

Symposium on Japan-Saudi Relations

On the occasion of 20 years enthronement of King Fahd bin Abdulaziz

Under the auspices of Arabic and Islamic Institute in Tokyo

Japan—Saudi Cultural Exchange Strategy

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Summary

1. Stereotype Image Gaps in between the Japanese and the Arabs :
 - ① The historical image—While the Arabs look upon Japan through “Japanese Maidens” by Egyptian Poet Hafez Ibrahim and “ A Country of Rising Sun” by Mustapha Kamel (Japan’s Victory over Tsarist Russia in 1905—1908), the Japanese tend to view the Arabs with great sympathy, for they associate the Arabs with their revolts against the Turks in the First World War, the colonial powers’ betrayal in their promises of their self-determination and national independence as well as with the tragedies of the Arab-Israeli conflicts.
 - ② The economic image—While the Arabs generally associate Japan as machine producers with high technological skill and their dealers (Sony, Toyota, National...) , the Japanese identify the Arabs as “oil-sheikhs” who control the taps of oil and natural gas in their memory of their bitter experience of the 1973 Arab Oil Strategy as then applied to Japan.
 - ③ The development model image —While the Arabs once emulated, at least theoretically, post-Meiji-Japan as ideal pattern of Asian development with its own painstaking process of capital formation and industrialization, the Japanese tend to think otherwise: unlike the resources-poor Japan, the Arabs are blessed with abundant energy resources. The subsequent windfall profits, especially brought about by the Oil Crisis (1973) has made them realize that another option exist for the shortcut to prosperity. The Arabs get rich, too rich to be enthused with time-consuming manpower training and transfer of technology.
 - ④ The cooperation image—The Arabs expect the clean-handed, colonial-free

Japan to act more positively for Middle-East Peace Process and they often criticize, on the economic scene, Japan for not going beyond commercial dealings, not much investing their money on industrialization of non-oil sector, infrastructure or socio-educational institutions. On the other hand, Japan expects the Arabs' assurance of stable supply of energy to their most important customer on a long-term basis and commits herself to play a more positive role for the Middle East Peace, including UNRWA contribution.

- ⑤ The religious image — The Arabs are generally under the impression that the Japanese, Shintoists or Buddhists, polytheistic and less committed to God and nonchalant in daily life, have little to share with them socially, while the Japanese view the Arab friends in the next-to Taliban image with Bulqua-covered women and so many “do-nots” habits.

2. 20th Century Pattern of Japan-Saudi Cooperation

- (1) Since Saudi Arabia was a major supplier of energy resources to Japan throughout the post-war period, the vital muscles of bilateral relations continued to be “energy-monocultural” cooperative relations.
- (2) On the cultural exchange side, sports, traditional or modern, were main vehicles. Large-scale Budo (Japanese martial arts) missions were dispatched at regular intervals. The Japanese side was cautious not to step into “do nots” spheres such as public and mixed singing, dancing and other performances of sexually arousing nature.

Intellectual exchange, with properly-selected topics and counterparts within pertinent frameworks of forums or lectures, were carried out. The government-related, cultural-exchange institution, Japan Foundation organized symposia, one titled “Japan and the Middle East”(1978) and the other “Islamic Civilization and Japan”(1980).in which Saudi representatives were invited to participate.

Likewise, personal exchanges at professional and student levels took place with success.

3. 21st Century New Multi-dimensional Modalities of Japan-Saudi Relations

(1) After the entry into the 21st century, modalities should be sought for going beyond the existing pattern and for widening and deepening new dimensions of intellectual exchanges at various levels, not only in between Government and Government but also between business circles, academics, media, opinion leaders, women and NGOs.

(2)Active personal exchanges are desirable :

— Japan sends (at Saudi invitation)

- ① Nobel Prize laureates —novelist and scientists
- ② Islamic research academics—male and female
- ③ Energy and water development specialists
- ④ Visual artists and cinema directors, actors and actresses
- ⑤ Sports players

— Saudi sends (at Japanese invitation)

- ① Islamic opinion leaders
- ② Lady journalists, artists and public figures such as Madam Obeid, Secretary General, UN Population Fund)

(3) Topics to be discussed will include how to promote dialogue between Islam and other civilizations as well as wide-range policy-discussions, for example, by comparing notes on the questions as regards how to minimize negative aspects of globalization of market economy such as widening gaps between the rich and the poor. Water resources development will be another important agenda item.

The End