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CULTURAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN AND THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA: THE CASE OF THE "SHARQ TARONALARI" FESTIVAL

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Abstract. This article analyzes the role and significance of the International Music Festival "Sharq Taronalari" in the development of cultural relations between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The study examines the history of the festival's establishment, its stages of international development, and the dynamics of the growing number of participating countries and delegates from a scholarly perspective. It also analyzes the participation of representatives of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the festival, their contribution to the promotion of national musical heritage, as well as the processes of cultural diplomacy and intercultural dialogue fostered between the two states through the festival. The findings of the research demonstrate that the "Sharq Taronalari" festival is one of the important instruments of Uzbekistan's international cultural policy and plays a significant role in strengthening cultural cooperation with Saudi Arabia.

Keywords: Republic of Uzbekistan, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Sharq Taronalari Festival, cultural relations, cultural diplomacy, international music festival, soft power, intercultural dialogue, international cooperation, Arabic music, musical heritage, cultural exchange, international cultural policy.

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary system of international relations, cultural diplomacy is recognized as one of the key instruments for strengthening mutual trust, cooperation, and friendly relations between states. In the context of globalization, international exchanges in the fields of culture and the arts not only enhance the spiritual and cultural affinity among peoples, but also contribute to increasing the international prestige of states. From this perspective, international music festivals serve as an effective platform for intercultural dialogue by bringing together representatives of different nations and ethnic groups.

Following its independence, the Republic of Uzbekistan has prioritized the expansion of international cultural relations and the global promotion of its national arts within its cultural policy. In this process, the International Music Festival "Sharq Taronalari" has emerged as one of Uzbekistan's largest and most prestigious cultural initiatives, becoming a global cultural platform that integrates Eastern and Western musical traditions. The festival, characterized by its international scope, expanding geographical participation, and high artistic standards, has been steadily developing year by year and gaining an important place in global cultural life.

This article analyzes cultural relations between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia through the case study of the "Sharq Taronalari" International Music Festival. The research examines the historical stages of the festival's development, the expansion of its participant base and geographical coverage, as well as the participation of Saudi Arabian artists in this international event, thereby highlighting the processes of cultural cooperation and cultural diplomacy between the two states from a scholarly perspective. Furthermore, the study explores the role of the festival in Uzbekistan's foreign cultural policy and its significance as an instrument of soft power.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study analyzes scientific, normative-legal, archival, and journalistic sources in order to examine the development of the International Music Festival "Sharq Taronalari" from 1997 to 2024. The reviewed literature is categorized into four main groups based on its content and nature.

The first group consists of the works of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. M. Mirziyoyev and the First President I. A. Karimov. These works outline the concepts of national revival, cultural policy, spiritual development, and international cultural cooperation. They are of fundamental importance for understanding the ideological and theoretical foundations of the festival.

The second group includes normative-legal documents regulating the establishment, development, and governance system of the festival. The decree adopted in 1997 laid the foundation for the festival, while subsequent legal acts ensured its expansion to the international level and its institutional improvement.

The third group comprises archival materials and official documents, which provide precise factual information regarding the early stages of the festival, the composition of participants, and organizational processes.

The fourth group consists of mass media sources and press releases, which serve as important materials for illustrating the festival's practical outcomes, award system, and international reputation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the research process, the historical-analytical method was employed to examine each stage of the festival within distinct chronological periods and to identify its developmental dynamics. A systemic approach enabled the comprehensive analysis of the festival as an integrated framework of international cultural cooperation, cultural diplomacy, and the preservation of musical heritage.

Through the comparative analysis method, the number of participants, geographical coverage, award systems, and the activities of scientific conferences across different years of the festival were systematically compared. The statistical method was used to quantitatively assess the dynamics of participant numbers, the extent of international participation, and the distribution of awards.

In addition, the reliability of the study was ensured through the analysis of normative-legal documents, archival materials, official press releases, and scholarly literature. This combination of methodological approaches has made it possible to reveal, on a solid scientific basis, the role and significance of the "Sharq Taronalari" festival in contemporary international cultural processes.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The International Music Festival "Sharq Taronalari" represents one of the most prestigious cultural initiatives of independent Uzbekistan. It serves as an important platform for bringing together the musical heritage of Eastern and Western peoples, strengthening intercultural relations, and fostering friendship and cooperation among nations. Since its inception, the festival has demonstrated a steady increase in both its geographical coverage and the number of participants, reflecting its growing international prestige and significance.

At its inaugural edition in 1997, a total of 243 participants from 31 countries and 2 international organizations took part in the festival [16]. This indicates that, from its earliest stage, the festival had already established itself as an international cultural event.

In 1999, the number of participants increased to 260, demonstrating a noticeable growth compared to the previous edition [17]. During this period, the increasing international interest contributed to strengthening the festival's reputation on the global cultural stage. In 2001, the number of participants reached 276, confirming the continued upward developmental trend.

Although in 2003 the number of participants decreased to 243, the artistic quality of the festival program did not decline. On the contrary, the participation of an additional professional

orchestra of 40 musicians further enhanced the musical level of the event. In 2005, the number of participants increased to 291, while in 2007 it reached nearly 300. In 2009, more than 260 artists and performers took part in the festival [16].

A significant milestone in the history of the festival was recorded in 2011. During the eighth edition, a total of 367 representatives from 56 countries participated [17], marking a record achievement for that period. This result further strengthened the festival's international reputation and established it as one of the major global music forums.

In subsequent years, the festival maintained its international relevance. Although the number of participants decreased to 241 in 2017, a sharp increase was observed in 2019, when the number of participants reached 340. In 2024, the highest result in the history of the festival was recorded. More than 400 representatives from approximately 80 countries participated in the event [17], further consolidating the role of "Sharq Taronalari" in the global cultural arena.

These indicators confirm that the "Sharq Taronalari" Festival has evolved into a major international cultural platform encompassing not only Central Asia but also Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas.

The International Music Festival "Sharq Taronalari" serves as an important instrument in the implementation of Uzbekistan's cultural diplomacy. In the context of contemporary international relations, where the role of soft power in enhancing the international prestige of states is increasingly significant, the festival functions as an effective mechanism for showcasing Uzbekistan's cultural potential to the world. The presentation of national music and artistic traditions by representatives of various countries within the framework of the festival contributes to strengthening intercultural dialogue and fostering mutual trust and cooperation among peoples. In this regard, the festival has become a practical example of cultural diplomacy in action.

Representatives of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have participated in the "Sharq Taronalari" International Music Festival on three occasions—in 1999, 2003, and 2008 [16]. These participations played an important role in presenting the country's rich musical heritage on the international stage and in advancing cultural diplomacy. The Saudi delegation consisted of six performers in 1999, six performers in 2003, and eight performers in 2008.

Saudi Arabia's participation in the festival contributed to introducing the distinctive features of Arab musical culture to an international audience, promoting national musical traditions, and strengthening cultural ties among Eastern peoples. In particular, traditional Arabic songs, folk performances, and contemporary musical compositions performed by the Saudi representatives were received with great interest by both audiences and experts.

The most successful participation of the Saudi delegation was recorded in 1999. During this edition of the festival, Muhammad Oman, representing the Kingdom, successfully demonstrated the rich traditions of Arab musical art at a high professional level. His performance not only highlighted the advanced level of Saudi Arabia's musical culture but also made a significant contribution to enhancing the international prestige of the festival.

The success achieved in 1999 is regarded as the highest result of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's participation in the "Sharq Taronalari" Festival. The artist's performance was evaluated as an exemplary model of refined Eastern vocal art, playing an important role in conveying the aesthetic and artistic potential of Arabic music to a wider international audience. At the same time, this participation demonstrated Saudi Arabia's active engagement in international cultural cooperation and contributed to the global promotion of its musical heritage.

The participations in 2003 and 2008 further illustrate the continuity of Saudi Arabia's engagement with the festival. In particular, the expansion of the delegation to eight members in 2008 indicates the growing interest and attention of the Kingdom toward the festival. The musical programs presented during these years combined elements of Arab oral folk tradition, traditional musical instruments, and contemporary stage performance practices.

The participation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the "Sharq Taronalari" International Music Festival has served as an important factor in promoting its national musical heritage on the international stage, developing intercultural dialogue, and strengthening artistic relations among Eastern nations. In particular, the high-level performance presented by Muhammad Oman in 1999 remains one of the most distinguished and successful appearances in the festival's history for Saudi Arabia.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study demonstrate that the International Music Festival "Sharq Taronalari" represents a culturally significant platform with strategic importance in the implementation of the international cultural policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The development dynamics of the festival between 1997 and 2024 indicate not only a quantitative expansion in terms of participants and geographical coverage, but also a substantial increase in its role in strengthening international cultural cooperation.

In particular, the participation of representatives of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the festival confirms the consistent development of cultural relations between the two states. Performances in 1999, 2003, and 2008 contributed to the international presentation of Arab musical heritage, thereby expanding intercultural dialogue and deepening mutual cultural understanding. This process clearly demonstrates that cultural diplomacy has become one of the key directions in the relations between Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia.

Furthermore, the "Sharq Taronalari" Festival serves as an effective mechanism for promoting Uzbekistan's cultural potential on the global stage as an instrument of soft power in contemporary international relations. Through the participation of artists from various countries, the festival contributes to strengthening mutual trust, respect, and friendly relations among peoples.

Overall, the "Sharq Taronalari" International Music Festival has functioned as an important bridge in the development of cultural relations between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, facilitating the advancement of bilateral cooperation to a new stage. In the future, further expansion of this cooperation will create a solid foundation for strengthening ties in cultural, academic, and humanitarian spheres.

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