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Perceptions of Japan in Hungarian Turanism

Abstract

The lively Hungarian interest in Asian cultures and Japan before 1945 had several motifs, one of them being the idea of Turanism, which was formed around the ethnic, linguistic, and cultural relation of the Turanian (Ural-Altaiic) peoples (including Hungarians) in the late 19th century and affected public thinking until 1945 in Hungary. The secondary literature on Turanism seems to have increased in volume in the past decades with a notable emphasis on Hungarian Turanism, and some new research has examined the issue of Japanese Turanism, making a connection with Hungarian Turanism as well. As Hungarian Turanism is regarded as a significant promoter and mediator of Turanism to other regions, too, it is important to analyse the manifold nature of this phenomenon with comprehensive approaches.

The paper focuses on the Hungarian background of the Japan-related Turanist ideas with a multifaceted examination and interpretation of Hungarian Turanism based on original research of the contemporary sources (including publications, archival documents of Turanist and Japan-related associations, newspaper articles, and reports on Japan-related events) and the available secondary literature. The paper also aims to examine what perceptions of Japan appeared in the ideas of Turanism, to present why and how Japan was attributed a special significance in Hungarian Turanism, and to analyse the origin, meaning, and the contemporary importance of this outstanding role. In the course of research, new aspects have arisen for examination: the perceptions impacted by the Japanese development of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and by the notion of the situation of Japan ‘between East and West’ as similar to that of Hungary; the debate on modernisation; the isolation of Hungary after the World War I; and the cultural achievements of Hungarian Turanism. Examining the complexity of the Hungarian historical, cultural, and political context of the early 20th century in connection to the perceptions of the East of that time in Hungary may provide a more complex interpretation and deeper understanding of the formation of Turanist ideas.

Keywords: Hungarian Turanism, Japanese image, Hungarian–Japanese relations, Oriental interest in Hungary, Hungarian Turan society, Japanese studies in Hungary

Hungarian interest in ‘the East’ and in particular in Japan has a tradition dating back to the late 19th century and originating from different cultural, historical, and political sources, which were determined by a distinctively Hungarian context. In Hungary, until 1945 lively interest in Japan resulted in an outstanding number of publications of popular and scholarly works about Japan.¹ The reason for this special attention paid to Japan in Hungary can be explained partly by the effect of *Japonisme*, the increased Western European artistic and cultural interest in the late 19th century and later by the successful modernisation of Japan at the turn of the 19th–20th centuries, but these still do not seem to give a satisfactory explanation for the flourishing Japan-related literature in the interwar period (1918–1945). It is true that *Japonisme* had a significant impact in Hungary, too, though a little later, at the turn of the 19th–20th centuries.² However, at the same time the growing interest in Asian cultures and Japan were partly motivated by the appearance of the ‘Turanian idea’ or ‘Turanism’ in Hungary, which was formed around the ethnic, linguistic, or cultural kinship of the Turanian (Ural-Altaiic) peoples (including Hungarians) in the late 19th century and affected public thinking until 1945. Scholarly interest in Turanism seems to have been increased in the past decades, with a notable emphasis on Hungarian Turanism.³ Some new research has examined the issue of Japanese Turanism, too, connecting it with Hungarian Turanism.⁴

However, in providing an overview of Hungarian Turanism, papers may overemphasise its political concept and influence on Hungarian government

¹ A bibliography compiled in 1943, listing the publications regarding Japan published in Hungary until 1943, contained 822 items, which can be called outstanding in the region. See Lévai 1943. A bibliography published in Japan in 1982 covering the relevant literature about Japan in Eastern Europe up to the 1980s listed the striking number of works published in Hungary compared to other countries of the region: the Hungarian bibliography list is 42 pages long with 433 items, while the Bulgarian is 14 pages long, the Polish is 11 pages long, the Czechoslovakian is 8 pages long, and the Romanian is 6 pages long. See Umemura 2006, 59. Also *Nihon to Tō-ō* 1982, 376–417.

² Dénes et al. 2020.

³ 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, and even research on the ideology was obstructed until the regime change in 1989. Moreover, even if it was mentioned, it was heavily condemned. 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. There have been significant scholarly books and papers published on Turkish, Hungarian, and even 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 2016, Levent 2011, Levent 2021, Ablonczy 2021, Ablonczy 2022.

⁴ Levent 2011, Levent 2021.

policy or public thinking before 1945. As a matter of fact, Hungarian Turanism usually remained outside official policymaking circles. It was not a homogeneous ideology (if it can be called an ideology at all) in any way. Across various time periods, there were great differences in its appearance, social and political groups, aims, and interpretations. Moreover, if it is understood as just political thought, the most important dimension would be completely lost in the assessment of Turanism: its cultural horizon. Not taking cultural achievements of Turanism into consideration can inevitably lead to some generalisations and simplifications of the complex phenomenon. The author of the present paper started to research Hungarian Turanism about 30 years ago and summarised it in their PhD thesis.⁵ This paper, on the one hand, tries to provide insight into the complex issue of Turanism, focusing on ideas concerning the ‘relation to the East’ in Hungary and the cultural achievements of Turanism and emphasising the possibility of various interpretations with more nuanced assessments. On the other hand, the paper aims to present why and how Japan was attributed a special significance in Hungarian Turanism and to examine the origin, meaning, and contemporary importance of this outstanding role.⁶ The analysis of the perceptions of Japan in the ideas of Turanism may provide a more nuanced understanding of the motifs of Hungarian Turanism, the nature of interwar relations between Hungary and Japan, and the role that the image of Japan could play in the Hungarian public opinion. Examining the complexity of the Hungarian historical, cultural, and political contexts of the early 20th century in connection to the perceptions of Japan of that time may provide a more complex interpretation and deeper understanding of the formation of Japanese images in regions other than Western Europe.

Turanism in Hungary until 1918

The growing interest in Asia resulted in the emergence of academic research and the establishment of Oriental studies by the middle of the 19th century, though it was largely influenced by the imperialist attitude of the Western powers.⁷ The

⁵ Farkas 2001a. For this paper, besides the secondary literature on Turanism, the author used mainly her own research on Turanism (presented in her PhD thesis in 2001), based on contemporary Hungarian texts from books, journals, newspapers, and archive sources of the Turan societies. Some parts of the PhD thesis were published. The cited contemporary texts from books, articles, letters, and documents are translated by the author.

⁶ Farkas 2001b, Farkas 2009, Farkas 2022.

⁷ As Edward W. Said interpreted ‘Orientalism’ in his book in 1979, 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 1979.

growing field of Oriental studies as an academic discipline and the ‘Oriental fashion’ in art popular at that time among the public in Europe certainly affected Hungarian artists and scholars, too. However, above and beyond the Orientalism found in Europe, Hungary had its own unique reason for taking an interest in the East, which was the tradition of the Asian origin in the Hungarian national consciousness. The Oriental aspect had always played a role in the question of Hungarian national identity,⁸ but in the 19th century, with the forward march of modernisation and the necessary reformulation of identity, its importance increased immensely. The supposition that Hungarians had their roots in the East, supposedly in Asia, had a particular effect on the nation’s interest in Asian cultures in the second half of the 19th century, as they were believed at the time to be relatives of ancient Hungarian culture.

Based upon the supposed Asian origin of the Hungarian people, in the last decades of the 19th century, a romantic nationalist cultural movement was formed around this idea, which was called ‘Turanism’. The ethnic and linguistic kinship and relations between Hungarians and the so-called Turanian peoples were interpreted from the then prevailing Ural-Altai linguistic theory.⁹ As Hungarians (and the Hungarian language) were regarded part of the Turanian group of peoples (and languages; now known as Ural-Altai), 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.¹⁰ Turanism began as and was first considered a scientific movement, aimed at the research of the history and cultures of Asian peoples with a special relevance to Hungarian culture. This was an impressive motivation behind the archaeological, anthropological, linguistic, and geographical explorations and investigations undertaken around that time by some exceptional Orientalist experts, who laid the foundations for the outstanding scientific Orientalism carried out by Hungarians.¹¹

Turanism could also be interpreted as being aimed at the cultural, economic, and political cooperation with the Turanian (Ural-Altai) peoples, trying to counter the effects of the Romantic European Pan-movements (Pan-Germanism, Pan-Slavism), which were thought to be dangerous for the Hungarians living ‘alone’ (i.e., without ‘ethnic relatives’) between these two great ethnic

⁸ For a summary, see Farkas 2001a: 13–35.

⁹ The old definition is given in a 19th century Hungarian encyclopaedia, *A Pallas Nagy Lexikona*. Budapest, 1893–1897. <https://www.arcanum.hu/hu/online-kiadvanyok/Lexikonok-a-pallas-nagy-lexikona-2/u-1A520/ural-altaji-nepek-1A70B/> (last retrieved: 15 September 2019).

¹⁰ ‘Bevezető’ [Introduction], *Turán* I, no. 1 (1913): 1; ‘A szerkesztők beköszöntője [Foreword from the editors]’, *Turán* III, no. 1 (1918): 1.

¹¹ Csaplár-Degovics 2018.

and linguistic families.¹² 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 public and even in some cases the political, social, and cultural (academic and art) elite.

The idea of Turanism offered an extremely wide range of different and often completely contradictory interpretation possibilities. Contemporary Western ideas of ‘the East’ (i.e., Orientalism); emerging European and American cultural, artistic, and economic interest in Asia; and a changing international situation (i.e., European expansion into Asia, imperialism) all had an impact on Hungarian ‘thinking about the East’ and mixed with ‘traditional’ Hungarian concerns about its position in Europe (including an awareness of the possible dangers of pan-ideas) and its cultural heritage (including the tradition of the Asian origin).¹³ This mixture of influences of different but still intertwined thoughts, theories, and ideologies of the contemporary trends of that time resulted in a complex, incoherent, and diversified circle of ideas called Turanism.

Turan Society until 1918

The Turan Society was founded in 1910, with the main objective of conducting scientific research into the East, which involved investigating the economic and cultural features of those peoples believed to be Turanian in origin and building up economic and cultural links with them.¹⁴ At the same time, following English and German examples, the society aimed to act as the forerunner of a ‘large-scale economic programme gravitating through Turkey towards Asia’,¹⁵ which clearly aligned them with the expansionist ambitions of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The Turan Society held lectures on the Turanian peoples, had lan-

¹² In *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind) in 1792, ‘Johann Gottfried 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 ethnic groups’. Ablonczy 2021: 225–248, 227.

¹³ Farkas 2001a: 32–42.

¹⁴ The history of the Turan Society was researched with the Documents of the Turan Society. Hungarian National Archives, MNL OL P section, fond 1384. Farkas 1993: 863; Farkas 2001a: 110–130, 151–180. Farkas 2001a: 56–75, Ablonczy 2022: 39–71.

¹⁵ Official request, dated 16 January 1912, submitted by the Turan Society to the Minister of Commerce, applying for their annual grant. Documents of the Turan Society, MOL P 1384, bundle 1, item 2, 1/1912.

guage courses teaching Turanian languages, and also organised and supported expeditions to Asia Minor, the Caucasus region, and Central Asia, resulting in significant ethnographic and linguistic research.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ The society published a journal titled *Turán* beginning in 1913 that was edited by well-known scholars.

Several ideas existed side by side within the Turan Society regarding its goals. The Orientalists expected a boost in scientific research on the model of the Asiatic societies that were being formed around the world, while others planned an ‘imperialist’ advance in the East.¹⁸ In addition, some supporters of Turanism hoped for a period of flourishing Turanism with the cultural and in some views possibly a political cooperation of the Turanian peoples. Even the name ‘Turanian’ was not completely clear, since one interpretation meant the Ural-Altaiic ‘family’ (according to which the Hungarians belong to the Ugric branch of the Ural peoples),¹⁹ but other opinions also regarded Altai peoples’ distant relatives.²⁰ As a result of these differences in perception, the interpretations regarding the main ideas of Turanism naturally also differed from each other. Turanism emerged as a complex phenomenon appearing on several levels, in which the different forms of appearance often existed independently of each other. The fragmentation of the Turanian thoughts was intensified after the First World War (1914–1918) and especially the Treaty of Trianon with its tragic consequences for Hungary in 1920.

Japan in Hungarian Turanism until 1918

Japan held a distinguished significance among the Asian countries and peoples in Hungary.²¹ By that time, Japan had the image of a modernising country alone among the nations and cultures of Asia to a level that matched the most advanced powers in the West, achieving success by carefully balancing modern development with preserving cultural heritage (and national identity).

¹⁶ Farkas 2001a: 61–63. MNL OL P szekció 1384 fond 14. csomó 12. tétel.

¹⁷ Farkas 2001a: 56–75, 110–130, 151–180.

¹⁸ Csaplár-Degovic 2018: 15.

¹⁹ Thus, the Finno-Ugric (i.e., Finnish, Estonian, Zurjen, Votjak, Cheremisiz, Mordvin, Lapp, and mainly Ostjak and Vogul) and Samoyed were considered closely related to Hungarian language and people, as linguistic and ethnic relations were not definitely distinguished.

²⁰ Turkish-Tatar, Mongolian, Tungus, Manchu, Japanese, Korean. Bán 1940: 55–57.

²¹ Farkas 2001a: 211–216.

The Japanese example proved that modernisation as a Western type of progress could be achieved without sacrificing national identity or cultural heritage.²² This was a current topic in discourses on modernisation in Hungary as well, and the Japanese model proved that preserving national culture and identity were not enemies of modernity, which is how they were often portrayed in Central European debates on modernisation.²³ Japan was considered an outstanding example for all the Turanian peoples to follow, so the Turanian people could become modernised and could rise to the level of the independent and powerful states as Japan had.

In 1913, Alajos Paikert (1866–1948), one of the leaders of the Turan Society (Turáni Társaság), in an article on ‘The Future of Asia’ in the journal *Turán* emphasised 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 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.²⁴

The idea that Hungarians and the Japanese, the ‘westernmost and easternmost Turanian nations’, have the joint task and mission of helping the other Asian Turanian peoples’ development and of functioning as a kind of bridge between East and West became a steady and established argument in Hungarian Turanism for the next decades.

²² Farkas 2020.

²³ Jedlicki 1973: 63.

²⁴ Paikert 1913: 8.

Turanism in the interwar period

After the First World War, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was disintegrated in 1918, and for Hungary, the 1920 Treaty of Trianon marked the end of the war and the official establishment of the new borders. (Embassies between Japan and Hungary were set up only in 1938.²⁵) After the trauma of the lost war and the 1920 Trianon Peace Treaty that reduced the area of Hungary by two-thirds, Turanism gained new momentum, and new motives emerged in its ideology. Although Hungarians saw themselves as a people possibly originating from Asia, but one who had settled in Europe and adopted Christianity in the 10th century, they became part of Western civilisation and became the defenders of Europe against the attacks coming from the East.²⁶ Having a strong self-image of being the ‘defenders of Christianity’, Hungarians felt that with the Treaty of Trianon 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, and try to find friends, relatives, and allies in Asia’.²⁷ A new idea of Turanism emerged as 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 among the Turanian peoples.

The supporters of different interpretations of Turanism formed separate associations. A society for academic research, the Kőrösi Csoma Society (Kőrösi Csoma Társaság), was founded by Orientalist researchers.²⁸

In 1920 a radical Turanian association, the Hungarian Turan Alliance (Magyarországi Turán Szövetség) was established.²⁹ The aims did not differ significantly from the basic principles formulated by the Turan Society (e.g., becoming acquainted with the Turanian peoples, establishing cooperation with them), but the association’s members were more radical in their interpretation and tools.³⁰ With explicit anti-Westernism, they proclaimed the superiority of

²⁵ Wintermantel 2016: 18–19.

²⁶ Balogh 2022.

²⁷ Farkas 1993: 864.

²⁸ The aim of the new scholarly society was clearly stated in their new journal: ‘Our programme is the field of Oriental research, which especially interests the Hungarians by virtue of their ancient history and geographical situation’. Ablonczy 2022: 85. ‘Olvasóinkhoz,’ *Kőrösi Csoma Archivum* 1: 1 (1921), 1.

²⁹ *A Magyarországi Turán Szövetség vázlatos története, alapszabálya és általános ismertetése* [The history, charter, and general description of the Hungarian Turan Alliance], Turán füzetek I/5–7., Budapest 1938. Farkas 2001a: 87–94. The documents of the Turan Alliance in the Hungarian National Archives: MNL OL P szekció 1366 fond, ‘Turán Szövetség iratai’.

³⁰ One of the main differences between the two Turanian associations was the attitude towards the Jews: the Turan Alliance had anti-Semitic ideas, whereas the Turan Society did not support anti-Semitism. MNL OL P 1384 11.csomó (Turáni Társaság iratai) 1942. február 15.

the Eastern (i.e., the Turanian) culture, the need for an Eastern orientation in Hungarian foreign policy, and the development of the consciousness of Turanian ethnicity among Hungarians. By 1923, the alliance had disintegrated (the police banned their meetings, too, which shows the government's attitude to radical Turanism). An attempt was made to revive the alliance between 1931 and 1933 and later in 1937 and 1938.³¹ It is important to note that the radical Turan association could only exist for a few years in Hungary and had a very limited support base. These extreme ideas did not have much in common with the cultural activity of the Turan Society focusing on European—and mainly Finno-Ugric—peoples, which made up the biggest part of the activities of the society and 'mainstream Turanism' in the interwar period.³²

The Turan Society continued to operate with a largely unchanged programme focusing on cultural and educational work with some support from the government.³³ They also emphasised their task related to the restoration and development of national consciousness, which was battered after the defeat in the war and its consequences.³⁴ They represented the conservative and national political direction of the interwar period in Hungary, so their Turanism can be called the 'mainstream Turanism' of that time in Hungary.³⁵ It is important to note that they rejected and distanced themselves from radical Turanism, racism, neo-pagan trends, unscientific theories, and the orthodox Turanism.³⁶ They advocated cooperation mainly with the European Turanian peoples (i.e., Turkey, Bulgaria, Estonia, and Finland) in the interwar period.³⁷ The society was therefore one of the cultural and educational social associations of that time. Only a minor part of its lectures and reading sessions were about Turanism, while the majority dealt with the culture of the peoples considered relatives, especially the European related peoples. Turanism never became part of the official policy of the Hungarian political elite; however, it was used by the government as an

'Turmezei László levele Gergelyffy Gábor igazgatónak, Budapest, 1942. február 15.'

³¹ In a new work, the author presented the history of Anti-German Hungarian racism, and he included some Turanist associations in his assessment. Bartha 2023.

³² Finno-Ugric relations in the interwar period. Ablonczy 2022: 108.

³³ MNL OL P szekció 1384 fond 12. csomó 7. tétel (Finance)

³⁴ Farkas 2001a: 110. A Turáni Társaság alapszabálya [The charter of the Turan Society]. MNL OL P szekció 1384 fond 10. csomó 1939. 02. 10.

³⁵ 'Mainstream' refers to the Turanism perception of the interwar period Turanian Society, which was tolerated and sometimes supported on a small scale by the government, supported by some prominent members of the political elite, had some support from the society with a steady membership of around 300 or so people, and had a rich and the most-widespread publishing activity, so it seems to be the most common and influential Turanism interpretation in the interwar period in Hungary.

³⁶ Farkas 2001a: 110–130, 151–170.

³⁷ Farkas 2001a: 196–203.

informal tool to break the country's international isolation, build connections, and help rapprochements and cooperations with different countries, for which mentioning some relations (like Turanian relations) could be seen as elements arousing interest and friendly approach.

Japan in Hungarian Turanism in the interwar period

Japan's 'special place' in Hungarian Turanism helped to maintain public interest in Japan even after Japonisme in Europe started to decay.³⁸ The Japan-related literature in the interwar period in Hungary frequently emphasised the significance of the Japanese development and success in lectures and writings about Turanism, underlying that this could be the possible future for the Turanian peoples: 'Japan today is tendentious, successful, and with its development it sets an example to the other Asian peoples and countries'.³⁹ This image of Japan reflected a generally favourable and positive picture in Hungary, even when the image of Japan became less favourable in the West.⁴⁰

In 1936, the Turan Society celebrated its 25th anniversary.⁴¹ In his opening speech, Archduke József Ferenc (1895–1957), the honorary president of the society, speaking about the importance of educational work in raising the awareness of national sentiments, referred to the Japanese example: 'Let's look at the military work, strength, training, and education of the Japanese nation. That's why they are so strong and able to create because they are imbued with the national idea'. Alajos Paikert, the director of the society, spoke about the possibilities of the Turanian peoples in the future, especially from a Hungarian perspective, but also mentioning the example of Japan.

The future of Turan is best shown by the example of today's Japan, which, taking over the most important and useful achievements of the West, but also retaining old national traditions, is currently the most advanced, best organised and educated in Asia, and at the same time also its strongest superpower. [...] As Japan developed simultaneously and before our eyes from the most remote, completely medieval, secluded state into one of the most modern and powerful nation, so other Asian states will soon follow this successful example.⁴²

³⁸ Farkas 2001b: 28–33; Farkas 2022. For a new interpretation of Japonisme (i.e., an appreciation of Japan and its culture) see Dénes et al. 2020; Farkas 2020.

³⁹ Paikert 1934.

⁴⁰ About the image of Japan see Wilkinson 1990. About the image of Japan in East Central Europe, see Dénes et al. 2020.

⁴¹ A Turáni Társaság negyedszázados jubileuma [The quarter-century anniversary of the Turan Society]. MOL P 1384 9. csomó 1937. 01. 31. *Turán* 1936. I–IV. 1–18.

⁴² Paikert 1936a.

The supporters of Turanism as a political idea had the dream if Turanian peoples united and organised themselves, they could grow into a powerful force and even one of the governing factors of world politics. In order to help this Turanian development, the two developed Turanian nations were expected to join their efforts: ‘The Hungarian nation in the West and the Japanese in the East have the mission to contribute to the exploration, arrangements, and organising work’.⁴³ As the idea suggested, Turanian peoples should follow the path that Japan had taken: ‘Today, Japan sets an example to other Asian nations and stands out with its successful and independent progress’.⁴⁴

Japan showed what a distant, at that time still small, and seemingly backward nation could accomplish in a short time. At that time, Japan organised its army and navy under the leadership of European instructors, learned the methods of industrialisation from Western peoples, the methods of scientific research, and much more, and today, not only in the East, but also in the world, the Japanese army and navy, Japanese factories, universities, and scientific institutes seriously and in a well-earned way can compete with the first similar institutions in the world.⁴⁵

This development of the Turanian peoples needed guidance and assistance. Therefore, Hungary hoped to still play an important role in the East—and this way in global politics—together with Japan, as they could be the initiators and contributors to the modernisation of the Turanian peoples.

We can notice a remarkable element in the articles about Japan: some authors emphasised that it was due to the previous high level of education that Japan was able to adopt European culture, technology, science, and art so well and succeeded in further developing them.⁴⁶ According to these opinions, Japan could be regarded as unique: ‘No exotic people were able to adopt the tools and methods of European education to such a large extent as the Japanese’.⁴⁷ It was stated that Japan became so successful in studying and adopting Western achievements that by that time it had all the elements of the Western civilisation and did not need the help of Westerners. In this way, the Japanese could combine the achievements and values of the West and the East, and with this they could become a serious, almost invincible competitor for the countries and peoples of both the West and the East. ‘Technical progress has made the Japanese a danger-

⁴³ Paikert 1936a.

⁴⁴ Paikert 1934.

⁴⁵ Paikert 1936a.

⁴⁶ Cholnoky 1934: 22.

⁴⁷ Cholnoky 1934.

ous competitor'.⁴⁸ The authors shared the general opinion that 'Japan will have a great role in the development of Asia in the near future'.⁴⁹

The Turan Society and the Hungarian–Japanese relations

The most significant activity of the Turan Society was the regularly held lectures about the Turanian peoples, with many lectures dealing exclusively with Japanese topics.⁵⁰ A large number of Japanese-related articles were published in *Turán*, covering almost all areas of Japanese culture and issues of contemporary Japan, too.⁵¹ The lectures given by the Turan Society usually attracted an audience of about 100–200 people, but since the texts of the lectures were published in the journal *Turán*, and even some newspapers briefly described the content of the lectures, we can assume that a much wider audience became familiar with the topics. Radio broadcasts provided greater publicity and recognition for the Turan Society, as from January 1928, once a month, the society had the opportunity to give a 25-minute-long lecture on Turanism. The series of lectures held by the Turan Society on the radio also featured Japanese topics: in 1928, Imaoka Jūichirō 今岡十一郎 (1883–1973) spoke about Japanese flower art and

⁴⁸ Cholnoky 1934.

⁴⁹ Paikert 1934.

⁵⁰ 1925. Róbert K. Kertész: 'Japanese architecture', 1926. Tihámér Turchányi: 'History of Japan', Vilmos Pröhle: 'Japanese literature', Benedek Baráthosi-Balogh: 'Japan's industrial, economic, and commercial relations'. 1927. Dezső Bozóky: 'Bushido'. 1928. Imaoka: 'Japanese festivals, tea ceremony, and Japanese flower art'. Baráthosi-Balogh: 'Wanderings in Japan'. 1930–31. Alajos Paikert: 'Hungarian opportunities in the East', István Mezey: 'Hungarian–Japanese relation', Jenő Cholnoky: 'Japan and its people'. 1934. Alajos Paikert: 'Asia Awakening', Jenő Cholnoky: 'The geographical, climatic, and economic conditions of Japan', 'The anthropology, customs, and lifestyle of the Japanese people'. 1935. István Mezey: 'The Path of the Japanese People', 'Japan and the Turanian Movement', Frigyes Fellner: 'Transitions in the Far East'. 1937. István Mezey: 'The East Asian Conflict', Jenő Habán: 'Japanese folklore'. 1938. Jenő Habán: 'Masterpieces of Japanese Poetry', Vilmos Pröhle: 'The 2600-year Japanese Empire', Jenő Habán: 'Meiji Tennō'.

⁵¹ 1937–38: Habán Jenő: 'An outline of Japanese history', Paikert Alajos: 'Review of the Japanese edition of *History of the Hungarian nation* by Nándor W. Metzger'. 1939: Virányi Elemér: 'Review of the book *The past, present and future of Japan* by Edgár Lajtha'. 1940: Isoyuki Hatta: 'The international cultural relations of Japan', Pálos György: 'The modern Japan'. 1941: Benkő István: 'The 2600-year-old Japan', Mezey István: 'The Japanese soldier', Somogyi József: 'The Land of the Rising Sun', Sonkoly István: 'The main features of Japanese music', Török László: 'The Turan Society and the Hungaro-Japanese relations', Zsuffa Sándor: 'The Japanese military virtues in history'. 1942: Bódis Rózsa: 'The Japanese writing', Cholnoky Jenő: 'Japan, Japanese', Máté-Törék Gyula: 'Japan', Zsuffa Sándor: 'Japan and China', Zsuffa Sándor: 'The sword of the Japanese officers'.

Vilmos Pröhle (1871–1946) about the Japanese people, and in 1930 Vilmos Pröhle introduced Emperor Mutsuhito as a poet.

The Turan Society was the first in Hungary to provide the public with a free opportunity to learn Japanese language, among other languages regarded as Turanian (e.g., Turkish, Finnish, Chinese). The first Turanian language course started in 1926, and a year later there were 20 students with Imaoka as the teacher. In 1928 there were 28 students, and the next year, after Imaoka returned to Japan and Tihamér Turchányi (1874–1930) took over the Japanese course, 32 students enrolled. After his death, due to the lack of a teacher, teaching Japanese was suspended for several years. In the 1936–1937 school year, in addition to the three languages (i.e., Finnish, Turkish, Chinese), the Japanese course started again with Jenő Habán as teacher. A total of 102 students enrolled for the four languages: 22 for Finnish, 25 for Turkish, 43 for Japanese, and 12 for Chinese.⁵²

The society registered the official (e.g., businessmen, politicians, and experts) and unofficial (e.g., artists, scientists, and those on a study trip or simple tourist travel) Japanese guests arriving in Hungary, and they assisted in their travels, programmes, and accommodation. Japanese specialists coming to Hungary were usually received by representatives of the relevant ministry, sometimes by the ministers themselves, and these events were widely reported in the press.⁵³ The visits of Prince Takamatsu and his wife in 1931 and Prince Kaya and his wife in 1934 in Hungary were presented in the Hungarian press in detail, with frequent mentions of the friendship of the two nations.⁵⁴

Organising Hungarian–Japanese relations also became the task of a separate society, the Hungarian Nippon Society, which 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.⁵⁵ The Nippon Society envisaged cultural activities, 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. With its activity, the society was the most important organiser and promoter of Japanese culture and art in Hungary between the two world wars.⁵⁶

The members of the Nippon and Turan Societies engaged in widespread publishing activities, introducing and promoting Japan and Japanese culture in Hungary. The common feature of the books published about Japan by Hungar-

⁵² MOL P 1384 9.cs. 1937. Ápr.14.

⁵³ Török 1941.

⁵⁴ Wintermantel 2016:21.

⁵⁵ Farkas 2022.

⁵⁶ Farkas 2022.

ian authors in the interwar period was that, in addition to presenting the old and the modernised Japan in detail (including everyday life, customs, and culture), they also emphasised that a large part of the perceptions of Japan abroad were wrong.⁵⁷ One of their goals was to disprove the stereotypes formed in the West and present the ‘real Japan’, which is also indicated by the titles: *The Real Japan* (*Az igazi Japán*), *The Unknown Japan* (*Az ismeretlen Japán*), and *Two Faces of Japan* (*Japán két arca*). These titles gave a very positive picture of the Japanese, who by that time were no longer clearly viewed favourably in the West. The authors seemed to be driven by the intention to understand Japan and to interpret the Japanese people, traditions, and the country within their own cultural settings and not to judge the Japanese based on the Western concepts and customs.

In this respect, one of the main proponents of Japan in Hungary was Benedek Baráthosi Balogh (1870–1945), who was one of the most important promoters of cultural Turanism at the same time.⁵⁸ His two-volume book about his travels in Japan, illustrated with his own photographs, was a great success in the early 20th century in Hungary, playing a significant role in shaping a favourable and attractive picture about Japan.⁵⁹ His personal relationship with Imaoka Jūichirō, although sometimes controversial, definitely had a great impact on Imaoka’s views on Turanism and this way on Japanese Turanism.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Pröhle 1922, Balázs 1929, Baráthosi Balogh 1930, Geszty 1935, Mécs 1942, Keöpe 1943, Mezey 1939, Cholnoky 1942.

⁵⁸ Benedek Baráthosi Balogh (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, with little support from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, mostly on his own money. He collected artefacts, everyday items, and linguistic materials along the Amur, in East Siberia, and in Japan, to study the Manchu-Tunguz peoples and also the Ainu people, about which he was one of the first European researchers. His ethnographic collection, especially the Ainu collection, with his photographs and sketches, was also of outstanding importance in the world. (Most of it is in the Ethnographic Museum, Budapest.) He became one of the most important promoters of the Turanian movement, publishing more than 20 volumes titled *Turanian Books*, which were, with some ‘Turanian history books’, mainly introductions to other peoples’ cultures: travelogues and cultural and literary introductions to Turkish, Japanese, Finnish, Estonian, Mongol, Mandsu, Buryat, Bashkir, Tartar, Bulgarian, Chinese, Korean, and even ‘our smaller Finno-Ugric brothers’ (i.e., Lapp, Ostyak, Zuryen, Mordvin, Cheremis, Votjak, Vogul, and Samoyed) and ‘our smaller Turkic brothers’ (i.e., Yakut, Uzbek, Turcoman, Azerbaijan, and Chuvash) culture. His lifetime achievement was neglected until the 1990s because of his Turanian views. His work as an ethnographer has been beginning to be recognised again in recent decades. See: Hoppál 1996.

⁵⁹ Baráthosi 1906.

⁶⁰ His role in introducing and spreading Turanism in Japan has been researched by Sinan Levent in his works about Japanese Turanism. See Levent 2011, 2016.

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 great role in developing East Asian studies. In 1936 and 1937, with the help of the Mitsui Foundation, the Nippon Society could launch its quarterly magazine, *Távol Kelet* (Far East), a journal dedicated exclusively to Japan (which was the first and has so far been the only journal of this kind in Hungary).⁶¹ A bibliography of works published in Hungarian dealing with Japan was also compiled, containing 822 titles of books and articles.⁶²

Scientific works can also be found in a growing number, signifying the founding and developing the new academic discipline of Japanese studies.⁶³ The internationally renowned geographer Jenő Cholnoky (1870–1950) dealt with Japan in several books and writings, and he not only presented the country from a geographical point of view but also characterised Japanese customs and people.⁶⁴ Recognised art historian Zoltán Felvinczi Takács (1880–1964), the founder and first director of the Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asiatic Art, was one of the first experts in Hungary to write about Japanese and Chinese art.⁶⁵ He reported on his study trip to Japan (as a scholarship researcher) in a two-volume book, which was at the same time a readable travelogue full of descriptions and praises of Japanese art.⁶⁶ Vilmos Pröhle wrote a summary on Japanese literature, which was the first book in Hungary to review the history of Japanese literature.⁶⁷ Catholic

⁶¹ *Távol Kelet* (Far East) 1936–37.

⁶² Lévai 1943.

⁶³ Umemura 2006: 64–65.

⁶⁴ *Japán, a felkelő nap országa* [Japan, the Land of the Rising Sun] (1942), ‘Japán és Európa [Japan and Turan]’ (*Turan*, 1934), *Japán földrajza* [The geography of Japan] (1941). Jenő Cholnoky (1870–1950) was an outstanding geographer and member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He was a member of the Board of Directors of the Turan Society, had several publications on Turanism, and was the president of the Turan Association 1920–23.

⁶⁵ ‘A Kelet művészete [The art of the East]’, ‘Kínai és japán képek [Chinese and Japanese paintings and drawings]’ *Nyugat*, 1914. I: 729–743. ‘Hangok a Távol-Keletről [Voices from the Far East]’ *Nyugat*, 1914. II: 260–262. Zoltán Felvinczi Takács (1880–1964) was an outstanding art historian, the first scholar in Hungary scientifically dealing with East Asian art, and thus the founder of the scientific research of Oriental art in Hungary. He was also an important organiser; he arranged the Oriental art collections of different Hungarian institutions into one separate Oriental museum between 1919 and 1923 (i.e., the Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asian Art) and was the first director of this museum (until 1948). Meanwhile he was one of the founders and a vice president of the Hungarian Nippon Society (1932–1944), one of the editors of the *Turan* journal, and a member of the Turan Society, writing about Turanism (in a cultural sense) several times. About Felvinczi, Takács Zoltán: Bincsik 2010.

⁶⁶ Felvinczi 1939.

⁶⁷ Pröhle 1937. Vilmos Pröhle (1871–1946) was a pioneer in the study of Chinese and Japanese language and literature in Hungary. Originally, he studied Turkish languages (he was a disciple of Arminius Vámbéry) and made several study trips to Turkey and Central Asia and then to Japan. The East Asia Institute was established in 1924 at Budapest University (today

priest Béla Zsigovits (1888–1955) went to Japan to study the work of the Christian missions, but in the end he wrote not only about Japanese Christianity but also about the religious life of the Japanese, Shinto, and Buddhism, and in this context he also explained the Japanese worldview and values.⁶⁸ Translations of Japanese works also began to appear during this period, but most of them at that time were translated from intermediary languages.

These are excellent examples of the often-neglected face of Turanism: its cultural horizon, the work and results of scholars and educators with valuable cultural contributions to the research of Japan, the foundation of Japanese studies in Hungary, and the introduction and popularisation of Japanese culture to the Hungarian public.

‘Japanese sympathy towards Hungary’ in the interwar period

An interesting feature of the Japan-related news, articles, and books in the interwar period in Hungary is the frequently mentioned ‘goodwill and sympathy’ of Japan towards Hungary after World War I. In relevant Hungarian literature, these reports about the sympathy of the Japanese towards the Hungarians were treated with reservations and were regarded as exaggerations aimed at boasting feelings of fellowship with Japan in Hungary. However, even if the events that these contemporary reports referred to may have been of minor importance, they still represented some kind of relationship that had not existed before between Japanese and Hungarian people, and in the time of political isolation for Hungary, they may have appeared to be small, encouraging cases for the Hungarian public. New research of these actual events and activities of certain Japanese persons in favour of Hungarians can provide a more nuanced and balanced picture about this issue.

ELTE) with his leadership. From 1924, the Japanese government appointed him head of the Japanese Consulate in Budapest. He wrote the first (and for almost 60 years, the only) overview of Japanese literature in Hungarian, with his own translations of Japanese literary works (directly from Japanese). He was an enthusiastic proponent of Turanism, a member of the Turan Society, one of the editors of *Turán*, and a founding member of the Hungarian Nippon Society. His lifetime achievements (in Turcology and East Asian studies) were neglected until the 1990s because of his right-wing political views. See Ormos 2012.

⁶⁸ Zsigovits 1937.

'Japanese supporters of Hungary'

The society placed great emphasis on building personal relationships in the hope of drawing attention of the Japanese political circles to Hungary. As Nándor Metzger (1894–1987), a correspondent of the Hungarian Press Agency in Japan and a member of the Turan Society) wrote in his letter to the society from Japan in 1935,

We poor Hungarians do not have money for expensive newspaper advertising, so the only way to arouse attention and sympathy for Hungary here is by building personal relations to support the Hungarian interests, be it of a spiritual or material nature.⁶⁹

The supporters of Hungarian–Japanese friendship often referred to the activity of some Japanese persons advocating rapprochement of the two countries or promoting Turanism and the Turanian relation of Hungarians and Japanese. The most important person in this respect was Imaoka Jūichirō (1883–1973), who played an outstandingly important role in Hungarian–Japanese relations, introducing and promoting Japanese culture in Hungary and later Hungarian culture in Japan (including propagating Turanism).⁷⁰ He had relations to several significant Hungarian artists, writers, and poets; he also held many lectures and published numerous articles and a book about Japan in Hungarian, 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 about the signs of Japan's benevolence towards Hungarian claims in international negotiations.⁷¹ Besides him, Adachi Mineichirō 安

⁶⁹ Letter of Nándor Metzger 1935. MOL P szekció 1384. Turáni Társaság iratai 8. csomó.

⁷⁰ Umemura Yuko's significant monograph on Imaoka: Umemura 2006. See also: 梅村 2013, 梅村 2010. Imaoka was one the most important promoter of Turanism in Japan. Levent 2011, Levent 2016. Imaoka Jūichirō 今岡十一郎 (1883–1973) 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 held numerous lectures on Japan throughout the country (e.g., from May 1926 to May 1927 he gave 37 lectures in Hungarian, in various cultural associations, in Budapest and in the countryside) about a wide range of Japanese topics (e.g., 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 titled *Új Nippon* (New Nippon) containing his collected articles was published by the prestigious Hungarian publishing house, Athenaeum. That year, Governor Miklós Horthy honoured Imaoka with a high Hungarian award for his services in the rapprochement of the two nations.

⁷¹ Imaoka 1930: 241–242.

峰一郎 (1869–1934)⁷² and Aibara Susumu 粟飯原晋 (1900–1931)⁷³ were often mentioned in reviews of Japanese friendship towards Hungary. István Mezey

⁷² Adachi Mineichirō 安達峰一郎 (1869–1934) was a Japanese legal expert (later President of the International Court of Justice in The Hague, 1931–1934). In 1917, he was appointed Minister Plenipotentiary to Belgium and participated in the Japanese delegation to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. As a permanent member of the Supreme Allied Council of the Peace Conference, Japan acted as a neutral arbitrator in the negotiations of international disputes, including the case of the Hungarian optants. Dr Adachi Mineichirō was appointed as the speaker of the issue, and he tried to take a neutral position. He supported the Hungarian position, and when he could not enforce his opinion, he resigned from his post. Later, as one of the presidents of the International Court of Justice in The Hague, he ruled in favour of Hungary in a lawsuit. His activities were often mentioned in Hungary as evidence of Japan's sympathy for the Hungarian people and as proof that this sympathy can be of actual benefit to Hungary in international politics. See: Geöcze 1936.

⁷³ Aibara Susumu 粟飯原晋 (1900–1931) was a Japanese Esperantist and official of the Tokyo branch of the League of Nations Secretariat. He studied Esperanto, and in 1921 he founded an Esperanto group at Keio University and presented to the university a final thesis on the Baha'i movement with a summary in Esperanto. He was a member of the committee of the Japanese Esperanto Institute and became the honorary secretary of the Esperanto section of the Japanese Association of the League of Nations and the head of the Esperanto Group of Keio University. He wrote many articles about Hungary for the Japanese, and he was an honorary member of the Hungarian Turan Society. According to the Hungarian reports of the time, he was one of the first pioneers of the pro-Hungarian movements in Japan after the First World War. See: Mezey 1939: 138–141. After the war, as a young journalist he started to study the situation in Europe, dealing with the issue of war responsibility and peace treaties. In 1924, as a university student he wrote a letter to the Hungarian Esperanto Institute in Esperanto asking for information about Turanism. (MOL P 1384 8. csomó. 1924. nov. 12. Letter of Aibara Susumu in Esperanto to the Hungarian Esperanto Institute, which was translated into Hungarian and forwarded to the Turan Society.) The Esperanto Institute forwarded the letter's Hungarian translation to the Turan Society, and this way Aibara Susumu came into contact with the leading figures of the Hungarian Turanian movement. In this letter, Aibara Susumu wrote about the Hungarian–Japanese kinship, justifying his interest in Hungary: 'Many Hungarians often spoke and wrote about the kinship of our nations, but not many Japanese know about this [...] Yes, we Japanese and Hungarians are indeed relatives and brothers. Japanese people who visited Hungary [...] really admired and praised Hungary and its hospitable people'. Aibara Susumu wrote that since the Hungarians were also an Asian people, they should cooperate with the Japanese people: 'We Orientals should come into direct contact, make friends with each other, and unite'. Finally, he asked for information about the Hungarian Turanian movement: 'I heard that there is a League of Turanian Peoples in Budapest and that its pioneers came to Japan a few years ago, that one of the committee members is the director of a girls' school in Budapest. Could you write me their addresses? Can they understand our common language? Is the League developing successfully in your country? And I heard that a Japanese man, Mr Imaoka, is now living in Budapest for the sake of the League. Do you know him? [...] Are there books in Esperanto or translated into Esperanto about Hungary's economic situation and other topics? Are they available?' The Turan Society responded to this letter, and they remained in contact until Aibara's death. Aibara asked for publications in order to promote Hungary in Japan, and in 1927 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the help of the Turán Society, sent him publications introducing Hungary. Until his death in 1931,

(1895–?) expressed the importance of these relationships as follows: ‘The role that Japanese politicians play in international forums is getting bigger and bigger’.⁷⁴ As a result of this, the part of the Hungarian public that turned to Japan with interest believed that Hungary could count on support from Japan, as this case recorded by Imaoka shows:

Many Hungarians have already asked me: [...] When will Japan fight for Hungary? To this I replied that in the treatment of the Hungarian prisoners of war in Siberia, at the meetings of the border adjustment committees, at the committee reviewing the atrocities committed in Transylvania, at the Hungarian-Romanian border incident, or at any international conference or meeting of the League of Nations, where Hungary had to be protected against ill will, Japan never forgot that he was a friend of Hungary and made every effort to reach an impartial and fair decision.⁷⁵

These relations were sometimes used by the Hungarian official foreign policy as references to prove the Japanese sympathy for Hungary. The society often received letters from the Hungarian embassies in Japan, Turkey, or Finland, which forwarded the requests of the governments for lists of Hungarians dealing with that country and its people.⁷⁶ Moreover, they specifically requested English and German language books dealing with Turanism.⁷⁷

The newspaper *Turán*, and István Mezey in particular, frequently published ‘evidence’ (i.e., Hungarian-related events and articles published in Japan) that Japan showed special interest and friendship towards Hungary, sympathised with the Turan Society, and even understood Hungarian revisionist efforts.⁷⁸ These minor events could only appear significant and important due to the isolation of Hungary, especially in the eyes of a group promoting friendship with Japan. However, it is true that there existed a certain level of connection between the societies and organisations of the two countries. There were some

Aibara Suzumu wrote articles (e.g., in the Tokyo newspaper *Miyako*) about the injustices of the Treaty of Trianon, showing the maps of the Revision League. See Mezey 1939: 138–141.

⁷⁴ Mezey 1929.

⁷⁵ Imaoka 1930: 241–242.

⁷⁶ Hollós Ödön japán császári konzul levele Móricz Péter ügyvezető társelnöknek 1935. ápr. 18., MOL P 1384 8. csomó. ‘The Japanese government is contacting us with the request that we provide them with the names of Hungarian writers, poets, newspaper editors, and otherwise all those who are literarily active with Japanese or East Asian issues in general, or who only occasionally deal with similar issues in the context of individual lectures or in newspaper articles’.

⁷⁷ The ‘Great Japan Turan Young Mens’ Association’ asked for books and publications about Turanism. 1935. jan. 22., MOL P 1384 8. csomó

⁷⁸ The actual relations of the Hungarian and Japanese Turanian associations will be the topic of another essay.

Turanist associations in Japan, too, that paid attention to Hungary, though the interpretation of Turanism was different in the two countries.⁷⁹

Hungarian POWs in Siberia

During the First World War, Russia captured (and held in camps) an estimated more than 2 million prisoners of war (POWs) in Russia from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (with ethnic Germans and Hungarians each constituting around one quarter and Slavic people constituting the other half).⁸⁰ The Russian POW camps were taken by the Japanese army between 1918 and 1920 during the Japanese Siberian expedition, and the repatriation of the prisoners started with the help of the Red Cross and with the cooperation of the Japanese officials.⁸¹ The repatriation of the prisoners progressed very slowly because of the Russian Civil War (1917–1922) and organisational and financial problems of Germany and the successor states of the dissolved Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, so the process took years, being completed in 1922.⁸² Hungarian POWs got home after several years of harsh ordeals after the Japanese authorities had agreed to help them repatriate in cooperation with the Red Cross.⁸³ This was the first time in history that Hungarians came into contact with Japanese soldiers in a large number. The head of the Hungarian Red Cross mission, Géza Dell'Adami (1888–?),⁸⁴ 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:

⁷⁹ Levent 2011, Levent 2016, Farkas 2001a: 218–237.

⁸⁰ According to the Hungarian Defence Ministry, 6,557 Hungarian prisoners had returned home by May 1920 (Wintermantel 2016: 14.), but the repatriation of Hungarians lasted until 1922. 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 between 1920 and 1921, of which approx. 8,200 people returned home to Hungary, while approx. 4,800 former Hungarian citizens were repatriated by the successor states. (Dell'Adami 1925: 178.) 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.

⁸¹ Jones 2014, Leidinger – Moritz 1997. The Japanese Army took over the Pervaya Rechka and Nikolsk Ussuriysk camps and later Krasnaya Rechka (Khabarovsk) from the Americans, too. According to the information of the Red Cross in November 1919, 2,062 Hungarian and Austrian, 4 Romanian, and 505 Turkish POWs came under Japanese rule. Mezey 1939: 102.

⁸² Nachtigal – Radauer 2014.

⁸³ Research on the Austrian-Hungarian prisoners of wars in Siberia: Bonhardt 1985, Kovács 1987, Kondo 2009, 近藤正憲 2006. New research by Márton Mati: Mati 2022a, Mati 2022b.

⁸⁴ Dell'Adami was also a POW in Krasnoyarsk until 1917, when he could escape and could go home.

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.⁸⁵

The mention of a Turanian relationship in the Siberian camps may have been the result of the ideas and activity of one of the most important supporter of Japanese relations in Hungary (and the main founder and organiser of the Nippon Society) in the interwar period, Dr István Mezey, lawyer and former officer of the Austro-Hungarian Army in the First World War.⁸⁶ He assisted in the repatriation of Hungarian POWs as a contact officer for the Japanese commander of the Nikolsk-Ussuriysk camp. As he had been in contact with the Turan society, we have good reason to assume that the camp commander obtained information about Turanism from him.

New research results are presenting a more and more detailed story of the Hungarian POWs in Siberia.⁸⁷ Memoirs and diaries of the former Hungarian POWs contain valuable information about the improved life conditions and favourable situation in the POW camps under Japanese rule and the warm feelings of the Hungarians regarding the Japanese army.⁸⁸ The POWs had high hopes for the Japanese and American presence. They believed that the representatives of the two nations would be the ones who would rescue them from the chaos of Russia.⁸⁹ In his paper, Mati cites an event from one of the diaries (i.e., that of Ferenc Vándor). When the camp was taken over by the Japanese, the commander of the Japanese expeditionary army addressed a letter to the POWs in a way different from the Russian or American attitude:

Japanese Lt Col. Takashima greeted the prisoners of war. He reassured us that he would try everything he could do for us so that we should not feel the burden of

⁸⁵ Dell'Adami.

⁸⁶ István Mezey (1895–?) was a lawyer, but because he was interested in Turkish culture, he learnt Turkish, and he came into contact with the Turan Society (he corresponded with the Turan Society about the compilation of a Turkish dictionary before the First World War) and presumably with Turanism. He was on a study trip to Turkey when the First World War broke out. He became a lieutenant in the army, was taken as a POW 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 about the POWs in his book on Japan, emphasising that the Japanese approached Hungarians in a friendly way, regarding the Hungarians relatives. Mezey 1939: 95–130.

⁸⁷ Mati 2022b: 181–204, Mati 2022a.

⁸⁸ Mati 2022b: 197–200.

⁸⁹ Mati 2022b: 193.

being POWs. He regarded us as heroes. Now that peace was close, he hoped that we would be transported home soon.⁹⁰

The good relations of the Hungarian POWs and the Japanese soldiers were corrupted in the Krasnaya Rechka camp, when the Japanese shot to death three Hungarians who tried to escape captivity.⁹¹ Apart from this unfortunate event, the overall perception of the Japanese command of the POW camps still remained favourable in the later memories.⁹² The good memories of the Hungarian POWs about the Japanese army in Siberia were later often referred to by supporters of the Hungarian–Japanese rapprochement, and all overviews discussing the history of relations mentioned the helpful and friendly behaviour of the Japanese towards the Hungarian POWs as an important starting point of the friendly relations.

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 hard 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 them never got out of there. Comparing the attitude 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 to be grateful for the humane treatment. Also, the Japanese officials were willing to help the work of the repatriating missions, and they cooperated with them and thus with the Hungarian mission, too.⁹³ The contemporary assessments of the Hungarian–Japanese relations and friendship in the interwar period written by the proponents of the rapprochement (with a notable bias, of course) of the two nations all referred to these events as evidence of Japanese benevolence towards Hungarians.

Japan and the Treaty of Trianon

In the relevant literature, the contemporary reports about the favourable treatment and understanding attitude of the Japanese officials towards the Hungarian claims and petitions during the negotiations preceding the Treaty of Trianon

⁹⁰ Mati 2022b: 197.

⁹¹ Mati 2022b: 199–200. Kondo 2009.

⁹² Mezey 1939: 95–130.

⁹³ Wintermantel 2021: 34–36.

were also treated with reservations and regarded as exaggerations. However, the newest research of the Japanese archives and diplomatic documents proves that the contemporary reports did have some actual basis for their undoubtedly biased accounts.⁹⁴ Japan participated among the victorious powers in the Treaty of Versailles negotiations that ended the First World War. However, since it had no interest in European affairs, the Japanese delegation showed a rather passive attitude. Nevertheless, the Japanese delegates participated in the negotiations and committee works and sent reports about them to Tokyo. Besides, the Japanese senior officers assigned to the Hungarian border establishing committees directly and actively participated in the procedure of determining the exact location of the new border that was only roughly prescribed in the peace treaty.⁹⁵ Their reports provide valuable and interesting information about the actual work of these committees and contain the personal opinions of Japanese senior officers frequently condemning unjust decisions towards Hungary. Two scholars (Yuko Umemura and Peter Wintermantel) researched the reports and telegrams sent to Tokyo by the Japanese general officers (now available in digitised form on the online interface of the Center for Asian Historical Resources of the National Archives of Japan).⁹⁶ The Japanese committee members not directly interested in European political affairs could remain unbiased observers in the process of negotiations, so their reports can be considered as authentic information about what exactly happened during the establishment of borders. The Japanese delegates often spoke very critically about these processes, about the tensions between committee members, and even about corruption.⁹⁷ A total of 15 Japanese commissioners worked in the commissions, and although most of them considered the new borders to be unnatural and unfair, and they may have expressed objections, in the end they usually did not confront the delegates of the Great Powers and accepted the decisions. For Hungary, their activities had minimal results,⁹⁸ but for Hungarian society at the time, they seemed to represent the only power that tried to observe the establishing of new borders somewhat objectively.

Most of the Japanese commissioners considered the new border to be unjust, and they often expressed their sympathy with the Hungarian side. Especially Major Andō Rikichi, who worked on the Hungarian–Czechoslovak border establishment committee, and Captain Sanō Mitsunobu, who worked on the Romanian committee, sympathised the most with Hungary. Since Andō also

⁹⁴ Umemura – Wintermantel 2021.

⁹⁵ Umemura – Wintermantel 2001: 7.

⁹⁶ Japan Center for Asian Historical Records www.jacar.go.jp

⁹⁷ Documents nos. 31 and 35.

⁹⁸ Péter Wintermantel indicates in his study an area of 700 km². Umemura – Wintermantel 37.

gave interviews to the Hungarian press, his views in favour of Hungary became known to the Hungarian public as well, and they were often cited by the Hungarian press as proof of Japanese sympathy. As a result of the new research, the limited reality of cases that have been classified as ‘urban legends’ cannot be denied. As the scholars stated,

In Hungary between the two world wars, public opinion believed that the members of the Japanese delegation to the peace negotiations were friendly towards Hungarians. Until now, we did not have precise information about the nature of this sympathy, but the historical sources uncovered in the context of this research support this fact without any doubt.⁹⁹

Of course, the favourable opinions and activities of the Japanese commissioners towards Hungary were greatly overestimated by pro-Japanese associations and individuals, and the personal opinions of Japanese officials were presented with an important political significance.¹⁰⁰ In the time of political isolation, it is quite understandable that the Hungarian public tried to look for friends or possible supporters. Proponents of Hungarian–Japanese friendship knew that actual benefits would only come to Hungary if Japan took on the support of Hungarian interests in its foreign policy, but they believed that personal connections and social and cultural relations could arouse the interest of official circles as well. These ideas became ‘central elements of the pro-Japanese folklore between the two wars’.¹⁰¹ However, Japanese sympathy for the Hungary may have been seen in private opinions and conversations but did not represent an official Japanese political position.¹⁰² Hungarian hopes had no basis, as Japan did not want to interfere in any form in European political relations, which were of no interest to her. At the end of the 1930s, official friendly relations between Japan and Hungary took place under completely different political conditions.

From the late 1930s, cultural relations, which were originally non-political in nature, became increasingly influenced by politics. The events in world politics (e.g., 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 been seen 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

⁹⁹ Umemura – Wintermantel 202.

¹⁰⁰ Farkas 2022; Farkas 2009.

¹⁰¹ Umemura – Wintermantel 47.

¹⁰² Wintermantel 2016: 21–23.

the need of political unity. The Hungarian–Japanese Treaty of Friendship and Cultural Cooperation in 1938, in addition to the cultural agreement, contained a treaty of friendship.¹⁰³ 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.¹⁰⁴ 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, just as ‘reinforcers’ for ideological purposes only. With the strengthening of the German–Japanese alliance, the Japanese orientation became more and more inseparable from the German orientation in Hungarian foreign policy, and thus it lost its cultural character. During World War II (1939–1945), the Hungarian–Japanese relationship lost its cultural character and became politicised, and as a consequence after the war any contact with Japan, including cultural relations, were lost, and most books on Japan were banned, with all other publications possibly connected to Turanism.

Conclusion

The present study attempted to clarify views and explanations of Hungarian Turanism that have been increasing in the secondary literature and to provide more nuanced approaches and interpretations. On the other hand, it also sought to examine the perceptions of Japan in Hungary and to try to explain why a very distant country could be popular and endowed with serious importance. The research was primarily based on contemporary sources: scientific, informative, and promotional publications (i.e., books and articles), newspaper reports, documents of Turanian societies (i.e., archive documents, data, and correspondences), as well as the statements of important and well-known persons who could have an impact on public opinion (i.e., scientists, writers, and politicians). Of course, the secondary literature on the subject was also taken into consideration. In order to examine the research material in the work, the historical, cultural, ideological, and social conditions and contexts of the era had to be analysed in order to properly interpret and evaluate the subject. The results may enable a more accurate and nuanced approach to understanding the relationship between Hungarian Turanism and perceptions of Japan between the two world wars.

¹⁰³ Umemura 2018: 119–132.

¹⁰⁴ Nagy 1943: 121–123.

It is important to highlight some aspects worth further consideration. In the overview of the history of Turanism, papers may overemphasise its political significance and its influence on government policy or public thinking before 1945. However, Turanism rarely, and even so, only partly became government policy in Hungary, did not have the support of the majority of the society, could not have a mass base, and usually remained outside official policy making circles. For the most part, Turanism remained an unclear, irrational circle of ideas, and in various time periods there were great differences in its concept, social and political groups, aims, and interpretations. Turanism never became part of the official policy of the Hungarian political elite, but it could be used by the government as an informal tool in their efforts to break the country's international isolation and build alliances, for which mentioning some relations (such as Turanian relations) could be seen as elements possibly arousing interest and friendly approach.

The undeniably valuable legacy of Turanism can be seen in its cultural interpretation. The scholarly works dealing with Japan published at that time represented the rising scholarly field of East Asian and Japanese studies in Hungary. The cultural aspect of Turanism provided a valuable contribution to Hungarian culture: the huge amount of scientific and cultural achievements of Hungarian scholars, teachers, writers, and researchers who were initially or partly influenced by the cultural ideas of Turanism but whose works ultimately significantly contributed to the development of Oriental studies in Hungary or who carried out extensive educational work to introduce and popularise the culture of the related peoples among the Hungarian public.

Turanism played a role in the formulation of Hungarian identity, especially during times of intense conflicts and political and social crises (e.g., modernisation at the end of the 19th century, war defeat, loss of territories, and international isolation in the interwar period), when the Hungarians' self-evaluation and concept of their position in Europe were seriously challenged. In times of a need to re-define identity, the supposed Oriental roots of the Hungarian people were more emphatically considered as part of Hungarian historical heritage and cultural traditions. Therefore, the research of these roots (and the contemporary Oriental cultures as well) was followed with attention by the Hungarian public.

Turanism could also be connected to the modernisation debates of the 19th–20th centuries of Hungary. Japan's development appeared in Hungarian Turanism as an example of the successful development of an Asian people, with an emphasis on achieving rapid and Western-style modernisation with a strong national consciousness based on the traditions and cultural heritage of Japan. The special situation of Japan 'between East and West' could be interpreted as similar to that of Hungary's situation, which made it possible to make compar-

isons and draw parallels between the development, situation, and task or even mission of the two nations, even without any reference to any kind of ethnic kinship. The idea that Hungarians and the Japanese, the ‘most westerly and most easterly Turanian nations’, have the joint task and mission of helping the other Asian Turanian peoples’ development and of functioning as a kind of bridge between East and West became a steady and established argument in Hungarian Turanism from the beginning of the 20th century until 1945.

After the First World War, Japan was among the victorious powers and the only country of them that had no interest in the process of arbitrament of the new state borders in Central Europe. Although the official Japanese position did not contradict the decisions made by the Great Powers, in their informal statements the Japanese diplomats often voiced their criticism of the incorrect events and verdicts experienced in settling the Hungarian borders. All of this was gratefully received by the Hungarian public, and the significance of these private statements were magnified, which of course increased sympathy for Japan. On the way leading to World War II, Japan became an ally of Hungary, which determined the public discourse about Japan.

The relationship between Hungary and Japan changed drastically after World War II. Japan and East Central Europe became parts of the sphere of influence of the USA and the Soviet Union, respectively, which defined the relations (or the lack of relations) between them, as they belonged to the opposite sides of the newly formed world order. Ideology in Hungary was also Sovietised in all areas: all levels of society and intellectual life were defined by Marxist ideology, and all elements of the pre-war regime having been labelled as imperialist and fascist were banned, including Turanism and works and news related to Japan available in Hungarian from the interwar and war periods. It also meant that for decades after the Second World War, Turanism and also Hungarian–Japanese relations were hardly studied in Hungary (or with a strong ideological bias), and only the regime change of 1989–1990 brought about a significant change in this area.

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