent variable present in the case of European integration – the political dimension of market integration – is notably absent in Asian integration. On the one hand, the added value of institutional arrangements at the international and national levels can be investigated. On the other hand, potential commonalities across regions may corroborate some of the theories that were formulated in the context of a single instance of regional market integration. In this article, I am going to analyze the development of cooperation between trade unions in Japan and selected countries with which Japan has negotiated economic partnership agreements. The goal of this analysis is to specify the conditions under which market integration encourages international trade union cooperation. Japanese trade unions represent a noteworthy case because Japanese capital dominates in the Asian region, and its unions are leading contributors to regional trade union structures (Williamson, 1994). Their attitudes towards international cooperation heavily influence labor's response in the region.

While this article and the literature in general concentrate on the interplay of regional integration features and labor responses, it should be noted that international cooperation may be motivated by revitalization efforts as well. Trade unions need to find ways to attract and retain members by responding to pressures from these members and offering adequate responses to the changing environment. International engagement has been part of the revitalization strategy in Europe and North America (Bieler, 2006; Frege and Kelly, 2003; Voss and Sherman, 2000; Waterman, 1998). Trade union leaders may perceive international engagement as a way to increase the attractiveness of their organizations (Gajewska, 2009). Some Japanese trade unions also undergo transformation to respond to the changing environment and expand their influence. The major trade union confederation in Japan faced pressure from below to introduce changes (Stewart, 2006; Suzuki, 2008; Urano and Stewart, 2009; Weathers, 2010; Williamson, 1994).

This article presents original data to examine a hitherto-unexplored area in the literature: cooperation between Japanese trade unions and their international counterparts in response to the signing of Japanese–Asian economic partnership agreements (EPAs) in the 2000s. I document the presence or absence of three forms of labor internationalism: the cognitive process of considering national organizations in the international context, networking between trade unions and the mobilization accompanying international agreements. Scholars have well documented the labor response to market integrations in North America and in Europe (Bieler, 2006; Erne, 2008; Gajewska, 2009; Kay, 2011). In making my comparison, I refer to their empirical findings. This explanatory framework shows how conditions at the international level determine responses to the challenges posed by market integration. First, I outline the theoretical debate on economic integration and labor responses to it and highlight analytically relevant features of the selected cases. Then I report on international cooperation by the main Japanese trade union confederations at the national level: the Japan Trade Union Confederation (Nihon Rodo Kumiai So Rengokai), commonly called Rengo; the National Confederation of Trade Unions (Zenroren); and the National Trade Union Council (Zenrokyo). It should be noted that Japanese trade unions are mainly enterprise unions (although this is not the only form of union; see Benson, 1996) and the majority of trade unions belong to one of the three aforementioned main confederations. While the confederations are not very powerful, they provide a venue for trade unions to formulate a common stance on international issues, and therefore they represent the best access point to gather empirical material.

Economic interdependence, political integration and the response of labor

In the literature on trade union preferences relating to international cooperation, authors mention both economic interdependence and elements of political integration. Therefore, I first define those two terms and then reconstruct the arguments about their effects. My first two hypotheses are general predictions about the relations between economic integration and labor internationalism and the other two specify the mechanisms that potentially induce cooperation.

Defining market interdependence and the political dimensions of integration

Economic interdependence is a situation in which workers from one country are affected by the working standards and regulations of another country. This is enabled by the liberalization of the market between those countries. While contrasting economic integration with political integration, I acknowledge that market liberalization is a political process: international free markets, like closed markets, require institutional supports and legal rules (Chorev, 2005). However, in addition to market-making measures, regional integration can involve political elements, which I define as those measures, clauses or rights that are designed to alleviate the negative externalities of market

liberalization. This definition of political elements relates to Polányi's (2001 [1944]) concept of a double movement. In the context of international cooperation, defining rights of workers at the international level can be considered such a measure. International trade union solidarity can be interpreted as the expression of a counter-movement (Munck, n.d.). Measures to foster cooperation among trade unions – providing the capacity to counter competitive relations – can also be conceptualized as part of the double movement.

Market interdependence and political integration as determinants of labor internationalism

Within the literature, there are two hypotheses regarding whether market interdependence induces competition or cooperation: (1) economic interdependence in itself brings about cooperation; (2) economic interdependence alone or accompanied by political measures does not lead to cooperation. Furthermore, authors identified mechanisms related to the political dimension of regional integration that lead to cooperation: (3) political measures in the form of international rights that accompany market integration lead to cooperation; (4) organizational resources being political measures accompanying market integration lead to cooperation.

Economic interdependence leads to trade union cooperation. The first hypothesis assumes that market integration on its own induces cooperation (Logue, 1980). Quantitative analysis of the linkages of trade unions confirms the importance of market interdependence and regional integration over other factors (Burgoon and Jacoby, 2004). Haas predicted that interest groups – trade unions among others – would accelerate political integration in response to the functional logic of economic integration (Haas, 1968). According to this hypothesis, political measures are a consequence of labor's efforts to counter the logic of the market.

Economic interdependence leads to competition. The second hypothesis predicts divergent interests between trade unions, and that this divergence precludes cooperation and induces competition (Ebbinghaus and Visser, 1996; Keller, 1997; Koch-Baumgarten, 1999; Meardi, 2002; Streeck, 1998, 1999; Visser, 1998). Cooperation is impeded by identifying with the foreign policy of the government, and by endorsing economic expansion of national firms (Cox, 1971: 568).¹ National differences have hindered labor interest representation at the European level since the early stages of integration (Marks and McAdam, 1996; Martin and Ross, 2001; Streeck and Schmitter, 1991). According to some analysts (Hyman, 2005; Turner, 1996), political measures such as support for a trade union confederation at the European level will not foster cooperation among trade unions. The European integration process before the 2000s involved a significant number of political measures, considering the extent of market integration. Later in the 2000s, the competitive logic of market integration took a dominant role (Schömann, 2011). Therefore, the second hypothesis can be reformulated slightly differently: since organizational resources were provided to unions before the deepening of economic interdependence, based on the

European case one can hypothesize that neither economic integration nor political measures alone led to cooperation.

The next two hypotheses I discuss assume that the political dimension of market integration induces labor cooperation, but they point to different mechanisms.

Political measures in form of rights that accompany market integration lead to cooperation. According to Kay (2005, 2011) legal measures that define workers' rights and regulate industrial relations at the international level, being cognitive resources and incentives for mobilization, lead to labor internationalism. They constitute a 'transnational opportunity' for cooperation.

Economic interdependence leads to cooperation if accompanied by political integration in form of providing organizational resources to build ties. Another conceptualization assumes that market interdependence accompanied by long-term socialization processes among trade unions results in cooperation. The organizational trade union structures at the international level, in which trade unions interact and build ties, bring workers' representatives together to realize and formulate their common interests. These international trade union organizations can exercise their mobilization potential in an informal way (Gajewska, 2009).

In the empirical part of this article, the above-outlined hypotheses, which were formulated by authors explaining integration processes in Europe and in North America, are used as a lens to examine the case of East Asian cooperation. First, I highlight the presence or absence of the political dimension that I broadly defined in this section and present additional discussions of those independent variables. Later, I argue that the European and Asian examples can be seen as analytic equivalents in terms of market integration.

The presence or absence of the political dimension in regional integration projects

In this section, I concentrate on the political measures in the EU and NAFTA integration process that are relevant to workers' interest representation and cooperation, corresponding to the arguments predicting their role in fostering cooperation (Gajewska, 2009; Kay, 2005, 2011). My exposition is not exhaustive but serves to highlight the absence of legal and organizational resources that makes Asian integration different from its European and North American counterparts.

Workers' rights

Kay (2005) argues that the inclusion of labor rights in North American integration was an incentive for labor to establish cross-border ties mimicking the state building processes. The labor protection clauses were included both in NAFTA² and the EU's 'Community Charter for the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers' (the 'Social Charter').³ In the context of Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)⁴ and other Asian arrangements there is no mention of workers' rights. However, APEC considers

issues related to the social sustainability of liberalization. It established a working group, the APEC Social Safety Net Capacity Building Network, in 2002. Asian economic partnership agreements contain no explicit mention of workers' rights. Labor standards and provisions on labor mobility were included in nine Asian EPAs according to a comparative study (Kawai and Wignaraja, 2008: 123ff.). Japan has negotiated agreements on labor standards and migration issues in its EPAs with Singapore (2002), the Philippines (2006), Brunei (2007) and Indonesia (2007), but not in agreements with Mexico (2005) and Thailand (2007).

Consultation and access to decision-making

European polity involves neocorporatist arrangements in which the European Commission consults organized interests (Magnette, 2003: 149). The incorporation of consultation was a response to protests at the end of the 1990s and was intended to legitimize the integration process (Smismans, 2003). For the most part, 'soft' issues were addressed and 'hard' pay and working time standards were left off the European sector social dialogue agenda (Marginson, 2005). Consultation within Asian integration is much less developed. The Asia Pacific Labor Network (APLN) is part of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), which until 2006 was known as the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) (LeQueux, 2008). Despite its lobbying efforts, the APLN's requests to be included in APEC working groups have been rejected. In contrast to the APEC Business Advisory Council, labor is not mentioned as a partner in consultations. Furthermore, national trade unions were not consulted when signing economic partnership agreements. The only developed consultation platform is the Trade Union Advisory Council at the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Material and organizational resources provided from regional institutions

The European Commission funds the main confederation of trade unions, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), and European sector trade union confederations. The EU encourages exchange between trade unions by setting the condition that several countries cooperate in order to receive funding for programs.⁵ Whether those organizational resources foster international cooperation is questioned in the literature (Hyman, 2005; Turner, 1996). Furthermore, funds for strengthening international cooperation between social partners structure the networks of organizations but do not necessarily empower them (Sissenich, 2008). In contrast, Gajewska (2009) argues that these funds may foster mobilization and cooperation in the long run because of the resulting ties between trade unions.

East Asian market integration in the 2000s

In order to compare two different cases of regional integration, one must establish *analytic equivalents* (Locke and Thelen, 1995).⁶ Despite the different forms of the regional

integration projects in East Asia, Europe and North America, workers face similar problems due to international integration: for example, relocation threats and competition stemming from migration of workers from countries with lower working standards. The East Asian integration process involves countries with different levels of development and different working standards. The process was fragmented and controlled by Japanese firms (Petit, 2006: 123ff.). Market integration in the EU takes place through institutionalization, whereas in East Asia it is the result of the expansion of cross-border trade and investment within the region driven mainly by Japanese multinationals and the extension of bilateral agreements to other areas of trade and economic activity (Kotera, 2005; Sohn, 2002).⁷

Recently concluded economic partnership agreements will intensify interdependence and increase labor mobility. Some of the agreements include labor standards and provisions on labor mobility along with the Singapore issues (trade facilitation, investment, government procurement and competition policies) (Kawai and Wignaraja, 2008: 123ff.; see also Suominen, 2009). Two pan-Asian arrangements have been established: the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) plus China, Japan, South Korea (ASEAN+3) and the East Asian Summit (EAS). The Tokyo Declaration of 2003 set the long-term goal of creating the East Asian Community (Lay Hwee, 2006: 259ff.). In June 2008, the Japanese Diet endorsed the ASEAN–Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, Japan's first agreement to be signed with a regional bloc. Trade policy was orchestrated by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) and responded to lobbying from and consultation with large multinational companies. It was expected that the main obstacles concluding the agreements would stem from protectionist interests of the agricultural sector, but this conflict was avoided through the use of exclusion clauses (Manger, 2005). Solis (2010) also defines the major conflict line as between internationalized manufacturing and agricultural sectors. The Ministry of Welfare and Labor has been involved in the negotiation of EPAs with Thailand and the Philippines because of the labor migration issue (Solis, 2010: 226–230). Japan and South Korea have been negotiating an EPA for years (since 2004) but no consensus has been achieved because of opposition to the opening of Japan's agricultural market (Xinhua, 2009). In Japan, the losers are expected to be farmers; and the winners, the manufacturing sector. There is a strong potential for a political reaction from organized labor in Korea (Ahn, 2006). The EPAs lead to intensification of interdependence between Japan and its Asian partners, partly opening markets and allowing the circulation of migrant workers. The recent integration initiatives in Asia have a similar impact on society as a wave of liberalization in the EU, or NAFTA.

Labor internationalism as dependent variable and data collection

Now I turn to the dependent variable: international cooperation. According to Ramsey (1997), trade union internationalism consists of three types of activities: information exchange and networking at all levels of organizing; attempts at multinational bargaining; and lobbying at the international level. This definition, which stresses actions undertaken

by the trade unions, should be supplemented by a preceding stage: the cognitive or constitutive process that enables trade unions to think about themselves as part of an international labor movement (Kay, 2005, 2011). Since the subject of this article is labor internationalism in response to the signing of international agreements, I focus on three forms of internationalism: the cognitive level, cooperation in the form of information exchange and mobilization accompanying international agreements.

I report on the situation up to the first half of the year 2010. The data are based on interviews conducted by a Japanese native speaker (who is knowledgeable of Japanese trade unions and works as a translator) and translated into English. The interviews were conducted between January and May 2010: three interviews in the Economic Department and the International Department of Rengo (the largest national trade union center with 6,832,000 members, which represents 67.7% of national union membership), one interview in the International Department of Zenroren (1,390,000 members, 13.8%) and one interview with the Secretary General of Zenrokyo (281,352 members, 2.8%). This covers approximately 77.9–84.3% of unionized workers.⁸ Rengo is the only trade union confederation that is included in governmental decision-making; the other federations have been excluded.⁹ The interviews consisted of questions about international involvement in general, the trade unions' stance on the international agreements and the interviewees' recollection of individual bilateral agreements. The interviewees are key informants regarding international cooperation due to their position in the trade union confederations. However, this limited number of interviews does not allow cross-checking of the information provided. My analysis also included union internal documents.

Japanese international trade union cooperation – first and second hypotheses

This section describes international involvement of the three main confederations, which relates to the first and second hypotheses predicting the relevance of economic interdependence on international cooperation.

Rengo

Japanese ICFTU's affiliates took part in the ICFTU's Asian Regional Organization (APRO), established in 1951. APRO represents 16.8 million members from 48 national trade union centers in 29 countries in Asia and the Pacific. During the 1970s and 1980s, the Japanese constituted 15–30% of the membership; in the beginning of the 1990s they contributed the largest part of the budget: 80%. Rengo, the nation's main trade union confederation, which was formed in 1989, preferred to make charitable transfers to other trade unions in developing countries¹⁰ as part of its international strategy. It has eschewed confrontational tactics against Japanese multinationals when coordinating activities (Williamson, 1994). Such behavior is consistent with the general character of the majority of trade unions in Japan, which are subordinate to and compliant with management (Gordon, 1998; Jeong and Aguilera, 2008). Although the International Department of Rengo is not very much engaged in activist internationalist politics, certain affiliates of

this trade union confederation are more engaged in this activity. The Japanese textile workers' union federation, Zenzen (Japanese Federation of Textile, Garment, Chemical, Distributive and Allied Industry Workers' Unions), and TWARO (the Japan-based Asian and Pacific Organization of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation) have been involved in organizing and training trade unions in the textile industry in Indonesia (Shimizu et al., 1998). Founded in 1954, the All-Japan Prefectural and Municipal Workers' Union (JICHIRO), a trade union affiliated with both Rengo and Zenrokyo, joined Public Services International (PSI) in 1981 and is PSI's largest Asian affiliate (Williamson, 1994).

Since Williamson carried out his research, Rengo's strategy of cooperation has undergone few major changes. Rengo established contacts in China at the end of the 1990s. Its other major partners are American trade unions and the South Korean Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU). Rengo establishes contacts motivated by the principle of economic interdependence, and those contacts take place mainly during gatherings of international trade union organizations. A criterion in the selection of the cooperation partners is their strength. Trade unions are less involved in cooperation in Asia because of differences and inequalities that make it difficult to find a common stance (interview Rengo International).

Consistent with the second hypothesis, Japanese trade unions are not expected to have a unified stance vis-a-vis economic partnership agreements because large companies benefit from them. Since trade unions are organized at the enterprise level, the confederation lacks leverage to build an oppositional stance (Manger, 2005). The former director of the International Department (1999–2005) admits that 'the policy of Rengo on the trade issue cannot be completely disconnected from that of the companies. But Rengo is doing its best to stress the importance of social aspects of the issue' (interview Rengo former International). It should be stressed that the Economic Department has defined the stance of the confederation, which also determines the strategy of the International Department. Rengo affiliates have had differing opinions on the issue: trade unions in export industries like the automotive or electronics sector have been more supportive of the agreements. This corresponds to the prediction that because different sectors are unevenly affected by internationalization of production, intensified by international agreements, a split between labor in different sectors may occur. This has an impact on labor's ability to resist and mobilize against free trade agreements, and potentially the form of internationalization projects (Chase, 2008; Manger, 2005). However, differences between sectors have been reconciled within Rengo. In November 2006, Rengo affiliates formulated a common statement binding across industries. The main purpose to gain access to negotiations and prevent an influx of foreign workers was present in the argumentation. They hoped the agreements would include the International Labour Organization (ILO) core standards, the tripartite declaration of principles concerning transnational companies (TNCs) and OECD guidelines on TNCs, as well as recognize trade unions as stakeholders at the regional level (interview Rengo Economic). Economic partnership agreements represent one of many issues that Rengo wants to work on, according to its action plan for 2008–2009 (Rengo's website). The government has refused demands to include this issue in the negotiation process,¹¹ and the confederation has not undertaken protest action on this point. It is on Rengo's agenda but is not seen as a

priority. The confederation has not developed a strategy regarding trade agreements. It plans to study this issue and search for best practices on including advantageous clauses in the agreements (interview Rengo International).

Additionally, the director of the International Department acknowledged that the confederation should cooperate with trade unions from other countries, not in bilateral cooperation but in international trade union organizations like the ITUC or the Global Unions. He stated that Rengo, being the strongest union in Asia and the most influential in Asian regional trade union structures, should initiate this cooperation but has not done so yet. More efforts have been put into lobbying the national government than into international cooperation with trade unions on this issue (interview Rengo International).

In the case of international EPAs, Japanese trade unions did not reach out to other Asian trade unions, due to the perceived inability of these other unions to influence the governments on the issue of international affairs. Regarding the issue of Filipino migrant workers, Filipino trade unions asked for cooperation on the issue, and Rengo said that it was willing to cooperate to ensure the labor rights of migrant workers employed in Japan (interview Rengo International). However, Rengo did not engage at all with Thai trade unions, explaining that its reluctance stemmed from the weakness¹² of Thai trade union partners. Rengo stated in 2010 that their main potential partners were Korean trade unions due to their strength (interview Rengo International). A similar argument is presented in an academic contribution, in which the weakness of trade unions in Indonesia and Thailand is identified as one of the obstacles to building an international trade union response to APEC (Bamber, 2005).

Zenroren and Zenrokyo

The National Confederation of Trade Unions (Zenroren) is informally linked to the Japanese Communist Party. Members of Zenroren primarily work for public sector and smaller private sector employers. Zenroren supports international involvement from below through rank-and-file action and coalitions with social movements (Williamson, 1994). In 2008, the trade union confederation changed its constitution to enable affiliation with international organizations. Some members belong to sectoral international organizations, but the confederation does not belong to any due to Rengo's opposition to Zenroren's admission into the ITUC. Zenroren has bilateral contacts with Indonesian trade unions, the Filipino May First Movement Trade Union Center (KMU), the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), and particularly good ties with the Center of Indian Trade Unions and the Thailand-based Focus on the Global South (interview Zenroren).

The National Trade Union Council (Zenrokyo) is a non-communist, leftist trade union confederation critical of Rengo. Zenrokyo has its strongest ties with the KMU and the KCTU. This cooperation started as a result of disputes with Japanese multinationals in which Zenrokyo supported its fellow Asian trade unions. The trade union confederation is also proactive on the issue of migrant workers. Its greatest obstacle to international cooperation is a lack of English-speaking staff (interview Zenrokyo).

The problem of EPAs was discussed by Zenrokyo, Zenroren and other trade unions in the Asia Pacific region. On the topic of these agreements, other trade unions perceived Rengo as lacking a clear stance towards them, or at least not showing clear opposition to

them (interview Zenroren; interview Zenrokyo). Zenroren has contacts with Indonesian trade unions, and they discussed this issue in 2007. Indonesian trade unions, however, support labor migration, and, as a result, it has been impossible to take action against the agreement. Zenroren's farmers' union has actively pursued cooperation with counterparts in Australia in the form of discussions and exchanges of information. The medical workers' federation affiliated with Zenroren opposes the immigration of foreign migrant nurses to Japan. The trade union has contacts with counterparts in the Philippines, and therefore they are aware of the problems connected to the migration of Filipino nurses. Instead, Zenroren calls for the improvement of working conditions in hospitals, so that Japanese nurses are more motivated to work there (interview Zenroren). Zenrokyo cooperates with the KMU on the issue of migrant workers thanks to the strong ties between these trade unions (interview Zenrokyo).

These trade union confederations failed to engage in the process of signing EPAs, instead taking an after-the-fact approach and only dealing with the consequences of these agreements, as can be seen in the migrant workers example. In this case, the confederations have cooperated in ameliorating the consequences of the agreements but not on the process of signing them. A preemptive strategy was not employed. In another example of their lack of engagement, Zenrokyo and Zenroren did not know about the agreement with Thailand because they lacked ties with Thai trade unions (interview Zenrokyo; interview Zenroren).

This would appear to confirm the second hypothesis (that trade unions have no interest in international cooperation); however, the explanation is different. Interviewees cited the absence of ties between Japanese and other trade unions as the main reason for the lack of international cooperation, which should direct the discussion towards other factors. The example of cooperation with Korean trade unions corroborates this point. At the beginning of 2004, 'Korean People's Action against FTAs and WTO' launched a campaign against the Japan–Korea bilateral agreement in solidarity with Japanese social movements. In November 2004, Japanese and Korean social movement networks protested in front of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs against the Japanese–Korean EPA. Four hundred people, of whom 50 to 100 were activists from South Korea, took part in this protest. Zenrokyo participated because of its ties to the KCTU (interview Zenrokyo). Zenroren had exchanges with the KCTU on the subject of the EPA and supported action organized by Zenrokyo, but could not participate in the protest due to a conflict with its other activities at that time (interview Zenroren). Rengo identified Korean unions as potential partners for cooperation, but due to other priorities no initiative was taken until January 2010 – the time of the interview. Rengo has contact with the FKTU on other issues (interview Rengo International). In the early stages of the EPA negotiations, Rengo, like the FKTU, disagreed with the KCTU on the best strategy to protect workers, advocating clauses on the protection of labor rights, agriculture and fishery and environment, instead of rejecting the agreement altogether, as the KCTU preferred (interview Rengo former International). Officially Rengo recognizes that the cooperation and counter-measures to market liberalization are necessary and should be pursued at the international level. However, the cognitive level – the awareness of the necessity to safeguard workers' rights in free trade agreements and to cooperate internationally (see Kay, 2005, 2011) – does not translate into concrete action.

The role of organizational and cognitive resources

This section summarizes findings on the mechanisms leading to internationalism, which relates to the third and fourth hypotheses. My analysis reveals that the agreements alone have not strengthened trade union ties, which have instead been built as a consequence of growing interdependence over time. This confirms that economic interdependence encourages trade unions to cooperate (first hypothesis). However, other factors also play a role in establishing ties: for example, the ideological profile and relative strength of the counterparts. Before the relatively recent introduction of the EPAs, cooperation took place within international trade union structures. Their involvement in the international labor organizations, however, is much lower than among European trade unions. Bilateral contacts have much more influence than international structures on whether the trade unions react to economic partnership agreements – another stage of increasing interdependence. For instance, in the case of the Japan–Thailand EPA there were no ties and no involvement between Japanese and Thai labor unions. Negotiations on the agreement with South Korea represent an opposite situation. This finding is consistent with the experience of European trade unions, where established relations defined the response to liberalization (Gajewska, 2009). The response of Japanese trade unions, however, was very weak overall in comparison to that of European trade unions in similar situations. The ties between trade unions defined their propensity to engage in cooperation but were not strong enough to induce mobilization. Zenrokyo's participation in the demonstration against an agreement with Korea is an exception.

Rights as cognitive resources for cooperation

Does Asian integration without workers' rights determine the reaction of trade unions at the international level (Kay, 2005, 2011)? Japanese trade unions referred to ILO and OECD standards as a benchmark for the economic partnership agreements. In comparison, the manner in which European trade unions framed their opposition to the Services Directive illustrated the broader realm of symbolic resources available in the case of EU integration. Trade unions there proposed the concepts of Social Europe and a European Social Model with more advanced demands for regulation (Gajewska, 2008, 2009). Rengo envisioned the development of the East Asian Community to promote fairness and the inclusion of labor unions and citizens in the process, according to its 2006 statement on the EPAs. Moreover, the ASEAN Social Charter has been promoted by trade unions in the ASEAN as an instrument and a minimum benchmark that obliges governments and non-state social actors to protect workers' right to decent work. Its proponents mention EU rights as a benchmark. Consequently, this case reveals that a lack of rights at the international-regional level may shape how trade unions frame the issue. It also illustrates, however, that cognitive resources can be derived from other examples of integration and international labor standards outside of the particular context of regional integration. This example reflects Abbott's (2000) prediction that cooperation among Asia Pacific trade unions will be based on the ideological imperative of protecting workers' rights. Trade union involvement will take place in the form of campaigning but without attempts to induce political spillover within regional integration. However,

recent EPAs triggered discussion about regional integration as a potential political project, leading trade unions to propose inclusion of workers' rights in the agreements. The signing of agreements was an occasion to conceptualize the incorporation of rights at the international level. The Asian mode of integration did not provide a 'transnational opportunity' given from above for building ties (Kay, 2005) but some ties were nevertheless established. While the 'constitutive effects' of international institution-building on social movements – collective identity and interests (Kay, 2011) – emerged despite the lack of favorable conditions, the failure to mobilize can be explained by the absence of transnational opportunity. An important feature of North American transnational law, the 'procedural rules that require a submission be filed in a country other than the one in which the alleged labor law violation occurred' (Kay, 2011: 433), which led to the building of ties and mobilization, is not present in Asian integration. There is no potential added value in mobilizing together with other trade unions, especially weaker ones, which explains the lack of motivation to cooperate.

Organizational resources and capacities

The relevance of international trade union structures in East Asia and for the Japanese trade unions I have discussed is limited. This contrasts with the European example. European trade union organizations provided a platform where the trade unions developed their first contacts, for example in the case of the Eastern enlargement of the EU in 2004. These organizations helped to deepen cooperation between Eastern European trade unions and the older members of the EU, and to allow these groups to mobilize together against the Services Directive in 2005 and 2006 (Gajewska, 2008, 2009). For Japanese trade unions, bilateral relations were much more decisive in determining their reaction to signing agreements. Rengo recognized the need to strengthen its response to integration in East Asia as well as its major potential role in this initiative, but as of 2010 had not taken action yet (interview Rengo International).

The ITUC (formerly the ICFTU) Asia Pacific Labor Network (APLN) was established in 1995 to support and promote the work of trade unions in the APEC region, and to provide a counterweight to the interest representation of business by establishing the APEC Labor Forum. Since the 1995 Kyoto alternative summit, APEC summits have been accompanied by protests and parallel meetings of trade unions and social movements (Price, 2000). The Asia Pacific Regional Organization of the ITUC (APRO) set out to influence the process of signing free trade agreements.¹³ These organizational developments illustrate that resources provided from above are not the only impetus to build transnational trade union networks (for the EU case, see Sissenich, 2008). The East Asian case shows that organizational developments may also follow international institution-building under the least favorable conditions.

In 2006, the formulation of the stance of Rengo affiliates coincided with a reorientation within international trade union organizations, manifested by the founding of the ITUC and the Global Unions. At this point Rengo affiliates became more involved in international issues and the coordination of policies with Rengo. Also, the policy differences between affiliates are diminishing in the wake of the activities of the Global Unions (interview Rengo former International). The ICFTU and subsequently the ITUC were

forced to change and open the discussion to new issues. The members from South Korea, South Africa and Brazil have promoted a more developmentalist agenda (O'Brien, 2000, 2008a). While international trade union structures foster a common stance in Asia, similarly to the European case, these structures do not foment action.

Although these organizations do exist and formulate the stance of the trade unions, Rengo did not see them as a significant force in motivating collective action towards EPAs and recent integration initiatives. This can be explained by the asymmetric power balance between Rengo and the other weaker Asian trade unions (interview Rengo International). In the APRO and APLN, Japanese and US trade unions are the most influential (Ranald, 1999: 300). This hierarchy is played out in Rengo's manner of involvement in these organizations. In the signing of agreements, Rengo did not have enough incentive or perceive the urgency to organize or coordinate actions in order to influence the process. Their main strategy was to influence the government and gain access to negotiations through lobbying (interview Rengo International). This confirms that the trade unions concentrate on the available opportunity structure, which determines their propensity to mobilize and engage in international cooperation (Kay, 2011).

More radical trade union organizations like Zenrokyo and Zenroren were excluded from the decision-making process. The government provided information to civil society actors, including Zenroren and Zenrokyo, but they had no opportunity to influence its decisions. These oppositional trade union confederations recognize the importance of mobilization at the international level. For instance, Zenroren and Zenrokyo participated in the Asian Regional Trade Union Solidarity Conference in November 2003. The purpose of this conference, initiated by the KCTU, was to strengthen the joint effort response against regional or bilateral free trade agreements, the World Trade Organization and TNCs in East Asia (Asian Regional Trade Union Solidarity Conference, 2003). No progress, however, had been made between the conference and the time of interview despite unions' consensus on and support for this initiative. The lack of resources constituted a considerable obstacle for these trade union confederations (interview Zenrokyo; interview Zenroren).

While the international trade union organizations had an impact on the Japanese trade unions, the extent of this impact was very limited. International trade union structures in East Asia do not constitute an independent body capable of motivating trade unions to act at the national and international level. Unlike in the European case, cooperation between North American trade unions came about without any organizational empowerment provided by international institutions. However, they were first unprepared to influence the process and their strategy has evolved over time (Evans and Kay, 2008). This contrast partly confirms the relevance of organizational resources; as well as the fact that differences between unions are not necessarily a major obstacle to cooperation.

An overview of the regional factors and forms of labor internationalism is presented in Table 1.

Conclusions and outlook

Although they recognized the necessity of representing workers' rights in international integration, Japanese trade unions were incapable of significantly influencing the recent

Table 1. Summary of the regional factors and forms of labor internationalism.

	EU	NAFTA	Japan and East Asia
International rights	Y	Y	N
Necessity to cooperate	Consultation	Rights execution	N
International	Y	N	N
organizational			Major contribution
resources			by Japanese Rengo
International- level	Y	Y	Limited
opportunity			
<i>Forms of labor internationalism</i>			
Cognitive	Y	Y	Y
Cooperation	Y	Y	Limited: mainly with
			strong trade unions
Mobilization	Y	Y	Only Zenrokyo

Note: The references regarding the varieties of regional integrations are given throughout the text. The references regarding the forms of labor nationalism can be found in the section on Japanese involvement in international cooperation. The European and NAFTA description is based on the literature (Bieler, 2006; Erne, 2008; Gajewska, 2009; Kay, 2005, 2011).

EPAs. I start with a discussion of the reaction of Japanese trade unions to Asian integration and their pursuit of international cooperation against the backdrop of the four predictions formulated in the context of other regional market integration. The findings of this article contribute to the literature discussing whether market integration evokes cooperation or competition among trade unions (first and second hypotheses). First, the analysis reveals that economic incentives triggered the building of ties, which though weak, were formed before the turn towards integration. Second, the economic interests that, according to many scholars, constitute a major obstacle to cooperation were less decisive factors in the Asian case. The interests of the trade unions might have prevented opposition to economic integration because the trade unions representing workers in transnationalized sectors had a positive orientation towards integration (Bieler, 2002, 2006; Manger, 2005). In Japan, the trade unions that represent workers in transnational sectors are relatively strong within Rengo. Nonetheless, an oppositional stance was formulated. Japanese trade unions changed their approach to international integration, partly thanks to the 2006 transformation in international trade union structures (O'Brien, 2008a). However, the lack of organizational rather than cognitive resources deterred action: few activities were undertaken. Simple opposition to liberalization is not the only possible response for domestic actors; they can also adjust to the situation and seek new ways of pursuing their interests (Bieler, 2006; Chorev, 2010). For example, one such adjustment to a new situation can be seen in the way in which trade unions dealt with migrant issues that resulted from allowing the free movement of workers in East Asia. In contrast to European trade unions, which demonstrated against the liberalization starting in 2004, Asian trade unions were surprised by recent developments and therefore unable to respond. The experience to adapting to international-level changes, however, can empower trade unions to

coordinate an international response in the future, as can be seen in the changes that occurred within the European trade union movement (Gajewska, 2009).

This article's analysis makes it possible to examine the relevance of factors leading to cooperation (hypotheses 3 and 4). Regarding the fact that workers' rights were not enshrined in Asian integration, this analysis reveals that the lack of mention of these rights was less important than was assumed (Kay, 2005, 2011). Trade unions, regardless of whether international agreements include workers' rights, are equipped with cognitive resources stemming from their identification as trade unions (Abbott, 2000). However, one should consider the other elements on the international level that might have influenced trade union strategy, consistent with the argument made by Kay (2005, 2011), which points to transnational opportunities. British trade unions, because of the economic interdependence of their economy and the lack of opportunities to mobilize opposition at the national level, developed an interest in international-level cooperation (Bieler, 2006). However, the main Japanese trade union confederation, although in a similar situation, did not follow this pattern. This seems to have been caused by a lack of opportunities at the international level and the perception that their potential partners were too weak to provide any added value through cooperation.

The absence of organizational resources at the international level has influenced how Asian trade unions respond to integration. The relatively rapid timing of integration prevented trade unions from creating effective ties, and newly formed structures lacked leverage in motivating trade unions to act. The main trade union confederation, Rengo, presents a hierarchical attitude to international cooperation within the region. Swedish trade unions were similarly hesitant to cooperate with regional partners before critical events in the 2000s made engagement necessary (Bieler, 2006; Gajewska, 2009).

Besides the international-level mechanisms I discussed, the analysis also provides insight into another factor that might shape the reaction of trade unions, namely the ideological profile of civil society in Japan. More radical trade unionists may prefer a more internationalist strategy (Anner, 2003). Indeed, more critical of government than Rengo, trade unions Zenroren and Zenrokyo were in favor of strengthening cooperation within the region and building resistance to EPAs. Zenrokyo actively engaged in protest against the EPA with South Korea. Because of the structural discrimination faced by alternative trade unions in Japan, there is not much hope in their capacity to influence the government, except through protest activities.

Looking at the whole population of anti-globalization forces in Japan, one can observe the emergence of resistance to international EPAs (Chan, 2008). This makes it necessary to include other groups in the analysis and to look at the dynamics of cooperation. In the EU, marginalized groups started to mobilize at the EU or transnational level first (Taylor and Mathers, 2002). Mainstream trade unions are following this trend in a piecemeal fashion (Bieler, 2006; Erne, 2008; Upchurch et al., 2009). So far, the major Japanese trade unions have been reluctant to form such coalitions (Suzuki, 2008), but the situation may change to more closely resemble the case of European trade unions. In 2004, Rengo engaged in organizing the NGO-Trade Union Forum for International Collaboration, inspired by the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. A delegation from Rengo also participated in the World Social Forum in Mumbai in January 2004. However, the impact of other social movements on Rengo is limited due to the perceived weakness

of these movements (interview Rengo International). An exception was the influence of social movements in the Sumida case, a dispute between Korean workers and a Japanese company in 1989. Rengo, at first reluctant to involve itself, was pressed by actions of the People's Action Network to Monitor Japanese TNCs and by media attention to intervene (Williamson, 1994). International organizations have been pushed by social movements to take a more radical response to globalization (O'Brien, 2000). Rengo's engagement in the regional integration project may be further intensified by both its participation in the transformed ITUC and pressures from other social movements.

Appendix: List of interviews

Attac Japan, Secretary, 3 January 2010.

Rengo, Economic Department, 12 February 2010.

Rengo, Director of Department of International Affairs, 14 January 2010.

Rengo, former Director of Department of International Affairs (October 1999 to October 2005), 11 May 2010.

Zenrokyo, Secretary General, 27 January 2010.

Zenroren, Director of International Bureau, 27 January 2010.

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Notes

1. For instance, the AFL-CIO's American Center for International Labor Solidarity, which works closely with the American embassy in Thailand, tried to convince Thai workers of the benefits of the free trade agreement between those two countries (Biothai, 2007).
2. The North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation, as the side agreement on minimum labor standards is known, was negotiated as an addendum to NAFTA (see Kay, 2005, for more details). Critics, however, claim that it has made no improvements to working conditions and that it is only a pre-emptive measure to weaken public criticism (O'Brien, 2008b).
3. The EU has acknowledged the right of workers to information, consultation and participation.
4. APEC was founded in 1989 and is an intergovernmental grouping based on non-binding commitments. Decisions are made based on consensus and on a voluntary basis.
5. Between 60 and 80% of ETUC revenues come from EU Commission project funding rather than membership dues (Traub-Merz and Eckl, 2007). The ETUC was established in the 1970s, drawing on its roots in international union organizations.
6. This type of comparison appears increasingly justified because of recent developments within the European Union that resemble new regionalism (Warleigh-Lack, 2006).

7. Toyota Motor Company, for example, had 35 overseas manufacturing affiliates at the end of 1995, more than one-third of which were in East Asia including China and Taiwan (Sohn, 2002: 169ff.). Arguments about the political rather than economic logic behind integration are elaborated in Ravenhill (2010).
8. These data reflect rates reported by the trade unions in response to questionnaires administered by the Japan Institute of Labor. Responses were collected from December 2001 to February 2002. Percentages are derived from the totals reported by the government and self-reporting from unions. The government reports membership numbers as slightly lower than the numbers provided by the trade unions, due to differing methods of measurement: Zenroren: 883,000; Zenrokyo: 140,000. Some unions are affiliated with regional branches of Zenroren but not with Zenroren directly. Zenroren counts these unions as its members while the government does not. The pensioners' union is one of the Zenroren's major affiliates and Zenroren includes its membership in the total figure, while the government does not recognize the pensioners' union as a labor union (Prof. Akira Suzuki, 2010, personal communication). The biggest trade union without affiliation is the National Federation of Construction Workers' Unions with a membership of 717,908.
9. Since the founding of Zenroren and Rengo in November 1989, the government has exclusively engaged with Rengo members, and excluded Zenroren members. Various interventions in parliament have not changed the situation, and numerous lawsuits challenging this discriminatory treatment have been dismissed by the high courts and district courts.
10. The Japan International Labor Foundation (JILAF) is an NGO (non-governmental organization) and NPO (non-profit organization) set up by Rengo in May 1989 to promote international cooperation. The activity of this NGO reflects the preferences of the government and has a non-activist character (Williamson, 1994).
11. Exceptions were negotiations on agreements with Vietnam and Indonesia in which the issue of incoming nurses was at stake. Rengo would like to be included in consultation on all EPAs (interview Rengo Economic).
12. Thai trade unions are relatively repressed in comparison with trade unions in other East Asian countries. In Thailand, state interference in internal union affairs is permitted (Caraway, 2009; Lawler and Suttawet, 2000).
13. The APRO operates by launching campaigns and assisting affiliates in the promotion of labor standards within them. Its aim is to gain recognition as a partner in negotiations on free trade agreements, as well as to present a common stance on the integration process during their lobbying effort (International Trade Union Confederation Asia Pacific, 2007).

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