

Cultural Diplomacy; the Case of Iran-Japan Relations during the Sanction Period

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Abstract

Considering the developments of the international community and the emergence of a relative turn from materialism and central security to culture-based discourse, "culture" and "cultural relations" have become an important element in the foreign policy of countries. Accordingly, "cultural diplomacy" is considered as a major priorities of foreign policy. The adoption of cultural diplomacy by the two states of Iran and Japan and the pursuit of cultural activities to maintain and develop mutual relations between the two countries under the conditions of Iran's nuclear sanctions indicate the importance of cultural relations at a time when political and economic relations undergo some inadequacies. Two countries of Iran and Japan, through various cultural exchanges under the tough conditions arising from sanctions, have attempted to mitigate the already generated negative space and keep communication channels open so that political and economic ties can be quickly restored to the normal state when the required conditions are met.

Keywords: *cultural diplomacy, political and economic relations, Iran, Japan, sanction period*

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Introduction

The developments of the international community over the past centuries and the relative turn from materialism and central security to culture-based discourse in the international system have highlighted the role of culture in various dimensions of human life and in the establishment of relations among countries. Accordingly, considering the existential nature of culture and its ability to bring about a convergence among nations and states, the role of culture has assumed great importance in country's foreign policy. Boosing cultural diplomacy has a key role in establishing good relations and providing the grounds for greater mobility in political, economic, and social relations between countries. Today, experts in cultural diplomacy and foreign policy acknowledge that success in achieving national interests is largely contingent upon the employment of culture and cultural diplomacy in order to persuade public opinion. To this end, governments have regarded cultural diplomacy as an effective and important approach to maintain and develop mutual relationships; in this way, they provide the necessary grounds to develop relationships with one another.

Iran and Japan are two important and decisive countries in global relations on both ends of the West and East Asia and are not an exception in this case. Indeed, they have always sought to opt for cultural policy making and embarked on maintaining and enhancing bilateral relationships, especially after the introduction of Iran's nuclear case and the imposition of comprehensive sanctions against Iran. Japan is today regarded as the third largest economic power in the world and is striving to play a major role

in maintaining international peace and security. This country was already considered a military and colonial power in the early twentieth century; however, it has attempted to shift its strength from the military arena to the economic and cultural spheres and to help in the realization of international understanding and peace by developing cultural diplomacy after failure in the World War II and undergoing abundant restrictions on part of the conquerors of the war. As a country with cultural and civilizational richness, Iran has always sought to have friendly and peaceful relations with other countries (in various scopes, i.e. politics, economics, etc.) through its Iranian-Islamic culture and civilization in order to both help develop its own rich culture and benefit from it to expand its relations with other countries. This important issue has been at play throughout Iranian history and has undergone innumerable ups and downs depending on the circumstances. The realization of the Islamic Revolution, the outbreak of the imposed war, the introduction of Iran's nuclear case, the imposition of comprehensive sanctions, and, ultimately, the introduction of Iran as a so-called country that violates international peace and threatens security have all made the statesmen pursue cultural diplomacy as a top priority and use the cultural and civilization approach to confront Iranophobia and Islamophobia. In this way, Iran has tried to maintain and expand its relations with other countries, including Japan.

The main question of this paper is concerned with the ways in which cultural diplomacy can affect the maintenance and development of political and economic relations between Iran and Japan following the incidence of Iran's nuclear program and the imposition of comprehensive sanctions against Iran. The main hypothesis held by the current authors is that Iran and Japan have attempted to mitigate the negative atmosphere and keep the communication channels open in order to maintain and expand bilateral political and economic relation by adopting cultural diplomacy during the sanction period.

I. Conceptual Framework

Cultural Turn: Many Western scholars and thinkers believe that a cultural shift has come into play in advanced industrialized countries in the late twentieth century that has affected various aspects of human life in such a way that many arenas, including social, leisure, political, and even economic scopes have found strong cultural aspects (Panahi, 2014: 3). This turn has contained a shift towards cultural discourse and a departure from Marxism-influenced materialism and political economy that flourished heavily in the 1980s and early 1990s (Larry Ray & Andrew Sayer, 1999: 1).

Disseminating into in all spheres, including political, economic, social domains, and so forth, cultural turn has affected inter-state relations and plays a significant role in international relations by turning culture into an important element in inter-state relations. In *Culturalism, Globalization and Human Rights*, the authors state that, unlike classical theorists of international relations who believe that inter-state relations are founded upon two elements of politics and economics, J. M. Michael, Keneth Thompson, and Sovdjet Moko emphasize the important role of culture and regard it as an indispensable element in international relations under the inspiration of cultural turn theory and by considering the extension of the role of culture to other domains. J. M. Michael has considered culture as the third dimension of international relations and believes that some affairs beyond formal relations between states are at play in human life. These affairs, like cultural issues, have a profound effect on international relations and are considered as the third dimension of inter-state relations after politics and trade, which are the first two dimensions of international relations. In an other article entitled *Cultural Diplomacy*, Keneth Thompson and Sovdjet Moko have also presented a functional insight into the role of culture. They believe that cultural relations are a comprehensive arena of international relations that can provide the grounds for a peaceful life and pave the way for global reconstruction. In other words,

From Thompson and Moko's perspective, the broad domain of culture is in fact an inclusive dimension of international human life that can ultimately facilitate political and economic relations and provide the grounds for bringing changes into the global structure (Salimi, 2006: 67-76).

There are two types of cultural turns at play in the study of cultural turn:

1. Cultural turn I: Culture as a tool and 2. Cultural Turn II: Culture as an object (Aoki-Okabe, Kawamura & Makita, 2006: 6).

In cultural turn I, culture is viewed a tool that is used to achieve other goals. In this kind of cultural turn, culture in itself is not important and is merely a tool for the achievement of other interests, both political and economic ones. In contrast, in cultural turn II, culture is of great importance and is considered as the main object of study unlike cultural turn I. In this kind of cultural turn, culture is a goal and other tools, such as political and economic ones are used to achieve this goal.

Based on the theory of cultural rotation and its match with the current discussion, we arrive at the theoretical approach that Japan acts in accordance with cultural turn I while the Islamic Republic of Iran acts according to a combination of cultural turns I and II. From the post-World War II era to date, Japan has attempted to theorize and conceptualize its relations with its surrounding environment on the basis of international cultural relations. This means that culture is used as a tool by Japanese foreign policy practitioners and, thereby, cultural diplomacy is regarded as an important element in the foreign policy of this country with the aim of serving the development, producing wealth, and enhancing interactions in various subject areas, including economics, politics, and even security. As a country with a rich discourse, ideology, and cultural history, Iran both makes use of culture as a tool to foster international relations and finds it important and valuable and, thereby, seeks to view the transmission of its national and Islamic culture in the international arena as a mission.

The study of the cultural turn theory indicates that all

countries, as constituent units of the international system, seek to adopt soft policies based on cultural issues in order to acquire reputation and credibility in the international community. In this way, countries take advantage of cultural tools to transmit the richness of their civilization and culture to other nations, influence the public opinion, and, thereby, regulate their relations with other nations.

Cultural Diplomacy: Cultural diplomacy refers to the promotion of foreign relations through cultural exchanges; in other words, countries adopt cultural diplomacy and, thereby, embark on disseminating and exposing patterns of their national culture abroad in order to present a positive and justified image of themselves in the international environment. Joseph Nye believes that cultural diplomacy is the best example of soft power that seeks to establish relations through culture, values, and ideas (Ryniejska: 12). To put it better, cultural diplomacy is fulfilled through flexible tools, such as culture, art, knowledge, and so on to promote mutual understanding among nations and states. In fact, countries use cultural diplomacy to gain international reputation, consolidate their status in the system, influence the behavior of other international units, and, ultimately, achieve political and economic goals as well as other goals. Accordingly, it can be argued that culture, as one of the manifestations of soft power, is a tool at the mercy of the foreign policy of countries and has a great role in producing wealth, authority, and security, and also plays an undeniable role in shaping political, economic, and social relations of countries.

The basics of cultural diplomacy are as follows: 1. Cultural policies of the source country, 2. Cultural policies of the target country, 3. Recognition of culture as a soft power, 5. Attention to modern diplomacy (non-governmental and intergovernmental actors and the importance of communications technology) (Sadegh Salimi Bani, & Mohammad Mojaver-Sheikhan, 2014: 177)

Governments pursue three major goals through cultural diplomacy: 1. Acquisition of an international reputation among

ethnics and nations and its effectiveness in their behavior. 2. Establishment of new scientific and cultural institutions to bring about more lasting relations and closer intimacy: Cultural diplomacy can lead to the establishment of cultural institutions or centers in other countries. These institutions themselves pave the way for the stability of relations in the uncertain environment of international politics. 3. Precise understanding of the existing principles of the culture of other nations and exploration in the cultural and social roots of other societies with the aim of promoting mutual understanding among nations (Dehshiri, 2014: 30).

Taking these goals into account makes it essential to mention that countries pursue their political and economic interests by adopting cultural diplomacy and, consequently, expand political and economic relations.

Cultural tools and methods of cultural diplomacy: 1. Highlighting the role and influence of past and contemporary scholars and thinkers of the respective country in advancing science and literature throughout the world and benefiting from their reputation, popularity, and credit for meeting the strategic goals of cultural diplomacy; 2. Using the latent capacities of the country's language and literature, promoting cultural diplomacy through the establishment of language and literature courses of the respective country at major universities around the world, and granting regular and ongoing scholarships at postgraduate and doctoral levels; 3. Attending international forums and conferences alongside participating in international art and sport festivals (international film festivals, stories, theaters, and the Olympic Games) as well as holding regular exhibitions, gatherings, workshops, and cultural seminars in the target country; 4. Placing special emphasis on the provision of specific cultural training for diplomats and bringing up cultured diplomats who are familiar with the cultural strengths and weaknesses of both the origin and target countries; 5. Helping with the establishment of ethnological centers (Iranology, Japanology, etc.), establishing this course at

prestigious universities around the world, and providing short-term sabbatical leaves for academic experts and those interested in the country's culture and literature with the aim of attracting elites and intellectuals from target countries (Khani, 2007: 229-230).

II. Japan's Cultural Diplomacy

In general, diplomacy is a means of achieving the political goals based on the national interests of countries. Since economic interests after the World War II are of great importance to Japan and have become a focal point of diplomacy for this country, culture is used as a tool for achieving economic benefits. In addition, cultural collaborations, which are rooted in relations among cultures or humans with different backgrounds, play an important role in advancing friendly relations between countries. Accordingly, the Japanese government uses cultural diplomacy to establish relations with other countries and to achieve economic benefits.

From the viewpoint of Kazuo Ogura (和夫小倉)- president of the Japan Foundation (国際交流基金)- cultural diplomacy refers to the use of cultural tools through which one country exerts political influence on other nations. Cultural diplomacy is considered as a part of a country's foreign policy and has a political influence. The main purpose of cultural diplomacy is to improve one state's image and credibility through cultural aspects, such as performing arts, language teaching, and intellectual traditions. Japan's cultural diplomacy has always sought to eradicate any negative image about Japan and/or to differentiate it and correct foreign misperceptions. According to Ogoura, Japan today must go beyond the traditional patterns of cultural diplomacy and take steps to rely on and share its own proud cultural traditions with people from other countries. This is not to improving the foreign image of country, but to cooperate on the achievement of human society, the survival of global peace, and cultural diversity (Ogoura, 2008: 44-53).

On this basis, it can be argued that culture, in the same line

with politics and economics, is considered a very effective element in the diplomacy of this country, which has witnessed a growing trend in recent years. Japan has introduced its cultural diplomacy as "cultural exchanges" and has divided it into three categories as follows:

1. Intellectual exchanges 2. Lifestyle exchanges 3. Exchanges of science, technology, and, art (文化交流と文化外交, 2016: 9-10)

To gain a better understanding of Japan's cultural diplomacy, it is required to know the most important cultural character of Japan, which is also important in relation to the international environment. It is noteworthy that one of the most significant cultural features of Japan is the integration of tradition and modernity while preserving Japanese tradition and culture in all aspects of society. Accordingly, in an article entitled *The Impact of Globalization on Culture: Case Study of Japan*, Tenko has been introduced as Japan's main cultural foundation, which is also of great importance in interaction with the international Community. The term *Tenko* means to change one's beliefs for the sake of gaining higher power. This belief is founded upon three principles: 1. Enthusiastic welcome of some Western thoughts and ideas, 2. In-depth examination of new faiths and beliefs, and 3. Re-belief in or return to old Japanese values (Hossein Salimi and Hafezeh Seifi Atashgah, 189-190: 2008). Based on this belief, it can be calmed that the Japanese culture is a combination of Shintoism, Buddhism, Confucius, and Western thoughts, and this combination is unavoidable for the achievement of benefits. In the words of Mohsen Talayi- the former ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Japan-, if one is aware of the extent to which Confucian thought has influenced Japanese individual and social culture and behavior, it will become clear that one of the main foundations of Japanese cultural diplomacy with the aim of culturalization in other countries is defined as follows (based on one of the principles of Confucius), "Sow repetition, and you reap a habit. Sow a habit and you reap culture" (Talayi, 2016).

Japan's cultural diplomacy is generally divided into five periods. The first period was shaped in the 1950s and 1960s with the aim of reforming the international image of this country from a military to a peace-loving state. In the second period, from the late 1960s to the early 1970s, the policy of Japan's cultural diplomacy shifted from a peace-loving country to an economically advanced one. During this period and in 1972, the Japan Foundation¹ (the principal custodian of Japanese cultural diplomacy) was established. The third period of Japan's cultural diplomacy became operational in the 1980s with the aim of participating in peacekeeping activities and economic assistance for the development of other countries. In the fourth period, i.e., in the 1980s, Japan showed an interest in active participation in global relations in order to have a serious presence in the international community. Finally, from 2000 to present, the policy of assistance with peace promotion has been pursued through cultural exchanges so that this diplomacy can contribute to international peace and stability (Ogoura, *Japan's Postwar Cultural Diplomacy*, 2008: 2-5).

The present paper assumes a special importance in the fifth period of Japanese cultural diplomacy and the reasons for its adoption. During this period, the incidence of September 11 attacks, the initiation of the Iranian nuclear case, the emergence of some sort of Islamophobia and Iranophobia, the imposition of comprehensive sanctions on Iran, Japan endeavored to use its cultural tools to play an active role in establishing peace in the

1. The Japan Foundation is the principal custodian of cultural diplomacy, cross-border cultural activities, and, in other words, the cultural arm of Japanese Foreign Ministry. This Foundation was established in October 1972, under the supervision of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of this country with the aim of promoting international cultural exchanges throughout the world. The basis of formation of the Japan Foundation is to introduce the culture of this country to other countries and to provide some help with the introduction of the culture of other countries to the Japanese people.

region and, ultimately, achieving its own interests. Japan's relations with Iran have been conceptualized and theorized on the basis of this diplomacy from 2000 onward in order to compensate for its weak political and economic ties with Iran through increased cooperation and cultural relations between the two countries.

In this regard, Kin-ichi Komano (欽一駒野) -the former Japanese Ambassador to Iran-, has expressed the following with respect to the importance of cultural relations with Iran, “There are commonalities between the Iranian and Japanese people and the Iranian-Japanese cultural relations are not only long-standing, but are also considered as the most important pillar of relations between the two countries. In this way, in the event of problems in establishing economic and political relations between the two countries, such cultural cooperation plays a significant role in resuming the relations and removing the barriers to political and economic relations” (Komano, 17: 2012).

Hiroyasu Kobayashi (小林博康), Japan's current ambassador to Iran, also states, “Taking advantage of cultural diplomacy is considered an undeniable element in the establishment and development of relations among countries, and cultural cooperation is of vital importance in relations between Iran and Japan, both of which are rich in culture” (Kobayashi, 2016). According to Kobayashi, unlike political and economic relations that are unstable and can undergo changes in the short run due to their dependence on various factors, cultural cooperation and relations are long-lasting and sustainable and can serve as an independent element in inter-state relations. In this regard, Japan should have a thorough understanding of its own culture and closely examine the cultures of other countries (Kobayashi, 2016).

The important point about Japan's cultural diplomacy is that culture in itself is not that much important to Japan; and cultural diplomacy is used as a tool to establish relations, especially economic relations with other countries, including Iran and, ultimately, to achieve transcendence and development and serve

its national interests. For this reason, Japan, after the World War II, seeks to achieve a high position in the international arena and to secure its national interests through its keen policy planning and investment in cultural diplomacy as an important part of its foreign policy. Considering the variety of contradictory contexts in the present world, one of the main objectives of Japanese diplomacy is to cooperate in conducting research on international understanding and cultural exchanges. According to the Japanese people, knowing other cultures of the world guarantees the higher dynamism of their economy through familiarity with different consumer markets and the psychological and social characteristics of the end users of their goods. Therefore, cultural cooperation with the target countries, including Iran, has led to a greater understanding of Iranian culture, which eventually guarantees the continuation of Iran-Japan cooperation in other sectors, especially in the economic sector.

III. Cultural Diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran

Iran, as a country benefiting from thousands of years of rich civilization and culture, has sought to define its relations with other countries on the basis of friendship, rapport, and mutual interests during history by means of cultural and civilization tools. In this way, while transferring Iranian civilization and culture to other countries, it can use such cultural tools to develop its political and economic relations with members of the international community. Since the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the use of cultural tools to develop relations with other countries in the form of cultural diplomacy has come into play, and the adoption of cultural policies has been considered as one of the main foreign policy priorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, what is important in this article is the increasing attention of the Iranian authorities to the importance of cultural diplomacy from 2002 onward and in the sanction period. Since 2002, the incidence of issues, such as the increasing sensitivity of Western countries to Iran's nuclear program, imposition of comprehensive sanctions,

creation of a negative international atmosphere, and, ultimately, and overshadowing Iran's relations with other countries, including Japan, have all prompted officials to mitigate the existing negative atmosphere with the adoption of more cultural policies and to correct the wrongly drawn image of Iran. In this vein, they can maintain and develop their relations with other countries.

As it was mentioned earlier, cultural diplomacy aims at introducing the culture of the source country and getting familiar with the culture of the target country, and cultural diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is no exception. Accordingly, it can be argued that Iran has primarily sought to introduce Iranian-Islamic culture to other countries by adopting cultural diplomacy and has secondarily attempted to recognize the culture of other countries in order to establish better relations based on mutual respect and the better fulfillment of national interests.

Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, describes the importance of cultural diplomacy and the need for serious attention to this issue, remarking that, "the Islamic Republic of Iran's cultural ambassadors are at the forefront of the international cultural front. Providing a true and fair image of the Islamic Republic's system and realities and today's developments in Iran, along with the promotion of the Persian language and literature, are among the heavy tasks of the cultural ambassadors of the Islamic government". (Meeting of the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Iranian officials, and cultural representatives abroad with the Supreme Leader, 2009).

Since the victory of the Islamic Revolution to present, nearly 30 public and non-governmental institutions have been responsible for cultural activities abroad, out of which only nine have statutes approved by the leadership (Kalhor & Sadeghi, 19: 2010). From among these nine institutions, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Organization for Islamic Culture and Communications are the two main active institutions in the field of cultural diplomacy.

The Cultural Policy Document of the Islamic Republic of

Iran, approved by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, is considered as a foundation for cultural diplomacy. In connection with cultural cooperation and exchanges with Japan, the majority of the principles of this document have been regarded as the basis. These principles are as follows:

- Principle 2: A comprehensive understanding of the culture and civilization of Islam and Iran, promotion of Islamic ethics and knowledge, and introduction of prominent figures of Islamic and Iranian history- Principle 4: Understanding human culture and experiences and use of global scientific and cultural achievements through appropriate methods and tools-Principle 7: Attempt to promote and develop Persian language and literature

- Principle 25: Assisting in development of constructive relations between domestic and foreign artists, writers, and researchers-Principle 26: Establishing, strengthening, and providing equipment of cultural-artistic information centers and centers for the preservation and regulation of cultural and artistic documents and certificates-Principle 27: Establishing and strengthening of research complexes and applied research in various cultural fields and sectors-Principle 29: Development and strengthening of the Persian language and literature courses in academic centers and colleges inside and outside the country, as well as the reinforcement of the Academy of the Persian Language and Literature -Principle 45: Development of domestic and foreign tourism and production of cultural and artistic materials required for introducing pilgrimage and touristic areas of Iran and planning to attract foreign and domestic travelers with increased productivity of visiting, tourism, and recreational facilities in compliance with the laws and values of the Revolution in order to identify the culture and civilization of Islam and Iran

The Foreign Relations section of the document reads as follows:

- Principle 46: Establishment and consolidation of relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran's academies with other academies, the expansion of cultural associations with other

countries, and the establishment and strengthening of centers, such as cultural counseling, Islamic International University, and International Cultural Research Center- Principle 48: Dispatch of cultural and artistic groups and facilities to different parts of the world and equipment of Iranian cultural agencies to expand and increase the presence of the Islamic Republic of Iran's cultural, artistic, media, news, and press in the international arena (Approvals Adopted by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, Politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1992)

The Cultural Section of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Organization for Islamic Culture and Communications, as sponsors of the implementation of the Iranian Cultural Diplomacy, have endeavored to operationalize the above-mentioned principles in Japan in order to take a positive step towards benefiting from Japan's scientific and cultural achievements, transferring Iran's culture and civilization to Japan, and, ultimately, maintaining and developing political and economic relations between the two countries.

Given the cultural policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran, it can be maintained that Iran has been seeking to achieve the following two goals by adopting cultural diplomacy in its relations with Japan:

1. Introducing the true Iranian-Islamic culture and values to the Japanese people in order to counter Iranophobia and Islamophobia.
2. Using cultural cooperation to maintain and expand relations with Japan: Iran, as a powerful and prominent Asian actor and the owner of one of the world's oldest civilizations, has always looked at Japan with confidence and has long believed in the goodwill of that country through its cultural ties with East Asian countries, including Japan, during the years of sanctions. As a result, it has sought to take steps to maintain and develop relations with Japan and, ultimately, to achieve national goals and interests by means of cultural ties, establishment of common ground for cooperation, and adoption of appropriate policies.

Finally, it should be stated that Iran has used culture both as a tool to provide the necessary conditions for the development and expansion of relations with Japan and has considered it important in itself and regards exchanging Iranian-Islamic culture as a mission.

IV. Iran and Japan Relation During Sanctions

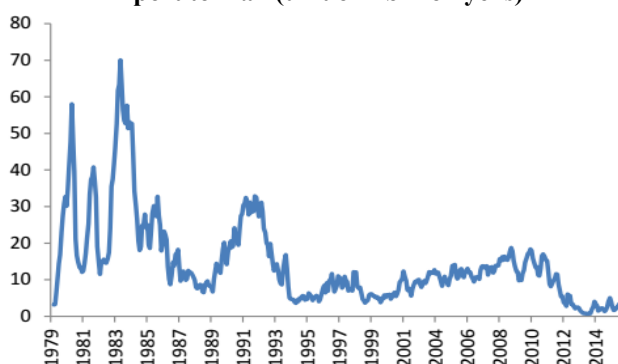
Western sanctions against Iran began after the victory of the Islamic Revolution and have continued in various forms over the past 38 years. However, with the increased sensitivity of Western countries to Iran's nuclear activities and the introduction of Iran's nuclear case to the IAEA in 2002-2003, the Iranian nuclear issue gained international momentum and more severe sanctions were imposed against the country. As a result of the increasing international sensitivity to the Iranian nuclear issue, different countries' relation with has been significantly affected by US policies, and Japan is not an exception. Accordingly, the atmosphere of the international community was shaped by the issuance of Security Council resolutions, comprehensive sanctions, and negative media propaganda against Iran and; thereby, Iran's relations with other countries, including Japan were severely affected. This led Japan to take an opposing stand against the Islamic Republic of Iran despite friendly relations at two meetings of the Board of Governors of the IAEA in September and September 2003. Japan embarked on the imposition of unilateral sanctions against Iran with the intensification of the Iranian nuclear issue and the significant increase of United States pressure on its allies.

Japan's ambassador to Iran, Hiroyasu Kobayashi, explains the sanctions imposed by Japan stating that, "Due to the origin of the issuance of these resolutions, namely the United Nations and Japan as a member, the country had to abide the sanctions and, thereby, it has imposed economic sanctions on Iran according to the resolutions issued by the Security Council. As a result, the amount of trade between the two countries and Iran's oil exports to Japan

during this period significantly reduced (Kobayashi, 2017).

After the imposition of the Security Council sanctions, Japan imposed its unilateral sanctions against Iran in 2010 due to US pressure and named it "complementary measures". In other words, Japan refused to use the title "unilateral sanctions against Iran" and introduced its sanctions as measures to complement the Security Council sanctions. Japan's decision regarding unilateral sanctions against Iran had a negative impact on Iran's attitude to Japan at that time and severely undermined relations between the two countries. In a Japanese article, entitled *The Difficult Future of Exporting to Iran amid Intensified Competitions*, the author states that Japan seized Iran's assets following the resolution pertaining to UN Security Council's economic sanctions on Iran's nuclear issue and the relations between the two countries reached their lowest level in the previous two years by cutting off banking relations with Iran in 2010 (秋山文子, 2016).

Export to Iran (unit of 1 billion yens)



(出所) 財務省貿易統計

Source: Ministry of Finance of Japan

During the sanctions era, Iran's oil sales to Japan and Japanese exports to Iran declined; Japanese offices in Iran closed one after the other; Japanese companies withdrew from joint ventures with Iran, and Iran-Japan relations were at risk of getting into a coma. During this period, the two countries realized the role and importance of cultural activities and cooperation, and tried to keep the communication channels between the two countries open as

much as possible by means of cultural diplomacy so that they can use these channels to bring the relationship back to the normal state when the conditions for the re-establishment of relations are met. In other words, political channels were almost closed and relations in the economic sphere underwent a declining trend in the Iran-Japan relationship during the sanction period, while cultural domain was the only area wherein relations could be maintained and expanded. During this period, efforts were made to develop cooperation and cultural relations between the two countries in order to enable negotiation on political and economic issues between the two countries through this alternative.

For example, during the sanction period, many discussions were held on human rights, the environment, disarmament, developments in West Asia (Middle East), and so on between the two countries due to the increasing attention to the adoption of cultural diplomacy by Iran and Japan and the creation of appropriate space to provide the necessary background for political and economic relations. Moreover, hundreds of meetings were held between Iranian and Japanese officials, the most important of which was the annual meeting of the Prime Minister of Japan and the President of Iran on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly summit in New York in the years of sanctions. The result of all these efforts was the visit of the Japanese Foreign Minister to Iran on May 2009 and the visit of the Speaker of the Parliament of Iran to Japan in February 2010, which was contrary to the prevailing situations in the years of sanctions.

In this regard, with reference to the Japanese Foreign Ministry archives, it was the first time that, after Japanese Foreign Minister -Yoriko Kawaguchi's (川口 順子) -visit to Iran in January 2004, a high-ranking Japanese official traveled to Iran during the sanctions and post-war period after the passage of five and a half years. However, it is noteworthy that negotiations between the foreign ministers of Iran and Japan have taken place sixteen times since 2006 where there have been five face-to-face meetings and eleven telephone negotiations (Japan-Iran relations, 2009).

In all these visits, the Japanese side acknowledged that Iran was an important partner for Japan and, throughout history, excellent relations have prevailed between the two countries and these relations should continue. According to Reza Nazar-Ahari - Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Japan-, Japan dispatched its ambassador, Kinichi Komano, who was a fluent Persian speaker, to Iran during the height of the sanctions to improve relations between the two countries through cultural cooperation. The reason for the election of Komano was the importance of cultural issues in the relation between the two countries and their effectiveness in the political and economic relations between them. This is so while the nature of the two countries' relations had been economic and the axis of relations between Iran and Japan had been consistent with the economy (Nazar-Ahari, 2016). Hiroyasu Kobayashi, the current Japanese ambassador to Iran, also believes that, "The economic ties between the two countries have been significantly diminished during the sanctions and, instead, cultural relations have assumed great importance; therefore, the Japanese Embassy does undertake significant cultural efforts in Iran" (Kobayashi, 2016).

Regarding the importance of nuclear negotiations and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) for Japan, it should be noted that although Japan was not a direct party to the Iran-P5 + 1 nuclear deal, it is considered one of a major and the potentially major beneficiaries of the agreement. Since the beginning of the nuclear talks between Iran and the P5 + 1, and given that Iran's nuclear negotiations have not been merely bilateral between Iran and the P5 + 1 and contained various domestic, regional, and international aspects, Japan has been following the talks with special focus from the very early days of the negotiations and sought to play an effective role in helping resolve the Iranian nuclear issue. Japan's positive role in this direction was such that it provided necessary cooperation and accelerated the bank openings required for the implementation of the Geneva Agreement before the JCPOA and between the

Geneva Agreement (which was a temporary agreement) and JCPOA. As a result, all three major Japanese banks resumed working with Iranian banks immediately after the JCPOA. The Japanese foreign minister was the only foreign minister who traveled to Iran twice from the initiation of the negotiations to the finalization of JCPOA.

After the JCPOA between Iran and the P5 + 1 countries came into effect on January 16, 2016, the United States, the European Union, and the United Nations announced that they have lifted anti-Iranian sanctions on Iran's nuclear issue. Welcoming Iran's nuclear deal with the P5 + 1, Japanese Foreign Minister -Fumio Kishida, 岸田文夫- called for the enforcement of the terms of UN Security Council Resolution 2231 as soon as possible on January 17, 2016. Accordingly, the Japanese government lifted its unilateral sanctions on Iran on January 22 (増野 伊登, 2016).

Following the lifting of sanctions, Iran and Japan signed "Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Act (FIPPA)" to support Japanese companies interested in reinvesting in Iran in February 2016. In addition, a Japanese bank (JBIC), backed by the Japanese State, supports international cooperation, Japanese exports, and foreign investment of this country and it provided Iran with a ten-billion-dollar credit line (KYODO, 2016).

The signature of FIPPA by Japanese Foreign Minister -Fumio Kishida- and Iranian Minister of Economy and Finance -Ali Tayebinia- on February 5, 2016 operationalized the obligations formed on economic relations between the leaders of the two countries (obtained on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly's annual meeting in October 2015). In this meeting, Hassan Rouhani and Shinzō Abe agreed that the two sides would take all necessary measures to provide the grounds for the reinvestment of Japanese companies in Iran. What is of great importance to Japan in this agreement is the issue of investment in Iran's energy sectors and participation in Azadegan oil project. It is noteworthy that China seized many of the investment portions of this project in 2010 and overtook Japan with the withdrawal of Japan from

Azadegan project during the sanctions. For this reason, Japan seeks to compensate for this loss in competition with China by signing this agreement (Miller, 2016).

Therefore, it can be argued that the maintenance of relations between the two countries over these years by means of culture and cultural cooperation has led Japan to re-establish ties with Iran faster than other countries after the JCPOA. Thus, it lifted its unilateral sanctions against Iran in the early days and encouraged commercial and industrial companies to reinvest in Iran. Hiroyasu Kobayashi, the Japanese ambassador to Iran, has stated that, "After the lifting of sanctions and the enforcement of JCPOA by the parties, economic relations between Iran and Japan will expand and a new level of economic cooperation will be opened between the two countries" (Kobayashi, 2016).

V. Iran and Japan's Cultural Measures

In spite of the long history of cultural relations between the two countries, the major development of cultural relations between Iran and Japan has taken place over the last century, especially after the signing of the cultural agreement on April 16, 1957 and, thereby, the increasing cultural exchanges between the two countries have been at play. In Iran, after the Islamic Revolution, the perspective towards the East and the Eastern nations and the emphasis on dialogue among civilizations and the exchange of cultures have led to the expansion of cultural relations and exchanges between Japan and Iran. However, the role of culture and the adoption of cultural diplomacy by the two countries are of paramount importance in maintaining and expanding bilateral political and economic ties during the years of sanctions. As it was mentioned, the increasing sensitivity of Western countries toward the Iranian nuclear issue and the imposition of international sanctions and pressures have pervaded a negative attitude towards Iran in the international environment; therefore, Iran's relations with other countries have been negatively affected and, consequently, its relations with Japan have also been

seriously affected.

As a result, the authorities in charge of the two countries decided to rescue their political and economic relations from the risk of collapsing by adopting cultural diplomacy and taking some relevant measures. In this regard, the two countries, Iran and Japan, have been seeking to mitigate the existing atmosphere and keep the communication channels open by taking various cultural measures in order to restore the political and economic relations between the two countries.

The most important cultural measures taken by the two countries to maintain and develop political and economic relations includes, 1. Efforts made by the two sides for the development of relations and promotion of friendship and understanding through the Japan-Iran Association (in Japan) and the Iran-Japan Friendship Association (in Iran) with the aim of expanding cultural, political, and economic relations (Archives of the Organization for Islamic Culture and Communications, 1998: Document No. 1). 2. Attempt to expand the courses of teaching the Persian language and literature in Japan (Archives of Islamic Culture and Communication Organization, Document No. 1242.1.1, 1998) and the Japanese language in Iran (Department of Japanese Language, Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Tehran) considering the important role of language in the relations between the two countries and greater mutual understanding. 3. Efforts made by the two sides for the development of Iranology in Japan (Archives of Islamic Culture and Communication Organization, Document No. 4269) and Japanese Studies in Iran (academic field of Japanese Studies) with the aim of conducting scientific research on the different historical, sociocultural, and political-economic aspects of the two countries; gaining a greater and deeper awareness of each other's society, culture, politics, government, and economy; and, ultimately, taking advantage of these measures to develop cultural, political, and economic relations. 4. Holding joint meetings between *Office of Political and International Studies* pertaining to Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Japan

Institute for International Affairs and *Sasakawa Peace Foundation* in various domains of culture, politics, economics, women, the environment, etc. 5. Establishment of links between Iranian and Japanese universities and efforts to expand academic and scientific connections through various scientific meetings. 6. Establishment of the Persian section of Japan's transboundary Radio and Japan's efforts to enhance communications between Japan and Persian-speaking countries, including Iran, through the broadcast of programs with the centrality of Japanese developments, Asian developments, Iran-Japan relations, the global economy, and major global events, as well as multimedia teaching of Japanese to the Persian audience of Radio Japan (Ghorghani, 2016). 7. Establishment of the Japanese section of the Islamic Republic of Iran's transboundary Radio and strive to expand its activities with the aim of introducing the facts of Islam, introducing the cultural and social interactions of the two ancient nations of Iran and Japan, explaining the history of the magnificent Islamic-Iranian civilization, presenting a critique of liberal western democracy, introducing Iran's achievements and success in the scientific, industrial, economic, and social spheres, introducing Iran's natural, historical, and cultural attractions, and explaining the views of the Islamic Republic of Iran on global, regional, and Islamic issues to Japanese audience of Radio Iran (Ghorghani, 2016).

Cultural Activities of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Japan: Custodians of Iranian cultural policy in Japan, i.e. the Cultural Section of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Representative of the Organization of Islamic Culture and Communications in Japan have taken significant measures to expand cultural cooperation and, ultimately, generalize it to political and economic spheres, especially during the sanctions.

Some of the most important cultural measures are as follows:

1. Granting scholarships to Japanese students.
2. Establishment of a representative of Al-Mustafa International University in Japan with the aim of expanding academic

exchanges in the field of humanities and Islamic sciences. 3. Translation of Iranian books into Japanese in various fields, especially in the areas of language, Persian literature, and stories of Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults. 4. Promotion of Iranian visual arts, such as calligraphy and gilding as well as holding art exhibitions in Japanese museums. 5. Holding exhibitions on selected works as well as other works loaned from the National Museum of Iran (monuments of ancient Iran and also valuables of the Islamic era). 6. Holding Iranian carpet exhibitions, especially the Iran Silk Carpet Exhibition in Japan wherein twenty pieces of antique and valuable carpet from the Iranian Carpet Museum were exported from the country and exhibited at Yokohama Silk Museum for the first time. 7. Holding joint art exhibitions for Iranian and Japanese artists. 8. Holding Iranian handicraft fairs and helping teach some Iranian crafts to Japanese fans. 9. Performance of Persian Traditional Music and organization of poetry night ceremony, reading Hafez, Shahnameh narrative for the Persian Language and Literature fans. 10. Holding research seminars and scientific studies to exchange thoughts and establish more relations among students, researchers, and professors of both countries. 11. Holding religious seminars between religious scholars of the two countries. 12. Providing sabbatical leaves and research opportunities for Japanese elites by traveling to Iran and delivering lectures in academic communities. 13. Signing of cooperation agreement between Iranian and Japanese Universities. 14. Holding Persian language classes and encouraging those interested in learning this language in order to expand the economic relations between the two countries. 15. Holding theater, participating in Tokyo Film Festival, and screening of Iranian films with Japanese translation. 16. Holding the seminar on Iranian cinema history in cultural consultation. 17. Display of Iranian athletic sports in Japan by the International Federation of Zurkhaneh Sports. 18. Participation in Tokyo International Book Fair. 19. Holding various meetings between the members of the

Iranian-Japanese Cultural Exchange. 20. Holding the Seminar on Iranian Studies in Japan. 21. Holding the Millennium Conference on Avicenna's Canon of Medicine under the title of Traditional Medicine Conference at Tokyo University. 22. Commemoration of Nisshin Maru Ship Event and Purchase of Iranian Oil by Japan during the Prime Ministry of Mohammad Mosaddegh. 23. Introduction of Iranian cultural and tourist attractions to the Japanese people. 24. Collaboration with Japanese television networks to introduce Iran to the Japanese people. 25. Women's issue and cooperation between the Japanese Women's Federation and the Presidential Women's Affairs of Iran towards the establishment of world peace. 26. Holding Iran's Cultural Week in Japan (Yousefi, 2016).

The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in collaboration with the Japan Foundation, annually organizes the Iranian Cultural Week in Japan on the following three axes:

- Introducing the culture, art, and civilization of the Iranian land to the Japanese people.
- Strengthening bilateral cultural relations and promoting mutual understanding between the people of the two countries.
- Improving the Image of Iran and Iranian people in public opinion of Japanese society (Islamic Culture and Communications Organization Archives, Document No. 3520, 2013)

Cultural activities of Japan in Iran: The Cultural Section of the Embassy of Japan in Tehran is responsible for organizing Japanese cultural events in the Islamic Republic of Iran. These cultural programs include:

1. Holding annual competitions on lecture delivery in the Japanese Language.
2. Presentation of Japanese Government Scholarships in Associate's program, Bachelor's program, and Research Scholarship.
3. Holding traditional Japanese music concerts.
4. Holding Japanese culture exhibition.
5. Holding Japanese painting and calligraphy workshops (Shodō, 書道).
6. Holding exhibition of contemporary Japanese artwork.
7. Holding a Japanese art exhibition of woodcut.
8. Presenting cultural

programs of the Japan Foundation to be used by Iranian cultural institutions and citizens. 9. Attending Tehran International Book Exhibition. 10. Holding speech sessions on economics at the invitation of Japanese economists. 11. Organizing Origami workshops (the art of paper folding, 折り紙). 12. Holding acquaintance meetings with Japan in Iranian schools and cultural institutes. 13. Holding the exhibition of Japanese photographers' photos. 14. Display of the Japanese cinema works. 15. Display of Japanese animation. 16. Holding Manga tournament (漫画). 17. Introducing Japanese culture in the field of "Animation and Manga" by specialists from the Japan Foundation. 18. Participating in Tehran International Short Film Festival. 19. Holding the exhibition of cherry blossoms and Japanese legend Genji (Genji Monogatari, 源氏物語). 20. Organizing traditional tea ceremony. 21. Holding workshops on "Kabuki Theater" (Kabuki, 歌舞伎) and "New Theater" that are among traditional Japanese theaters. 22. Holding the seminar on restoration of Restoration of Bam Cultural Work using three-dimensional images. 23. Participating in International Conference on the role of cultural heritage in the formation of national identity in Iran. 24. Holding Japan's Cultural Week in Iran (Cultural Section of the Japanese Embassy in Iran).

Conclusion

The examination of the cultural diplomacy of Iran and Japan and the cultural actions taken by the two countries reveals that both Iran and Japan are seeking to maintain and develop relations with each other and are determined to achieve the desired result through cultural cooperation and actions. Despite the political and social developments of the two countries during different periods, the relations between them have always been based on mutual friendship by means of cultural principles. In addition, the preservation and development of cultural, economic, and political relations between Iran (as a country on the edge of West Asia) and Japan (as a country on the edge of East Asia) have been extremely

important. The examination of the cultural practices made by the two countries of Iran and Japan leads us to the conclusion that all the mentioned cultural practices and measures are aimed at understanding the two countries as much as possible. Moreover, the durability and consistency of these practices reflect the tendency of Iran and Japan to develop mutual relations with each other.

Accordingly, Japan, on the one hand, have taken such steps as the establishment of Japan-Iran Association, promotion of the Persian language and literature teaching, and assignment of attention to Iranian studies and scientific research on various cultural, social, and political-economic aspects of Iran in order to gain more knowledge and a deeper awareness of the society, culture, politics, government, and economy of Iran. On the other hand, Japan seek to introduce their society, culture, economy, and technology to Iranians by pursuing cultural policies, such as broadcast of radio programs in the Persian Language and the conduct of various cultural activities through the embassy. In this way, they intend to maintain friendly and cultural relationships and further their interests through political and economic cooperation and relations with Iran as the most effective West Asian country.

Considering the foundations of cultural diplomacy, Iran is also seeking to introduce its own civilization, culture, society, economy, government, and international politics by broadcasting radio programs in Japanese and conducting various cultural activities through the Cultural Consultation and Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Japan. In addition, with the establishment of the Japanese Studies and Language Department at the University of Tehran, Iran has pursued its East Asian focus on foreign policy with a scientific approach to be able to establish significant cultural, political, and economic ties with Japan as the world's third largest economic power of the world.

Finally, it can be concluded that the two countries, i.e. Iran and Japan, place great importance on their bilateral relations and

have always, especially during the sanctions, been seeking to provide the grounds for the maintenance and expansion of political and economic ties by cultural tools, while considering economic issues as the center of relations. Iran and Japan have been able to maintain their relations during the sanctions through cultural diplomacy despite all the pressures and disruptions. By means of mutual efforts towards keeping political and economic channels open, they have tried to help with the development of mutual relations with each other during the post-JCPOA period.

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