



Market data	
EPIC/TKR	FJV
Price (p)	171.5
12m high (p)	268
12m low (p)	158
Shares (m)	129.9
Mkt cap (£m)	223
NAV (19 Apr'22, p)	176.3
Discount to NAV	3%
Country of listing	UK
Market	STMM
Description	

Fidelity Japan Trust (FJV) aims to achieve long-term capital growth by investing predominantly in equities and their related securities of Japanese companies.

Company information

Company mor	mation
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trusts.fidelity.	co.uk/fidelity-japan-
	trust
Key sharehold	ers (Dec'21)
Fidelity Platform,	/HL/II 20.8%
Lazard AM	16.6%
Allspring Global I	nv. 9.9%
City of London I	M 6.4%
Canaccord Genu	ity WM 4.0%

Eazara	10.070
Allspring Global Inv.	9.9%
City of London IM	6.4%
Canaccord Genuity WM	4.0%
Wesleyan Assurance	4.0%

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Mid-Apr March monthly factsheet

Analyst

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FIDELITY JAPAN TRUST PLC

FJV: 10 questions for the AGM on 17 May 2022

In this note, we ask the 10 questions we would ask the FJV board at the forthcoming AGM on 17 May 2022. To offer a perspective, we also give the answers that we would give, if we were asked the same questions. We believe they fall into four key categories: i) What are the likely impacts on the trust of the Russian invasion of Ukraine? ii) Having outperformed for many years, why has the trust's performance dipped recently, and what will see it return to outperformance? iii) How will the investments perform in a higher-inflation environment? iv) What is the macro outlook for Japanese equities, given the economic, market and ESG perspectives?

- Long-term outlook: It has been a challenging year for the trust on multiple fronts, in terms of both the macro situation and investor appetite for the trust style. Despite that, the long-term track record is of a share price total return performance around twice the benchmarks, and we explore the factors driving this performance in detail below.
- **Opportunities:** FJV is about identifying mis-priced companies with good growth prospects. In periods of market volatility, uncertainty and fear can trample fundamentals, and such opportunities can increase in the short term. As Warren Buffett said: "be greedy when others are fearful".
- **Valuation:** 96% of investments are listed in active markets. While some may have a degree of illiquidity, the NAV is "real". The discount of 3% is above the average of recent levels, but it is slightly above that of its peers, whom FJV has materially outperformed over five years. FJV is run for capital growth.
- Risks: FJV has seen periods of short-term underperformance, when its investment style has been out of favour - typically, when the market has undergone a sharp factor rotation. Recovery has usually been swift. COVID-19 is uncertain, with rising cases from a low base. There are also some Japan sentiment issues.
- Investment summary: FJV has outperformed its peers, benchmarks and UK indices, with a distinctive and active investment approach. Its companies show faster-thanaverage revenue and EBITDA growth (ca.2x and 3x the market, respectively), and have higher ROEs and ROICs (both around one third above the market). It invests for "growth at a reasonable price" (GARP) – so company valuations can be higher. With an active approach, investors are buying FJV's investment process, not its portfolio on a given day. Japan offers tech-enabled growth and structural reforms, and is levered to global trade. Its approach can be out of favour, but, under the manager's tenure, underperformance periods have been short.

Financial summary and valuation

Year-end Dec (£000)	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022E	2023E			
Gains/losses on fin. inst. FV	(27,452)	52,982	38,535	847	27,696	31,475			
Gains/losses on derivatives	(6,873)	14,155	22,360	5,521	14,012	14,012			
Income	2,795	2,906	3,287	3,476	3,530	4,012			
Investment manager fee	(1,843)	(1,226)	(2,035)	(2,877)	(2,154)	(2,448)			
PBT	(33,858)	68,233	61,067	5,801	42,439	46,392			
Investments	185,987	249,099	303,002	307,738	349,717	395,662			
Cash	0	1,196	4,336	4,741	4,741	4,741			
NAV (£m)*	188	252	309	313	355	401			
NAV per share (£)	1.39	1.90	2.37	2.41	2.73	3.08			
Discount to NAV (%)	-9%	-7%	-7%	-5%	-37%	-41%			

*2018-21 NAV on year-end s/p, 2022-23E NAV on current s/p; Source: Hardman & Co Research



Direct impact on investee companies appears modest, with little investee company exposure and FJV underweight most exposed sectors

Indirect impacts include effect of inflation (including effect on ratings, but also may benefit efficient enablers) and lower global demand

Market overreacting can create mispricing anomalies for fundamental investors like FJV

Q1 What will be the impact on the trust of the Ukraine crisis?

The humanitarian impacts of the invasion must, of course, always be the primary consideration. There will be a range of direct and secondary effects on the trust, and it is a very volatile situation. The comments below are our thoughts only at the time of publication, and are likely to date quickly.

The direct impacts appear modest:

- ► Taking the direct impacts first, investee companies have limited Russian and Ukrainian revenue (FJV estimates them to total less than 0.3%).
- Japan has a large trade deficit with Russia¹. However, most of its exports are in automobiles and automobile components (sector underweights for the trust). The trust is underweight financials, and so is not exposed to risk in that sector.

The indirect and long-term impacts are more uncertain, and will take time to be clear:

- Nearly two thirds of imports are in liquefied natural gas (LNG), crude oil and coal (in most years, Russia accounts for 7%-8% of Japan's LNG imports). Like other energy-importing countries, Japan is likely to face strong inflationary prices from these, and other commodities, rising in price. An investment theme for the trust has been to find companies generating efficiency improvement, and such businesses should see further re-invigoration, given the rise in energy costs.
- Rising inflation may also affect the ratings given to growth businesses, and FJV is a GARP investor.
- Most economists forecast that global growth will slow²³⁴, due to considerable uncertainty, lower demand and disrupted supply chains, as well as any disruption in financial markets. This will have an impact on a global trading nation like Japan.

Market dislocation is likely to see individual share prices overreact, and fundamental analysis can identify where such movements create mis-pricing opportunities. For example, if all Japanese stocks were to weaken because of concerns about the impact of fuel price inflation, this would be an anomaly for those companies providing products and services that enhance efficient production. As we identified in our initiation, compared with local investors, FJV has a competitive advantage in Fidelity's global presence, while, compared with international investors, it has been on the ground, with a local team, speaking Japanese, for a long time (since 1969). From January 2020 to January 2021, FJV's NAV rose by over 30%, 3x the market index, showing an exceptional performance through the COVID-19 market uncertainty.

¹ https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-data/h01266/

² https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-60610537

³ https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2022-02-25/war-in-ukraine-how-the-ukrainerussia-conflict-could-impact-the-global-economy

⁴ https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/10/business/economy/imf-global-outlook-ukraine-war.html

FJV's share price total return

recently, seen period of

underperformance

performance around twice the

benchmarks over long term but,



After many years of outperformance, why has the trust's performance recently dipped and what will see it return to outperformance?

Q2: Why has the trust underperformed recently?

The charts below demonstrate how FJV's share price has outperformed against UK markets and Japanese benchmarks since the start of 2016 (Nicholas Price, the manager, took over the mandate on 1 September 2015 – so this is a fair reflection of his performance). FJV's share price total return performance is generally around twice that of each of the benchmarks below. However, against each of these benchmarks, there has been underperformance recently.



Source: Refinitiv, Hardman & Co Research

We flagged, in our initiation report, that investment approach carried risk of being, temporarily, out of favour From peak to trough, the share price fell from 256p in November 2021 to a low of 158p in March 2022 – a period when the Japanese markets fell by 10%-15%. While it would obviously be ideal to have no periods of underperformance, we believe it is an inherent feature of the approach that has delivered long-term outperformance, and we do not believe that a period of underperformance should be considered as abnormal or unexpected. We highlighted, in our initiation, that, for short periods, the management style has fallen out of favour, and this will be the third such period since the manager took over in 2015. Unfortunately, the timing (either start or end) cannot be accurately predicted; however, it is worth considering what factors are driving the current situation, so as to identify how far it could persist and whether there could then be any reversal into a more positive performance. We have identified the following issues:



There has been a conspicuous style rotation, leading to the outperformance of Sharp style rotation value and sharp declines for growth stocks – most evident in the buying of low price-to-book (PB) names and selling of high PB stocks. This has occurred as accelerating rate hike expectations have driven up real interest rates in the US. It has seen banks and insurance stocks notably outperform (sector underweights for FJV because of their lack of structural global growth opportunities). Conversely, growth-oriented sectors, such as precision instruments, services and electric appliances, have been among the most significant underperformers. In this environment, holdings in mid-/small-cap growth stocks in the information & communication sector have been among the most severely hit. Given the rising momentum for US rate hikes, further volatility seems possible in the near term from this factor. Another factor of the recent market phase that has generated headwinds for Extreme narrowness of price movement fund performance is the narrowness of price movements. This has produced with intra-sector divergence strong intra-sector divergences and, as a result, natural hedges have not worked. The shares in Toyota Motor (a zero position in the fund, against nearly 4% in the index) outperformed group company Toyota Tsusho (an overweight holding in the fund) by nearly 20% in January 2022. Given the extreme nature of these movements, we expect them to correct at some point.

Gearing impact in falling markets

Modest impact on discount from lagged effect of private holding valuations in falling market

Gearing kept high as, over long term, it has added value, albeit increased shortterm volatility

- ► FJV employs gearing so, in a falling market, it will see a greater fall than that for ungeared plays.
- ► Our initiation also highlighted that we regard FJV's flexible mandate, which allows it to invest in private assets, as another positive. A small factor in a widening discount could thus be attributed to the fact that, in falling markets, there will be a lag in the timing of the valuation of these assets compared with public markets. At February 2022, ca.5% of FJV's assets were unlisted, which, with a ca.10% market decline, could account for a 0.5% impact. The impact will clearly vary by the operating performance of the holdings, any realisations, and market movements.

Clearly, the past cannot always be a judge for the future, and FJV is starting from a level of a much higher outperformance; however, the charts on page 3 appear to illustrate a broad consistency in showing that periods of underperformance have lasted for around a quarter.

Q3: Why did you keep gearing so high during a period of underperformance?

FJV employs gearing (total equity exposure of net assets at December 2021 121.7%, January 2022 122.2%, February 2022 124.2%) with indiscriminate selling in highconviction names, creating opportunities to add on weakness. In our initiation, we highlighted that, historically, FJV gave an attribution analysis and, from 2010 to 2017, on average, gearing added 2.5% p.a. to the NAV. So, over the long term, it has added to returns, and the key issue is that, just as it is hard to know when a period of underperformance may begin, it is also hard to know when it will end. To reduce gearing would mean missing outperformance upside opportunities in any recovery, as well as any downside risk, and, over the long term, value has been added by having the gearing, albeit at the known cost of increased volatility.



Outperformance driven by structural factors

Attractive market

Company-specific procedures and management

With known risks

Q4: What gives you confidence that outperformance will be delivered in the future?

FJV's outperformance against UK and Japanese peers has not come about by accident or luck. In our *initiation*, we discussed extensively the opportunities in Japan and the model that FJV uses to exploit them relative to peers. We do not propose to repeat all the points again, but we sum up the reasons why it has delivered outperformance below.

- The Japanese market has i) innovation-led growth potential, ii) government-led structural reforms, iii) improving corporate governance, iv) balance sheet strength/corporate cash piles/higher dividends, v) a good near-term outlook, vi) an affluent population, vii) been attracting new investors like Berkshire Hathaway, and viii) an attractive market valuation.
- FJV's trust-specific factors include the following: i) investment process and focus on under-researched growth companies compared with local investors (as noted earlier, FJV has a competitive advantage in Fidelity's global presence, while, compared with international investors, it has been on the ground, with a local team, speaking Japanese, since 1969; ii) flexible mandate 3.6% was added to the NAV when an unlisted position IPO-ed in March 2021, and FJV is an active user of derivatives; iii) active management combined with a strong sell discipline average turnover can be relatively high (2016-20 more than 70%); iv) closed-ended structure, allowing gearing; and v) positive (relative) ESG credentials, with ESG viewed as enhancing performance, as well as social credentials.
- ► We also highlighted the risks to this delivery, including i) the market appetite for FJV's investment style, ii) volatility of FJV returns (both covered in more detail in this note), iii) sentiment to Japan's historical GDP growth and productivity, iv) the impact of the ageing population on future growth, v) sentiment to recent market performance, and vi) sentiment to the level of government debt.



FJV buys businesses with pricing power, and exposure to inflation risk is a core part of analytical review

Some impact on ratings has already been seen. FJV's investments not dependent on terminal values, and nominal earnings should also rise.

Core approach unchanged

Market disruption creates opportunities

How will the trust perform in a higher-inflation environment?

Q5: How will the existing investments perform in a higher-inflation environment?

FJV is concentrated in companies with strong positions in growing markets, such as factory automation and software services, those with new product cycles, and those implementing ESG-related and structural changes. It favours companies that are not directly consumer-facing, and it avoids manufacturers that may face pricing pressures as supply constraints ease. It also avoids companies that have benefited from short-term bottlenecks and those with sluggish mid-term growth prospects. All these traits would suggest that its existing investments should be able to cope reasonably well in a higher-inflation environment.

Q6: How will higher inflation affect the ratings of your growth companies?

The trust has a "growth at reasonable price" (GARP) investment approach, and higher expectations of inflation can have an impact on ratings if they feed through to higher interest rates. Future earnings are discounted at a higher rate, and so have a lower present value. We note:

- > This has already been a factor in the underperformance seen to date.
- ► FJV's investments are generally currently profitable companies and are not ones that are dependent on huge terminal values at some future date. Accordingly, their sensitivity to the discount rate is much less than investments in unprofitable venture businesses or ones whose valuation is based off multiples of future revenue, rather than current earnings.
- As noted above, most investee companies have pricing power, and, as the nominal value of earnings may also be expected, there is a partial offset to rating pressure.

Q7: Does the higher-inflation environment change the companies you find attractive?

We do not expect any change in the core GARP approach. The manager will pick quality companies that are likely to show faster-than-average revenue and EBITDA growth, and that have above-average ROE. Portfolio risk will be managed through position size and top-level characteristics. This core approach is what has delivered the long-term outperformance noted above.

Having said that, any market disruption throws up individual mispricing anomalies, and one advantage of Fidelity's global franchise is the breadth and depth of its analytical reach. As we noted in our initiation, compared with local investors, FJV has a competitive advantage in Fidelity's global presence and, compared with international investors, it has been on the ground, with a local team, speaking Japanese for a long time (since 1969). This franchise means it is well-positioned to identify such anomalies.



Bias to more defensive names and oversold growth, including energy supply companies

Unusually, PE for portfolio now in line with market, although growth prospects, as usual, much better than market The manager turned a bit more cautious towards the end of last year (inventories were on the rise in the manufacturing sector, and there were signs of a post-COVID-19 shift from goods to services). He is focusing more on defensive/sustainable growth names and services companies that can grow earnings in the more difficult environment through 2H'22/2023, and those that can positively surprise the market on mid-term growth. The manager is also looking at oversold growth names that are globally competitive and trading on compelling valuations. Some small-cap growth names have become value stocks – so there is a good opportunity for multiple expansion in the future, including seeing opportunities in companies that supply equipment to the energy sector.

The price-to-earnings ratio (PE) of the portfolio has come down considerably, and is in line with the market, at around 14x on a forward basis (CY'23). This is unusual, given the much higher growth rates (estimated operating profit growth is 3x that of the market average for 2023) and higher returns. It is very unusual for the portfolio to be at a market multiple, despite the much higher levels of growth and returns. Looking forward, the manager expects the companies held in the portfolio to do well in terms of relative earnings growth.



Nearly half investee company earnings come from outside Japan

FJV stock selection means it is exposed to specific niches within Japan, not whole market

"What is the economic outlook for Japan?" is actually the wrong question to be asking, but GDP outlook robust, if unexciting

Valuations in line, based off historical earnings, but cheap on one-year forward earnings compared with past 10 years and relative to other markets. Analysts' forecasts may be somewhat dated, though.

What is the outlook for Japanese equities the rest of 2022?

Q8: What is Japan's economic outlook?

As we highlighted in our initiation, FJV is investing in many Japanese companies with global opportunities or that have the product set/technology to become global businesses in the future. Within FJV's portfolio companies, international revenue is currently ca.40 of the total. This has come down by ca.10% in the past year or so, due to profit-taking in the tech sector, especially semiconductor related names, and there has been a move away from cyclicals and more of a focus on defensive growth in areas such as foods and software, but global exposure remains a significant factor for the trust. When considering "the economic outlook" for FJV, this global perspective needs to borne in mind.

We also highlighted in our outlook that, within Japan, FJV's stock selection makes it relatively insensitive to domestic macro factors. It is buying emerging opportunities in growing sub-markets. These areas include automation and software services, and those implementing ESG-related and structural changes where growth prospects may be under-appreciated by other investors. A potentially shrinking population creates opportunities for such companies, even though, for an economy, it may create challenges.

Given those caveats, we would argue that perhaps "what is the economic outlook for Japan?" is actually the wrong question to be asking. For those who are interested, the fundamentals of the Japanese economy are robust, if relatively unexciting – the January 2022 IMF <u>World Economic Outlook</u> is calling for Japan's 2022 real GDP to rise 3.3% (global 4.4%). For Japan, this is an acceleration on 2021 (1.6%), while the rest of the world is expected to see a deceleration; so, the rate of change is a relative positive for Japan. In Japan, monetary policy remains accommodative, and additional fiscal stimulus is coming through. The latter saw a further proposal announced at the end of March 2022.⁵ We noted, on page 13 of our <u>initiation</u>, that the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) potentially reducing costs across Asia by \$90bn was likely to be effective only from the end of 2021, and that Japan would be one of the major beneficiaries, with the benefits only just starting to be seen. Clearly, this may change, given the developments in the Ukraine, but, *prima facie*, the starting position is reasonable. We do not believe that the recent earthquake changes the outlook.

Q9: Are Japanese equities cheap?

The Japanese market is priced at around 17.8x historical years' earnings, which is in line with the 10-year average (the US, at 19.0x, is also around its 10-year average of 18.7x). However, against forward-looking earnings, the multiple is below historical and other market averages. The left-hand chart below shows the one-year forward PE for Japanese, US and UK markets since April 2012. On this measure, Japan looks cheap, at 12.8x forward earnings, which is well below the 13.9x 10-year average. It is also well below the PE of the US market, at around 19x. We would caution, though, that sell-side analysts may yet to have fully adjusted their estimates for recent events (probably waiting for 1Q results and guidance); so the market's forward PE may be expected to rise. It is also unclear whether investors will give it the same weight in such uncertain times. Looking at other market comparisons, the Japanese market is at 66% relative to US markets, when the 10-year average is 82%.

⁵ https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/japan-eyes-fresh-spending-package-cushion-blow-fuel-spike-2022-03-23/

Japanese, US and UK market P/E since April 2012



The right-hand chart below shows the PB of the Japanese market since the end of 2010, which is in line with the long-run average.

Japanese market PB since end-2010



Source: Refinitiv, Hardman & Co Research



Starting from a below-average position, due partially to disclosure

Improving trend

Fidelity approach has better-thanmarket ESG engagement

Q10: What is the outlook for ESG in Japan?

Although Japanese companies generally have lower sustainability scores than their European counterparts, we believe this is not due to any fundamental differences in strategy, but has more to do with cultural reasons around disclosure practices and language. We explored some of the reasons for this in our *initiation* (see pages 29-30).

We highlighted, in that report, a number of corporate governance improvements currently under way in Japan. Fidelity also notes that Japan now has the largest number of TCFD (Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures) supporters and CDP (Carbon Disclosure Project) A-rated companies in the world. Given the other business changes, such as digitalisation and the efficiency improvements that are necessary in an environment with a shrinking population, it may be expected that Japanese companies will reduce their carbon footprint.

Sustainability is a core part of the Fidelity-wide investment process. Assessing which companies can grow sustainably over the medium term, and enhance the efficiency of other corporates and their supply chains, is a key part of FJV's portfolio construction. By working closely with the Head of Engagement in Tokyo and maintaining an active dialogue with investee companies, FJV aims to continually improve the sustainability of their businesses, which will also enhance their performance as investments. By working closely with the Sustainable Investing Team on the ground in Japan, FJV believes it can identify companies that are implementing real change and moving up the governance scale. As these companies improve disclosure, ESG ratings should catch up, and the market should adjust valuations accordingly. For investors, this creates an opportunity to benefit from the adjustment.



Valuation

As can be seen in the chart below, FJV's discount is broadly in line with the average of its peers, and slightly higher than the average for Japanese smaller companies.



Source: LSE, priced on 19 April 2022, Hardman & Co Research

Current discount slightly below fiveyear average From the chart below, we can see that, since the end of 2017, FJV has generally traded at a mid-digit to high single-digit discount to NAV.





Source: FJV Report and Accounts, NAV announcement, priced on 19 April 2022, LSE, Hardman & Co Research



Financials

Despite the sharp fall in January 2022, we have not yet adjusted our full-year numbers. Should FJV see a rapid recovery, as has been seen after prior periods of underperformance, this would not be necessary. We will review our estimates in the light of performance later in the year.

Income statement (£000)									
Year-end Dec		2021			2022E			2023E	
	Revenue	Capital	Total	Revenue	Capital	Total	Revenue	Capital	Total
Gains/losses on derivatives	0	847	847	0	27,696	27,696		31,475	31,475
Gains/losses on fin. invst. FV	0	5,521	5,521	0	14,012	14,012		14,012	14,012
Income	3,476		3,476	3,530		3,530	4,012		4,012
Investment management fees	(448)	(2,429)	(2,877)	(379)	(1,775)	(2,154)	(431)	(2,017)	(2,448)
Other expenses	(620)	(13)	(633)	(632)	(13)	(645)	(645)	(13)	(658)
Foreign exchange gains/losses	0	(533)	(533)	0	0	0		0	0
Profit/(loss) bef. finance costs & taxation	2,408	3,393	5,801	2,519	39,920	42,439	2,936	43,456	46,392
Finance costs	(35)	(138)	(173)	(35)	(138)	(173)	(35)	(138)	(173)
Profit/(loss) before taxation	2,373	3,255	5,628	2,484	39,782	42,266	2,901	43,318	46,219
Taxation	(278)	0	(278)	(275)		(275)	(275)		(275)
Profit/(loss) after taxation for the year	2,095	3,255	5,350	2,209	39,782	41,991	2,626	43,318	45,944
Earnings/(loss) per ordinary share (p)	1.61	2.50	4.12	1.70	30.60	32.30	2.02	33.32	35.34

Source: FJV Report and Accounts, Hardman & Co Research

Balance sheet (£000)								
@ 31 Dec	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022E	2023E
Investments	161,777	221,792	185,987	249,099	303,002	307,738	349,717	395,662
Current assets								
Derivative instruments	4,619	1,123	269	3,048	1,932	1,006	1,006	1,006
Other receivables	534	652	3,263	899	668	525	525	525
Amounts held at futures clearing houses and brokers	0	0	7,611	0	21	0	0	0
Cash and cash equivalents	620	908	0	1,196	4,336	4,741	4,741	4,741
Total current assets	5,773	2,683	11,143	5,143	6,957	6,272	6,273	6,273
Total assets	167,550	224,475	197,130	254,242	309,959	314,010	355,990	401,935
Current liabilities								
Derivative instruments	(424)	(456)	(6,529)	(1,075)	(91)	(717)	(717)	(717)
Bank loans	0	0	(1,718)	0	0	(11)	-	-
Other payables	(721)	(1,492)	(1,353)	(676)	(1,062)	(629)	(629)	(629)
Total current liabilities	(1,145)	(1,948)	(9,600)	(1,751)	(1,153)	(1,357)	(1,346)	(1,346)
Net current assets	166,405	222,527	187,530	252,491	308,806	312,653	354,644	400,589
Net assets	166,405	222,527	187,530	252,491	308,806	312,653	354,644	400,589
NAV per share (£)	1.22	1.64	1.39	1.90	2.37	2.41	2.73	3.08

Source: FJV Report and Accounts, Hardman & Co Research



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