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Japan As Seen by the Palestinian Media

How the Palestinian Press and
Social Media View Japanese
Culture, Literature,
Technology, Economy, and
Palestinian-Japanese Relations

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Mohammad Daraghmeh

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By

Mohammad Daraghme

Members of the Joint Working Group on Palestinian-Japanese Working Group

Mr. Toshiya Abe, Chief Representative of JICA Palestine Office

Mr. Mohammad Daraghmeh, Asharq news bureau chief – Palestine

Dr. Ali Jarbawi, Professor and director of Ibrahim Abu Lughod Institute of International Studies, Birzeit University

Mr. Raja Khalidi, Director General of MAS (Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute)

Dr. Abdel Nasir Makky, formerly with JICA

Dr. Aiko Nishikida, Associate Professor, Faculty of Law Department of Political Science, Keio University

Ms. Tomoko Ohji, Editor & Senior Staff Writer, Mainichi newspaper

Mr. Omar Sha'ban, founder and Director, Palthink, Gaza Strip

Dr. Khalil Shikaki, director of the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, Ramallah, Palestine

Dr. Hiroyuki Suzuki, Associate Professor, the University of Tokyo

Dr. Ryoji Tateyama, Professor Emeritus, National Defense Academy of Japan

Mr. Kohei Tsuji, NHK Washington Correspondent

PCPSR's Publications of the Joint Working Group on Palestinian-Japanese Working Group

Background Reports prepared for the first workshop

Mohammad Daraghmeh, **Japan As Seen by the Palestinian Media: How the Palestinian Press and Social Media View Japanese Culture, Literature, Technology, Economy, and Palestinian-Japanese Relations**

Dr. Abdel Nasser Makky, **Strengthening Japan's "Corridor for Peace and Prosperity" Initiative: Japan and the Jordan Valley**

PCPSR, **Japan in the Middle East, 2017-2021: The Palestinian-Israeli Peace Process and Palestinian-Japanese Relations (excerpts from Japan's MOFA Bluebook)**

PCPSR, **Official PA-PLO Positions on Japanese-Palestinian Relations: recent statements on the Palestinian-Israeli Peace Process and Palestinian-Japanese Relations**

Omar Sha'ban, **Japan's Developmental Role in the Gaza Strip: The Constraints of the "Split" and the Promising Potential in Partnering with Civil Society and the Productive Sector**

Khalil Shikaki, **Palestinian Public Perception of Japan: Report on Results of a Public Opinion Poll among Palestinians, December 2021**

Background Report prepared for the Second workshop

Khalil Shikaki, **Japan and Palestine: Timeline of Main Developments and Turning Points in the last 50 years**

Reports on workshop's proceedings

PCPSR, **Report on the Presentations and discussion of the First Workshop of the Joint Palestinian-Japanese Working Group, January 2022**

PCPSR, **Report on the Presentations and discussion of the Second Workshop of the Joint Palestinian-Japanese Working Group, March 2022**

Other Publications

The Future of the Middle East Peace Process: Policy Recommendations produced by the Middle East Study Group, Headed by Dr. Ryoji Tateyama, Professor Emeritus, National Defense Academy of Japan, Organized by The Japanese Institute of International Affairs

Government of Japan, **Japan's assistance to the Palestinians**

Government of Japan, **JAIP: Jericho Agro-Industrial Park**

Japan As Seen by the Palestinian Media

How the Palestinian Press and Social Media View Japanese Culture, Literature, Technology, Economy, and Palestinian-Japanese Relations

Japan has a presence in the Palestinian media. But while this presence expands significantly in news about Japan's generous economic assistance to the Palestinian people, whether through UNRWA, or through infrastructure projects and other assistance to the Palestinian Authority (PA) since its founding in 1994, it significantly narrow when covering other areas related to Japan, its culture, literature, economy and the customs of its people.

Japanese Culture

You rarely find a special topic about Japanese culture in the Palestinian press, but there are some writers and journalists who have visited Japan and recorded their impressions of that country and its people. There are also international news outlets the covers exciting and interesting stories that are published in the Palestinian media.

On October 18, 2010, Dr. Khaled al-Hroub published an article on the opinion page of the Palestinian newspaper Al-Ayyam about a visit to Japan in which he documented the Palestinian presence in those distant countries, and some deep impressions of the country's beauty, people's customs and scientific and industrial progress.

"On the road between Tokyo and Kyoto, on the fastest train in the world, the plains and valleys confined to the mountainous nature of the country and crowding it. ... Mount Fuji, the tallest and the most famous, stands in the middle of the distance between the two cities, hanging between the white clouds. We see its upper half, while the whiteness wraps around its center like a devoted monk's wrap."

On public ethics in Japan, he writes: "It is said in the interpretation of the amazing politeness of people here that their overcrowding in the few lands that nature has made possible has forced them to develop traditions of politeness and respect for the feelings of others."

"What lies ahead in Kyoto, one of the most ancient cities, the oldest capital of the empire, and the starting point for the Meiji Restoration," writes Khaled al-Hroub of Japan's ancient capital Kyoto. "We will visit the most important university, and visit the great Golden Temple, where visitors stand silent, wondering on its doorstep the edges of a history that goes thousands of years... In front of Tokyo's similar Asakusa Temple, there was a long street leading to the

luxurious façade where the Japanese scattered their impressive artifacts. They welcome visitors with their polite bows and hospitable hand movements".

Khaled al-Hroub writes in his article of the Japanese Arabist, Nobuaki Notohara, author of "The Arabs: A Japanese Viewpoint," which put a "blame" on Arabs for lagging behind the peoples of the developed world: "Why don't you rise up? You started with us, Muhammad Ali in Egypt, and the Meiji in Japan set off in an approximate time, so why did you freeze"?

Japanese Literature

Japanese literature is well-known in Palestinian cultural circles but rare in the media. Akram Musallam, literary editor of the daily Al-Ayyam, said: "Japanese literature translated into Arabic is well read in Palestine and in the Arab world, but its presence in the press and the media is weak for reasons related to the weakness of the Palestinian media and the scope of its attention, which is predominantly local." "There are a large number of Japanese novels translated into Arabic, and they are widely popular in Palestinian cultural circles because of their importance, the importance of their subjects and their differences from Arabic and Western literature." According to Akram Musallam, Japanese and South American literature are more prevalent in Palestinian cultural circles than European literature." Some Palestinian writers explore Japanese novels in their articles.

In his weekly column on the last page of al-Ayyam on January 4, 2010, Palestinian poet Ghassan Zaqtan wrote an article on the Japanese novel Narayama. The article states: "The author is Shichirō Fukazawa, and the short novel, in 49 pages, interspersed with drawings and an introduction to the translator, starting directly into the event: "Mountains followed by mountains. Wherever one goes, you only find mountains... In what looks like a trail-check, a journey begins behind the songs of this rugged mountainous region in the middle of the Japanese islands."

"Orin" is the name of the heroine, who is approaching 70 waiting for her journey to Narayama, carried across the valleys on a board that her son hangs on his back. There he will leave her next to a tree or rock and return without turning back, and there will also be waiting for her "God of the Mountain". There is a song that leads every station in the novel, a song that stems from the place and its fierce cruelty, and leads the seemingly sacred destiny of women: songs that come out of the dark corners of the destinies of those who have passed working age and are beginning to be ashamed of their strong teeth, appetite, chewing ability, and that they are still alive."

Translated Japanese Novels

Some literary websites publish the titles of Japanese novels translated into Arabic, and recommend reading them. In 2016, al-Mursal published the names and summaries of the top 10 Japanese novels translated into the Western language. According to the summary, the reason why many Arabs stay away from Japanese culture is due to the difficulty of the Japanese

language, and its geographic distance. But with the translation movement it became available to the Arab reader to see the most important Japanese literary production.

One of the novels presented by the site is Yasunari Kawabata's "The Sound of the Mountain," which he said was "a poem in praise of everything human in this universe". Others include "Kafka on the Shore" by Haruki Murakami. According to the article, the novel speaks of a 15-year-old boy living his life in his own world with old Nakata, after leaving his home and his parents and choosing to live as he wanted.

Another novel is Haruki Murakami's "Ichi-Kyu-Hachi-Yun", which achieved the highest sales rate of novels and books in Japan in 2009. According to the article, it addressed big questions in the way of storytelling. Also, Yasunari Kwabata's "Flock of White Birds", which, according to a number of critics, is one of the best scientific novels. The author relied on telling the story with human dialogues between the good character and the "Thousand Cranes."

Also, among them is "Botchan", by Natsume Sōseki. The article said it is a novel that has been popular with many young people over generations "talking about morality and what positive role it makes in building peoples and homelands." They included Haruki Murakami's "The Norwegian Forest", a romantic novel; "All She Was Worth", a police novel by Miyuki Miyabe; "The Master of Go," by Yasunari Kwabata's, a semi-fiction novel, Haruki Murakami's "The Strange Library"; and Yasunari Kwabata's "One Arm," which the author considered an example of the magical current of realism in Japanese literature.

Japanese Technology

Many Palestinian and other Arabic-speaking media are full of news about Japan's unique inventions. The news is often published based on reports by international news agencies rather than journalists and writers specializing in Japanese affairs. There are no journalists in any of the Palestinian media specialized in Japanese affairs, although there are some Arab writers who follow Japanese affairs, especially in the Egyptian and in the Gulf media.

In 2017, the media website albawaba, published a news article about Japan's innovation and strange inventions that make life easier, such as a bed-mounted tablet holder, children's toilets in public bathrooms, a women's helmet that can take the hair braid out of a special opening, and a special support for readers while lying on the floor, and more. "Japan is renowned for its strange inventions and amazing innovations. They have the ability to solve the simplest problems we face every day with simple genius solutions that make our lives easier and more comfortable," said the news article, which was presented in a positive style under the title "Inventions that you will only find in Japan."

In 2021, almrsl website published a report entitled: 25 inventions, which demonstrate that Japan lives in the year 3018: "Japan is at the forefront of the most advanced countries in all areas of life, particularly in technology. Despite many wars, the most famous of which was the nuclear attack from America in World War II, the country was soon rebuilt and became one of the first developed countries in the world in various fields."

Japan as Seen by the Palestinian Media

The website listed the types of these inventions including such things as shoe-shaped trains, Japanese toilets characterized by multiple buttons and services that can measure blood pressure and weight. They also include the buying of food and clothes from machines, the reshaping and resizing of agricultural products such as square-shaped watermelons, the most protective bra against breast diseases, the mobile refrigerator that comes to you without you going to it and it tells you what is inside it with the possibility of preparing a menu from the ingredients inside.

Also, one of Japan's inventions is the payment glasses, a screen connected to your phone that shows all the notifications and texts on your account. "The State of Japan has made great progress and a great revolution in ICT, leading the industry of modern computers, entertainment gaming devices and smartphones of various international brands as well as cybersecurity.

Social Media

Japan is largely absent from social media in Palestine. The vast majority of Palestinians are active on Facebook and Instagram, but only few on Twitter. In their tweets, Palestinians are interested in local affairs such as human rights violations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, both by the Israeli and the local authorities.

Palestinian and Arab personalities are often followed by the Palestinian public. There are those who follow Hollywood artists. Those interested in political affairs follow English-speaking Palestinian, Israeli and foreign political figures and some international politicians who tweet in English.

The Japanese Economy

Economic and international pages in the Palestinian media show interest in economic developments in major countries such as Japan. News and reports from international news agencies on economic developments in Japan as well as in other major countries are often published.

Mohammed Abdullah, editor-in-chief of *Al-Iqtisadi*, said the Palestinian press shows little interest in Japan because of its distance from us and its lack of influence on the Palestinian situation unlike that of the United States and Europe. "However, there is interest in what world news agencies report on the Japanese economy in terms of its excellence, growth and standing among the world's economies, including new technologies or Japan's assistance to the Palestinian people," he said.

An example of economic news published by the Palestinian press from Japan is the following news published by *al-Quds*, the largest Palestinian newspaper, in May 2021 under the title: Japanese exports increased by 38% in April. "A government report on Thursday showed Japan recorded a trade surplus of 255.3 billion yen (\$2.33 billion) in April," the German news agency DPA reported.

Japan's finance ministry announced today that the trade surplus exceeded analysts' expectations that the surplus would reach just 140 billion yen last month, compared to a surplus of 662.2 billion yen in March, according to revised data, while the surplus was in March, according to preliminary data (663.7 billion yen).

Another reported story referred to the car industry reported in January 2022: "Toyota shares record their biggest rise in 21 months." The share price of Japanese automaker Toyota rose 6.3% in Tuesday's trading, its biggest rise since April 2020 to a record high as the Japanese yen fell against the dollar to its lowest level in five years. Another news item was published in January 2022, from the German news agency, under the title "The main Nikkei index of Japanese shares registers its biggest decline in six months."

Palestinian-Japanese Relations

Palestinian media widely covers news of Japan's support for the Palestinian people and Japan's balanced political positions on the Palestinian-Israeli issue. Reports in the Palestinian media show that Japanese support for the Palestinians has reached about 2 billion dollars since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, partly through UN agencies. The Palestinian encyclopedia described it as the second state in financial support for the Palestinians after the United States.

Palestinian media publish detailed news and reports on the participation of Japanese officials in the opening of Japanese projects in Palestine, or in diplomatic visits between officials of the two countries. They report widely on the positions announced by Japanese officials during these meetings on the Palestinian issue, in particular the call for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, the cessation of Jewish settlement in Palestine, and the rejection of Israeli violations of Palestinian human rights.

The restoration of the largest mosaic flooring in the world

One of Japan's most well-publicized projects is the restoration of one of the world's largest mosaic carpets of Hisham bin Abdul Malik Palace in Jericho. Several Japanese officials, particularly the heads of the Representation Office of Japan in Palestine, visited the project during its completion period from 2016 to 2021. Those visits and statements made by Japanese officials were widely covered.

Japan funded the Protective Shelter project, which covered the floor of the reception hall at Hisham bin Abdul Malik Palace in Jericho, the third oldest city in the world. The palace construction began in 743 AD. President Mahmoud Abbas opened the mosaic after the project was completed, due to its special importance. Dozens of officials and specialists spoke to the media about the important tourism impact of this project, which was supervised by a Japanese engineering team. They emphasized first and foremost the strengthening Jericho's status as a domestic and international tourist destination with dozens of archaeological sites.

At the launch of the project, the Japanese ambassador was quoted by the Palestinian media as stressing his country's position in support of "the establishment of a viable Palestinian state," as

Japan as Seen by the Palestinian Media

well as Japan's continued support for economic and social development and building a stable economy.

Jericho's Agro-Industrial Park (JAIP)

Japan's name in the Palestinian media has been particularly closely associated with Jericho, where the Japanese Government has funded the establishment of one of the largest agricultural industrial zones in Palestine. The 615-dunum agro-industrial zone in Jericho was set up as part of Japan's initiative "Corridor of Peace and Prosperity." Latest reports on the park indicate that so far it has created some 3,000 direct and indirect jobs and that the JAIP is expected to double in size once the second phase of the project is completed.

At the time, the Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso was quoted by the Palestinian media as saying at a joint press conference that his country was working to contribute to peace and stability in the region. "Building a Palestinian state requires building a strong economy that will enable it to continue," he said.

Japanese Ambassadors in Palestine

Japan's ambassadors have a permanent presence in the Palestinian press by participating in the inspection of Japanese projects in Palestine, particularly JAIP. On October 7, 2020, *al-Ayyam* newspaper reported the opening of a series of new factories in the city with the participation of the Japanese Ambassador to Palestine Masayuki Magoshi and the Chief Representative of JICA's Palestine Office, the Japan International Cooperation Agency for International Cooperation in Palestine (JICA), Mr. Toshiya Abe.

On this occasion, Palestinian Economy Minister Khaled al-Assili planted an olive tree in memory of the late Japanese Ambassador Junya Matsuura, who was Japan's ambassador to Palestine from 2012 to 2015, and thanked the Government and people of Japan for their generous support to improve the Palestinian economy in various sectors and attract and encourage investment in Palestine, the newspaper said.

Remarkable presence of Japanese diplomats

Palestinian media show a remarkable presence of Japanese diplomats in activities aimed at revitalizing the economic sector. The Ministry of Economy website published on July 2, 2019, the launch of the "Industry Promotion Program" by Minister of National Economy Khaled al-Assili and Japan's Ambassador to Palestine Takashi Okubo to raise the contribution of the industrial sector to the Palestinian GDP from 13.5 to 25% over the next 10 years.

Humanitarian activities

In 2015, the Palestinian media quoted the United Nations Population Fund as saying: Japan has recently decided to spend \$100 million through international organizations, such as UNFPA, for humanitarian projects. "The Fund is one of our important partners implementing humanitarian projects in Gaza. We will continue to work together for the success of our project," the Japanese ambassador said.

Diplomatic relations

Palestinian and Japanese officials exchange diplomatic visits. Japan has appointed a special envoy for the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, who makes frequent visits to the region with the aim of exploring opportunities for Japan's contribution to the political process between Palestinians and Israelis.

The Palestinian media provide remarkable coverage of these visits and the positions expressed and statements made regarding Japan's political and economic support. These include a visit by president Abbas to Japan from February 14 to 17, 2017, during which he met with Emperor Akihito, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the president of JICA, Mr. Shinichi Kitaoka, and a large number of officials in Tokyo.

The Palestinian media quoted the Japanese Prime Minister pledge to Abbas of 78.2 million dollars in additional aid to Palestine, stressing his country's determination to continue its political and economic support for Palestine to be an "independent, democratic, growth-capable and cohesive" state.

The Japanese prime minister was quoted by the media as lamenting the lack of progress on the part of the Palestinian and Israeli sides in the negotiations in recent years, urging them to find common ground for the resumption of the peace process. Mr. Abe also stressed the importance of achieving reconciliation for a Palestinian in order to hold fair and transparent elections.

Recommendations

The paper proposes to enhance Japan's presence in the Palestinian media and cultural life. This can be done by hosting Palestinian journalists on tours in Japan, separately from Israeli journalists, during which they report on Japanese political, cultural and civilization. A media exchange program could be launched between Palestine and Japan.

Another recommendation is to host Japanese writers and literary figures in Palestinian cultural institutions for a series of open seminars in which they can talk about their literary production. Another idea is to hold film screenings of Arabic-translated Japanese films in Palestinian cultural institutions, such as Ramallah municipality, Mahmoud Darwish Museum, and the Cultural Palace.

Another suggestion is the hosting of Japanese bands at Palestinian art festivals, such as the Palestine Contemporary Dance Festival and the Summer Heritage Festivals held by the Palestinian Folk Art Center.

The **Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research** explored Palestinian-Japanese relations by establishing a joint Palestinian-Japanese working group made up of experts and academics to engage in a dialogue on the various facets of the relationship with the aim of proposing a joint vision on how to strengthen and advance that relationship in a manner that helps it meet the challenges of the future. This initiative sought to examine *Japan's role in the Middle the Middle East by focusing on Japanese-Palestinian Relation through a Joint Japanese-Palestinian second track policy workshops and consultation.*

The dialogue took place in two online workshops to discuss the current relationship and explore ideas and policies for the future. In addition, the effort included the preparation and publication of various background reports and working papers addressing some aspects of the current relationship. PCPSR also issued two reports summarizing the presentations and discussion of the two workshops as well as the recommendations of the second workshop.

The Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR)

P. O. Box 76, Ramallah, Palestine

Tel: +970-2-2964933

pcpsr@pcpsr.org

www.pcpsr.org

