

Aleš Gabrič

SLOVENIAN FAMILIARIZATION WITH JAPAN AND THE JAPANESE

For a long time, our ancestors familiarized themselves with faraway unknown lands by reading the travelogues written by the few travelers who described their impressions of these foreign expanses as seen through their own eyes. Not only did very few people travel far a few centuries ago, but even their readers were few and far between in the time when the majority was illiterate and books were expensive. In modern times, these travelers who would arouse people's interest in foreign lands mostly journeyed there because of concrete tasks, for example as diplomats or missionaries, while the youth travelled in order to further their studies. In the second half of the 19th century, a new period of discovering unknown places and lands, both nearby and more remote, began thanks to the diminishing costs of transportation. Consequently, the number of travelogues on foreign countries and continents increased and in Slovenia, reports from pilgrimages and about missionary activities became most frequent.¹

1 Šmitek, Zmago. Slovenska doživetja prostranstev. In: *Poti do obzorja : antologija slovenskega potopisa z neevropsko tematiko*. Ljubljana: Borec, 1988, pp. 382–390.

We should also not overlook the fact that in the last decades of the 19th century, literacy started increasing rapidly among the Slovenes, and with it also the interest in learning about foreign exotic places, even if all that was available was only more or less fantastic descriptions of strange lands and their inhabitants. As it was, until as late as the second half of the 19th century, such descriptions were mostly a mix of both empirical data and fantasy.² This made for an excellent source of stereotypes about Jews, Muslims, Turks, black people, or Indians. However, the Japanese did not appear in Slovenian literature until the middle of the 19th century; until then they had remained a great mystery – not only for the Slovenians, but also for the whole of Europe.

AN UNKNOWN LAND WHERE CHRISTIANS ARE PERSECUTED

In the Slovenian press in the middle of the 19th century, Japan was usually mentioned as a footnote – as a country with certain peculiarities or characteristics that the Slovenian readers were unfamiliar with and that they may have merely heard about, while perhaps only a few people had actually witnessed them. For example, in the *Drobtinice* newspaper, in the context of the educational materials for schools, Japan was mentioned in 1857, in a contribution entitled *Premembe zemlje (The Changing Landscape)*. Japan was described as an East Asian land “dotted with fiery mountains” and listed as a part of the volcanically active Aleutian Islands, Kuril Islands and Kamchatka.³ However, no Japanese volcanoes were included in the list of notable volcanic eruptions.

The aforementioned contribution was written on the basis of the Catholic outlook on the world, suggesting that everything had been created by God, and that “fiery mountains” were among the natural phenomena that could, to a limited extent, transform what God had created. Such Catholic views did not merely influence writers’ outlooks on the natural features of Japan, but also on its past and social structure. Even though the Catholic priest Valentin Sežun had ambitiously entitled his contribution on Japan, published in the Catholic publication *Zgodnja Danica* in January 1858, *Zgodovinski pogled v Japonsko cesarstvo (A Historical Insight into the Japanese Empire)*,⁴ the article was not much more than a description of the persecution of Christians in Japan. Besides the introductory remarks on the largest islands, three main religions, and the information that the capital city “Jedo” (i.e. Edo) had as many as 1.3 million inhabitants, we can

2 Ibid., p. 395.

3 Robida. *Premembe zemlje. Drobtinice*, 12, 1857, p. 255.

4 Sežun, Val.(entin). *Zgodovinski pogled v Japonsko cesarstvo. Zgodnja Danica*, 11, No. 1, 7. 1. 1858, pp. 1–3.

also discern a typical outlook on the unfamiliar people of that land, who were different and whose morality consisted of positive and negative traits: “The people of Japan are thrifty, sober, hardworking and clean, as well as wrathful, arrogant, superstitious, and true slaves to carnal desire.” After the article mentioned Marco Polo as the first European in Japan, it soon addressed the main topic: how Saint Francis Xavier had arrived in Japan in 1549 and set out to Christianize the Japanese. The author of the article celebrated this successful Christianization and mentioned that, allegedly, in 1582, more than 200,000 Japanese had been Christian, and that “they had 250 churches, schools, seminaries, and a novitiate of the Society of Jesus.”⁵ However, Emperor Taico-sama (Toyotomi Hideyoshi) started persecuting Christians, and this continued even after his death in 1598. The emphasis was on the following words: “In 1611 such a horrible persecution of the Christian religion began in Japan that it encompassed everything we may possibly read about the former Roman emperors (Nero, Decius, etc.) and the kings of The Vandals (Genseric, Huneric, etc.) because of its savagery against the followers of Christ. The persecution did not stop until Christianity was completely annihilated in Japan.” Sežun added that the Protestant Calvinist Dutch had contributed to the oppression of the Catholic faith in Japan as well, as they had supposedly encouraged the Japanese court to persecute missionaries. Numerous examples of massacres of Christians were listed, some of them quite unbelievable. The uprising of 1638 was followed by the worst pogrom, and as many as “37,000 to 70,000 people were slaughtered in one day!”⁶

Sežun’s article describes Japan as an isolated land which no foreigner could enter without the Emperor’s permission; a land of heathens who had destroyed, in the first half of the 17th century, the encouraging results of the Christianization and created many Christian martyrs. The *Zgodnja Danica* publication continued to follow the events in Japan: in the following year it reported that the Japanese government had “abolished the legislation that had condemned Christians as of 1614”, so that in the future the increasing number of foreign representatives in Japan would also be allowed to keep priests at their side.⁷ In the beginning of the 1860s, the *Zgodnja Danica* followed – with special emphasis – the canonization of the martyrs from the period of the persecution in Japan into sainthood. Even at the turn of the century, the more orthodox Catholic circles saw Japan primarily as the land where the first local Christians had been persecuted; as a country populated by heathens who should be led into the welcoming arms of the Catholic Church by means of strengthened missionary efforts.⁸

5 Ibid., p. 1.

6 Ibid., p. 2.

7 *Zgodnja Danica*, XI, No. 20, 30. 9. 1858, p. 159, Razgled po kerščanskim svetu.

8 *Zgodnja danica*, XLVII, No. 16, 20. 4. 1894, pp. 121–122, Sv. Marija Devica in Japan.

MORE NEWS IN THE MEIJI PERIOD

Realizations regarding Japan made their way into the general consciousness very slowly, but nevertheless persistently, once Japan started opening itself to the world. The doors to Japan started opening through the major European centers, which offered products and provided information on this remote country. Slovenian readers could occasionally read a little something about it, but despite this, it was hardly enough for them to be able to construct a clear picture of what kind of a land Japan was. Japan was often mentioned together with China, especially in the descriptions of the homeland of tea. For example, one journalist also mentioned Japan as a land of tea in addition to China and included the following information about tea (or *tê*) as a drink that was somewhat less familiar to Slovenians: “It is true that in our country this drink is not as widely known as the more popular coffee, and yet it is much more distinguished, judging by the strength and number of peoples devoted to it passionately.”⁹ The fact that Japan started to open itself to the world a few years after the beginning of the Meiji period was also felt by the somewhat wealthier Slovenians, as newspapers started publishing offers for the ordering and purchasing of certain luxury Japanese items, for example flower vases or cups.¹⁰

More information about Japan was available to the intellectuals, who would travel to the main European intellectual centers and become keenly interested in the cultural development of the European nations as well as the nations that the Europeans maintained increasingly frequent contacts with. These reports were mostly only collections of basic information about the remote land, while in-depth studies were rare. Shorter articles were summed up from the European press and contained stereotypical European perceptions of Japan and its inhabitants. The readers of the liberally-oriented newspaper *Slovenski narod* got to know the Japanese as the Asian nation that had started trading more vigorously with Europe. For the ecclesiastical publication *Zgodnja Danica*, the Japanese were mostly a heterodox people who persecuted Christians. Meanwhile, the editorship of the Pan-Slavic magazine *Slovanski svet* started quoting the Russian press and asking itself whether the military successes of Japan in the Far East could be a sign that the great Slavic Russia would soon have a new, strong competitor, as the development of the relationship between Japan and Great Britain could endanger the role of the largest Slavic state in East Asia.¹¹

Information about Japanese cultural development reached Europe much more slowly. For example, the Japanese fine arts only became very interesting

9 V. J. Čaj. *Glasnik slovenski*, 2, No. 8, Celovec, 15. 10. 1858, pp. 132–135; No. 9, pp. 147–149.

10 *Slovenski narod*, X, No. 129, 9. 6. 1877, p. 4; No. 142, 24. 6. 1877, Obznanilo.

11 *Slovanski svet*, VIII, No. 3, 19. 1. 1895, p. 25, Ruske drobtinice.

for the Western cultural centers after the successful exhibitions in London in 1862 and Paris in 1876,¹² while the broader public became more intrigued after the first study of Japanese culture in the English language had been printed in London in 1878.¹³ However, at that time English was relatively poorly known to the Slovenian intellectuals, who were mostly educated in German schools. Travelogues written by the increasingly numerous visitors to Japan and published by their national publishing houses after their return to their homelands were equally difficult for them to read, as these authors were mostly American and British and so their works were published in English.¹⁴ Consequently these texts were inaccessible for the Slovenian intellectuals, who wore mostly schooled and educated in the German language. In order to familiarize themselves with the non-European nations, the more enthusiastic intellectuals in the current Slovenian territory would much more often resort to German literature. Of the authors who had made significant contributions to the knowledge about Japan and its inhabitants in the Western cultural sphere, the Ljubljana Lyceum Library kept the works of Wilhelm Heine, published at the end of the 1850s and in the beginning of the 1860s. Heine was a German painter who visited Japan first as a member of Matthew Perry's expedition and then also as a member of the Prussian expedition to Japan.¹⁵ He painted numerous motifs from Japan, which then circumnavigated the world and were also used by Perry to illustrate his works.¹⁶ Heine's book *Japan and Its People* (*Japan und seine Bewohner*), published in Leipzig in 1860, was perhaps the most well-founded work on the topic available in Ljubljana. Naturally we cannot begin to guess how many readers read this book or other works by Wilhelm Heine, who invested much effort in promoting closer connections with Japan in the German space.

As few descriptions of Japan made their way even into intellectual circles, it is obvious that it was almost impossible for those whose education had concluded after the obligatory eight-year elementary school to find out anything whatsoever about this country. Much of the subject of geography in the whole of Austria was based on the works of the Slovenian geographer and cartographer Blaž Kocen (Blasius Kozenn), who prepared quite a few textbooks and atlases

12 Wichmann, Siegfried. *Japonisme : the Japanese influence on Western art since 1858*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2001.

13 Ibid., p. 11.

14 Baty, Thomas. The Literary Intraduction of Japan to Europe. *Monumenta Niponica*, 7, 1951, No. 1–2, pp. 24–39; 8, 1952, No. 1–2, pp. 15–46; 9, 1953, No. 1–2, pp. 62–83; 10, 1954, No. 1–2, pp. 65–80. Only a few works mentioned in Baty's paper as important for getting to know Japan in Europe were, according to the COBISS database, available in libraries in the territory of present-day Slovenia.

15 Heine, Wilhelm. *Japan und seine Bewohner*. Leipzig: Purfürst, 1860.; Heine, Wilhelm. *Eine Weltreise um die nördliche Hemisphäre, in Verbindung mit der ostasiat. Expedition 1860–1861. 2 Theile*. Leipzig: Brokhaus, 1864.

16 Baty, The Literary Introduction, 1952, pp. 16–18

for use in schools. Kocen's *Geography for Public Schools*, which was published in Slovenian in 1879 and served as the geography textbook for the majority of Slovenians at the time, contained only a modest amount of information on Asia. The pupils were only able to find out that Japan was an island kingdom, that the ruler was called *Mikado*, and that some of its cities were very large.¹⁷ Kocen's geographical atlas for the various types of Austrian schools was not much different.¹⁸ Asia was only shown on the general physical map and on the political map. The only Asian country whose map was included was India, which was at the time already a colony of an important European country.

Even in the general upper secondary schools (so-called gymnasiums), Japan was merely a footnote in the curriculum and lessons until the end of the 19th century. The physical geographical description of Asia was mostly limited to the part of the Asian mainland which was closer to Europe. Furthermore, the history curriculum was especially Europe-centric and did not concern itself with the nations on other continents.¹⁹

Naturally, the Slovenian geography and history textbooks from the end of the 19th century followed the established principles. In the geography textbooks, prepared by the geographer and historian Janez Jesenko, we can only find some basic information about Japan. The descriptions of the Asian mountain ranges, rivers, climate, flora, etc., focused only on the continental part of Asia. However, despite the modest descriptions, it was occasionally nevertheless possible to notice praise on account of the swift progress that Japan had experienced in the decades after it had started to open itself to Western influences.²⁰

On the other hand, Jesenko's history textbooks barely mentioned Japan at all. Similarly, the Japanese past remained largely unknown even to the few students who managed to finish the entire eight-year gymnasium. The situation was similar even in the higher grades, where textbooks in the German language by Professor Anton Gindely from the Charles University in Prague were used. These also followed the aforementioned model, prescribed by the state curriculums.

17 *Kocenov zemljepis za ljudske šole : z 10 slikami* (poslovenil Ivan Lapajne). V Beču: E. Hölzel, 1879, p. 65.

18 *B. Kozenns Geographischer Schul-Atlas für Gymnasien-, Real- und Handelsschulen*. Wien: E. Hölzel, 1897.

19 *Lehrplan und Instructionen für den Unterricht an den Gymnasien in Österreich*. Wien: Im kaiserlich-königlichen Schulbücher-Verlage, 1900, pp. 117–178.

20 Jesenko, Janez. *Zemljepis za drugi in tretji razred srednjih šol*. Ljubljana: Narodna tiskarna, pp. 31–33.

THE FIRST SOMEWHAT LONGER DESCRIPTIONS OF JAPAN IN SLOVENIA

For the more inquisitive, who sought information from the various parts of the world, things started changing in the last two decades of the 19th century after the Austrian school reform. At that time, the percentage of literacy in Slovenia increased to encompass as much as three quarters of the population. The majority of Slovenians could familiarize themselves with the strange and distant land by reading two contributions about Japan. One of them was published in six episodes in April and May of 1889 in the newspaper *Novice (gospodarske, obrtniške in narodne)* as a part of a series of descriptions of unknown nations and countries written for this newspaper by “Fr. Jaroslav”. The person behind this signature was the priest, writer and translator France Jaroslav Štrukelj, who retired early due to medical problems and proceeded to read, write, and translate in solitude. Štrukelj also listed a few works written in English as his sources, but it is not clear whether he had read the originals or the German translations. After Štrukelj’s death, his acquaintance and posthumous collector of his materials Frančišek Lampe stated that Štrukelj had collected many books and that his writings were based on “the German and Czech works”.²¹

In the introductory part, Štrukelj wrote that the first European to start learning about Japan was Marco Polo, and then added the explanation involving the persecution of the first Christians in Japan in the 17th century, which was the usual practice for Catholic priests. He praised the hardworking and diligent nature of the Japanese people. According to Štrukelj, Europeans could look up to the Japanese model of agriculture, as the Japanese took better care of the land and “their fields are so clean that one can barely find any weeds”. He went on to state that the Japanese had always been excellent craftsmen, and that their products were better than the Chinese. When they encountered the West, “they appropriated all the inventions, and because they are skilled, industrious and diligent, their craft industry has recently advanced incredibly”.²² With regards to the Japanese customs, Štrukelj listed those that were most unusual for the Europeans, i.e. the different style of clothing and the low-roofed houses with very little furniture. He also emphasized that married life in Japan was not worth praising, but he did not elaborate on this remark.²³

21 Lampe, Frančišek. Frančišek Štrukelj-Jaroslav. *Dom in svet*, 12, 1899, No. 22, p. 678.

22 Štrukelj, Frančišek (=Jaroslav). *Zemljepisni in narodopisni obrazi. Novice gospodarske, obrtniške in narodne*. 47, No. 18, 1. 5. 1889, pp. 139–140; No. 19, 8. 5. 1889, pp. 148–149; No. 20, 15. 5. 1889, pp. 155–156; No. 21, 22. 5. 1889, pp. 163–164; No. 22, 29. 5. 1889, pp. 170–171, pp. 139–140.

23 *Ibid.*, pp. 148–149.

Even in his further assessments, Štrukelj limited himself to the major characteristics without going into any detailed explanations of his opinions. On the one hand, he commended the roads and the facilities available to travelers, but on the other hand, he later mentioned that travelling around Japan was slow and uncomfortable. Štrukelj's descriptions of the religious customs of the Japanese people, Shintoism and Buddhism, remained incomplete and superficial, and in this regard he mostly focused on the largest temples in the contemporaneous as well as former capital cities.²⁴ It is positive, Štrukelj continued in his account, that besides numerous temples, many charity organizations assist people who need help. He also praised the Japanese education system. Apart from the schools, he also commended Japanese libraries, museums, theatre, printing houses, and literature. However, his readers were unable to glean a more detailed image from the few modest pieces of information he provided, or compare Japanese cultural development with their own.²⁵

Even though the *Novice* was a very well-known newspaper among Slovenians, in the time under consideration, it was not exactly the main Slovenian publication. The second description of Japan and its inhabitants – the book by the Slavacist and historian Josip Stare *Kitajci in Japonci (The Chinese and the Japanese)* – definitely reached a wider circle of Slovenian readers.²⁶ It was published as a part of the regular annual collection of the *Družba sv. Mohorja* publishing house in 1893, which meant that all members of this book club – the first club of this sort in Slovenia – received it. In the beginning of the last decade of the 19th century, the *Družba sv. Mohorja*'s book club had more than 50,000 members, and the book was thus sent to more than 50,000 Slovenian readers. Despite its title which referred to both the Chinese and the Japanese, the book adhered to the traditional model of presenting the Asian reality to the average Slovenian: greater emphasis was placed on the continental part of Asia, while only a minor part of the work focused on the continent's islands, in our case on the Land of the Rising Sun. The 143-page book stopped describing the life of the Chinese on page 131. This was followed by a chapter on the Koreans and the Japanese. After a few pages about Korea, the author dedicated (merely) the last eight pages of the book to the Japanese.

Josip Stare's book did not contain any references, and therefore it is not known which accounts or travelogues he based his work on. With regard to the Japanese, he stated that they had various origins, but that they had been brought together into a single Japanese nationality by their shared cultural customs.

24 *Ibid.*, pp. 155–156.

25 *Ibid.*, pp. 170–171.

26 Stare, *Kitajci in Japonci*. Celovec: Družba sv. Mohorja, 1893.

In the introduction, Stare provided some basic historical information about Japan from the first millennium onwards and described its religious makeup. Initially Japanese cultural development had taken place in close contact with the Chinese, but in the middle of the second millennium, the Japanese had isolated themselves from the world, and since then their ships had only sailed between their central islands. Stare began his description of Japanese life and customs by stating that “culture has brought the Japanese and the Chinese close together, though the Japanese still separate themselves from their teachers in many aspects”. He first mentioned the Japanese tidiness and cleanliness: “The Japanese are cleaner, more sober and friendly, and they will eagerly and quickly adopt foreign customs and habits; they also possess a better understanding of the arts and literature.”²⁷ Stare described the Japanese as lighter-skinned than the Chinese, with slight, yet strong figures. The rich and the poor supposedly wore the same kind of clothes: “It is only the fabric that separates a wealthy man from a pauper, as the clothes of the former are made of silk, while the latter use cotton or simply hemp”. People protected themselves from the sun and the rain with wicker hats, “which look like a wide overturned bowl”.²⁸ Stare also mentioned that Japanese women wore makeup and braided their hair, while the men “used to tie their hair in knots, but lately they have started to cut and arrange their hair like Europeans.”²⁹

According to Stare, unlike the Japanese men, their women were more traditional: “They are by no means looking forward to the profound changes taking place in Japan today.” Supposedly the greatest wish of Japanese women was to fulfil the wishes of their husbands to the greatest possible extent: “Japanese women do not even dream of any independence or women’s rights, and they like to subordinate themselves to their husbands.”³⁰ They adapted their life goals to their husbands’ wishes, stated Stare, and even more so to the needs of their children whom they brought up carefully and independently, as: “During the first years, Japanese children are fed and taken care of by none other than their mothers. The mothers will never let other women take care of their babies, but will breastfeed them themselves until the third, often even the fifth year of their lives”.³¹

Stare had many bad things to say about the faithfulness of the married Japanese men, who would supposedly often neglect their wives, chase them away, and replace them with other women; and just like the Chinese they supposedly

27 Ibid., p. 137.

28 Ibid., p. 138.

29 Ibid., p. 138.

30 Ibid., p. 138.

31 Ibid., p. 139.

often “take other women in addition to their true wives, and then their household is no longer a happy one, as one woman will plot against the other and each of them will want to be the most important”.³² In the author’s opinion, this was purportedly also because for the Japanese, as well as for the Chinese, marriage was not a matter of the state or the church, but rather only a family ceremony: “Marriages, solemnized in such a manner, can easily be dissolved in the event that the husband gets tired of the wife.”³³ Thus, mothers paid special attention to the upbringing of their daughters, in order to teach them to fulfil their husbands’ needs and wishes in their entirety.

In his descriptions of the interiors of the Japanese houses, “which do not contain much furniture in comparison with ours”, Stare often compared the Japanese practices with the Chinese. The same rooms were used for eating as well as for sleeping, and the wife had to take care of everything and especially pay attention to her husband: “The Japanese custom where the man of the house eats alone and the wife attends to him is peculiar – only when the husband is full and goes to rest, does the wife sit behind the table. However, she can only take pleasure in food and drink in the knowledge that she has served her husband well and that he has been pleased with her in every way.”³⁴ The Japanese diet was mostly vegetarian, and therefore the Japanese “agriculture is especially remarkable”.³⁵

Stare described another bad habit, an old tradition that had remained despite Japan’s opening itself to Western cultural influences: “pricking with needles or ‘tattooing’”. According to him, “Like savages, the Japanese also use needles to draw on their skin all over their bodies, ‘adorning’ them with stars, flowers, or even images of dragons.”³⁶ The author added that this custom had by no means been eradicated, despite the more recent prohibition by the government.

Due to frequent earthquakes, the Japanese lived in small wooden houses, which were therefore all the more vulnerable to another danger: fire. However, firefighting had a long tradition in Japan. The houses were illuminated by candles and warmed with embers in containers. Therefore Stare expressed some doubt about what was normally one of the most highly praised Japanese characteristics: “Despite the famous Japanese cleanliness, their houses are sometimes not entirely clean, for some smoke does spread from the foul-smelling candles as well as from their fireplaces, because they do not have any chimneys.”³⁷

32 Ibid., p. 139.

33 Ibid., p. 139.

34 Ibid., p. 140.

35 Ibid., p. 142.

36 Ibid., p. 140.

37 Ibid., p. 141.

Josip Stare concluded his description of life in Japan with an outline of the recent political, economic, and technological changes. Several times he described the Japanese as skilled craftsmen, who had initially looked to the Chinese but soon outmatched them, while lately they had been mimicking the European models. “Especially in the last years, profound changes have taken place in Japan: overnight they wish to rearrange everything in accordance with the European example.”³⁸ That is why the Emperor introduced numerous reforms, started sending the Japanese youth to the European universities, modernized the Japanese education system, “introduced our Christian calendar, and even convened a National Assembly in accordance with the European example”. By encouraging railway and ship transportation, the Japanese had strengthened their international trade. The readers of Stare’s book could feel this as well, because “today one can find a variety of European products in the Japanese stores, similarly as our stores may offer Japanese products”.³⁹

In light of all of the above, if we ask ourselves what the average Slovenian would have known about Japan and its inhabitants at the end of the 19th century, the answer is clear: very little. In schools, students only learned a few basic geographical facts, though they were most likely unable to visualize them very well. Other descriptions – the aforementioned texts as well as the miniscule details published in the press – were dominated by images that were most likely not very different from the views that the majority of other Europeans held of Japan. The only exceptions were those who were superiorly educated, as well as the people who started coming into closer contact with the Japanese trade. However, for the majority of Slovenes, Japan was a greater mystery than even India or China, to take an example, had been. This was also obvious from the above mentioned descriptions, in which certain characteristics of Japanese everyday life were equaled to the Chinese or described as somewhat different from the Chinese – because it was self-evident for the authors of these sorts of descriptions that their readers were more familiar with the Chinese reality and that these sorts of comparisons were a good way to present Japan as well.

The Slovenian press ascribed some very commendable characteristics to the Japanese, especially cleanliness and tidiness. In their concern about the cleanliness and tidiness of their living environment, the Japanese were supposedly very different from the Chinese, whose cultural customs the Japanese had otherwise assumed, as the authors would often emphasize. Unlike the Chinese, the Japanese were more open to novelties, and in the recent decades, this had been apparent in their swift opening and adaptation to European and American influences and

38 Ibid., p. 142.

39 Ibid., p. 143.

lifestyle. Naturally, this openness for “our” civilization was regarded as positive by the Slovenian press.

In contrast, the press underlined the negative fact that in the past, the Japanese had persecuted Christians and the Christian religion. The beliefs and religious customs of the Japanese were a great mystery, though this was relatively unimportant in comparison with the fact that centuries ago they had suppressed the achievements of those who had spread Christianity in Japan. Due to this unfamiliarity with their religious traditions, some of the Japanese traditions were described as unusual, exotic, and unacceptable to the Western world. Meanwhile, certain character traits – which were not even necessarily described realistically – acquired an exceedingly negative reputation. Of these we should certainly mention references to the infidelity of Japanese men, the (allegedly frequent) poor treatment of their wives, and the unequal position of women in the family. Naturally, the outlook on Japanese family relations was based on the idealization of family relations in the Christian world.

Until the end of the 19th century, Japan had been an unknown distant land for the majority of the population that lived in the territory of today’s Slovenia. This was also confirmed by the fact that the Slovenian language at the time did not yet contain any generally-established names for Japanese cities or leaders. Besides “*Japonska*”, the Slovenian name for Japan that only became established later, we can also come across names like “*Japan*” or “*Japonija*”. In the Slovenian language at that time, the Japanese people were not necessarily “*Japonci*”, but also “*Japanezi*”. The names of Japanese cities were even more problematic and only started to acquire their final form when reports and references to Japan in the European and thus also Slovenian press were no longer rare exceptions, but became almost everyday occurrences. This happened with the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904.

ON THE “YELLOW PERIL” IN THE TIME OF THE RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR

Just like elsewhere in the world, in Slovenia, the Russo-Japanese War increased the interest of the local population in the previously little-known country of Japan and its people. After the outbreak of the war, the Slovenian press started publishing extensive military reports. It was obvious which side in the war Slovenians would sympathize with. Russia was like a big brother to Slovenia; a land which Slovenians had learned much about from the local books and newspapers. At the beginning of the war, many renowned Slovenians voiced their

support of Russia loudly and sent their regards and expressed their wishes for a swift Russian victory. Russia's cultural achievements had already been known among the Slovenian intellectuals, and at the beginning of the 20th century, neo-Slavic ideas had grown stronger among Slovenians as well.

Russia's opponent in the war that captured the attention of the whole world was practically unknown to the small Slovenian nation that was striving for its own cultural emancipation in a multinational European state. Therefore the war that Japan participated in also represented an opportunity for the Slovene journalists to write about this land, its inhabitants, and their customs more frequently. At first, the journalists would mostly refer to the negative evaluations of the Japanese, which resulted in insulting and racist descriptions of the Japanese people and their character. The Slovenian press saw Japan's progress as "the yellow peril", and when the conflict between Russia and Japan started escalating, the *Slovenec* newspaper wrote several weeks before the beginning of the war, that "In the east, Russia is performing an incredibly important cultural role in the name of Europe as it strives to rein in the yellow peril and Buddhism."⁴⁰

On 8 February 1904, the *Slovenski narod* newspaper bragged "that our newspaper was the first one to publish that the war could break out 'today or tomorrow'. No other newspapers – neither Austrian, German, nor British – reported this, which should convince the Slovenian public of the excellence of our connections." Apart from aggrandizing Russia, the *Slovenski narod* wrote that Japan had gone to war "without any hope of victory". Referring to a statement made by an (unnamed) Slavic diplomat who had lived in Japan for a long time, it claimed that a part of the Japanese leadership was supposedly aware of this, but that Japan had succumbed to the wish to go to war with Russia because "the Japanese are born optimists. Every Japanese who buys a lottery ticket is immediately, from the outset, convinced that they will hit the jackpot. Thus the Japanese also believe that Japan will win, no matter whom they fight, especially since they won against the Chinese in the last war."⁴¹ The reference to the swift development of Japan in the recent decades was followed by a very disdainful article on the influence of this development on the character of the Japanese people: "Outwardly, the Japanese might appear civilized, but on the inside they are the same Asiatic barbarians as before. Under the influence of European civilization, the Japanese people, who had earlier been honest and open like all barbarians, have become lying, scheming, dishonest and stubborn chauvinists, who see themselves as the most important nation in the world. Consequently, hatred of foreigners in Japan has been increasing on a daily basis, and now the animosity has already attained

40 *Slovenec*, XXXII, No. 4, 7. 1. 1904, p. 1, Rumena nevarnost.

41 *Slovenski narod*, XXXVII, No. 30, 8. 2. 1904, p. 1, Vojna na daljnem vzhodu.

dimensions that cannot even be compared with China.” After acknowledging that in comparison with the other Asian countries, the Japanese Army was exemplary, the journalist added that it could nevertheless not compete against any of the European superpowers. “Japan will undoubtedly be defeated,” the journalist stated, and added that at which point the Japanese would retaliate and take it out on the foreigners “that currently live in Japan. In this event, atrocities against foreigners will be committed, the likes of which history has perhaps never seen.”⁴²

In the following days, the Slovenian newspapers were full of derogatory and insulting descriptions of other races, nations, and religions. The liberally-oriented *Slovenski narod* newspaper expressed its fondness of Russia by humiliating the Japanese and those who supported them, especially the British and the Americans. Even though it mentioned the Japanese openness to the influences of European civilization, the newspaper also emphasized that the Japanese had adopted these influences in their own “Asiatic” manner, and that they were merely copying and repeating – without creating anything new on their own. “The Japanese are a very practical people, lacking any imagination, and therefore they make especially good merchants. They particularly excel in their special talent of at least outwardly adapting to foreign, European culture.” The Japanese were said to be hardworking and very tidy, which “distinguishes them from all other Asiatic nations”. However, in terms of character, the Japanese were supposedly “incredibly untrustworthy lying and vengeful people, and very immoral as well” – allegedly they “excelled” in all the negative character traits. The description of Japan’s significant progress in the last decades – for example regarding education, organization, and the democratization of their political system – was immediately followed by doubt: “Japan now has its own constitution and National Assembly in accordance with the European example, but it is questionable whether the Japanese people, who are currently still essentially barbaric and rude are mature enough and ready for such modern institutions.”⁴³

Responsibility for the outbreak of the war and breach of international law was ascribed to one side only, which was, without any shadow of a doubt, Japan. Slovenian journalists shuddered at the thought that “the dwarfish Japanese, who have joined the circle of the civilized nations only a generation ago”, were able to secure the support of certain European nations, especially the British and partly also the Germans. Without any hesitation, they claimed that the Russian victory, which initially nobody doubted even for a second, would also be important for Slovenians: “We have to openly admit that a Russian defeat would not be as fatal

42 Ibid., p. 2.

43 *Slovenski narod*, XXXVII, No. 31, 9. 2. 1904, p. 1, *Vojna na Daljnem vztoku*.

for Russia alone, as much as for the other Slavs as well. We should not assume that we, the rest of the Slavs, do not need Russia, and that we can rely on our own strength. That would be a grave mistake. A strong, respectable Russia represents a considerable moral support for all Slavs, and the Slavs will only be taken seriously for as long as Russia remains mighty and influential. It is certain that in the event that Russia's reputation should suffer were it to be defeated in this fight, the Austrian Slavs would be pushed against the wall even harder than before.⁴⁴

Thus the initial news of the Japanese military successes was received with skepticism and as false news from the countries that supported Japan in the war. The news that Russian soldiers in Manchuria and Vladivostok had allegedly robbed Japanese houses and massacred the Japanese people was rejected even more resolutely: "These are nothing but malicious lies, and nobody will believe the Japanese, except perhaps for a few fanatical Englishmen or Austrian Germans! The Japanese with their thirty-year-old culture could be capable of such actions, but never the civilized Russians!" an upset journalist of the *Slovenski narod* newspaper wrote.⁴⁵

The Catholic newspaper *Slovenec* also involved another people whom it saw as eternally hostile to the Christian Slavs: the Jews. "What will happen? All the newspapers keep writing about this. Naturally, the main Jewish newspapers keep supporting Japan, as the Slavic culture is by no means close to the Jews. This is how the Jews show their anger towards Russia, because Russia keeps treading on their toes in a way that they deserve." Thus the Slovenian newspapers ascribed the first reports of Japanese military achievements exclusively to Jewish and British propaganda, while advising their readership: "Once again we recommend that our readers do not get upset by what London reports. Even if the Japanese see any further victories at sea, the final victory will undoubtedly be Russian."⁴⁶

For several months after the beginning of the war, the Slovenian newspapers kept referring to the reports of the Japanese victories as a part of the anti-Russian propaganda. Only when the Russian press started reporting on their own military losses and defeats did the skeptical Slovenians begin to suspect that the great Slavic Russia might not win the war so easily after all. However, they remained optimistic in their reports that the Russians still had considerable reserves that could be deployed at the front, and that on the other hand, Japan had exhausted all of its military resources due to the several months of fighting and would soon go bankrupt. Subsequently, Russian reinforcements would supposedly soon put

44 *Slovenski narod*, XXXVII, No. 34, 12. 2. 1904, p. 1, *Vojna na Daljnem vztoku*.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

46 *Slovenec*, XXXII, No. 34, 12. 2. 1904, p. 1, *Vojska*.

a stop to the opponent's advance, which would not only mean that Japan would be stopped in this concrete war; supposedly this would also be an achievement of the white civilization, as a journalist of the *Slovenec* newspaper hinted in October 1904: "The yellow peril does not only threaten Russia, but also – even more so – the rest of Europe. Already in this regard we should hope that the Russians manage to subdue the yellow troops that are marching towards the West. The sooner the Japanese are defeated, the better for them, as well as for Europe."⁴⁷

The Russo-Japanese War was certainly the first conflict to be covered by the Slovenian press with so much photographic material. While the newspapers covered the war extensively, the *Dom in svet* magazine published an extensive collection of photos from the Russo-Japanese War in 1904 and 1905. The editor of the magazine was the Catholic priest Evgen Lampe, himself a passionate photographer. During his editorship, the magazine paid considerable attention to this new technological development. Lampe invested much effort in collecting newspaper reports and photos, and in 1906 he published a book *Vojska na Daljnem Vzhodu* (*War in the Far East*), which he edited and largely wrote himself. The 380-page book mostly focused on military and political issues and was written in a tone that favored the Slavic land of Russia. This was already obvious from the simple fact that the cover showed the supreme commander of the Russian Army in East Asia, while the book concluded with the wish that the internal political conflicts in Russia would be resolved as soon as possible: "The external war was followed by an internal conflict. We hope that the Russian internal struggles end more fortunately than its war in the Far East has progressed."⁴⁸

Despite the clear support shown to Russia by the majority of Slovenians, the contents of the book were not insulting towards the Japanese – like the Slovenian newspapers had been at the beginning of the war. The fact that the majority of the reports described matters from the Russian viewpoint can also be ascribed to the fact that the editor had access to the Russian press as well as to the newspapers favorably disposed towards the Russians, and that the Japanese or American and British press which favored Japan was relatively unknown in Slovenia.

Initially, the author or editor tried to remain neutral. He wrote that both of the opponents fought for the same goals: "This war is of global importance, as two significant parts of the human race are fighting: the white and the yellow tribe.– The Russians and the Japanese are fighting, first and foremost, each for their own superiority in East Asia."⁴⁹ The rise of the United States and the Japanese victory in the war would, according to the author's opinion, threaten

47 *Slovenec*, XXXII, No, 224, 1. 10. 1904, p. 3, Rusko-japonska vojska.

48 Lampe, Evgen (ed.). *Vojska na Daljnem Vzhodu*. Ljubljana: Založba "Dom in Sveta", 1906, p. 380.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 1.

the several millennia of Europe's leading position in the world. "This fight is especially interesting for us Slovenians,"⁵⁰ the author believed, as Japan had supposedly gone to war precisely at the time when Russia and Austria had started negotiating the resolution of the situation in the Balkans. The author hinted that the war had interrupted the attempts to defuse the Balkan powder keg, a question which could be solved in accordance with the wishes of both Austria and the great Slavic Russia.

The description of the beginning and development of the war assigned the whole blame to Japan. The Japanese cunningness, lack of any principles, and breach of the written and unwritten political rules were mentioned several times. The selfish Japanese interests in the wars in the Far East were mentioned often, as the Japanese supposedly only wanted to increase their territory and exploit the local resources. There were no such hints when it came to Russia or the other European colonialists – as if they had arrived in the Far East with nothing but good intentions for the local populations. Whatever could be seen as positive for Japan was written in a more reserved manner.

The Europeans were allegedly also surprised by the Japanese belligerence, supposedly resulting from their upbringing in accordance with the notion that it was worth dying for one's homeland in a fight with the enemy. As a Catholic priest, Evgen Lampe wrote: "The deeper reason for such contempt for life can be found in the pagan religious principles of the Japanese."⁵¹ The political modernization of Japan was evaluated as somewhat more positive. Unlike Russia, which was "still under absolutist rule where the Tsar has all the power in his hands, Japan has, on the other hand, adapted to modern development also in this sense, and it has a National Assembly in accordance with the model of the other European countries".⁵² Lampe may have remarked bitterly that many a European ruler could only wish for a National Assembly that would simply confirm the ruler's proposals obediently, but he added that "not even in Japan does everything go smoothly. Consider a state which has developed so swiftly – we could almost say overnight – from an Asian country into a 'civilized' empire!"⁵³

On several occasions, the author would return to the issue of Japanese belligerence, fanaticism, and supposedly a different attitude to life than that of the Europeans. Lampe also underlined this unusual attitude to life and death in his descriptions of *hara-kiri*. Allegedly, the Japanese had such traditions due to their "confused religious principles",⁵⁴ – the latter of which Lampe ascribed to

50 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 93.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 110.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 111.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 170.

Buddhists and Shintoists. In this regard, he also mentioned blood feuds, which was another example of double standards. As it was, vendetta was a very familiar phenomenon in the Balkans, which Slovenians sympathized with as they wished to ensure, with the Russians' assistance, a closer cooperation between the Southern Slavs. From this angle, the description of how the Japanese saw their opponents was very interesting as well. The hatred towards the Russians was purportedly contributed to by their upbringing and the media that incited hatred, "and the peasants pay the price just to be free of these terrible Russians that they themselves have never even seen or come into any contact with, except on the battlefield".⁵⁵ Attentive readers might have doubted whether the journalists of the *Slovenec*, *Slovenski narod*, *Dom in svet* and other Slovenian newspapers and magazines which shaped the Slovenians' opinion of the Japanese, had ever had any contacts at all with the Japanese themselves.

Towards the end of the book, in the chapter on the peace negotiations after the war, Lampe wrote that both sides were dissatisfied with the results. The author even somewhat exaggerated his descriptions of the Japanese disappointment with the peace treaty. However, not even an author as favorably inclined towards the Russians as Lampe could overlook the changes brought about by the war. He simply wrote the following: "Politically, Japan is no longer merely an island nation, but a considerable force with generally recognized property on the continent. Its influence on China, which has already been extremely profound, will only keep increasing with every passing year."⁵⁶

THE CHANGING ATTITUDE TOWARDS JAPAN AFTER THE WAR

People became aware of this fact all over the world, even in Austria and in the Austrian provinces inhabited by Slovenians. It was also reflected in the school textbooks where Japan had previously barely been mentioned. The new textbook from 1912 – *Zgodovina novega veka od westfalskega miru do današnjih dni za višje razrede srednjih šol*⁵⁷ (*History of the Modern Times from the Peace of Westphalia Until Today for the Higher Grades of Secondary Schools*) – was very different. The textbook was written by the secondary-school teachers Franc Komatar and Matija Pirc. It adhered to the traditional Eurocentric model, and the chapter *Postanek sistema svetovnih držav* (*The Origins of the System of the*

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 230.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 308.

⁵⁷ Komatar, Franc in Pirc, Mat. *Zgodovina novega veka od westfalskega miru do današnjih dni za višje razrede srednjih šol*. Ljubljana: Društvo slovenskih profesorjev, 1912.

World States)⁵⁸ did not yet mention Japan among the superpowers that had divided the world up amongst themselves in the struggle for colonies. However, new information was added in the conclusion of the textbook, where the rise of Japan in the East Asian space was described on several pages.⁵⁹

After the war, Japan became a country that could not simply be overlooked, not even in Slovenia. In July 1912 – in the same year when the first textbook that paid somewhat more attention to Japan was published in Slovenia – the Japanese Emperor Meiji or Mutsuhito died. He was the first Japanese Emperor that the Slovenian newspapers had ever written about. They also mentioned the modernization of Japan and the expansion of this state's territory during Emperor Meiji's rule. For example, the *Štajerc* newspaper wrote the following: "The late emperor was a very forward-thinking man. Under his rule, Japan underwent an enormous cultural, economic, and political transformation, while earlier it had resembled China in all aspects. Japan is now a modern country, comparable to the European superpowers, and global politics certainly have to take it into account."⁶⁰

Unlike at the end of the 19th century, after the Russo-Japanese War in 1904 and 1905, Japan was mentioned regularly in the reports of the Slovenian daily political newspapers, even more so in the years after World War I. As a member of the camp victorious in World War I, Japan's influence on the political map of the world increased. This was followed by reports of its political contacts and the signing of international treaties and agreements with the global superpowers. The leading global news agencies wrote about these issues regularly, and their reports were also published by the Slovenian press. How Japan was seen by the Slovenian media can be illustrated with a report published in the *Slovenski dom* newspaper in May 1920. The basic information about the negotiations between the British and the Japanese governments on the extension of the cooperation agreement between Great Britain and Japan, which was to expire shortly, was followed by a short evaluation: "The Anglo-Japanese Alliance in fact helped Japan ensure its hegemony in Asia. Its alliance with England allowed Japan to defeat two of the largest global superpowers (China and Russia), annex Korea, and receive Kiautschou Bay and Shandong from Germany. Now the Japanese control the main Chinese and Siberian ports, as they had also conquered Vladivostok, Sakhalin, and the Amur province."⁶¹

Newspapers mostly published short and exceedingly political news items about Japan, but scarcely anything about the Japanese people or their culture.

58 Ibid., pp. 243–261.

59 Ibid., pp. 274–277.

60 *Štajerc*, 13, 1912, No. 31, p. 3, Japonski cesar umrl.

61 *Slovenski narod*, LIII, No. 116, 23. 5. 1920, p. 5, Angleško-japonska zveza.

At least some journalists were obviously aware of this, as they started adding explanations that Japan was no longer what it used to be, that it was not simply a new superpower, but also a modern state, undergoing a swift modernization. In March 1923, the *Jutro* newspaper thus commented in the contribution meaningfully entitled *Moderna Japonska (Modern Japan)*, that “we Europeans still believe that Japan is exclusively what we see in the operas and operettas about Japanese life. Bamboo and paper! Grotesque little houses and grotesque people, as if at a masquerade.”⁶² As the article is not signed, it is not clear whether this was an original text or a summary or translation from another newspaper. In any case, the article also reflected the Slovenian viewpoint, as Slovenians could also get ideas about Japan from certain performances in the *Narodno gledališče* theatre. These, however, actually reflected the European outlook on the unknown lands, which did not have much to do with reality. Already in the 1920/21 season, the opera house staged a short opera *The Village School* by the Austrian composer Felix Weingartner, based on the old Japanese tragedy *Terakoya*, which was even repeated a few times in the following season. However, the Slovenian cultural audience also based its impressions of Japan on Giacomo Puccini’s *Madame Butterfly*, which was known at least for its music, as its individual parts were often included in the programs of various orchestras. A journalist of the *Jutro* newspaper also wrote that the country’s victorious wars and collaboration with Europe and America had already thoroughly erased the image of the old Japan and created a new one: “Japanese cities already contain a large number of ‘skyscrapers’ – tall buildings with a large number of floors. Technology in Japan is superb: express trains rush around the country, and battleships as well as the newest vessels are moored in their harbors. Modern lifts, modern warehouses, modern icehouses, typists, enormous factory smokestacks – all of this gives Japan a new Euro-American face.”⁶³

Besides the usual political news, the newspapers also described an occasional peculiarity from the life of the Japanese, for example their focus on personal hygiene, which was supposedly far superior to the European level.⁶⁴ During the Sino-Japanese War in the 1930s, Japan once again ended up on the front pages of the Slovenian press. The articles were mainly reports, based on the news from other European newspapers. Consequently, they sympathized with the European forces that opposed the Japanese aggression against China. The translations of news from foreign press agencies were, however, not followed by any original commentary or analyses of the events.

62 *Jutro*, IV, No. 53, 4. 3. 1923, p. 5, *Moderna Japonska*.

63 *Ibid.*

64 *Jutro*, IV, No. 266, 13. 11. 1923, p. 5, *Japonec in kopelj*.

All that the majority of Slovenes knew about Japan was still what they had learned about it in school, which was not very much. A few additional paragraphs on Japan only appeared at the very end of the textbooks for the final grade of secondary school. The textbook *Zgodovina novega veka* (*History of the Modern Times*), written by Franc Komatar and Karl Capuder and published in 1924, described Japan on a page and a half in one of the final chapters, entitled *Izvenevropske dežele* (*Non-European Lands*). Already the fact that Japan was the first to be addressed from among these countries, attests to its role in the world. It was mentioned before China and even before the United States – the authors only dedicated a few modest sentences even to the latter superpower, which had otherwise resorted to an isolationist policy. With regard to Japan, the authors included a few basic pieces of information about how Japan had resisted Western influences and Christianity since the beginning of the 17th century, finally opened its doors after 1860, and started adopting European cultural influences and modernizing itself rapidly since then. The authors also underlined the discrepancy between the country's swift economic development and social issues, as “the economic and social issues are increasingly unfavorable due to the rapid industrialization and backward social legislation (female and child labor).”⁶⁵

The textbook *Zgodovina najnovejše dobe* (*The Most Recent History*), written by the secondary-school teacher Janko Orožen from Celje and published in 1933, paid even less attention to the non-European countries. It barely even mentioned the United States of America, China was virtually non-existent, and Japan only appeared in the chapter *Rusija in Daljni Vzhod* (*Russia and the Far East*). Only a bit more than half a page was dedicated to the development of Japan with the main emphasis on its openness towards the Western world. The text on the Russo-Japanese War in 1904 and 1905 was somewhat longer, but it was not followed by any commentary on what the war had meant for the situation in the Far East and for the role of Japan in the modern world. Instead, the author only emphasized that the defeat in the war had resulted in the beginnings of constitutional life in Russia.⁶⁶

After World War I Japanese themes started appearing more often in various works of art. Already the aforementioned contribution stated that the European world – and Slovenian space with it – still perceived the Far East from its own European perspective. Films, dramas, and operas saw Japan through the eyes of the rather ignorant Europeans and applied European outlooks and criteria, yet it

65 Komatar, Franc in Capuder, Karl. *Zgodovina novega veka: za višje razrede srednjih šol*. Ljubljana: Jugoslovanska knjigarna, 1924, p. 333.

66 Orožen, Janko. *Zgodovina najnovejše dobe: za VIII. razred srednjih šol: (1815–1920)*. Ljubljana: Tiskana Merkur, 1933, pp. 157–160.

was impossible to directly familiarize oneself with the Japanese outlook on reality and Japan itself through the works that were available to the Slovenian public. Average Slovenians were thus unable to get to know Japanese film and theatre directly, but could only base their opinions on the deliberations of European authors, who imagined the topic in their own way – mainly on the basis of the works by Japanese authors available to them and not from any firsthand experience.

Just like opera enthusiasts elsewhere in the Western world, the audience at the *Narodno gledališče* theatre and opera in Ljubljana envisioned Japan mostly on the basis of how it was presented in Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, which was staged quite often. However, instead of asking themselves whether this work involved a more Japanese or a more European perception of reality, Slovenians were also known to argue about whether the performance was Slovenian enough. When a German opera singer appeared in the title role of *Madame Butterfly* or *Cho-Cho-San* and performed in the German language, the newspapers were filled with outrage, wondering why singing in the German language was allowed when it had supposedly been finally expelled from the Slovenian cultural institutions in 1918.⁶⁷ During the staging of this work in the 1935/36 season, the *Gledališki list* publication of the *Narodno gledališče* theatre explained to its readers that Puccini had used certain characteristics of Japanese music, but that he had only been able to familiarize himself with it through the records sent to him by a friend from Yokohama. With regard to the music and the opera as a whole, Puccini had preserved a significant part of the characteristics of his other operas, thus fusing together elements from two musical worlds. "At the same time, the Japanese *Butterfly* also adopts the spirit of the new Italian music," stated the translation of an older review from Vienna, included in the Ljubljana *Gledališki list* publication.⁶⁸

In the *Drama* theatre, Far Eastern motives arrived on stage with the works of the German dramatist Klabund (Alfred Henschke used the pseudonym Klabund after the publication of his first collection of poetry). In the 1933/34 season, his play *The Cherry Blossom Festival* was a true hit. Klabund based his adaptation on the aforementioned tragedy *The Village School*, as it had been written by Takeda Izumo. The tragedy about love and sacrifice received excellent responses from theatre critics, who could not praise the work highly enough. Many of them also urged those who had not seen the performance yet to take the time and acquire the tickets.⁶⁹ The audience reacted accordingly, and with sixteen

67 *Slovenski narod*, LXI, No. 16, 19. 1. 1928, p. 2, Fr. G.: Ljubljanska opera.

68 *Gledališki list Narodnega gledališča v Ljubljani – Opera*, 1935/36, No. 2, pp. 10–12, *Madame Butterfly*.

69 *Gledališki list Narodnega gledališča v Ljubljani – Drama*, 1934/35, No. 11, pp. 82–84, *Nekaj sestavkov iz slovenskih kritik o "prazniku cvetočih češenj"*.

repeats, Klabund's play was the second greatest hit of the 1933/34 season on the stage of the *Narodno gledališče* in Ljubljana – with only a single new Slovenian play garnering more repeats that season.⁷⁰ Klabund's play saw many repeats also in the following season, and in the 1939/40 season the theatre staged the work anew. However, Josip Vidmar wrote in the *Gledališki list* publication of the *Drama* theatre that this was nevertheless an adaptation in line with European criteria, as he made the assessment that Klabund had preserved “all the greatness of the ancient original, but added enough soft and gentle erotic lyricism that the careful viewer can distinguish it from the monumental greatness of the Japanese poet”⁷¹ in his play.

The interest in the Far East was also indicated by the decision of the theatre management that in the following season, 1940/41, another work by Klabund would be staged which was yet again based on a literary work from the world so distant from Europe: the play *The Chalk Circle*, based on the motifs of the Chinese dramatist Li Qianfu. Ciril Debevc, the director of these two performances, informed the Slovenian audience that neither of the plays, especially not the “Japanese” one, depicted the culture of these nations and that they were not actual representations of reality. He wrote the following about Klabund's plays: “From the literary point of view, Klabund's ‘The Chalk Circle’ in its European form is much closer to me – and perhaps also to the audience – than it is closer to the original and thus more consistent and complete in terms of style. We cannot claim this in the case of ‘The Cherry Blossom Festival’, for example (which was written by a Japanese author). To his adaptation of the ‘Festival’, Klabund has nevertheless added many European – I could almost say sentimental – elements, which have decisively altered the original's elevated, hard, and merciless face.”⁷²

To claim that the audience hoped to see exotic otherness in both of these performances would probably not be far from the truth. After all, Mila Šarič, who starred in the main role in both these plays by Klabund, understood the works in this manner as well. When a journalist who believed that after these sorts of experiences she might have felt “a special attitude towards the Chinese and Japanese cultures” posed her a question to this effect, Šarič answered honestly: “Frankly speaking, I don't have any special attitude to these cultures, at least not consciously. However, I am fascinated by the exotic nature of the Chinese and Japanese legends and motifs, especially when they are communicated in such a

70 *Gledališki list Narodnega gledališča v Ljubljani – Drama*, 1934/35, No. 3, pp. 19–23, Letno poročilo Narodnega gledališča v Ljubljani za sezono 1933–34.

71 Vidmar, J.[osip]. Klabund: Praznik cvetočih česenj. *Gledališki list Narodnega gledališča v Ljubljani – Drama*, 1939/40, No. 12, pp. 89–92, p. 90.

72 *Gledališki list Narodnega gledališča v Ljubljani – Drama*, 1940/41, No. 10, p. 86, Razgovor z režiserjem “Kroga s kredo”, C. Debevcem (pp. 85–88).

poetic and ethically superior form as the plays you have mentioned. Thus I have no choice but to love these works.”⁷³

THE FIRST SLOVENIAN DESCRIPTION OF JAPAN BASED ON PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

In Slovenia, the perception of Japanese culture still lacked the perspective of someone who had seen Japan with their own eyes, experienced it, and assessed it without resorting to the European prejudice and stereotypes. Alma Karlin was the first to present such a point of view to Slovenians. She was born in Celje in 1889 and lost her father early on. She had travelled around Europe with her mother already as a young child. Alma developed a passion for familiarizing herself with foreign environments while studying the languages, different philosophic viewpoints and customs of other nations. She was a keen reader on the subjects of history, geography, nature, and the customs in foreign environments. She also began to compose a dictionary of ten languages, one of them Slovenian. Although born to Slovenian parents, Alma mostly wrote in the German language, and therefore only a narrow intellectual circle was familiar with her work, even in Slovenia. As a fluent speaker of several languages, she would quickly find work as a teacher of foreign languages, translator, or journalist in any destination. In November 1920, when she was thirty-one, Alma decided to set out on a long journey around the world, starting in Trieste. The first visa she received was for Japan. However, she changed her decision that Japan would be the first leg of her journey due to transportation complications and thus headed out towards the west for an eight-year circumnavigation of the world. After visiting several coastal regions, her first lengthy stay was in Peru. Then she travelled around the Central American states for a while and finally reached Japan in June 1922, after visiting California and Hawaii.⁷⁴

She would describe her journey regularly in the *Cillier Zeitung* newspaper, published in the German language in her hometown of Celje. Because of these articles sent from all around the world, featuring the news of this unusual traveler who journeyed around the world and even met tribes that had rarely seen any white people, her writing soon spread among the Slovene audience interested in reading travelogues and descriptions of customs among other nations and tribes less familiar to the Europeans. With the money she earned, she would

73 Slavec, Maša (=Maša Sl-eva). Razgovor z igralko glavne ženske vloge Milo Šaričevo. *Gledališki list Narodnega gledališča v Ljubljani – Drama*, 1940/41, No. 10, pp. 84–85.

74 Šlibar, Vladimir. Alma M. Karlin – popotnica in zbirateljica. V: Počivavšek, Marija (ed.) *Almine meje in margine*. Celje: Muzej novejšje zgodovine, 2009, pp. 134–147.

purchase items, collect postcards, and keep sending them home, which is why her legacy also includes an extensive ethnological collection. After she had returned to Celje in the autumn of 1929, she worked on structuring her memoirs more methodically. Finally she published them in a book *Samotno potovanje v daljne dežele* (*A Solitary Journey to Faraway Lands*).⁷⁵

Alma Karlin's writings reflect an unusual spirit of accepting differences and peculiarities. Unlike numerous Europeans who saw the white race as the most developed of all the races and also evaluated the "primitivism" of other nations, peoples, and tribes from this viewpoint, she described the customs of others by comparing them with her own without any prejudice, superiority, or feelings of adherence to a "higher" race. Her comparisons may indeed describe her own view of the world and give an analysis of the behavior and customs of others through her own eyes. However, just like she would state that certain habits of others were not to her liking, she would, on other occasions, write without any (white) prejudice, that the European customs in other cases did not rise to the level of those that she was describing at a given moment.

Alma Karlin had very fond memories of Japan. She herself did not feel that her work was pioneering in any way, as she believed that numerous Europeans had already written about Japan or about other nations they had encountered during their own travels. However, she probably overlooked the fact that barely anyone had focused as seriously on studying the issue as she did. She lived in Japan for one year. As she had found a well-paid job, this was one of the most prosperous years during her eight-year journey, and thus she could familiarize herself with different parts of Japan.

Of the everyday Japanese habits, Alma emphasized cleanliness and safety. The muddy streets annoyed her, but she also wrote how "the Japanese who wear Western footwear or that thing, somewhat reminiscent of shoes",⁷⁶ made sure to keep their shoes clean. She also emphasized that unlike Europeans, who preferred sitting, the Japanese would crouch and kneel instead. The amount of powder and makeup that the Japanese women used was unusual for a European woman. As far as personal hygiene was concerned, the fact that the Japanese did not use handkerchiefs apparently bothered her the most, as even the Japanese children from high society whom she taught foreign languages were often snotty. She also described, without moralizing, the Japanese relaxed attitude towards nakedness, incompatible with the strict criteria of the European bourgeois society. "Despite everything, the Japanese are not immoral, not even by our standards. They see

75 Karlin, Alma. *Samotno potovanje v daljne dežele: tragedija ženske*. Celje: Celjska Mohorjeva družba, 2007.

76 Karlin, Alma. *Popotne skice*. Ljubljana: Kmečki glas, 1997, p. 74.

nakedness in a completely detached manner,” Alma underlined to the European readers, used to bourgeois moralism. Unusual scenes would only happen if the European and Japanese culture came into contact in this regard. Thus she described an example of two locals helping a Russian woman who had collapsed in the street by giving her a massage. “As fully-clothed people cannot be massaged very well, I will leave the rest to the readers’ imagination,” Alma concluded in her characteristically jocular tone.⁷⁷

With regard to interpersonal family relations, Alma described an exceedingly subordinate relationship of women towards their husbands, but this did not mean that the men did not respect their wives. She also spoke very highly of the children’s upbringing, although she found it unusual that mothers would carry even several-year-old children on their backs. However, bringing up children without spanking them – by merely providing suitable examples (with the exception of teaching them how to wipe their noses) – greatly benefitted the children: “Following the example set by their parents, the children become polite, serious, responsible, courageous, and used to restraint. As they are not such savages as our children, there is no need whatsoever for any spanking.” She added that the unusual Japanese footwear might have contributed to this, because “how are boys supposed to run around in such impossible sandals?”⁷⁸

Alma was unable to come to terms with the Japanese postal system, though. According to her, receiving and sending mail was far too complicated, and she often had problems with it. However, everything would always turn out well in the end. She was also bothered by the inconsistencies when arranging for meetings and appointments. Whenever she made an appointment at a specified time, the meeting would often be postponed, which could involve a few redundant chores and questions. After one such experience she simply concluded: “One should not be in any hurry in Japan!”⁷⁹

After she visited the red-light district of Yoshiwara, Alma wrote a more detailed description of the relationship between men and women. She warned the European readers that this article was not for children or “older ladies who might hold an antiquated view of modern life and think that whatever is not discussed or is merely whispered about in ladylike circles after the second cup of coffee simply does not exist.”⁸⁰ She began her account by explaining simply that two kinds of women existed in Japan: wives and geishas. She did not only feel sorry for the latter, but also for the former, as “the wife is merely a workhorse and breeding animal”. Women got married young, following an agreement between

77 Ibid., p. 76.

78 Ibid., p. 77.

79 Ibid., p. 79.

80 Ibid., p. 80.

the families, upon which the wife moved into her husband's house and had to obey him as well as his mother. "Her life is miserable until the son becomes the master of the house and she becomes the mother-in-law, able to torture others." A few Japanese women discussed their unhappy family life with Alma, and she wrote about it with more bluntness than her usual candor: "This is a type of thing that I reject completely."⁸¹

Because women could not educate themselves, the men would talk to geishas, who were educated. Alma warned the European readers about the differences between geishas and the joro, described the social circumstances that allowed for this phenomenon, and added that the Japanese attitude to these women was different, as "they are not seen as sinners".⁸² During her visit to Yoshiwara, which she saw in the company of a young artist, she did not come across any other women who might be sightseeing, but only encountered men, who, however, were not impolite. She was surprised at the peace and ordinariness, as "white people, who might go there in order to see something – I mean something scandalous – would be thoroughly disappointed."⁸³ She concluded the text by summarizing how different the attitude towards prostitution and the degradation of women for money was in the West: "I have to admit that I was unable to breathe freely during my hike around Yoshiwara, as I could not stop considering what a random European might stoop to in such circumstances."⁸⁴

Thus Alma Karlin was the first Slovenian woman to write at length about her stay in Japan. It is not known how many readers got to know her initial works as they were published, because her writing only became more popular in the decades after her death. Her approach was certainly different from the previous stereotypical remarks of the Europeans about the inhabitants of other continents, which mostly stemmed from the European white superiority complex. Her travelogues were printed at a very specific time, which most likely contributed to her works not attracting more attention as soon as they were published. As it was, in the 1930s the Western media would mostly write about the Japanese aggression against China, the cruelty of its army, and its disregard for the principles of international politics. Such an atmosphere was not particularly suitable for works that described Japanese customs without any pre-existing prejudice.

81 Ibid., p. 81.

82 Ibid., p. 82.

83 Ibid., p. 84.

84 Ibid., p. 85.

