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## The Hungarian Nippon Society

### Abstract

The Hungarian Nippon Society was founded in 1924, with the aim of building and developing Hungarian–Japanese relations, popularising Japan and Japanese culture in Hungary, and encouraging research on Japan. The society organised public lectures on Japan and Japanese culture and art exhibitions and social events connected to Japanese culture, and through these activities the society was the most important organiser and promoter of Japanese culture and art in Hungary between the two world wars. This society was the first (and for a long time, until the foundation of the Hungarian Japanese Friendship Society in 1987, the only) association in Hungary to focus solely on Japan and Japanese culture. This study summarises the most important issues related to the Nippon Society, with the aim of placing its history and activity in the broader historic and ideological context of its time. Examining the history of the Hungarian Nippon Society can provide us a more nuanced picture about how and why Japan’s image changed during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in a Central European country that had different images and concepts about the East and thus a different approach than Western European societies had. Moreover, this case of a primarily cultural association in a politically difficult era can show how different cultural and intellectual thoughts and theories can be affected by identity issues and by contemporary politics, political thinking, and international situations.

**Keywords:** Hungarian Nippon Society, Hungarian–Japanese relations, Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Orientalism, Turanism, Alajos Paikert, István Mezey, Géza Dell’Adami

This paper is a concise summary of a basic research of the history and activity of a cultural association dedicated entirely to Japan that was active in Hungary between the two world wars. The author started to explore the history of Hungarian–Japanese relations more than 20 years ago, and in doing so, among other topics, researched the history and activity of the Hungarian Nippon Society (1924–1944) on the basis of the publications of the society, the contemporary press, and archival documents. The results have been published in great detail

in Hungary and have been regularly cited in other scholarly works. This study summarises the most important issues related to the Nippon Society, with the aim of placing its history and activity in the broader historic and ideological context of its time and examining the impacts of contemporary politics, political thinking, and the international situation on the character of a cultural association in connection with Japan between the two world wars.

The Hungarian Nippon Society was founded in 1924, with the aim of building and developing Hungarian–Japanese relations, popularising Japan and Japanese culture in Hungary, and encouraging research on Japan.<sup>1</sup> The society organised public lectures on Japan and Japanese culture and art exhibitions and social events connected to Japanese culture, and through these activities the society was the most important organiser and promoter of Japanese culture and art in Hungary between the two world wars. This society was the first (and for a long time, until the foundation of the Hungarian Japanese Friendship Society in 1987, the only) association in Hungary to focus solely on Japan and Japanese culture.

The relationship between the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and Japan was severed after the First World War as the Monarchy disintegrated in 1918. For Hungary, the 1920 Treaty of Trianon marked the end of the war and the official establishment of its new borders. The treaty prescribed that Hungary end its state of war with the Allied Powers (including Japan) and that subsequently they would enter into official contact with Hungary. However, embassies between Japan and Hungary were set up only in 1938.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the two countries had cultural relations organised by civil societies, the most important of which was the Nippon Society.

The initiatives for the foundation of an independent society for the promotion of Hungarian–Japanese relations originated from different directions, which nonetheless were closely connected to each other. One direction was the ideological effect of Turanism and Orientalism in Hungary, and the other was the personal experience of several hundreds of Hungarian military officers (and thousands of soldiers) with the Japanese army and Japanese officers in 1918–1921, when the Japanese Siberian Expedition Army took over the Russian prisoner of war (POW) camps in Siberia. Later, in the second part of the 1930s, a third factor became more important: the political rapprochement (from 1936) and military alliance (from 1939) between Hungary and Japan.

Examining the history of the Hungarian Nippon Society can provide us a more nuanced picture about how and why Japan's image changed during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in a Central European country that had different

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<sup>1</sup> Farkas 2009b: 226–247.

<sup>2</sup> Wintermantel 2016: 18–19.

images and concepts about the East and thus a different approach than Western European societies had.<sup>3</sup> Also, this case of a primarily cultural association in a politically difficult era can show how different cultural and intellectual thoughts and theories can be affected by identity issues and by contemporary politics, political thinking, and international situations.

### **Orientalism and Turanism in Hungary**

According to new scholarly works on Orientalism, we can no longer perceive the European attitude towards the East as a homogeneous whole.<sup>4</sup> In contrast to Saidian Orientalism,<sup>5</sup> there existed an independent, Central-European Orientalism: the phenomenon of ‘frontier Orientalism’, referring to the historical experience of the people of this region in connection with their own roots and their occasional or everyday encounters with the Eastern world.<sup>6</sup> In Hungary there was more than one factor that played a dominant role in shaping the attitudes and perceptions of the East; there were Saidian or classical Orientalism, frontier Orientalism, and the oriental tradition of the Hungarian identity.

This tradition originated from the awareness of the supposed Asian origin of the Hungarian people. In the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a romantic nationalist cultural movement called Turanism was formed around this idea.<sup>7</sup> The ethnic

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<sup>3</sup> Farkas 2009a. For the image of Japan in East Central Europe, see Dénes et al. 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Watanabe 2020; Gingrich 2006; Dénes et al. 2020.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Orientalism’ (i.e., the interest in the Asian cultures and peoples in Europe mainly in the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) represented a distant, exotic, overseas world of the ‘East’ (albeit one that was regarded as inferior), which could be learnt about, even conquered, and which inspired Western art. As Edward W. Said interpreted Orientalism in his book in 1978, it was a colonial concept reflecting Western superiority and mainly referred to a British and French overseas colonial ideology most easily traced in academic, scientific, and artistic ‘high culture’. Said 1978.

<sup>6</sup> As Andre Gingrich pointed out in his essays, in the Monarchy, the East – which in this context meant first and foremost the Ottoman Empire – represented a neighbouring world, close enough to pose a constant threat, an enemy that the region’s peoples had fought against for centuries. Gingrich’s Orientalism is local and multiple: it is a systematic set of metaphors and myths of folk and public culture and is reproduced in everyday life among those who live on or near a frontier (real or imagined, present or historical) with the East. Gingrich 2006.

<sup>7</sup> The relevant literature on Turanism connected the issue mainly to Pan-Turkism for a long time (Landau 1981: 5–8, 78–79, 176–186.) Owing to some of the elements of the ideology, after 1945 the new hegemonic ideology in Hungary condemned the whole of Turanism as an extreme nationalist (or even racist) ideology, so it was officially banned in any form. Even the research of this ideology was obstructed until the regime change in 1989. Fortunately, since then several publications of new research have been issued, so a more thorough and objective picture is beginning to emerge about Hungarian Turanism as a means of ‘thinking about the East’ in Hungary. (Ablonczy 2016: 14.) See Farkas 1993, Farkas 2001a, Farkas 2001b, Ablonczy 2016, 2021, 2022.

and linguistic kinship and relations between Hungarians and the so-called Turanian peoples were interpreted from the then-prevailing Ural-Altai linguistic theory. The supposed Asian origin of the Hungarian people resulted in increasing attention towards Asian cultures, as they were thought to be closely related to ‘ancient Hungarian culture’. Turanism began as and was first considered to be a scientific movement, aiming at the research of the history and cultures of Asian peoples with a special relevance to Hungarian culture.

It also became the ideology of the cultural, economic, and sometimes even political cooperation with the Turanian (Ural-Altai) peoples. The emergence of the political implications of Turanism can be understood on the basis of the historical context of that time. Turanism was born in the age of Romanticism, parallel with other movements formed around the idea of ethnic families in Europe at the end of the 19th century. Moreover, it was actually formed with the aim of countering the effects of the romantic European pan movements (e.g., Pan-Germanism, Pan-Slavism), which were thought to be dangerous for the Hungarians, who lived ‘alone’ (i.e., without ethnic relatives) between two great ethnic and linguistic families, as such a circumstance would cause Hungarians to vanish because of the predominance of the Slavic and German peoples in the region.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, Turanism was also able to appear as a ‘modern’ phenomenon, as it could be connected to European artistic movements (e.g., Art Nouveau) and scholarly interest in Oriental cultures as well. It grew into an ideology (though not homogeneous in any way) that, in various ways and to various degrees, significantly influenced the Hungarian political, social, and cultural (academic and art) elite.

Also, the concept of the ‘Asian origin’ of the Hungarians was a main initiative for the scientific research of the ethnogenesis of Hungarian people – scholars and explorers (e.g., Sándor Kőrösi Csoma) travelled to Asia to find the memories and relatives of Hungarians. In this way, Turanism was a major contributor

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There have been significant scholarly books and papers published on Turkish, Hungarian, and even on Japanese Turanism in the past few years in English, too; so a new discourse has started about this complex issue. Demirkan 2000, Nizam 2005, Levent 2011, Levent 2021, Ablonczy 2021, Ablonczy 2022.

<sup>8</sup> ‘[...] when Johann Gottfried Herder published the fourth volume of his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind) in 1792, a small, rather short sentence had the greatest effect on his Hungarian readers and would remain important for many years to come. Herder’s statement that “[today’s Hungarians] are mixed with Slavs, Germans, Vlachs, and other peoples, they are the smallest number of inhabitants, and in a few centuries their language will probably be extinct” gave a tremendous impetus to the defenders of the Hungarian language. [...] Herder had considered the possibility that the Hungarian language, and thus the Hungarian nation, might disappear. The fact that this language was a minority language in Hungary itself prompted intellectuals to reflect on its place and, above all, on its kinship and affinity with other idioms.’ Ablonczy 2021: 225–248, 227.

to the formation and development of Hungarian humanities, including Oriental studies (Sándor Kőrösi Csoma, Ármin Vámbéry, and Aurel Stein), linguistics (Vilmos Pröhle), archaeology (Ferenc Pulszky), and geography (Jenő Cholnoky and Pál Teleki). The first Hungarian scholars of these academic fields usually started their careers on the basis of, or influenced by, Turanism, but that does not mean that their later scientific work had any connection to the ideology of Turanism, which usually only served as initial inspiration. The results of these scholars are important milestones of Hungarian scholarship.<sup>9</sup>

However, this approach of scholars and the public has never meant (except in some rare cases of a minority of extreme political ideologies) that Hungarians regarded themselves as Oriental or even part of the East. However, it does mean that especially in the time of a need to re-define identity (e.g., 19<sup>th</sup> century modernisation and the birth of the nation states, or the era between the two world wars when Hungary's position in Europe had to be re-defined) the Oriental roots were considered a part of the Hungarian historical heritage and cultural traditions. (Understanding this duality is important for the interpretation of Hungarian national consciousness of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.) Therefore, the main motive for the research of these roots (and the contemporary Oriental cultures as well) can be seen in searching for the elements of the collective cultural and national identity of the Hungarians. Therefore, this research was attentively followed by the Hungarian public, even after the Oriental 'fashion', the intense interest in Eastern cultures, started to fade in Europe by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Hungarian Turan Society was founded in 1910 with the program of promoting, initiating, and assisting scientific research of Turanian (which meant 'Asian' in the interpretation of the Turanian Society) cultures, peoples, and regions.<sup>10</sup> The society arranged and funded expeditions to Asia and had a journal entitled *Turán* published on these topics. The society also aimed to introduce Turanian (Asian) cultures and peoples to the Hungarian public with educational lectures, articles, and books, and in accomplishing these goals they had a major share in making Oriental cultures known and even popular in Hungary. They definitely excluded any political and religious issues.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Csaplár-Degovics 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Farkas 2001a, 56–75., Ablonczy 2022. Turan Society.

<sup>11</sup> The history of the Turan Society was researched with the documents of the Turan Society, Hungarian National Archives, MOL P 1384. Farkas 2001a. 56–75, 110–130, 151–180.

## Japan in Hungarian Turanism

Since the first years of the existence of the Turan Society, Japan was an outstanding topic among the Asian countries and peoples.<sup>12</sup> It was seen as the only Asian country that could avoid becoming a colony, and with a successful modernisation process it rose to the status of a great power, equal to the Western powers. This process was seen to have been achieved by carefully balancing modern development (i.e., ‘becoming Western’) with preserving Japan’s cultural heritage (and national identity), which was a topic in the discourse on modernisation in Hungary as well. Japan was considered an outstanding example for all the other Turanian peoples to follow, through which the Turanian people could become civilised and modernised and could rise to the level of the free and powerful states.

In 1913, Alajos Paikert, one of the leaders of the Turan Society, published an article in *Turán* on ‘The Future of Asia’, emphasising the rapid and successful development of Japan. He set Japan as an example to the other Turanian peoples and designed the tasks of Japan and Hungary as the easternmost and westernmost nations of the Turanians to help the Turanian peoples of Asia in this process:

We all know the epoch-making development of Japan from a closed island country at the end of the world to a considerable empire even among the greatest powers of the world. [...] The country of the Rising Sun, who was looked down on so much by the powerful European neighbours, suddenly showed the world remarkably how strong and serious of a world power it became from a shy small country. [...] Owing to her position, this easternmost branch of the Turanian family of peoples aspires to the same place in the East as England has in the West. The extraordinary intelligence, diligence, courage, and political sense of the Japanese enable them to play significant role in the future world history, and we, Hungarians, the westernmost representatives of the Turanian peoples in the heart of Europe, are intended the same task here as the Japanese in the Far East: to strive and work, not against other nations, but for all of us, for the unitary and friendly progress of the whole mankind.<sup>13</sup>

The ‘Japanese model’ was presented as an example to be followed by the rest of the Turanian peoples. The Hungarians and the Japanese, the most westerly and most easterly Turanian nations, had the joint task and mission of helping

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<sup>12</sup> Farkas 2001a, 211–216.

<sup>13</sup> Paikert 1913: 8. The citations from contemporary Hungarian texts are translated by the author.

the other Asian Turanian peoples along this path of ‘elevation’, functioning as a kind of bridge between East and West.

This most easterly branch of the family of Turanian nations [...] The Japanese are being trained by their extraordinary intelligence, diligence, courage, and political sense for yet another great role in the future history of the world, and we Hungarians, the most westerly members of the Turanians, here in the heart of Europe, have the same mission as the Japanese in the Far East, to struggle and labour, not against the other nations, but for the unified, comradely advancement of us all, the entire human race.<sup>14</sup>

National/nationalist endeavours could be expressed with reference to the Japanese example, which proved that modernisation, as a Western type of progress, could be achieved without sacrificing national identity or cultural heritage.<sup>15</sup> Under the Japanese model, the defence of national interests and the preservation of national culture were regarded as contemporary ideas, not as the enemies of modernity. The idea that modernisation, as a Western type of progress, could be achieved without sacrificing national identity or cultural heritage was an important argument in Hungarian debates on modernisation. Discourses also revived certain traditional tropes, which had lingered in the cultural memory for centuries, about Hungary’s peripheral existence on the ‘borderland’, ‘in-between’ East and West and about its periodically recurring role as a ‘bridge’. In these thoughts, the ‘bridge’ situation of Japan could be interpreted as similar to that of Hungary, which made it possible to make comparisons and draw a parallel between the development, situation, and task or even mission of the two nations.

## After World War I

After the traumas of losing World War I and the 1920 Trianon Peace Treaty for Hungarians, Turanism gained new momentum, and new motives emerged in its ideology. Hungarians saw themselves as a people originating from Asia, but after having settled in Europe and adopting Christianity in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, they became part of Western civilisation and became the defenders of Europe against the attacks coming from the East.<sup>16</sup> Having a strong self-image of being the ‘defenders of Christianity’, Hungarians felt that with the Trianon Peace Treaty Europe had betrayed Hungary and left her without any allies or friends. Hungary – as the argument went – ‘had better now turn off from the West, face East again,

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<sup>14</sup> Paikert 1913: 8.

<sup>15</sup> Farkas 2020: 43–56.

<sup>16</sup> Bulwark of Christendom.

and try to find friends, relatives, and allies in Asia'.<sup>17</sup> Turanism transformed into the ideology of the desperate and reflected the frustration of Hungarian society and its disappointment in the West. The internal discourse about Hungary as a frontier country or borderland (according to which the Hungarians are the easternmost Western people or, alternatively, the westernmost Eastern people) intensified after 1918.

Japan held a special place in this ideology especially after World War I, and it maintained public interest in Japan even after Japonisme in Europe started to decay.<sup>18</sup> A new image of Japan had solidified by that time: losing their romantic image as an exotic, uncorrupted, and noble people, the Japanese became to be seen as an example of modernisation with tradition, a nation that could develop successfully with preserving its identity and national interest.<sup>19</sup> The significance of the exemplary development of Japan was always emphasised in texts about Japan, underlying that this could be the possible future for the Turanian peoples:

Japan today is tendentious, successful, and with its own push sets an example to the other Asian peoples and countries.<sup>20</sup>

As Japan developed from a remotest, totally medieval, secluded state to one of the most modernised and greatest nation of the world, so will the other Asian countries follow this example. (...) The Turanian future is shown by the Japanese, who adopting the most important and useful achievements of the West while preserving their old national traditions, are now the most developed, best organised and trained, and strongest power in Asia.<sup>21</sup>

The articles always highlighted that the Japanese could adopt and improve Western culture and technical developments so successfully because of their earlier high level of culture. A kind of moral of the Japanese development was also drawn up: the country was closed for centuries, but they admitted that they could not develop in seclusion, so they studied Western achievements and adopted them, and this way they had all the elements of Western civilisation and did not need the help of the Western powers. All the opinions made it clear that 'Japan [would] play a great role in the development of Asia'.<sup>22</sup> Japan's uniqueness was also mentioned: 'No other exotic people was able to adopt the

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<sup>17</sup> Farkas 1993: 864.

<sup>18</sup> Farkas 2001b. For a new interpretation of Japonisme (i.e., an appreciation of Japan and its culture) see Watanabe 2020; Farkas 2020.

<sup>19</sup> Farkas 2009a: 186–216.

<sup>20</sup> Paikert 1934.

<sup>21</sup> Paikert 1936: 9.

<sup>22</sup> Paikert 1934.



means and methods of the European knowledge so well as the Japanese'.<sup>23</sup> In this way, the Japanese were seen as being capable of fusing the achievements and values of the East and the West, and through this, they were seen as being able to become an 'insuperable rival' for both the East and the West. 'Technical development has made the Japanese dangerous rivals'.<sup>24</sup>

Japan had a special place in Hungary: the elements of its image changed, but this image reflected a generally favourable and positive picture even when the image of Japan became less favourable in the West.<sup>25</sup>

## The Hungarian Nippon Society

### The foundation

The activity and ideas of the Nippon Society were not independent from those of Turanism, but the foundation and initial aims of the two arose from different sources.<sup>26</sup>

The most important initiator of the foundation and the main organiser of the society's activity during its existence was Dr. István Mezey, a lawyer and former officer of the Austro-Hungarian Army in World War I.<sup>27</sup> During the war Mezey was taken as a POW by the Russians and transported to Siberia, from where he fled to Japan, where he learnt Japanese. He assisted in the repatriation of Hungarian POWs as a contact officer for the Japanese commander of the Nikolsk-Ussuriysk camp. (Thus, there is good reason to assume that the camp commander obtained information about Turanism from him.)

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<sup>23</sup> Cholnoky 1934: 22.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Cholnoky 1934: 22.

<sup>25</sup> Wilkinson 1991. About the image of Japan in East Central Europe, see Dénes et al. 2020.

<sup>26</sup> Farkas 2009b: 226–247.

<sup>27</sup> Dr. István Mezey (1895–?) He obtained a law degree and began working as a lawyer. First, he was interested in Turkish culture, learnt Turkish, and in this context first came into contact with the Turan Society (he corresponded with the Turan Society about the compilation of a Turkish dictionary before World War I) and presumably with Turanism. He was on a study trip to Turkey when World War I broke out. He became a lieutenant in the army, was taken prisoner by the Russians, and was transferred to Siberia, from where he fled to Japan (where he learnt Japanese). He assisted in the repatriation of Hungarian POWs as a contact officer for the Japanese commander of the Nikolsk-Ussuriysk camp. Mezey later devoted a chapter to the topic of POWs in his book on Japan, emphasising that the Japanese approached friendship towards the Hungarians, claiming that the Hungarians are their relatives. He mentioned the helpful, friendly attitude of the Japanese towards the Hungarian POWs as an important starting point in every review of the history of relations. Mezey 1939.

The Russian POW camps were taken by the Japanese army in 1918–1920 during the Japanese Siberian expedition.<sup>28</sup> The topic of the history, situation, and problems of World War I POWs has become the subject of historical study in just the past decades (the first scholarly histories appearing in the 1990s).<sup>29</sup> Especially the case of the prisoners taken into Russian captivity is important for the history of the former members of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, as Russia captured (and held in camps) an estimated more than 2 million POWs in Russia from the Monarchy (with ethnic Germans and Hungarians each constituting around one quarter and Slavic people the other half). The repatriation of the prisoners progressed very slowly because of the Russian Civil War and organisational and financial problems of Germany and the successor states of the dissolved Monarchy, so the process took until 1922.<sup>30</sup>

The Hungarian sources so far have different numbers for the Hungarian prisoners of war returning home from Siberia. According to the Hungarian Defence Ministry, 6,557 Hungarian prisoners returned home by May 1920.<sup>31</sup> Géza Dell'Adami, the leader of the Red Cross mission to repatriate Hungarian prisoners, wrote about 8,000–10,000 Hungarians. His data were said to be based on the statistics of the International Red Cross, and it stated that approx. 13,000 Hungarian prisoners of war boarded during 1920–1921, of which approx. 8,200 went home to Hungary, while approx. 4,800 former Hungarian citizens were repatriated in their respective successor states.<sup>32</sup> According to the new research and relevant literature in English and German, the data given by Dell'Adami do not seem to be an exaggeration.

After the Monarchy was dismembered in 1918, the successor states had to organise the repatriation of their citizens, but it was complicated for the Hungarians, as the majority of the country became the territories of the successor states, so it was not simple to determine the actual citizenship of many ethnic Hungarian prisoners. They became the last ones to return home from Siberian camps in 1921–1922.<sup>33</sup>

Hungarian POWs returned home after several years of harsh ordeals after the Japanese authorities agreed to help them repatriate in cooperation with the Red Cross. This was an important encounter of Hungarians with Japanese soldiers,

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<sup>28</sup> Jones 2014, Leidinger–Moritz 1997.

<sup>29</sup> Jones 2014.

<sup>30</sup> Nachtigal–Radauer 2014.

<sup>31</sup> Wintermantel 2016: 14.

<sup>32</sup> Dell'Adami 1925: 178. He was also a prisoner of war in Krasnoyarsk until 1917. Summary of the history of the Hungarian prisoners under Japanese control: Mezey 1930.

<sup>33</sup> Research on the Austrian-Hungarian prisoners of wars in Siberia: Bonhardt 1985, Kovács 1987. 近藤正憲 2006. New research by Márton Mati PhD student (Károli University, Military History Doctoral School), forthcoming 2022.

officers, and officials in a large number, when the Japanese took over the Russian POW camps in Siberia. As the head of the Hungarian Red Cross's mission to repatriate POWs from Eastern Siberia, Dell'Adami later wrote a book about the mission's activities, in which he thanked the Japanese authorities for their favourable treatment of the Hungarian POWs and for their helpful attitude to the efforts of the mission. Dell'Adami wrote:

Before we sailed, there was a farewell party in the Japanese camp in Nikolsk [...] Around the white table there were officers of three fraternities, Japanese, Hungarians, and Turks. After a few cordial greetings, Lieutenant Tanaka explained in a clever speech the need to unite the Turanian peoples and toasted to the development of the three leading valiant Turanic races.<sup>34</sup>

The reports from the 1920s and 1930s in Hungary stated that the Japanese–Hungarian friendship began in Siberia during these events.

The racial kinship of the Turanian tribes in the Far East may never have been as prominent as in the post-World War I period. It was interesting to note the interest shown between the two pillars of the Turanian Bridge: Japan and Hungary. Dai-Tó (sic) (Great East), a magazine in Mukden, edited in Japanese, Hungarian, and Tatar, was the leading newspaper in the Turanian movement.<sup>35</sup>

The contemporary reports emphasised the important role of the former POWs in founding the new association.<sup>36</sup> The inner cover of the journal of the Nippon Society, *Távol Kelet*, contained the details about the foundation of the society (in English, too):

The Hungarian Nippon Society was founded on 1 June 1924, on the suggestion of those Hungarian officers who, having been prisoners-of-war in Eastern Asia had an opportunity to get acquainted with the Japanese *bushido*. After their return to Hungary they decided to make efforts towards the tightening of the cultural and economic links between Japan and Hungary.<sup>37</sup>

In an overview of Hungarian–Japanese relations published in 1943, one of the directors of the Nippon Society, Iván Nagy, wrote about the establishment of the society:

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<sup>34</sup> Dell'Adami

<sup>35</sup> Dell'Adami

<sup>36</sup> Contemporary accounts on the foundation of the Nippon society: Mezey 1929, Mezey 1936, Nagy 1943b.

Contemporary works on the history of Hungarian POWs returning from Siberia via Japan or with Japanese help: Dell'Adami 1925, Mezey 1939.

<sup>37</sup> *Távol Kelet* (Far East) 1936. I. Inner cover,

The former POW officers who enjoyed the benevolent, exceptional treatment of the Japanese Expeditionary Army at the time (1918–1920), in order to deepen relations between the two countries, founded the Hungarian-Nippon Society on 1 June 1924, with the leadership of Dr. István Mezey, a reserve lieutenant and lawyer [...] This company took over the task of organising social relations between the two countries from the Turan Society founded in 1910.<sup>38</sup>

In the Hungarian relevant literature, the story of the World War I Hungarian POWs returning home from Russian camps in Siberia with the help of the Japanese Army, and especially the reports about the sympathy of the Japanese towards the Hungarians, were treated with reservations and were regarded as exaggerations aimed at boosting comradeship with Japan in Hungary. The same evaluation was applied in the relevant literature regarding contemporary reports about the favourable treatment of the Japanese officials towards the Hungarian claims during negotiations preceding the Trianon Peace Treaty. In the latter case, the newest research of the Japanese archives and diplomatic documents proved that the contemporary reports had not exaggerated the situation.<sup>39</sup> The Siberian situation still needs to be thoroughly researched, but it seems reasonable to suppose that the reports and memories of the survivors reflected the true feelings of the captives. They suffered immensely in the Siberian camps without proper – or even acceptable – housing, clothes, food, and health care. They struggled with extreme cold, hunger, and serious illnesses, and many of the POWs did not survive. When comparing the approach of the Japanese army (cooperating with the Red Cross and providing the prisoners with food, clothing, and medical aid) with the unbearable circumstances under the Russian forces understandably led the prisoners to appreciate the Japanese conduct and made them grateful for such humane treatment. Also, the Japanese officials were willing to assist and cooperate in repatriating missions (e.g., with the Hungarian mission).<sup>40</sup>

The former POW officers actually formed only one group of the founders. A report in the journal *Turán* (the journal of the Turan Society) in 1925 reported on the formation of the Nippon Society: ‘The Hungarians who visited Japan and the Japanese who visited Hungary implemented their old plan to form a separate society in order to bring the two related peoples closer together’. Thus, a significant number of Hungarians who had travelled to Japan took part in the founding of the society (e.g., Benedek Baráthosi Balogh<sup>41</sup>, who was an important promoter

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<sup>38</sup> Nagy 1943b: 113.

<sup>39</sup> Umemura – Wintermantel 2021.

<sup>40</sup> Wintermantel 2021: 34–36.

<sup>41</sup> Benedek Balogh of Baráthosi (1870–1945) was originally a teacher who considered it his task to research the origins of the Hungarians, and therefore he travelled to East Asia several times

of Turanism and a possible mediator between Hungarian and Japanese Turanists, as probably he introduced Turanism to Imaoka Jūichirō 今岡十一郎<sup>42</sup>).

Among the founders of the Nippon Society there were supporters of Turanism, but also there were scholars of Oriental cultures who did not have any specific interest in Turanism (Ervin Baktay, Gyula Germanus), and there were also researchers of Japanese culture with Turanian interest (e.g., Zoltán Felvinczi Takács, who was later the vice president of the society between 1932 and 1944, the first art historian in Hungary dealing with East Asian art, and the first director of the Hopp Ferenc Museum of Asiatic Arts). The presence of scholars without Turanist interest in founding the Nippon Society shows an important difference between the interests of the societies' respective members.

On the board of directors and among the members of the society we can also find representatives of scientific oriental studies. Among them, Zoltán Felvinczi Takács<sup>43</sup> and Vilmos Pröhle<sup>44</sup> played an important role in the society's later activities, but we can also see the names of significant experts of other oriental cultures, such as Ervin Baktay,<sup>45</sup> Gyula Germanus,<sup>46</sup> and Aladár Bán.<sup>47</sup>

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at his own expense, with little support from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. In 1908–1909 he collected mainly linguistic material along the Amur. He left for Japan in 1914 and from there again to the Amur region to study the Manchu-Tunguz peoples. By 1945, he became one of the most important promoters of the Turanian movement, publishing more than 20 volumes entitled 'Turanian Books'. His ethnographic collection, especially the Ainu collection, was also of outstanding importance in the world. (Most of it is in the Ethnographic Museum, Budapest.) His work as an ethnographer has begun to be again recognised in recent decades, see Hoppál Mihály: *Távoli utakon*. Bp. 1996.

<sup>42</sup> Umemura 2006: 24–25, Levent 2011: 307–325, 312.

<sup>43</sup> Zoltán Takács Felvinczi (1880–1964) was the first art historian in Hungary dealing with East Asian art. In 1919 he set up the Museum of East Asian Art from the legacy of Ferenc Hopp, and as director significantly developed the museum until 1948. He published numerous studies and dissertations on oriental art, with which he gained international recognition. He was the vice president of the Nippon Society between 1932 and 1944.

<sup>44</sup> Vilmos Pröhle (1871–1946) originally studied Turkish languages and made several study trips to Turkey and Central Asia, and then to Japan. He is considered a pioneer in the study of Chinese and Japanese language and literature in Hungary. The East-Asia Institute was established in 1924 under his leadership, and from 1924, the Japanese government appointed him head of the Japanese consulate in Budapest.

<sup>45</sup> Ervin Baktay (1890–1963) was an orientalist, expert of Indian culture, deputy director of the Ferenc Hopp Museum of Oriental Art and a lecturer in Indian art history at the University of Budapest.

<sup>46</sup> Gyula Germanus (1884–1979) was an orientalist, primarily concerned with Arabic literature and language.

<sup>47</sup> Aladár Bán (1871–1960) was a translator and folklorist. He dealt with the culture of the Finno-Ugric peoples. He was the editor of *Turán*, the head of the Finnish-Estonian department of the Turan Society, and one of the most active proponents and organisers of the Finnish-Estonian-Hungarian relations.

The Turan Society also supported the establishment of the Nippon Society, and one of the presidents of the Turan Society, Alajos Paikert, took part in the formation, too. There was a close and friendly relationship between the two societies throughout their existence. There were several leading members of the Nippon Society who were also important members of the Turan Society: Vilmos Pröhle (editor of *Turán* in 1922–1925), Aladár Bán, István Mezey, Iván Nagy, Benedek Baráthosi Balogh (vice-president of the Turan Society), Zoltán Takács Felvinczi, and many others. Probably there were also some other lesser-known people who were members of both societies, but it does not mean that the Nippon Society was merely a branch of the Turan Society. The Nippon Society always deliberately emphasised the role of the former POWs in the formation of the association in its statements and documents, and this way it may have sought to prove its independence from the Turan Society.

### **The activity of the Nippon Society<sup>48</sup>**

The focus of the Nippon Society was partly narrower than that of the Turan Society, with the aim at building relations with only one country, Japan, but at the same time it had a wider margin of manoeuvre in establishing contacts between the two countries, as its objectives did not include any ideology or the spread of Turanism. The Nippon Society envisaged activities of a purely cultural nature, to strengthen closer contacts between the two peoples, to build and nurture cultural relations, to promote scientific research, to hold informative and scholarly lectures and organise social events, and to publish and distribute similar publications. They more or less achieved these goals, fulfilling a real cultural mission between the two peoples, but they did much more to make Japan known – and popular – in Hungary at that time, to promote Japanese culture and even political goals, and to emphasise friendship (and sometimes kinship) between Hungary and Japan. The society organised public lectures on Japan and Japanese culture, Japanese art exhibitions, and social events connected to Japanese culture, and through these activities the society was the most important organiser and promoter of Japanese culture and art in Hungary between the two world wars.

Of course, in addition to lectures and academic papers given by experts, there were numerous lectures and public speeches not without ideological-political

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<sup>48</sup> The journals *Turán* and *Távol Kelet* reported on the activities of the Nippon Society, on the lectures, reading sessions, exhibitions, art evenings, and every cultural or social event that could be connected to Japan. They also announced the arrival of Japanese guests or visitors in Hungary and published reviews of new books on Japan.

overtones, several of which were related to the idea of Turanism or Japan's aims for expansion and its new role in international politics. This duality – sometimes purely cultural and sometimes political – of the activities of the society can be observed throughout its operation.

Providing popular public lectures was one of the main areas of the activities. The topic of the lectures was partly related to Turanism, but most of them served more educational purposes, describing the conditions, history, art, and customs of contemporary Japan. Organising 'art evenings' (public lectures illustrated with pictures of art for the general audience) and exhibitions was also an important part of the activities of the society. These events – Japanese music performances, art exhibitions, and art performances – were of great interest to contemporary audiences.

The activities of the Nippon Society – exhibitions, concerts, public lectures, soirees, and performances – were advertised and reported in significant nationwide newspapers, so it can be assumed that the effects of these events were much larger than what the size of the actual audiences would indicate.<sup>49</sup> The terms 'Japan' and 'Japanese' and the notions that these words indicated at that time became well known in everyday expressions and images in Hungary.

In the first 10 years of its existence, the Nippon Society was mainly active in holding regular monthly presentations and organising social evenings on occasions, for which they were trying to win over the most illustrious public and political figures. As these events with the notable and illustrious guests were regularly reported in the social news part of the daily newspapers, it was probably an effective propaganda for society in addition to the books and articles of Japanese topics published in different journals.

Let us see some of the important events of the Nippon Society. On 29 October 1924, the Nippon Society held its first public lecture with Felvinczi Takács Zoltán talking about Japanese art. On 25 November 1924, a Japanese art soiree evening was organised in Vigadó (a prestigious and elegant concert hall in Budapest), with lectures on Japanese music and the Hungarian–Japanese relations and Hungarian artists performing Japanese songs, music, and poems. In 1925, the public lecture series of the Nippon Society included lectures about Japanese architecture, Japanese and Chinese figurines, Japanese history, literature, and contemporary economy by experts and members of the society. In 1930, a Japanese kabuki theatre had performances in Budapest, and the Nippon Society organised a Japanese music performance and lectures about the Japanese theatre for this occasion. In 1931, a Japanese art exhibition was organized in Budapest, and the special role of Japan in Hungary can be demonstrated with

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<sup>49</sup> Prestigious or popular newspapers: *Az Est*, *Magyarország*, *Pesti Napló*, *Budapesti Hírlap*.



this event: despite the two countries having no diplomatic relations and being still very far from any kind of alliance, the opening ceremony of this exhibition was honoured by the presence of the Hungarian Minister of Education and Culture Kuno Klebelsberg, and even the head of the state, Governor Miklós Horthy was present.<sup>50</sup> He gave a speech about the significance of Japan at the ceremony: ‘The Hungarian people have always turned to Japan, the nation of the Far East, with great interest. They also always expressed their warm sympathy’.<sup>51</sup>

Imaoka Jūichirō 今岡十一郎 (1883–1973) played an outstandingly important role in the development of Hungarian–Japanese relations, introducing and promoting Japanese culture in Hungary and later Hungarian culture in Japan (including propagating Turanism).<sup>52</sup> He spent nine years in Hungary as a scholarship holder between 1921 and 1930, and during these years he was very active in introducing and promoting Japanese culture (he learnt to speak excellent Hungarian). He held numerous lectures on Japan throughout the country. For example from May 1926 to May 1927, he gave 37 lectures in Hungarian to various cultural associations in Budapest, and in several cities in the country (Pécs, Győr, Békés, Debrecen, Szombathely, Makó, Székesfehérvár, Pápa, and Kisújszállás) about a wide range of Japanese topics (including fine arts, women’s issues, folk customs, music, architecture, and philosophy). His lectures and articles were published in the Hungarian press, and in 1930 a book entitled *Új Nippon* containing his collected articles was published by the prestigious Hungarian publishing house Athenaeum. The same year, Governor Miklós Horthy honoured Imaoka Jūichirō with a high Hungarian award for his services in the rapprochement of the two nations. He had relations to several significant Hungarian artists, writers, and poets, and this way he undeniably had an effect on the favourable image of Japan in Hungary. He wrote that Japanese people could feel the friendliness of the Hungarians when coming to Hungary and also about the signs of Japan’s benevolence towards Hungarian claims in international negotiations.<sup>53</sup>

## In the 1930s

In the first 10 years, ‘cultural’ is the most appropriate descriptor of the activities of the Nippon Society and the nature of Hungarian–Japanese relations. However, from the late 1930s, social relations, which were originally non-political

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<sup>50</sup> Newspaper report with photo of the opening ceremony, Wintermantel 2016: 52.

<sup>51</sup> Wintermantel 2016: 52.

<sup>52</sup> Umemura Yuko’s significant monograph on Imaoka: Umemura 2006. See also Umemura 2013; Umemura 2010; Umemura 2009.

<sup>53</sup> Imaoka 1930: 241–242.



in nature, became increasingly influenced by politics. Japan's cooperation with Germany was established in 1936 with the Anti-Comintern Pact, and Hungary joined in 1939. The existence of a common ally – which had not been present in Hungarian–Japanese relations thus far – left its mark on the nature of social and cultural relations. The activity of the society is a faithful reflection of the slight changes in the course of Hungarian–Japanese relations. On the one hand, the society emphasised its role in initiating and developing scientific oriental research (mainly Japanese, but also East Asian as a whole, aspiring the status of a European Centre for East Asian Studies), and on the other hand, the contemporary political events and the changing situation in East Asia became the focus of interest in lectures and articles about Japan, with a visible bias towards Japanese aims and interests.

In 1935, Mitsui Takaharu, one of the leaders of the huge Mitsui company (*zaibatsu*), offered the Hungarian Ministry of Religion and Public Education a donation of 10,000 pengő a year and the Nippon Society 5,000 pengő for five years for the development of Hungarian–Japanese cultural relations.<sup>54</sup> The purpose of the foundation was to finance the trip of Hungarian researchers to Japan, the costs of university lectures on Japanese language and literature in the university in Budapest, and the publication of books and articles related to Japan. A bibliography of works published in Hungarian dealing with Japan was compiled,<sup>55</sup> and Hungarian scientists and researchers could embark on a study trip to Japan. In 1936 Zoltán Felvinczi Takács took part in a 13-month study trip to Japan, in 1937 István Mezey won the foundation's one-year Japanese scholarship, and in 1940 Lajos Ligeti received a six-month scholarship. (Felvinczi and Ligeti, just like Vilmos Pröhle, were among the founders of the academic field of East Asian studies in Hungary.) Associations and societies dealing with Japan, as well as the Ferenc Hopp Museum of East Asian Art, were also supported by this foundation.

In 1936 and 1937, with the help of the Mitsui Foundation 三井基金, the Nippon Society launched its quarterly magazine, *Távol Kelet*, a journal dedicated exclusively to Japan (which was and still is the first and only journal of its

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<sup>54</sup> Nagy 1943b: 113–114. (The contemporary average monthly wage for a public official was around 200 pengő.)

<sup>55</sup> *Távol Kelet* 1937. I–IV: 83–101. I. A bibliography was compiled twice, in 1937 and 1943. In 1937, the collection of works dealing with Japan published in Hungarian until then included 133 titles of books and book prints. In 1943, the bibliography contained the titles and brief descriptions of the books and book prints published between 1937 and 1943 and the journal articles on Japan published between 1937 and 1943. The two bibliographies were published in 1943 in the compilation of Dr. Gábor Lévai, titled *The Hungarian Book of Japan*, as the first booklet of East Asian papers. It contained a total of 822 titles, expanded with articles published between 1920 and 1937.

kind in Hungary).<sup>56</sup> It was edited by István Mezey and Zoltán Takács Felvinczi, but Iván Nagy, Vilmos Pröhle, and others also served on the editorial board. The articles written by Hungarian experts of Japanese topics embraced many aspects of traditional and contemporary Japanese culture and life. The cover was decorated with the badge of the society; two circles containing a Japanese cherry blossom and a Hungarian folk floral motif are intertwined as the number eighth, and around it there is an inscription in Hungarian and Japanese: *Magyar Nippon Társaság*. The issues of the journal mainly included articles, studies, and analyses written by Hungarian authors on Japan, as well as descriptions and reviews of Japan-themed books. At the end of each issue, a short summary of the Hungarian articles in English could also be found, but it was also common for a Hungarian author's article to be published in English.<sup>57</sup>

The aims of the journal were defined as follows on the inside of the cover:

The Far East is at the centre of world interest today. The events of historical significance that took place there have aroused the interest of the widest range of the public so much that we feel a serious need to inform Hungarian society about the events in the Far East and the global political context from time to time [...] Eastern literature, science, art, social issues, and economic life are no longer a matter of mysticism for Europeans but of serious science. We want to inform the Hungarian public about all these in our journal with the articles of the best Hungarian and foreign researchers, experts, and artists [...] The long-term goal of *Távol Kelet* is to realize the old desire of Hungary to be a link between East and West and to make Hungary a European centre for Oriental research. The studies published in foreign languages in our journal, as well as the English-language extracts of our Hungarian articles, also serve this purpose.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *Távol Kelet* (Far East) 1936–37.

<sup>57</sup> Some of the articles in *Távol Kelet* in 1936–1937: [In cases where the bibliographical data of Hungarian works are provided, names of the authors are in the original Hungarian order with surname first.] Felvinczi Takács Zoltán: A Hopp Ferenc Keletázsiai Művészeti Múzeum 1936/1. (Hopp Ferenc Museum), Szemelvények a japán költészetből. 1936/2. (Extracts from Japanese poetry), Habán Jenő: A japáni írás rendszere. 1936/3–4. (Japanese writing), Zsoldos Benő: Japán mondavilágából. 1936/3–4. (Japanese myths), Hollós Ödön: Japán gazdasági fellendülésének igazi okai I–II. 1936/1, 2. (The real causes of Japan's economic boom), Ledermann László: Japán ipari fellendülése a világháború óta. 1936/3–4. (Japan's economic boom since the World War), Nagy Iván: Japán közoktatásügye. 1–2–3. 1936/1, 2, 3. (Japan's educational system), Takahashi Ito: A japáni társadalom mai irányzatai 1936/2. (The Japanese society today), Csorba Béla – Geszty Júlia: Pillanatfelvételek a mai Japánról. 1936/2. (Pictures of Japan), Japániak Japánról. 1937. (Japanese about Japan.) (Some article titles are translated into English to show the wide range of Japanese topics presented to the Hungarian audience.)

<sup>58</sup> *Távol Kelet* 1936. inner cover.

In addition to cultural topics, analyses of the contemporary situation and politics in Japan were frequent topics of the lectures and articles,<sup>59</sup> mainly by István Mezey, with a visible bias towards Japan.<sup>60</sup> He interpreted the events from the point of view of the Japanese in explaining the Japanese actions in northern China and Manchuria. As he wrote in his 1936 article, ‘The New Manchu Empire’,

Japan’s population is growing by one million a year, and overpopulation cannot be deduced because all gates are closed before Japanese immigration. The people of Japan, who are proliferating and excluded from the possibility of emigration, need raw materials and a market for their industrial products. Manchuria is the only solution with its unlimited possibilities. So, it is understandable that it has become a dogma for Japan to stand or fall with Manchuria.<sup>61</sup>

Nevertheless, we can say that in the two years of *Távol Kelet*’s existence (1936–1937), the Nippon Society remained true to its fundamentally cultural character. The majority of the articles and studies were works on cultural-artistic,<sup>62</sup> economic,<sup>63</sup> or social issues<sup>64</sup> of Japan at the time. The review section contained information, meetings, and other events related to Japan that could be considered as contacts of Japanese and Hungarian culture or people.

With the support of the Mitsui Foundation, the Nippon Society could also publish books on Japan written by scholar members of the society, covering a wide range of topics, which is also an outstanding example of the intensive

<sup>59</sup> Lectures: Simonyi-Semadam Sándor beszámolója japán útjáról (Report on his travel in Japan), Pröhle Vilmos: A japán nyelv és irodalom (Japanese language and literature), Mezey István: A Távol-Kelet jelenlegi gazdasági problémái (Economic problems of East Asia), Mezey: Japán és a turáni mozgás (Japan and the Turanian movement), Mezey: Japán és Mandzskuó (Japan and Manchukuo), Mezey: Japán új irányvonala (Japan’s new directions).

<sup>60</sup> Mezey: Az új Mandzsu császárság (The new Manchu Empire) 1936/1., Németh Lajos: Japániai Északkinában (The Japanese in North China) 1936/1., Mezey: A japáni nép új útja (The new road of Japan) 1936/2.

<sup>61</sup> Mezey: Az új Mandzsu császárság (The new Manchu Empire) 1936/1.

<sup>62</sup> Felvinczi Takács Zoltán: A Hopp Ferenc Keletázsiai Művészeti Múzeum 1936/1. (Hopp Ferenc Museum), Szemelvények a japán költészetből. 1936/2. (Extracts from Japanese poetry), Habán Jenő: A japáni írás rendszere. 1936/3–4. (Japanese writing), Zsoldos Benő: Japán mondvilágából. 1936/3–4. (Japanese myths).

<sup>63</sup> Hollós Ödön: Japán gazdasági fellendülésének igazi okai I-II. 1936/1, 2. (The real causes of Japan’s economic boom), Ledermann László: Japán ipari fellendülése a világháború óta. 1936/3–4. (Japan’s economic boom since the World War).

<sup>64</sup> Nagy Iván: Japán közoktatásügye. 1–2–3 (Japan’s public education) 1936/1, 2, 3, Takahashi Ito: A japáni társadalom mai irányzatai (The current trends of Japanese society) 1936/2, Csorba Béla – Geszty Júlia: Pillanatfelvételek a mai Japánról (Pictures of Japan today) 1936/2, Japániai Japánról (The Japanese about Japan) 1937.

Hungarian interest in Japan.<sup>65</sup> Books on Japan published between the two world wars in Hungary have in common that while introducing Japan in details – the traditional and the modern elements of the country, everyday life, customs, and culture were all among the topics – they all emphasised the inaccuracies of the stereotypes in the West about Japan. The books usually appeared as travelogues to make them more popular among the audience, but at the same time they provided a wide range of proper information about contemporary Japan. The authors emphasised the inaccuracies of the entrenched stereotypes about Japan in the West, and they aimed to disprove the errors and misunderstandings about Japan and to present the ‘real Japan’, the ‘true Japan’, and the ‘unknown Japan’.<sup>66</sup>

At that time there were also scholarly works published on Japan, and they represented the rising scholarly field of East Asian and Japanese studies in Hungary.<sup>67</sup> The authors of these works, especially Zoltán Felvinczi Takács and Vilmos Pröhle, played a great role in developing East Asian studies. Takács, art historian and scholar of Oriental studies, was the first scholar in Hungary to scientifically deal with East Asian art, and thus founded the scientific research of Oriental art in Hungary. He was also an important organiser; he concentrated and arranged the Oriental art collections of different Hungarian institutions into a separate Oriental museum between 1919 and 1923 (Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asian Art, the first and most important museum of Asian art in the region). He was the first director of the museum until 1948; meanwhile he was also one of the founders and a vice president of the Nippon Society (1932–44). Vilmos Pröhle is considered a pioneer in the study of Chinese and Japanese language and literature in Hungary (though he originally studied Turkish languages). The East Asia Institute was established in 1924 at Pázmány Péter University in Budapest (today Eötvös Loránd University) under his leadership. He published

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<sup>65</sup> Pröhle Vilmos: *A japán nemzeti irodalom kistükre* (The Japanese literature), Nagy Iván: *Japán közoktatásügye* (Japan’s educational system), Mezey István: *Az igazi Japán* (The real Japan), Nagy Iván: *Magyarország kapcsolatai a 2600 éves Japánnal* (Hungarian-Japanese relations), Felvinczi Takács Zoltán: *A Hopp Ferenc Keletázsiai Múzeum* (About the Hopp Ferenc Museum); Mezey István: *Hungaro–Japanese Relations*, Mezey István: *A Historical Sketch of Hungaro–Japanese Relations* (1936), Somogyi József: *A Magyar Nippon Társaság magyar–japán emlékkiállítására* (Exhibition of the Nippon Society), Somogyi József: *Japán és a keletázsiai nagytér* (Japan and Greater Asia).

<sup>66</sup> Mécs Alajos: *Az ismeretlen Japán* (The unknown Japan), Mezey: *Az igazi Japán* (The real Japan).

<sup>67</sup> Cholnoky Jenő: *Japán, a felkelő nap országa* (1942), *Japán és Európa* (Turán, 1934), *Ázsia* (1942), *Japán főrajza* (1941), Felvinczi Takács Zoltán: *A Kelet művészete, Kínai és japán képek Nyugat, 1914. I. 729–743, Hango a Távol-Keletről Nyugat, 1914. II. 260–262, Pröhle Vilmos: A japán nemzeti irodalom kistükre* (The Japanese literature) 1937, Zsigovits Béla: *Japán keresztény szemmel* (Japan seen from Christian viewpoints) 1937.

the first scholarly works on Japanese literature and language in Hungarian. In the meantime, he was a supporter of Turanism, vice president of the Nippon Society, and also one of the leaders of the Turan Society.

The example of the lives and works of these outstanding scholars shows the particular place of Oriental research in Hungary in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century Hungary had developed a solid system of scientific institutions for research, and more could be found behind successful Oriental research than efforts of state or scholarly interest. The approach of Hungarian scientists and scholars – and the public – to the Orient more or less had an emotional foundation.<sup>68</sup> Especially in times of needing to re-define Hungary's identity (e.g., after 19<sup>th</sup> century modernisation, the birth of nation states, and the trauma of losing World War I in 1920 when the position of Hungary in Europe had to be re-interpreted), the supposed Oriental roots were more emphatically considered a part of the Hungarian historical heritage and cultural traditions. Therefore, the research of these roots (and the contemporary Oriental cultures as well) was attentively followed by the Hungarian public, even after the Oriental 'fashion' started to fade in Europe. The supposed Eastern origin of Hungarians was the main motivation behind the archaeological, anthropological, linguistic, and geographical explorations and investigations undertaken around that time by some exceptional orientalist experts. Their scientific works and their results were not connected with the Turanism that had provided the initial inspiration, but they did lay the foundations for the outstanding scientific Orientalism carried out by Hungarians.

The year 1936 provided the greatest event in the history of the Nippon Society: a three-day-long (May 16–18) Hungarian–Japanese Festival to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the society's founding.<sup>69</sup> During the festival, an exhibition about Hungarian–Japanese relations was organised, and a theatre play titled *The Treasure of the Ronins* (based on the story of the 47 *rōnins* 浪人) by Hungarian playwright Miklós Kállay was staged in the Hungarian National Theatre. The ceremonies were honoured by the presence of a Japanese delegation and an honorary session of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, where in addition to the members of the Japanese delegation and the society, many leading figures of Hungarian scientific, art, and public life also appeared. After the opening ceremony with mutual greetings, a Japanese university professor gave a lecture on Japanese ethics. In addition, several receptions, gala dinners, and other events highlighted the festival.

During the late 1930s, a gradual change can be observed in the concepts and guiding ideas of the Hungarian Nippon Society, which was indirectly related to

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<sup>68</sup> Csaplár-Degovics 2018: 15–16.

<sup>69</sup> Hungarian-Japanese Festival, Mezey 1936c.

the slightly changing relationship with Japan. Events in world politics (the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact by Germany and Japan in 1936, with Hungary joining in 1939) also played a role in this, as Japan for Hungary (and Hungary for Japan) could have come into play as part of an evolving political vision. It was not yet an official political direction; however, proponents of the Japanese relationship no longer thought and referred to the Turanian kinship or the need for cultural unity among the Turanian peoples, but to the similarity of political goals (to change the status quo of the contemporary global order) and the need of political unity. With the strengthening of the German–Japanese alliance, the Japanese orientation became increasingly inseparable from the German orientation in Hungarian foreign policy, and thus it lost its underlying content: its cultural character. In the summer of 1941, Hungary entered World War II; in December, Japan attacked the United States. The dark memory of the military alliance also overshadowed cultural relations. During the war, the Hungarian–Japanese relationship lost its spontaneous, social character and became an instrument of politics, and thus, with the fall of the political structure, any contact with Japan was lost.

Nevertheless, the achievements of the cultural connection between Hungary and Japan in this period are certainly remarkable. The greatest emphasis was placed on the publication of works dealing with Japan by the proponents of the Japanese–Hungarian rapprochement. The writings about Japan conveyed the culture of Japan to an enthusiastic Hungarian audience at a high level. From 1937 onwards, the journal *Turán* took over the publication of reports and articles on Japan, which was now a prominent part of the paper.<sup>70</sup> In 1943, during the ongoing war, the Nippon Society published a book on Japan titled *Nagy-Kelet-Ázsia* [Great East Asia] with a collection of essays partly by scholars of Japanese studies (including Zoltán Felvinczi Takács about Japanese art and Lajos Ligeti

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<sup>70</sup> Articles on Japan in *Turán*

1937–38: Habán Jenő: A japán történelem vázlata (Outline of Japanese history), Paikert Alajos: Metzger W. Nándor: A magyar nemzet története (Japánul) (Book review).

1939: Virányi Elemér: Lajtha Edgár: Japán tegnap, ma és holnap (book review).

1940: Isoyuki Hatta: Japán kulturális kapcsolata a külfölddel (Japan's cultural relations), Pálos György: A modern Japán (Modern Japan).

1941: Benkő István: A 2600 éves Japán állam (2600-year-old Japan), Mezey István: A japán katona (The Japanese warrior), Somogyi József: A felkelő nap országában (In the country of the Rising Sun), Sonkoly István: A japán zene főbb vonásai (The main characteristic of the Japanese music), Török László: A Turáni Társaság és a magyar-japán kapcsolatok (Turan Society and Hungarian Japanese relations), Zsuffa Sándor: Japán katonai erényei a történelem távlatában (Japan's warrior values in history).

1942: Bódis Rózsa: A japán írásról (The Japanese writing), Cholnoky Jenő: Japán, Japáni (Japan, Japanese), Máté-Törék Gyula: Japán (Japan), Zsuffa Sándor: Párhuzam Kína és Japán között (Japan and China), Zsuffa: A japán tisztek kardja (The sword of the Japanese officers).



about Hungarian researchers in Inner Asia)<sup>71</sup> along with papers about the culture and social conditions of Japan (e.g., literature, religion, economy) and about the military and political situation in East Asia.

The Nippon Society continued its activity, though it no longer had exclusive control over Japanese relations. In 1939, on the occasion of concluding the cultural agreement, they organised evening lectures in several towns in the country. In addition to political speeches, popular lectures on Japan continued to play an important role.

In 1938 a Hungarian institute (*Nippon Hangari Bunka Kyōkai* 日本ハンガリ文化協会) was established in Tokyo with the contribution and assistance of the Mitsui Foundation, Imaoka Juichiro, and István Mezey (who at the time lived in Japan with the Mitsui scholarship).<sup>72</sup> In the institute, books and periodicals in Hungarian and in other languages about Hungary were available to those interested, and Hungarian language courses, reading sessions, music evenings, and exhibitions were planned. Also, in 1938 it was announced in Budapest that the Japanese Imperial Embassy would be based in Budapest instead of Vienna from May 1938. (Because of the Anschluss in March 1938, it no longer made sense to maintain a Japanese embassy in Vienna, so the Japanese government decided to relocate the Vienna embassy to Budapest.) A Hungarian embassy was set up in Tokyo in 1939, and this way formal diplomatic relations with ambassadors were established.

Negotiations on the possibility of a cultural agreement began the same year. After the cultural relations that had developed so far, so to speak, spontaneously, the time had come to organise cultural and scientific contacts on a regular basis. The idea of the treaty to be concluded with Japan fit nicely into the series of agreements established by Minister of Culture Bálint Hóman, deepening the cultural relations between Hungary and other countries. Turanism never became part of the official policy of the Hungarian political elite, but it was used by the government as an informal tool to break the country's international isolation and build alliances. Hungary signed treaties of friendship and collaboration with several countries regarded as 'Turanian' in the 1920s and 1930s (e.g., Turkey in 1923, Estonia in 1937, Finland in 1937, Japan in 1938, and Bulgaria in 1941). The agreement, which was signed on 15 November 1938, was officially called the Hungarian–Japanese Treaty of Friendship and Cultural Cooperation. Thus, in addition to being a cultural agreement, it was also a treaty of friendship.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Nagy 1943a.

<sup>72</sup> About the Nippon Hangari Bunka Kyokai: 梅村 裕子, 今岡十一郎の活動を通して観る日本・ハンガリー外交関係の変遷」国際関係論叢第二巻第二号東京外国語大学国際関係研究所1–48頁2013年. Umemura 2017: 119–132.

<sup>73</sup> Umemura 2017: 119–132.

The articles and reports praising the treaty contained the familiar arguments of the supporters of the Hungarian–Japanese relationship: Japan’s special attention to Hungary, Hungary’s special position between East and West, and the resulting role of a ‘bridge’ for the renewal of a culturally ‘aging’ Europe.<sup>74</sup> The ministerial explanation following the text of the agreement emphasised that Japan had become one of the world’s most important powers in an astonishingly short time, and thus the Hungarian government welcomed the idea of concluding a friendly and cultural agreement between the two countries. The explanatory memorandum also emphasised that Hungary had long shown great interest in Japan, mainly through its scientists and researchers. Since the turn of the century, social and cultural associations had largely nurtured relations with the Far East, namely Japan; their work was recognised with appreciation in the ministerial justification.<sup>75</sup> It was possible to reach and to establish relations with Japan through Turanism and the cultural activity of the Nippon Society, but once the political and diplomatic relationship had been established, these were no longer needed as maintainers but just as ‘reinforcers’ for ideological purposes only. Relations continued in a state-regulated channel, using, of course, the achievements of the Nippon Society.

### Conclusion

The ideology of Turanism emerged around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a distinctly Hungarian form of Orientalism, which was originally a scholarly movement aimed at researching the East and Hungary’s ethnographic roots. As Turanists regarded Hungarians as belonging to the Turanian group of peoples and languages (also known as Ural-Altaiic), the aim of Turanism was to carry out research into Asian peoples (those considered as being Turanian in origin) and to foster closer ties with them. After the traumas of losing World War I and the 1920 Trianon Peace Treaty for Hungarians, Turanism gained new momentum, and new motives emerged in its ideology. Hungarians felt that with the Trianon Peace Treaty, Europe had betrayed Hungary and left her without any allies or friends. Turanism transformed into the ideology of the desperate and reflected the frustration of Hungarian society and its disappointment in the West with the hope and intention of finding friends or supporters (and perhaps allies) among the Turanian peoples. The internal discourse about Hungary as a frontier country or borderland between East and West intensified after 1918. Turanism never became part of the official policy of the Hungarian political elite, but it was used

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<sup>74</sup> Iván Nagy 121–123.

<sup>75</sup> Nagy 1943b: 121–123.



by the government as an informal tool in their efforts to break the country's international isolation and build alliances.

Japan was an outstanding topic among the Asian countries and peoples. It was seen as the only Asian country that had been able to avoid becoming a colony, and with a successful modernisation process it rose to the status of a great power, equal to the Western powers. This process was seen to have been achieved by carefully balancing modern development (i.e., 'becoming Western') with preserving Japan's cultural heritage (and national identity), which was a topic in the discourse on modernisation in Hungary as well. This special case of Japan made it possible to draw parallels between the Japanese and Hungarian situations, and thus between the 'East' and 'West'.

The Hungarian Nippon Society was founded in 1924, with the aim of building and developing Hungarian–Japanese relations, popularising Japan and Japanese culture in Hungary, and encouraging research on Japan. The society organised public lectures on Japan and Japanese culture, Japanese art exhibitions, and social events connected to Japanese culture, and through these activities the society was the most important organiser and promoter of Japanese culture and art in Hungary between the two world wars, at a time when the two countries had no political and diplomatic relations.

The initiatives for the foundation of an independent society for the promotion of Hungarian–Japanese relations originated from different directions, which nonetheless were closely connected to each other. One of them was the ideological effects of Turanism and Orientalism in Hungary, while the other was an actual experience of several hundreds of Hungarian military officers (and thousands of soldiers) with the Japanese army and Japanese officers in 1918–1921 when the Japanese Siberian Expedition Army took over the Russian POW camps in Siberia. Later, in the second part of the 1930s, a third factor became more important: the political rapprochement (from 1936) and military alliance (from 1939) between Hungary and Japan.

The Nippon Society envisaged activities of a purely cultural nature, to strengthen closer contacts between the two peoples, to build and nurture cultural relations, to promote scientific research, to hold informative and scholarly lectures and organise social events, and to publish and distribute similar publications.

The scholarly works dealing with Japan published at that time represented the rising scholarly field of East Asian and Japanese studies in Hungary, too. The authors of these works played a large role in developing East Asian studies. Their scientific works and their results were not connected with the Turanism that had provided the initial inspiration, but they did lay the foundations for the outstanding scientific Orientalism carried out by Hungarians.

In the first 10 years (1924–1934), ‘cultural’ is the most appropriate descriptor of the activities of the Nippon Society and the nature of Hungarian–Japanese relations. However, from the late 1930s, social relations, which were originally non-political in nature, became increasingly influenced by politics. During World War II, the Hungarian–Japanese relationship lost its spontaneous, social character and became an instrument of politics. Thus, with the fall of the political structure, any contact with Japan was lost.

The Nippon Society was a product of its age in the sense that it represented a remarkable mixture of influences of different but still intertwined thoughts, theories, and ideologies of the contemporary trends of that time, including Orientalism, Japonisme, Turanism, and the impact of contemporary politics, political thinking, and the international situation. The intentions for developing cultural exchange with Japan, supporting academic research, and popularising Japan in Hungary merged with Hungarian identity issues, with the intentions of building international relations, and with the search for the place of Hungary in a completely new international environment after World War I. All these were intertwined with a special Hungarian interest in Japan originating from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, along with the widespread conviction about the ‘decay of the Western world’ (as described by Oswald Spengler in his famous book in 1922, *Decline of the West*) and about the emergence of the East. The activity and guiding ideas and thoughts of the society were closely connected to the image of Japan in the beginning and first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Hungary, too. The history of the Hungarian Nippon Society tells us much about the image of Japan in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in a Central European country that had different images and concepts about the East and thus a different approach to the East than Western European societies had. The discourses about Japan and the East in Hungary, triggered by the changing international context of the era between the two world wars and by the changing global position of Japan, also revived the centuries-old tradition – or cultural memory – of Hungary’s ‘in-between’ or ‘borderland’ existence between East and West, and its periodically recurring possible role as a ‘bridge’. These discourses, of course, had at least as much to say about Hungarian identity issues than they did about Japan and the image of Japan in the world.

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