

Introduction to Special Issue: Japanese Studies in Israel as a Micro-Cosmos of Japanese Studies in Other Part of the World

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On May 7-9, 2012, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Israel, a special symposium was held at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Supported by the Japan Foundation, a group of fifty-five scholars from Israel and abroad gathered for three days to reflect on the history of Japan-Israel relations and to discuss future prospects and opportunities (for the list of participants and abstracts see: <http://eastasia.huji.ac.il/japan-israel-2012/index.html>).

The symposium, titled *Israel and Japan: Regional, Bilateral, and Cultural Perspectives*, was the biggest of its kind ever to take place in Israel and the wider Middle East. The symposium was both a milestone in the cultural and educational relations between Japan and Israel, and an intellectual project with a broad academic and theoretical value. The event also provided a chance to reflect on the state of Japanese studies in Israel as a micro-cosmos of the development of Japanese studies outside Japan and the United States.

The papers at the symposium were organized around three main themes. The first, *Japan in Asia vs. Israel in the Middle East*, encouraged the participants to draw analytical and theoretical insights from these two seemingly different contexts—Japan in Asia and Israel in the Middle East—and discuss the possible roles of diplomacy, commerce, and culture in the transitional processes toward peace.

The second theme was titled *Geopolitics and Diplomacy in Japan-Israel Relations*. Here, the central idea was not only to look at Japan's diplomacy toward the Middle East and particularly toward Israel, but also to examine the reciprocity between diplomacy and "hard" interests. Among the questions raised were: To what extent the issue of resources influenced the relations? What about each country's mutual relations with the U.S.? Does diplomacy play a vital role in constructing international relations, or are these relations mainly the result of interests and international politics?

The third theme, *Cultural and Scholarly Exchange between Israel and Japan*, examined the appearance of Japan and the Japanese language in Israel and looked at the extent of Hebrew and Biblical studies in Japanese academia. Through the examination of

various forms of “translation,” learning, and imagining each other’s culture, participants reflected on questions such as: What impact does Japanese art and culture have on the image of Japan in Israel? What has brought students into Japanese studies’ classes in recent years? What is the right way to teach the Japanese language in Israel’s higher education institutions? How does the popularity of Japanese contemporary culture affect Israeli youth? And, how do the developing diplomatic relations between the two countries affect the growing academic and cultural exchange between the two countries?

Political Encounters, Social Crossroads, and Betwixt and Between

The papers in this special issue reflect the main thematic and analytical foci discussed during the symposium. These include a wide assortment of disciplines—history, sociology, cultural and media studies, literary theory, translation, visual arts, biblical studies, and political science—to reflect on the various relations and linkages connecting Japan and Israel and compare certain aspects between the two countries.

The papers are divided into three clusters. The first, *Political Encounters*, examines the historical and diplomatic dimensions of Japanese-Israeli relations since the late nineteenth century and discusses the virtue of comparing certain aspects of the two countries’ political and international conduct. It starts with Maruyama Naoki’s paper, which deals with a relatively overlooked aspect of Japanese-Israeli relations—analyzing Japan’s early encounters with the Zionist movement in the first decades of the twentieth century. His work sheds light on the existence of meaningful historical roots in Japanese-Israeli relations established through the initiatives of individuals. Meron Medzini’s paper examines Israeli-Japanese diplomatic relations from their formal inception in the early 1950s. Medzini’s paper documents major shifts in the bilateral relations over a period of approximately forty years and situates Israel’s attitude towards Japan with its wider diplomatic relations with other Asian countries.

The following two papers in the political cluster demonstrate the usefulness of the comparative approach. Ehud Harari’s paper examines the lessons to be learned from the Japanese experience of reconciliation with its Asian neighbors, and the importance of the economic relations which Japan established with several Asian countries after the Pacific War. His central argument is that in spite of the vast differences between Japan and Israel, it is still possible to draw important theoretical and analytical lessons related to the transition

toward peace in post-conflict regions. Sigal Ben-Raphael Galanti and Alon Levkovich's paper focuses on the practice of judicial review in Japan and Israel and its effects on democracy. They find that while judicial review functions quite differently in Japan and Israel (in spite of the fact that both countries share a few similar political and institutional characteristics as parliamentary democracies), in both countries judicial review has empowered civilians by limiting the state's authority and ensuring that it accommodates individuals' rights. Lastly in this cluster, Hamanaka Shingo's paper introduces a new way to look at the Israeli-Arab conflict within the larger political constellation that he calls a "system approach." Utilizing a specifically designed public opinion poll, Hamanaka describes Israeli people's "political mental map," indicating their attitude towards and perceptions of other countries in the Middle East.

The second cluster, *Social Crossroads*, outlines some important socio-cultural developments, which characterize the relationship between Japan and Israel. The four papers in this cluster examine the linkages and parallels between the two countries concerning collective memory, popular culture, media, and urban space. Michal Daliot-Bul and Ofra Goldstein-Gideon discuss the phenomenon of Israeli fandom of Japanese popular culture, which has been developing since the late 1990s. Their paper looks at the ways in which fans create their own media-centered "imagined community," which can be associated with a wider phenomenon known as "Cool Japan." Helena Grinshpun compares the reconstruction of public spaces in Japan and Israel through focusing on the emergence of a 'café culture' in both countries. By looking at the historical connections between the café and national imagination, her paper explores the role that everyday practices play in forging identities in the two countries.

Ran Zwigenberg's paper explores the issue of collective memory in Israel and Japan by comparing the commemorations of the Holocaust in Israel with that of the atomic bombing in Japan. His paper analyzes the ways in which traumatic lessons are being internalized, interpreted, and incorporated into the official historical narratives in both countries. Rotem Ayalon presents a different perspective on historical narratives by analyzing the correspondence between Ōe Kenzaburō and Amos Oz, two highly appraised novelists who were explicit in voicing their opinions on issues related to their country's politics. Their discussion of the concepts of humanity and history sheds light on the public role undertaken by modern writers, and on the nature of their engagement with society.

Beyond enumerating the similarities and differences between Israel and Japan in terms of historical commemoration, media communication, and the cultural construction of public spaces, the papers in this cluster emphasize the impact of exogenous forces within these arenas. In particular, the papers demonstrate the role of historical developments and, more recently, the advent of globalization, which in both countries has made a strong impact on determining political and social agendas.

The third cluster, *Betwixt and Between*, examines Japanese-Israeli connections through the lens of literature, translations, and language, showcasing productive interactions within the Japanese and Israeli academic and cultural spheres. As we learn from Takeuchi Yu's paper, the study of the Bible and the Hebrew language within Japanese academia was at first a branch of Christian studies. A rise in the learning of Jewish religious texts has been apparent, nevertheless, in the last generation. An increasing number of scholars and students in Japan are interested in the study of the *Talmud*, Rabbinic texts, and the history of Jewish communities; their publications and various associations are clearly visible today within the Japanese academic scene. Igo Tomoyasu's paper exemplifies the unique and productive cooperation that can arise by applying Japanese paradigms to the ancient study of *Talmudic* texts. His paper concentrates on a conversation between two dead women in the *Berachot* Tractate, whose clear "ghostly" (and thus heterodox) component baffled many. Applying the *marebito* (foreign visitor) concept coined by pioneer Japanese folklorist Origuchi Shinobu, Igo proposes a reconstruction of the narrative as an auspicious folktale with clear moral messages.

Being a major and ongoing struggle for all who attempt a profound understanding of a foreign culture, the attempt to translate and transform concepts, messages, and texts from the Hebrew to Japanese and vice versa, is a topic that engages many scholars. Murata Yasuko, a translator of canonic Hebrew authors into Japanese, details in her paper the professional dilemmas that impose on the translator of Hebrew, which extend to a disloyalty to the original texts for the sake of making sense in Japanese.

The communication of cultural concepts and forms between Japan and Israel is apparent also in the various aspects of visual culture. Not coincidentally titled "Japanese Architecture in Hebrew," Arie Kutz's paper surveys the translation of Japanese architectural forms and styles in the Israeli public sphere. Kutz demonstrates that leading Israeli architects, whose works are often regarded as inflective of the "international style," have

gathered a library of Japanese architectural magazines, from which they appropriated motifs and elements for some well-known buildings in Israel's campuses and museums.

Additionally, Shalmit Bejarano analyzes the appropriation of Japanese visual traditions in paintings by Israeli artists. Bejarano argues that Japanese models bore a special significance for local artists that began in the early twentieth-century with the attempt to construct modern Jewish art in an Oriental fashion. Japanese art remained a model for emulation and self-measurement also a hundred years later, although in recent years artists have expressed a critical approach towards the role of the "alternative other" prescribed to Japanese culture. Both the process of "othering" and its critique can be interpreted vis-à-vis the disintegration of a Zionist identity.

This rich and diverse cluster indicates the maturation of a cultural exchange between Japan and Israel in the current generation. The growing sophistication of the cultural agents has opened more forms of communication and transmission which reflect larger trends of cultural receptivity, not unrelated to globalization. At the same time, the growing exchange and communication that globalization has brought forth stimulates a growing understanding of individual "others," together with nuanced reflections on one's own culture.

Beyond Japan and Israel

What kind of analytical insights do these papers reflect and how do they contribute to the understanding of Japanese studies? The papers in this special issue suggest that in spite of the vast differences, comparing Israel and Japan and analyzing the links between them is beneficial not only for producing knowledge about these two countries, but also for the sake of developing new theoretical insights which may be relevant in broader contexts. For example, the first cluster on politics and history underlines the importance of earlier historical roots and diplomatic negotiations concerning the nature of bilateral relations. The second cluster, *Cultural Crossroads*, demonstrates the different ways in which history and culture are produced, reproduced, and framed. The final cluster documents the ways in which knowledge of other countries is being conceived and cultivated through art, architecture, and literature, and in turn, becomes integrated into the imagined self of the importing culture.

The whole project carries an important methodological message: that we should examine and compare not only societies and states which share common borders or have similar socio-cultural characteristics, but also be open to comparisons which may seem

distant at first. Moreover, comparing case-studies in two different countries and focusing on places of interaction may shed light on the social changes and dynamics brought by exogenous forces such as globalization. Despite the fact that Israel and Japan do not share especially long historical and cultural relations, the papers demonstrate the power of the media and of cultural relations in forging new identities in both countries.

Finally, the entire project asks to convey a message regarding the development of Japanese studies, also outside the major universities of North America. By focusing on what may seem marginal and anecdotic at first, this issue attempts to suggest alternative routes to approach and assert larger political, historical, and cultural constellations. By contributing to the knowledge about Japan from a very local approach, Japanese studies in Israel attempt to open new horizons for learning about other countries and their culture at a time when the borders between countries seem to be losing their former importance. Focusing on comparisons, we hope, bears the importance of developing the faculty of a more nuanced appreciation of the foreign as well as one's own culture.

We hope that the range of disciplines and academic attitudes found in this special issue, the empirical and theoretical richness of the papers, and the developments they analyze will contribute to the body of research on Japan. We also hope that this compilation will inspire new directions for research and new initiatives for collaboration between scholars working in the field of Japanese studies.

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