

## *The Center for the Study of Japanese Experience*

After nearly 3 centuries of deliberate feudal isolation during the Tokugawa period, Japan responded with extraordinary swiftness to its forcible opening in 1854 by Commodore Matthew Perry's squadron, and the gathering pressure from the fleets and traders of European countries. A group of reformers recruited mostly from the lower ranks of the Samurai nobility, turned Japan from a closed kingdom of feudal satrapies into a modern industrialized nation-state. It was, as Arthur Koestler put it, like breaking the window of a pressurized cabin. The Japanese crashed out into the world devouring everything that had been done or thought in the rest of the planet.

The Meiji reformers had, in a sense, to reject their own history and find new methods for governing. The momentous change reached its climax between 1868-1871, when the feudal shogunate was overthrown and a modern centralized government set up. Within less than two decades, the Meiji reformers managed to overthrow centuries of fixed isolationist assumptions, and implement their own theories and techniques. It was a full-scale revolution rather than a simple restoration of power to the emperor. In fact, no other country, however hard it has tried, has yet equaled or even come close to what the Japanese have achieved.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Japan was recognized as one of the major world powers, the only non-white country to be admitted into the exclusive club of advanced nation-states. Japan's speed in modernization, referred to as *Meiji Ishin*, is unprecedented in world history. *Meiji Ishin*, indeed, represents a turning point in Japanese history and has intrigued historians in Japan and the world at large. It has also triggered deep thinking in the Third World.

The *Center for the Study of Japanese Experience* has grown out of this interest. Established in Beirut, Lebanon, as an independent research organization, it is devoted to the study of the Japanese experience in modernization. The *Center* embodies a systematic attempt to understand the Japanese modernization

process at all levels, using an analytical approach to understand it and draw out those basic concepts and lessons which would be appropriate for the Arab World.

The members of the *Center for the Study of Japanese Experience* are scholars, writers, and academicians, who come from various backgrounds and are trained in different fields. They have put their experience and expertise at the service of studies and programs taking place in the Arab World towards modernization. The members of the *Center* form a coherent and scientifically minded group. They are convinced of the pressing need to study the Japanese experience in particular, and try to shape some guidelines for their own world. Their goal is to formulate a developmental program that will be put at the service of all concerned groups.

### **Why Japan?**

Japan, as seen above, incarnates a kind of super state, one of the most striking examples of successful economic, financial and technological growth. This success poses a number of questions of special relevance for the Third World: how was modernization, for example, achieved while safeguarding old traditions and institutions? In other words, how could Japan bring into harmony tradition and modernity? Or, again, what is the yardstick for measuring the fruits of modernization? Such and other questions are of primary importance for the Third World countries and shall lie at the heart of the *Center's* preoccupations.

The founding of the *Center for the Study of Japanese Experience* indicates clearly an increasing Arab interest in Japanese and other Asian successful models of development whether, in Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan or South Korea. In many creative ways, such models have gone beyond the Western ones and are extremely important to study. However, the *Center's* interest is not new but goes back to the Arab Renaissance period. Yet, unlike the latter, it does not spring from the desire to imitate the *Meiji Ishin* experience, but rather to learn the philosophy behind it and the tools it has used to industrialize the country though it was itself a late comer like most of the Third World countries.

The *Center for the Study of Japanese Experience* is certainly aware of the uniqueness and specificity of *Meiji Ishin* and of the difficulty of any other country to imitate or emulate it. Nevertheless, it recognizes the importance of studying it in depth in order to learn from it whatever could be of use for the developing countries. The *Center* is particularly concerned in the identification of the specific socio-economic and political aspects of the Japanese development with which the Third World countries are still struggling. The *Center* looks for an on-going dialogue on technology and development, now that a handful of Far-Eastern nations have successfully followed the Japanese model, thus vitalizing their own economies and achieving high standards of living, a fact which gives hope to other small nations as well.

The United Nations University Report on the Japanese Experience was very clear in emphasizing that any dialogue on technology and development "can bear fruit only if more advanced theoretical formulations are derived from the concrete experience of each nation." The *Center* basically seeks to answer the following question: What is it, in the astounding economic success of Japan, that might provide lessons for the developing countries?.

### **The Center's Constitutional Law**

Below are a few of its main clauses:

Familiarize the public with the Japanese experience through research, writings, translations, seminars and conferences.

Found a specialized- *Journal* for the dissemination of the above while making all published material available to experts, scholars and interested people.

Establish a platform for interaction and dialogue amongst experts in the various fields of development and modernization, and amongst institutions concerned with the Japanese experience and the Asian models that followed its path in Lebanon, the Arab World and Japan.

Promote interest in the Japanese model regarding the development of man and the organization of the sectors of work and production.

Screen, compile, and review major studies and publications on the Japanese and Asian experiences.

The *Center* functions in three major spheres:

- 1 The Japanese sphere in order to consolidate cooperation with Japanese scientific associations.
- 2 The Arab sphere to stimulate both, the intelligentsia and the decision-makers and encourage them to join forces with the *Center* in order to study the Japanese model and shape the necessary guidelines for Arab development.
- 3 The International sphere in order to cooperate with institutions concerned with Third World development programs.

### **Study Programs and Research Projects**

Accordingly the *Center's* scope of interest will have to proliferate and cover a wide spectrum of study programs and research projects. Thus, and by order of priority, which will depend certainly on the *Center's* financial resources, these studies will focus on the following:

Japan's international role: economic power and politics, its role in Asia, its policy towards international organizations and the Third World. Science and technology in Japan: its diffusion and social role.

The Japanese language: its development, and capacity to absorb scientific and technological progress.

Japanese culture: education, art, literature, the theatre and their role in social development. Tradition and ethics: the upbringing of children, civic education, the concept of heritage and its role in the mentality of people.

Democracy, hierarchy and socio-political structure in Japan: interaction between individual and state amongst classes, in the family, between city and country.

Corporate life: the concept of administration, its by-laws, unions, quality production, corporate tradition and commitment.

The educational system: the rationale behind it, its policy and programs.

The Japanese economy: its structure, organization and administration, savings policy, world position. The Japanese woman: traditional and modern woman, her attitudes, social obligations and role.

Japanese nationalism: values, traditions, family, nation, state, allegiance, commitment, and sacrifice.

Religious education: Confucianism, Buddhism, Zen and Shintu, sectarian co-existence, its impact on the individual, its dynamism and interaction with modern times.

Annual conferences will be held to communicate the findings of the *Center's* research widely and appropriately.

### **The Center 's Publications**

The Center aims to disseminate widely its findings through three major series of publications: mono-graph series, a quarterly and a yearbook all designed to further scholarly understanding of the Japanese Experience from a Third World point of view.

### **Administration**

The *Center for the Study of Japanese Experience* was officially founded in Beirut, Lebanon by official decree, in April 1988.

The founding members elected a board of Trustees as follows:

Dr Mona Takieddine Amyuni *Chairman*

Antoine Boutros, *Secretary-General*

Dr Hafez Kobaicy, *Head of Research*

Dr Michel Nehme, *Treasurer*

DR Isam Khalife, *Head of Administration*

Dr Sami AOun, *Consultant*

DR Maan Ziade, *Consultant*

### **Sources of Finance**

The *Center* hopes to be backed up and helped financially in its research and cultural activities by all parties concerned in development programs in Japan and the Arab World. The *Center's* constitutional law states that sources of income will be provided by membership fees, donations, and grants. The success of the *Center* primarily depends, therefore, on the constant support of committed and affluent individuals and institutions concerned with the progress of humanity, and aware of the dramatic international implications of underdevelopment. Such financial support would secure regular income in order to allow the *Center* to implement its programs systematically.