

# Dancing with the Fan: The Role and Value of a Japanese Fan and Kimonos in the Transmission of Japanese Culture by Marija Tsuneko Skušek

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## Abstract

The article addresses several issues concerning a Japanese fan and the kimonos found in the collection of Ivan Skušek from Slovene Ethnographic Museum. They belonged to Ivan Skušek's Japanese wife Marija Tsuneko Skušek, and were after her death donated to the museum together with other objects from the Skušek collection. With analysing these items and researching the life of Marija Tsuneko Skušek the article discusses the roles these objects had in transmitting Japanese culture to Slovene audience with a focus on the Japanese dances as one way of transmission. During her life in Ljubljana, Marija Skušek in one way adopted to the Slovene society very quickly, but on the other hand she presented Japanese culture and her identity in several lectures along with Japanese songs, dances and a tea ceremony. With researching the roles and values of these object in the museum collection, the article also discusses the importance of understanding not only the physical appearance of the items and their life, but also the wider background of items and collection, focusing also on the owner of these items in the relation to the collector. It is also important to stress how these objects transformed from daily objects of use to rarefied art after they were handed over to the museum, and within this process their value also changed.

**Keywords:** fan *maiōgi*, kimono, dance, transmission of culture, everyday object, East Asian collection

## Izvleček

### Ples s pahljačo: vloga in pomen japonske pahljače in kimon v prenosu japonske kulture Marije Tsuneko Skušek

Članek obravnava več vprašanj, ki se nanašajo na japonsko pahljačo in kimone iz zbirke Ivana Skuška v Slovenskem etnografskem muzeju. Pripadali so ženi Ivana Skuška, Mariji Tsuneko Skušek, in so bili po njeni smrti predani muzeju skupaj s celotno zbirko Ivana Skuška. Članek z analizo teh predmetov in raziskovanjem življenja Marije Tsuneko Skušek razpravlja o vlogi, ki so jo imeli ti predmeti pri posredovanju japonske kulture slovenskemu občinstvu, s poudarkom na japonskih plesih kot enem od načinov prenosa. Marija Skušek

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je bila v Ljubljani zelo hitro sprejeta v slovensko družbo, hkrati je tudi pogosto predstavljala japonsko kulturo, in sicer z izvajanjem predavanj ter japonskih pesmi, plesov in čajnega obreda. Z raziskovanjem vlog in vrednosti teh predmetov v muzejski zbirki članek razpravlja tudi o pomenu razumevanja ne samo fizičnega videza predmetov in njihovega življenja, temveč tudi širšega ozadja predmetov in zbirke, pri čemer se osredotoča na lastnico teh predmetov v odnosu do ustvarjalca zbirke. Pomembno je poudariti, kako so se ti predmeti po predaji muzeju iz vsakdanjih uporabnih predmetov spremenili v redko umetnost, s čimer se je spremenila tudi njihova vrednost.

**Ključne besede:** pahljača *maiōgi*, kimono, ples, prenos kulture, vsakdanji predmeti, vzhodnoazijske zbirke

## Introduction

This article focuses on a Japanese fan and kimonos from the Skušek collection that were made especially for and used by Tsuneko Kondō Kawase 近藤常子 (1893–1963) or later Marija Skušek. Klara Hrvatin in this volume looks into the many lectures on Japanese culture that Marija Skušek delivered in Slovenia and the wider Yugoslavian area. During these lectures given in German and later also in Slovene she talked about Japanese customs, the everyday life of Japanese women, Japanese writing system, music, health, marriage, and life in Japan supported by photos and live dance and music. She was invited by many organizations and clubs around Yugoslavia as people were very interesting in Japanese culture (see more in Hrvatin 2021). She did not only talk about Japanese society and its culture, but performed different Japanese dances for which she would dress in a kimono. She also sung Japanese songs and performed a tea ceremony. Such presentations were very rare at that time and Marija Skušek, being the first Japanese person naturalized as a citizen of Slovenia, thus had an important role in cultural exchange between the two countries.

Within the research projects *East Asian Collections* we came across some specific items in the Ivan Skušek Collection in Slovene Ethnographic Museum. Among them there we found one interesting fan categorized as a *maiōgi* (舞扇) or “dance fan”, which is a rare with regard to other fan collections in Slovenia.<sup>1</sup> This in-

1 There is only one other *maiōgi* in Slovenia, it is in SEM, but it is not part of Skušek's collection, while in other two collections (Alma Karlin Collection and the Collection of Objects from Asia and South America from Regional Museum of Celje) that are being researched in this project, another dance fan was not discovered. However, there are no data about the other dance fan in the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, and we do not know how this fan ended up in museum and where it came from.

spired me to think about what kind of role foreign (East Asian) objects had in transmitting the culture to a local audience through different kinds of performance, including dances and songs. Furthermore, in the article I would also like to address the question of how the items being used in everyday life at a certain time later become museum objects, and thus a part of a collection.<sup>2</sup>

In order to offer some answers to these issues, I examine the inventory of books and photos. While focusing on one dancing fan and several kimonos listed as Marija Skušek's belongings, this article thus focuses on the roles of physical appearance and dancing in the transmitting of Japanese culture to local audiences in Slovenia, Mrs. Skušek's new country. I also look at the relationship between these objects and a collection itself, and the complex contexts of the cross-cultural connections of the owner. According to the inventory of the collection there are only few Japanese items, as Ivan Skušek lived and collected in Beijing, China. However, as he married a Japanese woman some personal objects like a fan and kimonos can be found in the collection. Thus, the research is done through analysis of these items and photos of Mrs. Skušek, and with reading the newspaper reports on her activities, and discussed through a theoretical framework on museum items and collections, and on transmitting culture through performance. Unfortunately, there is not much data about Marija Tsuneko Skušek's life prior moving from Japan to China sometime after 1905 and before marrying Ivan Skušek for the first time in 1920 in Beijing, even though there has been some research about her, so some of the arguments have to be researched further. While living in Slovene society she changed her name to Marija Skušek in 1927, when they married in Christian church, but she was also known by her nickname "Mrs. Japanese" or Marija Tsuneko Skušek (マリア常子スクシェキ) (Kotobanku 2021)

## The Japanese Fan and Kimonos in Skušek's Collection

Objects that belonged to Marija Skušek are part of vast collection of Ivan Skušek Jr. (1877–1947), one of the greatest collectors of East Asian objects (mostly Chinese) from the Slovene territory. His collection is extensive and can be compared to some Western European collections of East Asian objects, while it also signifies the local peculiarity and uniqueness pertaining to the European periphery (Grčar 2021). As discussed by Tina Berdajs in this volume (2021) a Japanese fan, few kimonos and *obi* are part of set of items used or made for the Skušek's Japanese wife, Tsuneko Kondō Kawase.

2 Today there are four other fans in the Skušek collection, but others are Chinese fans, which were purchased by Ivan Skušek himself.

Ivan Skušek Jr. was one of the few seamen and travellers<sup>3</sup> from the Austro-Hungarian Empire who stepped foot in East Asia in the early 20th century, as he set sail in the service of the Austro-Hungarian Navy as an officer and served on Austrian warships and merchant ships together with missionaries, diplomats, researchers and other experts (Čeplak Mencin 2012, 101). Ivan Skušek Jr. was an Austro-Hungarian Navy officer who found himself confined in Beijing during WWI and could afford the purchase and transportation of larger and much more valuable items (Vampelj Suhadolnik 2019, 117). In his almost six years (1914–1920) in Beijing, he regularly visited antiques markets, and enthusiastically and systematically assembled numerous of Chinese objects with the goal to establish a museum after returning home. This was not achieved due to a lack of money and his death, and his collection was later handed over to the Slovene Ethnographic Museum (SEM) by his wife Marija Skušek. While most of the objects in collection are Chinese, such as porcelain, silk garments, lanterns, furniture and other visually appealing items, as well as his much less known but extensive numismatic collection of Chinese coins (see Grčar 2021), there are few pieces which were identified as Japanese and some of them likely belonged to his Japanese wife, while for some other Japanese items the way of acquiring them is unclear.

In Beijing Ivan Skušek namely met a young Japanese woman who owned a flower shop, Tsuneko Kondō-Kawase. She had previously been married to a German chief customs official, Paul Heinrich Schmidt, and had two children with him, son Matthias (1912–1933) and daughter Erika (1914–1958). When the war started, Schmidt was summoned back to Europe, and left his family in Beijing without contacting them anymore.<sup>4</sup> Although he never made it back, he provided for his wife by buying her a flower shop, even though she had previously worked as a nurse (see Hrvatinić 2021). Skušek married Tsuneko Kondō-Kawase in Beijing in 1920 and then together with her children and his precious artefacts left for Europe in June of the same year. They finally arrived in Ljubljana on September 8, 1920. Mrs. Skušek stayed in Slovenia until her death in 1963, became Slovenian, survived her husband and children and never returned to Japan. The last time she was in Japan was visiting her mother in Gifu in 1919, together with Ivan and her children before going to Europe (Čeplak Mencin 2012, 110). In her later years she clearly expressed her wish to see Tokyo again, a wish that was never granted (Govc 1963).

3 In Slovene museums and other institutions there are at least 21 different collections or private legacies of East Asian objects (Vampelj Suhadolnik 2019, 97–100). These objects were mostly brought to the Slovene region at the end of 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries from East Asia by sailors, missionaries, diplomats, researchers and travellers.

4 However, his faith is unclear, as no data about him has been found yet.

According to the list of inventories of the Ivan Skušek Collection there are several other Japanese objects, like a set of 12 ceramic teacups and small plates, a partial set of miniature Japanese figurines made of ceramic and fabric *hina-ningyō* 雛人形, a folding screen (*byōbu* 屏風), four woodblock prints (*ukiyo-e* 浮世絵), and four pictures with silk embroidery. However, there are no entries in the list as to whether these objects were bought by Ivan Skušek or they were part of the belongings of Mrs. Skušek, as in the case of the focal fan and kimonos.

Although she had lived in Beijing for several years, Mrs. Skušek still had some Japanese items that later ended up as part of Skušek's collection, which was latter housed at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. These are mostly things she used herself, such as a Japanese fan, or they were made for her like few kimonos and *obi*. Beside some folding fan there are four regular kimonos, one winter kimono, one coat, one undergarment *kimono* (着物) and four *obi* (帯). However, there are no other kimono accessories that are needed to dress up in the outfit, which might have been lost or given away and thus never made it to the museum. According to some photos of Marija and Ivan Skušek (see figs. 3, 4), we can recognise more fans and kimonos that might have been in her possession, which also never made it to the museum. Those which managed to get to the museum are listed as personal objects made especially for Mrs. Skušek, and were probably not acknowledge as a part of Skušek's collection before being handed over to the museum. While "all collecting is done with a specific purpose in mind" as the items in a certain moment are appealing to the collector (Yasaitis 2006, 449), this purpose might be different in the case of the personal belongings of Mrs. Skušek than the other items in the collection. When investigating the individual objects in a certain collection, we cannot be too narrow in our work. As Thomsen (2015, 274) notes, it is good to understand "the individual motivations, the personal relationships, and the complex contexts of the cross-cultural connections" of the collector or the owner of these items, as in case of Mrs. Skušek. Thus it is important to emphasise the knowledge about the life of the item in the world of collection with regard to understanding the process of cultural transfer.

## The Transmission of Japanese Culture to a Slovene Audience

Maintaining one's own culture abroad is big issue in a new country and depends on several elements. According to Gsir and Mescoli (2015, 15) "each migrant abroad is potentially a cultural representative of the culture(s) of the country of origin through his/her daily behaviour and cultural consumptions". There are several actions implemented by migrants in order to show or promote their culture

abroad, and in the case of Marija Skušek we can definitely discuss the action of performing culture, because the diplomatic relations of Japan and Slovenia (at that time the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and later the SFR Yugoslavia<sup>5</sup>) were minimal and certainly we cannot talk about diaspora policies in that period (1920–1963).

As a culture is manifested through the behaviours of individuals, we can obtain some knowledge how she acted and behaved in transmitting her origin culture to the new society with an analysis of the life of Mrs. Skušek. In her performances she used some cultural products and commodities that were associated with Japan: clothes (kimonos) and objects used on an everyday basis (i.e. chopsticks, fans) and also objects used in artistic performances (such as dance, music, photos). All these elements contributed to defining her “specific image and to displaying it, an identity which is designed both for the self and for others” (Gsir and Mescoli 2015, 15). In this definition two things played the central role: the objects, which have their agency, as they are “things-in-motion illuminate that their human and social context” (Appadurai 1994, 77), and the body, that constitutes the “means through which these cultural products can be assimilated and become part of the self (which will be then shown to others)” (Gsir and Mescoli 2015, 15). These material and bodily practices have important roles in the concrete performance of culture, through the ways in which people put their culture into action, like Mrs. Skušek, who gave lectures on Japanese topics, dressed in a kimono and performed Japanese dances while her daughter Erika sang Japanese songs.

The newspapers recorded various activities of Mrs. Skušek, such as presentations and lectures on Japanese society and culture (see Hrvatin 2021). They give us insight into the content and manner adopted as she presented various aspects of Japanese culture. We learn that she had lectures about Japanese culture and she also danced some Japanese dances, as is suggested from the title of an article in the newspaper *Mariborski večernik Jutra* from 1935: “Japanese Evening at Ljudska univerza; The Curiosities of Japanese life—Japanese Dances and Music” (*Mariborski večernik Jutra* 1935). The article reports that “On Monday evening in Ljudska univerza here our Japanese Mrs. Marija Tsuneko Kondo-Skušek and her daughter Erika from Ljubljana have appeared on stage and gave us the presentations of the Japanese culture”. The so-called “*japonski večer*” (Japanese evening) was crowded with people listening about Japanese life and customs, way of life, the status and position of Japanese women in Japanese society, the form handwriting and “... then she performed three Japanese dances, in which she expressed all

5 The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes existed from 1918 until the 1929, when it was renamed to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. In 1945 Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia and in 1963 the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia were established. In 1991 Slovenia became independent country.

the gracefulness, serenity and fantasy from the land of smiles” (*Mariborski večernik Jutra* 1935). Later her daughter Erika also talked about Japanese music and musical instruments, and then performed three Japanese songs (*ibid.*).

Another article with the title “Japanese lecturer in Split” in the newspaper *Novo doba* from 1930 reported that there would be Japanese women in Split who will give a lecture about different aspects of Japanese life and will show some pictures and also perform some Japanese dances, as it is written “...but in the end she will show a few Japanese dances”. (*Novo doba* 1930, 6) There is another article reporting a similar performance “... Finally, she showed us some folk dances and sang along very well”, or “Mrs. Tsuneko has at the end, as much as she could do it without music, showed some characteristic Japanese dances” (*Novosti* 1930, 6). It is said that the lecture Marija Skušek gave at the People’s University of Maribor in 1930 was the most remarkable presentation of the season, where visitors were enchanted by Japanese singing and dancing (Hrvatini 2021).

In the time when Mrs. Skušek was living in Slovenia there were no other Japanese people living in the city. In one way she assimilated to the Slovene environment by changing her name, nationality, converting to Christianity and learning the language. As proposed by Gsir and Mescoli (2015, 12) maintaining cultural links with one’s origin country on a regular basis might be an obstacle for quicker integration into the host society, but that without any support from the origin country and no diaspora community in the receiving country integration can be easier, which is clearly the case with Marija Skušek. Besides, as mentioned above, after her arrival in Slovenia in 1920 she stayed here until her death. During her life in Slovenia, she was surrounded with Slovene people and culture, but she was also aware of her own Japanese culture as well and was happy to introduce and show it to anyone who was interested. There were always a lot of people coming to the Skušeks’ apartment where many of the objects they brought from China and Japan were displayed, and thus they were living with these objects everyday (see Motoh 2021). Being dressed in a kimono, showing people the objects, and using a fan were the ways of introducing the foreign Chinese and especially Japanese cultures to the new society.

## Fans and Kimonos in the World of Japanese Dance

There are at least four articles reporting that Mrs. Skušek performed “Japanese dances” in these lectures and there are many photos of her being dressed in a kimono, as already mentioned above. However, from the very general description of her performance it is impossible to confirm which dances she performed, but in Japan a dance fan can be used whether in *nihon buyō* 日本舞踊 (*nichibu* 日舞)

or folk festival dance (*minbu* 民舞). It is also not known where Marijia Skušek learned the dances while living in Japan (1893–1905?)—whether she learned in *nihon buyō* school, from professional dancers or from local folk dances (*minbu*) or festivals (*matsuri* 祭) (Nachi no ōgi matsuri n.d.) is unknown. What is certain is that she performed “japonski ples” or Japanese dances to Slovene audiences, who were exited and thrilled about her performances. With the finding of a dance fan or *maiōgi* (see figs. 1, 2) in the Skušek Collection, we can assume that she was using this fan in the dances.

In traditional theatre and dance the details of attire, makeup, props, stage sets, lighting, and movement are visual cues that characterize particular dances, and in Japan the kimono, wigs, makeup, fans and other physical attributes of a character are prescribed, along with specific actions such as body carriage, stage positions, gaze, and movement quality (Hahn 2007, 82–83). Even though these dance performances in Yugoslavian and Slovenian territory with a fan and kimono were “out-of-context”, which means there were performed out of their cultural environment, in our case Japan, they were important for transmitting the culture from one place to another. Within these performances “original” objects were playing important roles as they were representations of the Japanese people. Thus, these kinds of public presentations like lectures and dances are performances of Japanese identity (see Mayer Stinchecum 2008). “Theatre, music, dances and other visual arts can be used to perform, to represent identity and to showcase the past, the present and the future.” (Johnson and Jaffe 2008, 4) These objects were elements used for the transformation of Japanese culture and expressed and also negotiated a Japanese identity in the foreign country, and such performances as the product of cultural practices represent people and also ideas of nationhood (ibid., 6).

Japanese fans and their variety of uses are symbols of Japanese identity, but they also contain their own picturesque symbolism. A fan is not only an accessory to keep cool during the hot summer months, but is an integral part of many facets of civil and ceremonial life, and there are many variations of forms. As in the past, even today the fan may still be an essential prop in the theatre, used by the referee of a *sumō* wrestling match, for certain formal manners and forms of etiquette, as seen in military fans and Shinto and Buddhist ceremonies, and it can be part of various festivals. (Shintani et al. 2003, 1, 77; see also Armstrong 1974; Hutt and Alexander 1992, 23; Irōns 1981)

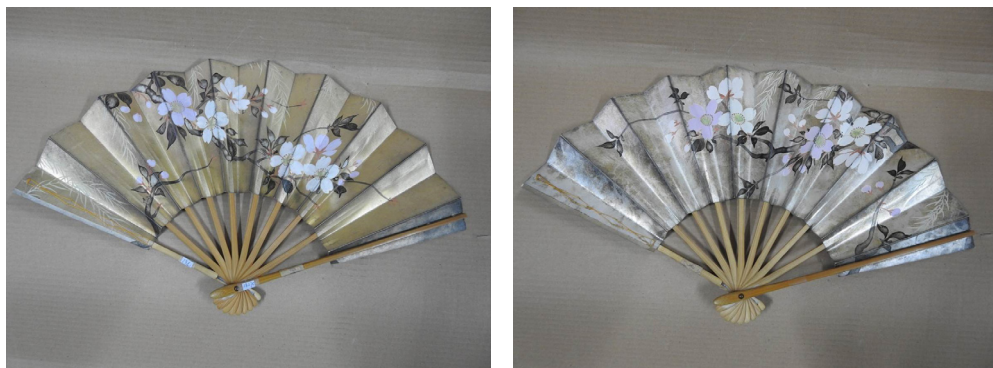
The specific fan that belonged to Mrs. Skušek (figs. 1, 2) is called a *maiōgi* 舞扇 (dancing fan), which is part of the wider category called *sensu* 扇子 or *ōgi* 扇 (folding fan) (Kawashima 2002; Nakamura 1983). *Maiōgi* first made its appearance in



the 17th century. The sticks are usually very thin and vary in number between six and eight, and invariably have a double guard to give the leaf strength and balance for the dance (Iröns 1981, 68). It is an essential prop in the theatre and the “fan dance” (Ortolani 1990; Mabuchi 2017, 34; Hutt and Alexander 1992, 23–24), and is constructed of paper, bamboo, and metal. It is a simple object—like two hands held together with fingers outspread, with blond bamboo *hone* 骨 (bones) radiating from an intersection to expand into nineteen folds of paper. The paper is glued to the bones and, on the outermost bones, secured with thread. A metal finding fastens the bones tightly at their point of crossing—the *kaname* 要 (pivot point)—and lead weights are discreetly tucked within the outer bones for balance. Often the paper folds display beautiful designs, ranging from abstract shapes to intricate depictions of scenes. Like the individual sections of a Japanese screen scroll, panels or sections of the fans’ artistic design can be appreciated as complete units when the fan is partly closed or, with the entire fan unfolded, can be viewed from the larger context of the nineteen-panel composition (Hahn 2007, 9).<sup>6</sup> The fan in the Skušek Collection has a thick silver (*gin-iro* 銀色) leaf on one side and gold (*kin-iro* 金色) leaf on the other side with a flower design in white creating a dramatic effect when catching the light. The guards are doubled, ending with tiny tassels in imitations of the *hiōgi* 檜扇 or court fan (ibid.).

The inspection of other fan collections available online in Europe or the USA shows there are only a few similar fans held in them. In the Fan Museum in the UK are three of the fans presented as *maiōgi* in their catalogue (Preston 2001). They are from Meiji period (1868–1912) and similarly described with regard to material and construction, but also their special use, as: “double paper leaf is painted on both sides with different design. At the river end of each guard a lead inset is visible, where the lead insert is to ensure the correct fall of the fan when flung away in a dance” (ibid., 15). There may have been another dance fan that belonged to Mrs. Skušek as it is seen other photos (see Motoh 2021), but this fan did not end up in the Skušek Collection. After renewed inspection of items from East Asia in the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, another fan similar to Mrs. Skušek’s was found in the same depository, although there is no information about that fan, whether it is from same collection or has been donated or sold to museum at a later time. In other collections of East Asian objects there are quite a few fans from East Asia, but none of them are *maiōgi* fans.

6 Similar to Mrs. Skušek’s fan are two presented in the book by Hutt and Alexander (1992, 49, 51) that come from the same period in similar colours—gold and silver with designs in white, or violet and green.



Figures 1 and 2. The *maiōgi* fan considered in this article. Double paper leaf painted with cherry tree and blossom. Lacquered wooden sticks and guards. 50.5 cm across when open, and 29.7 cm long when closed. (Source: Skušek Collection, Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Ljubljana)

*Maiōgi* as a stage prop as well as the dance itself imitate life and nature. The related dance was originally devoted to the gods, with the dance movements people were thanking the gods for a good harvest, apologizing for bad actions, and asking them for future good harvests along with the health and happiness of their family. *Kagura* (神樂), or dances dedicated to the gods, were carried out in Shinto shrines, where the dancers called *miko* danced and transmitted requests, thanks and apologies to the gods. Later dances began to be used in relation to Buddhism, such as *nenbutsu odori* (念仏踊り), or *bon odori* (盆踊り). There are also many dances with “masks” (*kamen* 仮面) that represent a wide variety of spirits and demons. Together with *minyō odori* (民謡踊り folk songs dances) or *minbu* these were used in all parts of the life cycle and in rituals for gods, annual celebrations, war, peace, disasters, imitating real but also unreal life with their varied movements and poses (Hahn 2007, 10). On the stage the fan is an allusion to various objects (flowers, seeds, jars, paddle, sword, bow, musical instruments), but also different motifs from nature (wind, snow, waves, mountain top) including different phases of the moon, falling cherry blossoms, etc. (Sellers-Young 1993, 75). According to the characters represented in the story (men, women, young, old man), the fan gets different roles. On certain occasions a fan can be replaced by other elements, such as an umbrella, ball, branch of flowering cherries and peaches, scroll, and so on (Hahn 2007, 14–16), children also use a doll or parasol, a paper umbrella which can be spotted in a photo of Mr. and Mrs. Skušek with their friends (see Motoh 2021). Such a fan can on the stage be used to illustrate a whole variety of actions, from something as esoteric as viewing the moon to presenting the precise actions of playing a *shamisen*, drinking sake, and cutting flowers. Many young dancers and

all adult students of dance own at least one fan with which they can practice. The Skušek fan resembles an actual fan used in performance in size and weight, but it does not have the elaborate painted images of a fan designed specifically to be used with a particular dance piece (Sellers-Young 1993, 38, 39). The set of movements (*kata* 型) also refer to fan positions such as *nigiri* (moving the fan in front of the body), *kaname* (holding the fan at the centre) and *hiraki* (opening the fan) (ibid., 46). Dancers spend countless hours moving with fans, which are extensions their dancers' bodies and essential to this expressive art. Such fans, or *sensu*, spring to life in dancers' hands. Through daily practice they learn to manipulate them to tell stories. The Japanese dance repertory is filled with dances in which the fan must, in the mind's eye, continuously transform into various objects or scenery throughout the performance—a sake cup, a pine tree, or a leaf in the wind. Fans also impart intangible aspects of dance, such as emotions or atmosphere. The prop can playfully obscure, highlight, and reveal images of the dance narrative and, literally, the dancer's body—covering a smile, partitioning off faces in conversation, or framing an exposed neck (Hahn 2007, 8, 14).

In similar way to a fan, a kimono presents in any performance the outward visual appearance of the individual, and served this role when Mrs. Skušek was giving a lecture about Japanese life and society or dancing a Japanese dance or performing a tea ceremony in front of Slovene or even wider Yugoslavian audiences (*Jutro* 1927). In a newspaper she was even called a “Japanese princess who became our (this is Yugoslavian) citizen”, being also presented as a “Japanese intellectual” or “Japanese feminist”, but on the other side she was also seen as “exotic interesting flower” (*Novo doba* 1930) or even “Mrs. Japanese” (Kotobanku n.d.). With her way of speaking Slovene, strongly accented, and dressing in silk kimonos, she represented an exotic culture from far away, not only with the objects from China and Japan that were displayed around her home (see more Motoh 2021), but also with her clothes and movement in her presentations.

Japanese traditional clothing is closely related to Japanese dance, with the colour and patterns often matching the theme expressed by the dance. From the photos and article reports in the newspapers it is clear that Marija Skušek wore a kimono on many occasions, especially when she was giving lectures or dancing, but on other occasions as well, like when she married in a Christian church and thus accepted all the related sacraments in 1927, and adopted her Slovene name, Marija Skušek (see fig. 3). Certainly, however, she wore other clothes on other occasions. Comparing the photos of her dressed in a kimono and the list of items along with photos in the Skušek Collection it is obvious she must have once had more pieces of kimono in her closet than there were left behind after her death (see figs. 3, 4), but in the museum there are now only four kimonos (figs. 5, 9, 10), one coat, one

undergarment kimono (*nagajuban*) (fig. 6) and four *obi* (two of them in figs. 7, 8). There are no signs of other kimono accessories, like padding in form of a towel, strip of plastic (*eri-shin*) for the collar of the *nagajuban*, ropes for the hip (*koshi-himo*), *date-jime*, *obi-ita*, *obi-makura*, *obi-gae*, *zōri*, or *kōrin* belt, which might have been lost or never given to the museum. Another question is if these kimonos and *obi* of Marija Tsuneko Skušek were designed in Japan, China or Slovene territory, and when they were produced as well. As such it is also unknown for which occasions the kimono were made.



Figure 3. Photo of Tsuneko Skušek and her husband Ivan Skušek after her receiving the Christian sacraments (baptism, communion, confirmation and church marriage) in Ljubljana in 1927. (Source: Photo Archive of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Ljubljana)

A kimono, which is literally wrapping the body, sometimes in several layers and belts (*obi*), provides a form of communication in Japanese society (Hendry 1993, 162), and when worn in other country communicates and transmits Japanese culture as well. The final result of wrapping the body in a kimono gives aesthetic pleasure, and especially a higher degree of politeness and formality, as a kimono does not allow informal movements. There are various simpler implementations of kimonos, and for summer festivals there are “cotton kimono” or *yukata*. The

form of kimono a woman wears indicates her age and status: “The woman’s kimono is one of the unique expressions of Japanese life. It can denote the age and marital status or the wearer, the season of the year, the beginning of a new life, and even death” (Shaver 1966, 113). Wearing a kimono also provides a visual reinforcement of the synthesis of culture, which is performed in dance and music (Coaldrake 2008, 78).



Figure 4. Marija Tsuneko Skušek, making a radio show on Japan at the beginning of the 1930s. (Source: Photo Archive of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Ljubljana)

Japanese kimono (literally “thing to wear”), refers to a straight-cut robe, which has a long ancestry that can be traced back to China and since the 8th century became widely worn by the Japanese court, and from the 10th century (Heian period 794–1192) on developed with different variations of size, material, decoration. The deemphasising of the shape of the wearer shifts the focal point of the garment from line to surface, making kimonos a perfect canvas for the decorative arts. A wide variety of decorative processes are used in the making of kimonos, from different weaves, to embroidery, to sophisticated dyeing techniques (Nomura and

Ema 2006). The kimonos made at the beginning of the 20th century are different in designs, materials and process of production than contemporary kimonos. There are also many different types of kimonos, differentiated by style or purpose, such as *kosode*, which is the most common form and also the generic term; *furisode* with long, swinging sleeves; *katabira*, an unlined summer kimono of hemp or ramie; *awase*, a lined kimono used in cooler weather; *uchikake*, an unbelted robe worn over a *kosode* (ibid.).

As mentioned earlier by Shaver (1966, 114), kimonos indicate the age and status of the wearer, as young women, whether unmarried or young wives, wear *furisode* (long sleeves), while married women and especially mothers wear kimonos with shortened sleeves. Similarly, the colours also indicate differences—the young wear bright colours, like red and various colours, and as women age the colours become gradually less and less vivid, finally reaching a state of grey, yellowish tan and then black in older age.



Figure 5. Kimono, dark blue silk with red patterned cloth sewed in on upper part and design of flowers on lower part. Length 155cm, wide 122 cm. No. 18462. (Source: Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Ljubljana)



Figure 6. Undergarment, red silk with white collar, with pattern of waves and flowers. Length 133.5 cm. No 18464. (Source: Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Ljubljana)

Analysing the collection of Mrs. Skušek we realised that three of the four kimonos are in dark colours (dark blue, blue or black) with some decorations (figs. 9, 10), short sleeves and are made of silk, which confirmed that these kimonos are for a mature woman. The blue one (fig. 5) has the upper part decorated with a sewed red and white pattern design, a rather odd decoration for a kimono. The lower part has a pattern of flowers and sticks on the front outside and inside. This kimono is listed in the inventory as an undergarment (*nagajuban*), but it as it does not have a white collar and it is longer than a usual undergarment. An undergarment is usually in white or light colours, but it could also be in other colours like red in this collection (see fig. 8), which might be considered today as vintage clothing. There were other kimonos that she wore according to some photos (figs. 3, 4), but there are not in museum collection.

Whether the kimono is for a theatre performance, special occasion or everyday use, an *obi* is vital. The four *obi* in the collection are of different patterns and colours, but similar length (from 375 cm to 409 cm) and width (from 31 to 33cm). Three *obi* are made of silk, one in dark blue (fig. 7) with embroidered

plum flowers, chrysanthemums, maple leaves and lines on one side and beige on the other side without any designs, while the second one is in brown silk (fig. 8) with embroidered fans and flowers and maple leaves, the third one in light green with painted waves and birds in blue on both sides, and the fourth *obi* is in brown and green brocade with gold threaded patterns of flowers on both sides. There are several types of *obi* as well, these are probably called *chūya obi* (昼夜帯, “day-and-night obi”) as they were made in the Meiji period and are not much made or worn today, with dark, sparingly decorated underside and a more colourful, decorated topside.



Figure 7. *Obi* in blue silk with embroidered patterns of flowers and waves in blue, white, red and orange colours. The other side is in beige colour without pattern. Length 374cm, wide 31cm. No 18466. (Source: Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Ljubljana)





Figure 8. *Obi* in brown silk with embroidered patterns of fans in gold, blue, white, green and brown colours. Length 396cm, width 33cm. No. 18468. (Source: Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Ljubljana)

As noted above, the kimonos and *obi* in this collection are now considered as vintage clothing, as they are not often made or worn today. However, these items were once worn for everyday occasions, even though the influence of Western clothing quickly spread in Meiji period. This was also a period of building a cultural identity in Japan, and kimonos played an important role as they were recognised in two key ways: as a cultural construction of what is Japanese and what is Western, and thus what is traditional and modern. This was also discussed in the framework of the “women question” addressed in the Meiji period (Goldstein-Gidoni 1999, 351). As Marija Skušek lectured and performed in a kimono, she presented a Japanese person, but also a Japanese woman. Japanese men were more encouraged to wear Western clothing for special occasions, while women wore kimonos. Even today a kimono wrapped around the female body has become a national symbol of tradition, and one that completes the image of being Japanese as opposed to being Western (ibid., 352).

## The Values of the Japanese Kimonos and Fans in the Transmission of Culture and Museum Collections

The objects like the fan and kimonos found in the Skušek Collection were originally not part of the formal collection, as already mentioned above. These were objects especially made and used by Marija Skušek that she wore on different occasions. At the time of use these items were not seem as works of art in a museum, but as objects in her closet. However, when she lived in Ljubljana she also used the fan and kimonos to perform her Japanese culture and identity. While she adapted to Slovene society very well, speaking Slovene, giving up her Japanese citizenship and becoming Christian, she also maintained a Japanese identity with such cultural performances and visual appearances. As people around Yugoslavia were very interesting in Japanese culture, she enraptured and enchanted them by dressing up in a kimono and then performed a tea ceremony, sung Japanese songs or danced Japanese dances.



Figure 9. Kimono, black silk with grey lines, inner layer in red and green silk. Length 160 cm, up 122 cm; no. 18459. (Source: Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Ljubljana)



Figure 10. Black silk with green leaves on the lower part of kimono and white family crest on upper front and back side and red inner layer. Length 165cm, width 124cm; No 18461. (Source: Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Ljubljana)

Japanese dance embraces and embodies Japanese culture, as it shows aspects of its aesthetic components such as the attire, with the mimetic movements drawn from Japanese culture, along with the aesthetic of the physical movements, and even the physiques of the dancers (Hahn 2007, 168). As an insider with regard to Japanese culture, Marija Tsuneko Skušek could present an “authentic” performance of the Japanese tradition outside of her country to foreigners, as she was also recognized as a promoter of cultural exchange between Japan and Slovenia. (figs. 3, 4) She used her body in public as an instrument of the art and was performing culture, where objects like the fan and kimono, along with her dancing body and music, were a form of communication with the audience and thus transmitted cultural knowledge from one country to the other. People in Yugoslavia were fascinated by the fact that the “movements in dance are fluid, graceful, acquiring aesthetic ideals that reflect the Japanese culture” (*Mariborski večernik Jutra* 1935). Whether or not we consider this fascination with “exotic Japanese women” within the framework of Orientalism, the impact of her

presence in Slovene society is still vivid today. With analysing the items that belonged to Mrs. Skušek we explored her life in Slovenia and understand the value of these items as objects for cultural transmission, and the roles that they had in the four decades she spent as “Mrs. Japanese”.

Another important issue that we discovered by analysing these objects is their transformation from daily objects of use during her life to rarefied art objects after they were handed over to the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. When these objects were used in everyday life they had no great economic value, but today when they are a part of the collection they are considered antiques and defined as objects of economic value. These objects today are systematically analysed and recognised as subjects, which is key to the comprehension of their value (Appadurai 1994, 76). These kimonos are compared on the one hand to artistic objects like paintings or woodblock prints, which are considered valuable in themselves, and on the other to kimonos of other eras, such as those worn by *geisha*. Here it is also important to point out that the fan, kimonos and *obi* were not acquired with the goal of making them part of a collection. Ivan Skušek did not buy them in an antique market, and they only became part of his collection later when they were catalogued and analysed.

This analysis of a fan and kimonos in the Skušek Collection has highlighted the roles and values of these objects in the museum collection. The article also discussed the importance of understanding not only the physical appearance of the items and their life, but also the wider background of items and collection, focusing also on the owner of the items. It is also important to stress how these items transformed from daily objects of use to rarefied art objects after they were handed over to the museum, and within this process their value also changed as they are museum objects representing Japanese culture on Slovene territory.

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