

# The First “Mrs. Japanese” of Slovenia between the Two World Wars: Marija Skušek and Her Series of Lectures on Japanese Women

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## Abstract

The paper's main aim is to bring forward Marija Skušek (born Tsuneko Kondō Kawase 近藤常子 (1893–1963) and her presentations and transmission of Japanese culture to the Slovene (at that time Yugoslav) public as the first Japanese citizen who was naturalised in Slovenia. It focuses mainly on the period from 1920, when she first entered the country, until the Second World War, drawing special attention to one of her main activities—giving lectures in the years 1930–1931, and on a smaller scale 1935–1936, mostly presented to the public under the title “A Japanese about a Japanese Woman”. Such lectures testify to the Japanese-Slovenian cultural exchanges, and the cultural milieu in Slovenia in which she acted. The author takes into consideration newspaper and journals sources discussing her activities and in particular the data available from the “Archive on Marija Skušek–Tsuneko Kondō Kawase”, recently re-discovered at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum of Slovenia, where her original lecture's manuscripts, correspondence, newspaper clips and photos are collected.

**Keywords:** Marija Skušek (Tsuneko Kondō Kawase), Skušek Collection, Japanese culture, women's movements, Franja Tavčar

## Prva »Madam Japanka« v Sloveniji med svetovnimi vojnama: Marija Skušek in serija njenih predavanj o japonski ženi

### Izvilleček

Glavni cilj pričujočega prispevka je predstaviti Marijo Skušek, rojeno Tsuneko Kondō Kawase 近藤常子 (1893–1963), kot prvo Japonko, ki se je naturalizirala v Sloveniji, in njeno posredovanje japonske kulture slovenski (takrat jugoslovanski) javnosti. Osredotoča se predvsem na obdobje od leta 1920 – od prihoda Tsuneko Kondō Kawase v Slovenijo – do druge svetovne vojne, pri čemer posebej izpostavi vpogled v njene glavne dejavnosti, ki pričajo o japonsko-slovenski kulturni izmenjavi in kulturnem okolju v Sloveniji, v katerem je delovala. Natančneje, pod drobnogled bo vzeta njena serija predavanj v letih 1930–1931 in v manjšem obsegu 1935–1936, ki so bila javnosti večinoma predstavljena kot »Japanka

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o japonski ženi«. Osnova za članek je nedavno odkriti arhiv v okviru projekta VAZ – »Arhiv o Mariji Skušek – Tsuneko Kondō Kawase« v Slovenskem etnografskem muzeju, v katerem so zbrani tudi njeni izvirni rokopisi predavanj, dopisovanja, izrezki iz časopisov in fotografije.

**Ključne besede:** Marija Skušek (Tsuneko Kondō Kawase), Skuškova zbirka, japonska kultura, ženska gibanja, Franja Tavčar

## Introduction

Known also by her nickname “Mrs. Japanese”, Marija Skušek, born Tsuneko Kondō-Kawase (近藤常子 1893–1963),<sup>1</sup> was the first Japanese person to be naturalized as a citizen of Slovenia (at that time part of Yugoslavia). She promoted Japanese culture and language and was crucial for the cultural exchange and friendship between the two countries from the 1920s to 1960s. Recently renewed attention has been paid to her within the project VAZ,<sup>2</sup> which in order to reconstruct the East-Asian collections in Slovenia examines the so-called Skušek Collection—the collection she and her husband, the naval officer Ivan Skušek (1877–1947), brought from China to Slovenia in 1920, presently in the custody of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum.

Her activities in promoting Japanese culture and the objects from the mentioned collection are recorded in newspapers and other sources mostly in the period after she married in church, accepting all Christian sacraments in 1927, when she adopted Slovenian name—Marija Skušek.<sup>3</sup> To start with, we can notice her participation in presenting Japanese culture and artefacts in the form of a “Japanese corner”, sometimes called a “Japanese room”, for exhibitions. Among the earliest known is the exhibition “Pogrnjene mize” (Exhibition of Set Tables) in 1927. Soon after we can read about her presentation at a Japanese Evening at Union Hotel Ljubljana with a lecture titled “Whoever suffers and even sheds tears, brings light and happiness to the whole family”, which represents the beginning of another of her activities—lecturing on Japanese culture in the early 1930s.

1 Original Kawase, although also Kavase is used according to some sources including the name we can find on her marriage certificate from 1927. As for her name Tsuneko in Chinese characters, we can find information on her as well on the name written in kanji as 近藤恒子 (as for example in *Kotobanku*).

2 For more on the VAZ project and database of East Asian Collections in Slovenia, see <https://vazcollections.si>.

3 The name which she would often use after coming to Slovenia on her documents and photos, as well as on lecture manuscripts was as well Marija Tsuneko Skušek マリヤ常子スクシエキ.

Some of the sources even state that she gave more than three hundred lectures in her lifetime (Hanahusa 1987, 12).

The basis for the current article is the recently re-discovered archive within the framework of the project VAZ—“Archive on Marija Skušek – Tsuneko Kondō Kawase” at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, where her original lecture manuscripts, correspondence, newspaper clippings, photos, and so on are collected. What it aims to highlight is an examination of Marija Skušek’s role in transmitting<sup>4</sup> the knowledge and perception of Japanese culture and society to Slovenian and also a Yugoslav audience, focusing on the period from 1920—from the time she entered the country until WWII. More precisely, it will take into consideration her series of lectures spanning in the years 1930–1931 and on a smaller scale 1935–1936, mostly presented to the public as “A Japanese about a Japanese Woman”. Based on her original manuscripts, we will try to reconstruct the content of the lectures, their possible locations (places, institutions) and dates. At the same time, we give an insight into what kind of cross-cultural content the Slovene audience could learn about and try to take a closer look of what such activities reveal regarding the cultural milieu in which Marija Skušek acted.

Her lectures were richly represented in the newspapers of the time, but to this day there has been no research that focuses on an analysis of her role as a lecturer during the interwar period. In this regard, the author intends to examine her original manuscripts for the lectures, as well as newspaper and journals sources discussing her activities. More specifically, this study will draw from the “Archive on Marija Skušek – Tsuneko Kondō Kawase”, and on a smaller scale the “PMS-MP Archives, Anton Lenarčič: Letters and Records Related to the Collection of Antiquities and Artworks from the Chinese Skušek Family” from the Maritime Museum “Sergej Mašera” Piran.

## Background: The Story, or Stories, of Marija Skušek

If we look for Marija Skušek in Japanese or Slovene reference books, online encyclopaedia and databases<sup>5</sup> then we can find the following information about her life. Born in Gifu Prefecture, Japan, she would later move to Northeast China. She met her husband presumably in Beijing, where she probably moved with her

4 On transmission of Japanese culture by Marija Skušek to Slovene audience see also Visočnik Gerželj (2021).

5 Such as *Slovenian biography* (SAZU) (Štrukelj 2013) or the Japanese *Kotobanku*, a digital version of the Japanese name dictionary, and the Japanese *Webcat Plus* database.

family after the Russo-Japanese War.<sup>6</sup> Among her major activities in Slovenia, Marija Skušek was a head nurse for the Red Cross and active council member, receiving the group's highest award in 1962. She is also briefly mentioned as a promoter of cultural exchanges between Japan and Slovenia, and a lecturer on Japan. The fact which stands out in her bibliography is her marriage in 1927 (April 18), when she accepted all the Christian sacraments and took on a Slovenian name—Marija Skušek.

More details on Marija Skušek's life before she came to Slovenia are given by Ralf Čeplak in his book *V deželi nebesnega zmaja: 350 let stikov s Kitajsko* (2012, 109–112). Before travelling to Slovenia, she and Ivan Skušek had a civil marriage, while they would arrive in Slovenia on 8 September 1920, together with her children—son Matthias Schmidt (1912–1933) and daughter Erika Schmidt (1914–1958)—which she had had from a previous marriage with the German senior customs official Paul Heinrich Schmidt. The combination of rail and ship travel took three months, starting with a train ride from Beijing to Tianjin, then the family continued the journey aboard different ships to Nagasaki, Singapore, across the Indian Ocean to Aden, Suez, Marseille, and Trieste, and finally by train to Ljubljana, where Marija Skušek would stay until her death in 1963, surviving her whole family. With the exception of her last trip home, probably in 1919, when she visited her mother in Gifu, together with Ivan and her children, she never went back to Japan, even though in her later years she clearly expressed a wish that “I would like to see Tokyo again. After all those years” (Govc 1963, 7).

The collection of hundreds of valuable Japanese and Chinese artefacts, some which could have possibly come from the Chinese Imperial Court, travelled to Slovenia via a different route, initially by train to Tianjin, then by sea to Hamburg and finally by train to Ljubljana (Čeplak 2012, 110). Throughout her and Ivan's marriage a constant ambition was to build a museum where they could store all their antiquities<sup>7</sup> they had brought from China, but they were faced with too many obstacles and unfortunately their plans were never realized. Ivan Skušek taught his wife Marija as much as possible about the artefacts. As he said himself:

Tsu will receive guests in a Japanese kimono. I will explain to them the origin and age of the exhibited objects. When I would not be at home, she will do that. I've been teaching her systematically for a while now, so she kind of got into the subjects and memorized them. (Skušek Franci n.d.)

6 For more on the history of China's relations with Slovenia at the time, see Lipušček (2013).

7 The project was supported by architect Jože Plečnik, with whom the couple had a good relationship (Marinac 2017, 170).

After Ivan Skušek's death in 1947, Marija Skušek tried to secure a suitable place for the collection on her own, as well as a stable financial situation when acting as its custodian. To protect the collection, she applied for help at the Institute for the Protection and Scientific Study of Cultural Monuments, which inventoried 373 objects (Marinac 2017, 171; *Stara inventarna knjiga Narodnega muzeja* n.d.), with some parts of it taken to the Modern Gallery and Slovene National Museum. Everything seemed ready for the collection to finally get its own place and for Marija Skušek to receive a monthly annuity, but finally Maria and the family decided to decline the offer as they considered the proposed payment too low. Later, in 1955, she tried to bring the collection under the auspices of the Maritime Museum "Sergej Mašera" Piran. Then the Villa Istrica in Portorož was chosen as a possible new home for the collection as well as living quarters for Marija Skušek as its custodian, but as the building was still owned by an Italian optant the Skušek family decided not to move the collection there (see Marinac 2017, 170–72). After her death in 1963, the collection was taken over by the Slovene National Museum, which in turn handed it over to the Slovene Ethnographic Museum in 1964.

In the 1970s, the Skušek Collection and its relation to Marija Skušek were mostly studied by the ethnologist Pavla Štrukelj (Štrukelj 2013). In 1955, Štrukelj was employed as a curator for non-European collections at the Slovenian Ethnographic Museum in Ljubljana, while in the period 1964–1990 she ran the Museum of Non-European Cultures in Goričane Castle, where the Skušek Collection was exhibited as the largest and permanent exhibition until 1990 (Čeplak 2012, 117; Marinac 2017, 172). Štrukelj was also in charge of the collection's inventory (*I. inventarna knjiga muzeja Goričane* n.d.). Some additional facts about the collection management and the Skušek family itself have been gathered by Ralf Čeplak (2012, 98–117), who replaced Pavla Štrukelj after she retired as curator of the Asian, Oceanic and Australian museum collections at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, as well as curator at the Museum of Non-European Cultures in the Goričane Castle until 1990, when the museum was closed for renovation. We can also find interest in Marija Skušek from the Japanese side. In the 1990s, Ms. Ruriko Hanahusa 花房るり子, then Ruriko Chida 千田るり子, lived in Ljubljana, studying at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Ljubljana. She was eager to carry out research on Marija Skušek, met her husband's relatives and obtained various materials, but finally decided not to continue with the research owing to the frictions within the family (Shigemori Bučar, email to the author, January 28, 2021).<sup>8</sup>

8 The activities of Marija Skušek were also recorded in Japan and she would also write articles on Slovenian culture for Japanese newspapers such as *Asahi Shinbun* (Kondō 1957). Recently, we could find her name also in the publication by Tadao Kumada—*Amazing Japanese! Ancestors who Crossed the Sea (A Supplementary Volume)* (*Sugoi zo Nihonjin!- Zoku, umi o watatta gosenzosamatashi sugoi zo* 日本人!—続・海を渡ったご先祖様たち) (Kumada 2009).

In research that has been conducted to date, as well as in newspaper articles on Marija Skušek, a number of views or constructs were formed, especially with regard to her family roots and the period before her arrival in Slovenia. For example, certain assumptions about her family having noble roots (as she is in many sources mentioned as a daughter of court architect Kondō-Kawase Kagijiro), that some of the items from the collection were her father’s legacy, the suggestions she might have been a geisha in the past, as well as other matters for which there is no relevant evidence. This article will not deal with such issues, or provide new information on them.

### Marija Skušek’s First Series of Lectures in 1930 and 1931: Original Transcripts and Venues

It is hard to imagine what an attraction Marija Skušek was in the 1920s and 1930s when the citizens of Ljubljana watched her walking in a Japanese kimono along the city streets. What is certain is that she was simply loved by the people in Slovenia and beyond, and often described as a “gallant woman from Ljubljana” (*Slovenec* 1930b), “an educated and nice lady” (*Slovenski narod* 1936), “Ljubljana’s Japanese lady” (Kajzer 1995, 304), “always smiling and full of her unique politeness” (*Ljubljanski dnevnik* 1963), on the basis of which we can conclude that she was generally well accepted. Some sources go even further, noting her nicknames of “Lady Japanka (Mrs. Japanese)”, “Okasan (mother)” (Govc 1963), “teta Tsu (aunt Tsu)” (*Ljubljanski dnevnik* 1963), which also speak of her close ties with the Slovene people.

Her series of lectures on the Japanese woman and her role in a rapidly changing society, Japanese culture and customs attracted much attention in Slovenia in the 1930s. Regarding Marija Skušek’s manuscripts, as well as newspaper reports on her events, there had to be at least twenty lectures at the time in Slovenia and nearby. The first lecture was held in Ljubljana, on January 24th in 1930, were Marija Skušek lectured at the District Workers’ Insurance Office (fig. 7), invited by the General Women’s Association in Ljubljana (Splošno žensko društvo v Ljubljani), the first Slovenian organization for women’s rights that was founded in 1901, which mostly fought for women’s suffrage, education and work.

An interesting lecture accompanied by slides. On Friday 24th, at 8 o’clock this month (January, 1930), a Japanese lady Mrs. Marija Skušekova-Kondō is to present a lecture On a Japanese woman at the Okrožni urad za zavarovanje delavcev (District Workers’ Insurance Office) in Miklošičeva

Street. As a wife of a bank director, she has lived in Ljubljana for a long time, but she is in constant contact with her homeland and even contributes to their journals. She intends to give an insight into the life of a Japanese woman, her customs and traditions and her striving to improve her position. For her colourful presentation, she will be dressed in a precious kimono. Admission is free for everyone, with only 3 dinars to be paid for heating and lighting. (Skušek, Marija n.d.)



Figure 1. Marija Skušek (1893–1963), making a radio show on Japan at the beginning of the 1930s. (Source: Photo Archive of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Ljubljana)

For the presentation she prepared 15 typed pages of text on the topic (*ibid.*). According to the media reports, she began with a short introduction in Japanese and also concluded her presentation in Japanese, and before finishing the lecture she also had a few words to say about the Japanese characters and writing system (fig. 10). The front page of the lecture text was entitled *endai* 演題, meaning “the subject of the lecture/speech”, and in the right corner she signed it with her distinct signature Marija Tsuneko Skušek (マリア常子スクシエキ) (fig. 3).

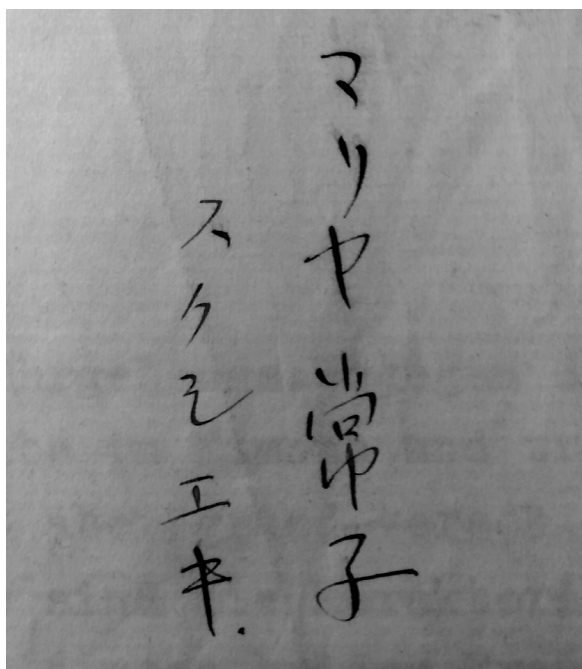


Figure 2. Marija Skušek’s distinct signature Marija Tsuneko Skušek (マリア常子スクシエキ) written in katakana except for the name Tsuneko, on her prepared draft for the lecture entitled *endai* 演題, the subject of the lecture/speech, from around the 1930s. Photo by the author. (Source: Archive of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Ljubljana)



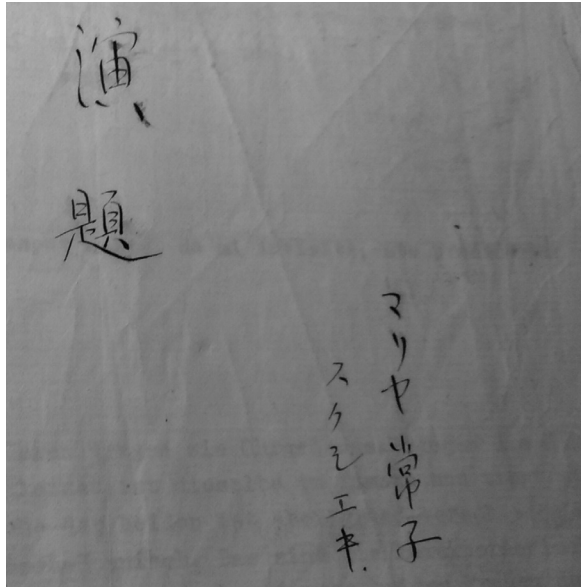


Figure 3. A photo of the cover page of the text Marija Skušek prepared for the lecture. Photo by the author. (Source: Archive of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Ljubljana)

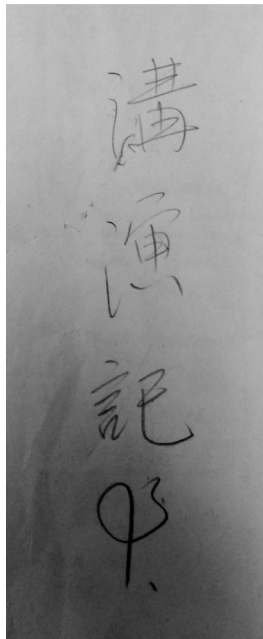


Figure 4. Marija Skušek's handwritten title *kōenkiji* 講演記事 (clippings of newspaper articles on her lectures). Photo by the author. (Source: Archive of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Ljubljana)

Based on her original scripts, kept at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum—“Archive on Marija Skušek–Tsuneko Kondō Kawase”, it is clear that she had very carefully prepared two versions of the speech, one in German, one in Slovene. She used both, depending on the occasion and the place where the lecture was held. We know she could speak Japanese, Chinese and German,<sup>9</sup> with which she became acquainted in China, as well Slovenian, but at her earlier presentations she chose to speak German, as it was the language she could communicate in better than in Slovenian, while for her later performances she started to use Slovenian as well.

Mrs. Lecturer will hold her lecture as on Tuesday in German, although she also speaks Slovene, for the reason, as she herself said, because the Slovene language was the hardest for her to learn and to handle, as it is the most difficult of all languages. (Skušek, Marija n.d.)<sup>10</sup>

Characteristic of the text for her speech in Slovene were the marks with an acute accent (/) with which she marked the stress of each word, which would make the pronunciation easier (see footnote 15). Be it in Slovene or German, her lectures were very well received, and in many cases, she had to make further appearances due to the great demand, as we can read below.

At the request of those 300 visitors, who had to return because the hall was already full after 6 o'clock, Mrs. Tsuneku Marija Skušek responded most readily to their wish, so she will repeat her lecture on Thursday, 20th of November 20 at the Pučko sveučilište. (Skušek, Marija n.d.)<sup>11</sup>

On the back page of the German version of the text we can find the dates and places of the lectures that she carefully wrote down (fig. 5), but which do not give the whole picture of the frequency of her lectures, and neither do they include the timetables of her lectures to be given afterwards. She travelled quite far and told her story in different places and at different institutions (figs. 6–8). Especially well noted was the first lecture in Ljubljana. From a letter sent to her and signed by Janko Kukovec (the head of the People's University

9 As Marija Skušek was previously married to German customs official Paul Heinrich Schmidt, she could handle German well.

10 “Gospodja će predavačica održati svoje predavanje kao i u utorak na njemačkom jeziku, premda govori i slovenski, s razloga, kako je sama rekla, jer je slovenski jezik najtežje naučila i najmučnije vlada s njime od svih jezika.”

11 “Na želju onih 300 posjetnika, koji su se morali povratiti jer je dvorana bila već prepuna posilje 6 sati, gdje Tsuneku Marija Skušek odzvala se najpripravnije njihovoj želji, pa će ovo svoje predavanje opetovati u četvrtak 20. studenov u Pučkom sveučilištu.”



Table 1: Slovene and English transcription of the Japanese text in fig. 5. It includes the dates and as well the places of the lectures. The venues (halls) are added in brackets, where they could be verified.

Date of performance	Place of performance (hall)
<b>1930</b>	
24.1.1930	Ljubljana ( <i>Dvorana okrožnega urada za zavarovanje delavcev na Miklošičevi cesti</i> (District Workers' Insurance Office in Miklošičeva street))
17.2.1930	Maribor ( <i>Ljudska univerza (Kino Apolo)</i> (People's University (Cinema Apolo))
27.2.1930	Tržič
14.3.1930	Radio Ljubljana
16.3.1930	Šiška ( <i>Samostanska dvorana</i> (Monastery Hall))
17.3.1930	Celje ( <i>Ljudsko vseučilišče v trgovski šoli</i> (People's University in the School of Commerce))
21.3.1930	Radio Ljubljana
	Dobrna (?) Red Cross Society
8.10.1930	Graz
9.10.1930	Graz
18.11.1930	Zagreb ( <i>Pučko otvoreno učilište Zagreb</i> (Public Open University Zagreb) <sup>12</sup> )
18.11.1930	Zagreb ( <i>Pučko otvoreno učilište Zagreb</i> (Public Open University Zagreb))
21.11.1930	Zagreb ( <i>Pučko otvoreno učilište Zagreb</i> (Public Open University Zagreb))
7.12.1930	?
11.12.1930	Split ( <i>Narodno pozorište</i> (National Theater))
<b>1931</b>	
2.2.1931	Varaždin ( <i>Pučko otvoreno sveučilište Varaždin</i> ) (Public Open University Varaždin))
?2.1931	Trbovlje (?)

12 The institution known today as the Public Open University Zagreb (*Pučko otvoreno učilište Zagreb*—POUZ), which was previously called the Moša Pijade Workers' (and People's) University (*Radniško (i narodno) sveučilište "Moša Pijade"*—RANS).



Figure 6. Union Hotel Ljubljana, the venue of the Marija Skušek's lecture in 1930 (on 6th January), presented as part of a Japanese Evening. (Source: Grand hotel Union)



Figure 7. District Workers' Insurance Office on Miklošičeva Street (the arched entrance marks today's Health Insurance Institute of Slovenia), the venue for the first of Marija Skušek's series of lecture in 1930–1931. (Source: Wikipedia 1928)



Figure 8. The building of the first studio of Radio Ljubljana (on the site of a former salt warehouse on Bleiweisova Street in Ljubljana). (Source: Wikipedia n.d.)

## On the Content: Japanese Women, their Rights and Women's Movements

The aforementioned lectures presented different topics concerning Japanese society and women, giving especially detailed information on the position of Japanese woman at that time. Also, on the level of the presentation, Marija Skušek would along the presentation show slides of Japan, in some instances she would also present Japanese dances and songs, while she would give her lectures in a kimono, which probably added to their appeal (see fig. 1). The version of the text of her presentation recently found in the “Archive on Marija Skušek – Tsuneko Kondō Kawase” was entitled as *endai*<sup>13</sup> (演題, meaning “the subject of the lecture/speech”) as already mentioned, and has no certain title. When we read about in the media of the time, and particularly newspaper and radio announcements, it was usually referred to in the Slovenian media as a lecture called “A Japanese about a Japanese Woman”, or “Woman in Japan” or in German language media as “Eine Japanerin über die japanische Frau”. She used this text as a basis for most part of her lectures (Skušek, Tsuneko Marija n.d., 1–15). Concerning the topic of the lecture, we could divide it into three major thematic parts. She would mostly discuss 1) Japanese ideals for womanhood, 2) women’s changing social position in the late 19th to early 20th century, and 3) insights into Japanese women’s etiquette and the Japanese language. In the second thematic part of the lecture, she included two subtitles, namely “Women’s Schools” and “A Woman in Public Life”, while the third thematic part included the subtitles “The Woman, the Walk of a Japanese Woman” and “The Age of a Japanese Woman”.

At first the audience could learn about the differences between Chinese and Japanese ladies, which Marija Skušek felt Europeans tended to confuse: their differences regarding dressing and customs in relation to wearing jewellery, emphasizing that compared to a Chinese lady a Japanese woman has “healthy legs” (Skušek, Tsuneko Marija n.d., 1). She characterizes Japanese women with the attributes “boundless patience, blind obedience, grace, generosity, and great sacrifice in all circumstances” (ibid.). She asks the audience not to think she is praising herself as a Japanese woman, and further mentions that famous scholars and world travellers share her views, noting the description of Japanese women given by Lafcadio Hearn (1850–1904),<sup>14</sup> pointing out that a “Japanese woman forgives a hundred times and sacrifices a thousand times, while she calmly endures the greatest contempt” (ibid., 1–2).

13 The author uses the same term, *endai*, when referencing Marija Skušek’s lecture manuscript (see Skušek, Tsuneko Marija n.d.).

14 Lafcadio Hearn (or Koizumi Yakumo 小泉 八雲, 1850–1904) was a writer of Greek-Irish descent who was married to a Japanese woman and known for his books on Japanese culture.

She continues with 10 pieces of advice, in which spirit Japanese women are taught to live or are advised before they get married, in which we can find all the necessary things a Japanese woman has to take into consideration before getting married. Below are the first three of the ten pieces of advice, as mentioned by Marija Skušek. They are taken from the original text of her lecture, as it was typed and edited with the acute accents (/). We can see as well how she added the readings in katakana for some words, as well as Chinese characters for some names and words, so she could pronounce them more easily.

1. When you get married, the house of your parents is no longer your home, but your home is only that of your husband. You must definitely forget your father's house, your birth house. You left it and you can't return anymore.

2. The main person in your new home is your husband. You can never in any way object to him. You should not even think about it. You have to read every wish in his eyes and listen to him blindly. Even if your husband would do you wrong or put you in trouble, you must never be angry with him for that, but try to calm him down with a kind face and the most beautiful words and give him the right of way in everything. Avoid any quarrel with him.

3. If your husband gets into trouble, violates the law or harms it, you must never think that you are allowed to do the same thing. You must always remember that you are walking the pure path of a woman, and avoid everything that could inevitably lead you to fail in your faithful wife duties. (Skušek, Tsuneko Marija n.d., 2–3)<sup>15</sup>

All of three pieces of advice tell us how a woman has to be devoted to her husband after marriage, without equal rights; she should not be jealous, lie or disobey her husband, and respect him as well as his parents (Skušek, Tsuneko Marija n.d., 2–4). With all the rules she has been given a Japanese woman learns to act humbly, and in many cases has to accept a life of what she calls "self-denial"

15 "1. Ko se omožiš, hiša tvójih stáršev ni več tvoj dóm, ámpak tvoj je samó dóm tvójega možá. Očéto-vo hišo, rójtstno hišo móraš vsékakor pozabíti. Zapustíla si jo in se nič več ne móreš v njo vrníti.

2. Glávna oséba v tvójem nóvem dómu je tvoj mož. Móžu níkákór in níkdár ne smeš ugovárjati. Na to níti mísliti ní. Vsáko željo mu móraš z očí bráti in ga slépo slúšati. Nej bi ti mož stóril še táko krívico ali nepríliko, se za to níkákór ne sméš nanj jezíti, ámpak skušaj ga s príjaznim obrazom in z najlepšo besedo pomíríti in mu v vsem práv dáj. Vsákega prepíra z njim se popólnoma izogíbaj.

3. Če bi mož zašél na nápačna póta in zákon kršil ali mu škodóval, níkákór ne sméš mísliti, da sméš mórdá isto, kár je stóril on. Védno móraš pómniti, da hódíš po čísti póti žéne, in se vséga izogíbati, kar bi ti mógló tvójim dolžnóstim zvéste žéne iznevéríti."



(Skušek, Tsuneko Marija n.d., 2–4). For example, a woman has to wait for her husband to come home, even if he is very late, and follow the old Japanese custom “in the case that the husband brings a geisha to the house, she should not show her resentment but accept her husband’s companion in the friendliest way possible” (ibid.). She even mentions the habit of geishas visiting homes for the new year bringing gifts to their best clients and thanking the wives for their husbands having visited her, and hoping they will be able to do the same in the following year (ibid.). When a Japanese woman marries, she becomes her husband’s property, and only if her husband’s parents allow it can she visit her old home and her parents, and if anything goes wrong or she cannot handle the burden of married life, she gets a small *harakiri* knife, which can “aid her” (ibid.).

The above advice could remind us of Neo-Confucian thought and values based on *The Great Learning for Woman* (女大学, *Onna Daigaku*), which was often gifted to new brides as a textbook directed toward their moral education. It is usually attributed to the author and Neo-Confucianist philosopher Kaibara Ekke 貝原益軒 (1630–1714), following the Neo-Confucian intellectual orthodoxy of Edo period (1603–1867) Japan, imposing total subordination of women to the needs of the husband. If not directly related to this text, it could be related to some other textbooks from the same genre of morality texts known under the name *joshiyō ōrai* (女子用往来), written for women in the Edo period. Texts of this kind were widely published and circulating in the cities of Edo, Kyoto, Osaka, Nagoya, Sendai and Mito (see also Doi 2011, 4). The same texts, however, were strongly criticized by the progressive intellectuals in Japan in the Meiji period (1868–1912) when the country started to modernize, as they presented a poor picture of women’s status in Japan in comparison with the West, when one measure of the degree of modernity in a country was how women lived (ibid., 1). It could also remind us of the educational ideal of *Ryōsai Kenbo* (Good Wife, Wise Mother), which appeared in the latter part of the Meiji period, which imposed an ideal traditional role for woman as a symbol of cultural identity, one criticized by feminists for its denial of women’s equality in education, work, and marriage.

In the continuation of the lecture, including the sections which she entitles “Women’s Schools” and “A Woman in Public Life”, she takes a completely different stance, emphasizing what we could call “the modern Japanese woman” and the tendency to search for a better social position and the new possibilities in the emergence of feminist movements.

nerinen bereits schon vor 70 Jahren im Auslande studie  
 Die ersten weiblichen Wesen die in Amerika vo  
 speziellen Wunsch des Kaisers studierten waren <sup>3 Mädchen</sup> ~~3~~  
 又アケレン  
 mit den Namen SUTEMATSU, TSUDA und URIFU und später n  
 " 捨松 " 津田 " あり.  
 Frau Atomi und Miwata. Nach ihrer Rückkehr aus Amer  
 " " "  
 Japanerinen, die sich in Amerika den Titel von Profe  
 und sich ihr Haar abgeschnitten und sich in Männer  
 Umsturtz im japanischen Frauenleben au

Figure 9. The part of Marija Skušek’s text from her prepared speech in German, where she mentions women who defined Japanese education at the beginning of 20th century. Photo by the author. (Source: Archive of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Ljubljana)

ri	三	solnce,	日	žena,	女
človek	人	luna,	月	dete,	子
solnce	日	jasno,	明	dobro =	好
<u>Spomlad</u> , točim	春	svetlo.		Prav za prav:	
Prav za prav:				Žena in dete je	
1/2 letno meseca		zemlja	土	največja imo,	
se človek solna		dva človeka	人	vina.	
veseli.		sedeti,	坐		
glava,	百	Prav za prav:		živna polje,	田
rizovo polje	夕	Dva na zemlji		moč,	力
	夏	sedeca človeka.		moč, nau	力
<u>Poljete</u> , haia		človek	人	Prav za prav:	
Prav za prav:			土	Moč, kateri svojo mo	

Figure 10. An excerpt from Marija Skušek’s notes explaining Japanese characters, which she would introduce at the end of her lectures, such as (framed text): “earth” (土), “two people” (人人), “to seat” (座), “in other words: two on the earth seating man”. Photo by the author. (Source: Archive of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Ljubljana)

The section “Women’s Schools” indicates Marija Skušek was trying to demonstrate the rights of Japanese woman in comparison to the woman rights in America, with a focus on education, with women being able to attend regular educational institutions such as high school and college, along with education being provided for midwives and sister nurses, and finally a school for members of the church. She put special attention on a school for the higher nobility or so-called school for princesses, which would have separate facilities for each girl, while every big city in Japan at that time also had school for maids, where they could learn geography, history, arithmetic and literature, besides handicrafts and housework (Skušek, Tsuneko Marija n.d., 7).

Furthermore, she gives an outline of Japanese women and their rights in the early 20th century, mentioning among other things that Japanese women were “allowed to elect men to state and municipal assemblies, while they are not allowed to be elected themselves” (Skušek, Tsuneko Marija n.d., 8) in the year 1925. An important part in her speech are the depictions of women acting to achieve women’s rights concerning equality, education, social protection and the abolition of low tea houses or brothels. She takes the position of a woman who would like to change the inequality between the sexes, and gives an insight into the active women’s movements and individuals. She highlights Japanese women’s associations “with 3,639 branches and 1,300,000 members across the country” (ibid.), consisting of respected pedagogues, editing journals with scientific and educational content. She also mentions some changes in the social position of women in Japan such as regulation of the position of unmarried mothers according to the European model (protecting mothers while fathers are forced to pay support).

Moreover, she praises Japanese women who were able to study abroad, either in America or England. Among the first who received a college degree from a foreign institution she mentions Princess Ōyama Sutematsu 大山捨松 (1860–1919) (born Yamakawa Sakiko 山川咲子), Tsuda Umeko 津田梅子 (1864–1929), and Uryū Shigeko 瓜生繁子 (1862–1928). These were all pioneers of women’s education, who as students joined the Iwakura mission and went abroad for their studies. Besides those names, she also noted Atomi Kakei 跡見花蹊 (1840–1926), a Meiji period educator, calligrapher and painter, who founded the Atomi school in Kanda, known today as the oldest women’s university in Japan, along with Masako Miwada 三輪田眞佐子 (1843–1927), the founder of Miwada Girls’ High School (三輪田高等女學校) in Kudan-kita, Tokyo, which is today known as Miwada Gakuen (三輪田学園中学校). Both “educated in the Confucian tradition and were among the first to promote education for girls” (Mehl 2001, 579), and “although they did not fight for woman’s rights in opposition to the state and were not led by Western ideas, they helped to redefine the role of women, linking it to the well-being of the nation” (ibid.). Both women contributed significantly to the

modernization of Japan, but receive little attention from scholars nowadays (Mehl 2001, 579).

In the field of medicine as well, she discusses two figures, Ogino Ginko 荻野吟子 (1851–1913), admired as the first woman in Japanese history to receive a license to practice Western medicine in 1885, and Takahashi Mizuko 高橋瑞子 (1852–1927), who received a licence in 1887 (Nakamura 2008, 3).



Figure 11. A caricature of Marija Skušek with her autograph published in a Croatian magazine in 1930. (Source: Novosti 1930)

Next, or what we could define as the third major topic of her lecture, Marija Skušek would take some time to talk about certain customs in Japan, such as the practice of removing the natural eyebrows and repainting them higher on the forehead (she probably had in mind so called *hikimayu* (引眉), and the custom of teeth blackening (so called *ohaguro* (お歯黒)), which were both essential for a married woman in order to show that she was married. She mentions that such customs were still in use around 30 years before (Skušek, Tsuneko Marija n.d.,

12), while officially they were prohibited in 1870. She then mentions the habit of honorific forms of address for the husband and males in general, including newborn boys. Moreover, when walking into a room when a baby boy was sleeping it was inappropriate for a woman to walk around his head, and so she could only walk around the baby's feet (*ibid.*, 12–13).

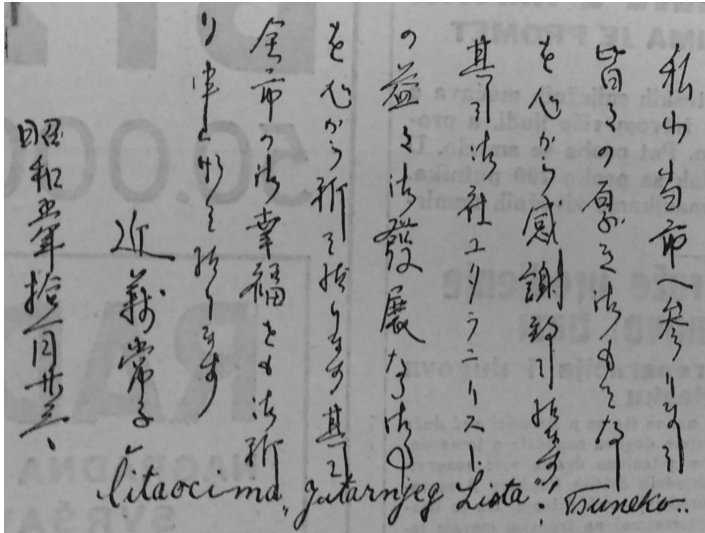


Figure 12. Inscription written by Marija Skušek for the readers of the newspaper *Jutranji list* and the people of Zagreb in 1930 after her well received lectures. (Source: *Jutranji list* 1930)

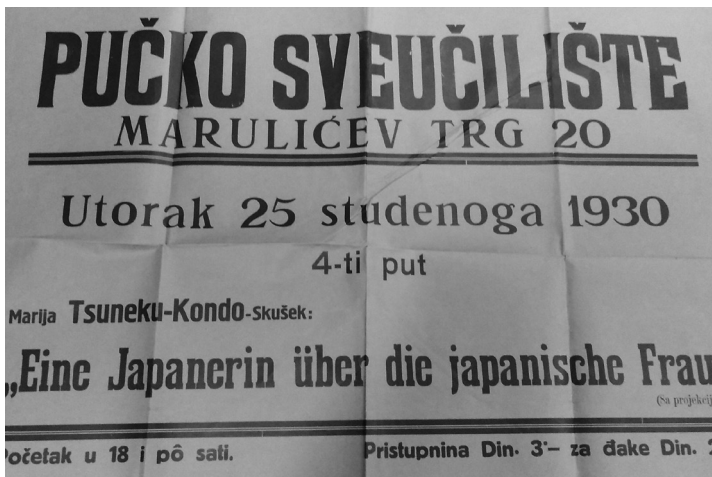


Figure 13. A poster for Marija Skušek's lecture (November 25, 1930) in Zagreb, its fourth repetition. Photo by the author. (Source: Archive of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum)

In the last part of the lecture she has four independent titles in her notes. In “The Woman”, she discusses the old habits of make-up, the permanent hair style and a special “high bolster made from camphor wood with a low elongated pillow” (Skušek, Tsuneko Marija n.d., 14) on the top of it used by a Japanese woman to keep her hair in shape (probably she had in mind a *takamakura* (高枕)). In “The Walk of a Japanese Woman”, she defines the etiquette of a woman and the posture when walking, in “The Age of a Japanese Woman” she discusses how the age of a woman is defined by her dress, the colour of her clothes and hairstyle, as well as customary ways of greeting. Of the Japanese holidays she chooses to describe Dolls’ Day, and the habit of preparing special dishes to offer to the dolls, and the roots of the holiday, which she relates to a 100-year old custom of the Imperial family, were dolls were used as charms to ward off evil spirits. By setting the dolls afloat down a river they hoped that they would carry bad fortune away with them (ibid.,15). Before concluding the lecture, she would explain a little about the Japanese writing system and some characters, as seen in fig. 10.

To sum-up the content of the lecture, we could see that the main thread of the manuscript was the presentation of Japanese women in various ways, while above all we could get an overview on their position and rights in the late 19th to early 20th centuries. In particular, the audience would gain an insight into women working to gain rights on education and social protection, and the effort to abolish brothels, among other things, while also presenting some of the regulations that had changed concerning women’s rights, which were made according to the European model. Looking at her lecture from the perspective of the 1930s, when radio had only just started with in Ljubljana, we might only imagine how attractive the topics were to audiences, on one side bringing forward serious issues such as women’s position in Japanese society, but at the same time also touching upon more common or popular topics such as Japanese women’s behaviour, way of walking, dressing, hairstyles, make-up, etc. Moreover, since Japanese women were the main focus of the lecture,—some publications would go so far as to introduce Marija Skušek as a “a well-known Japanese feminist”, or something similar, but to learn more about this we would have to carry out further analyses on the organizations at which she was invited to lecture.

### On Marija Skušek’s Second Series of Lectures in the 1935 and 1936

Of course, the abovementioned series of lectures in the 1930–1931 were not the only lectures Marija Skušek would present. Until WWII, she continued with her

lectures and newspaper reports from the time suggest she was especially active in 1935 and 1936, and also gave some in 1937. We can find reports on her lectures held in Maribor, Zagorje and Jesenice, but probably there were more. The topics of these were similar to her first series of lecture described above, but with certain differences.

In the lecture in Maribor, for example, where she would speak in Slovene in 1935 (having lectured there for the first time in 1930), she adds various new pieces of information on Japan, with regard to its development or new characterizations of the people there, and in this way gives a broader view on Japanese life. And while she does discuss male-female relations, she does not centre the lecture around women's rights or organizations, as in the earlier series of lectures in 1930–1931. Another feature of these lectures is the inclusion of performances, which included dance and music, although sometimes these were already included in her lectures in early 1930s.

Her presentations of dances are mentioned to in newspapers as follows: “Mrs. Tsuneko has at the end, as much as she could do it without music, showed some characteristic Japanese dances” (*Novosti* 1930), or “but in the end she will show a few Japanese dances” (*Nova doba* 1930a). We also read about this in a report from the People's University of Maribor from 1930.

One of the most resounding events of this season (the second half of the 1930s) was the Japanese evening. In two consecutive shows Marija Skušková presented Japan. Visitors were also enchanted by the singing and dance. (Dolar in Potočnik 2000, 622)

The inclusion of dance and music in her presentations is more common in her later presentations, notably in 1935 and 1936, while in some of them she would perform with her daughter.<sup>16</sup> The author assumes that that was due to the fact that her daughter—Erika Skušek, later Erika Schmidt—had by then already finished her studies at the Conservatory in Ljubljana, today known as the Academy of Music,<sup>17</sup> where in 1930 she started studying piano and solo singing (PMSPM Archives). That is also the period before she would get married,

16 For more on Marija Skušek and the characteristics of her dances, see Visočnik Gerželj (2021).

17 The Conservatory is today known as the Academy of Music in Ljubljana. Until 1926 it operated under the auspices of the Glasbena matica Society, and in 1939 it grew into the Academy of Music. We can read about Erika Schmidt's performance: “Accompanied by the orchestra, Franci Šturm, Erika Schmidt, Zorka Sodnik, Dušan Šantel, Roman Koch, Olga Primic, Anica Zajec and Rizanda Stare presented a four-hand piano playing on four pianos. They performed Dvořák's Slavic Dances in C major, Op. 46, no. 1, and Bach's Concerto for 4 Pianos, BWV 1065 also accompanied by an orchestra.” (Pintarič 2020, 93)

which she did in 1937 to Anton Lenarčič, so she could be still more involved in her mother's lectures.

She showed all kinds of those Japanese hieroglyphic characters and then she [showed] three Japanese dances, which reflected the grace, serenity and fantasy from the land of smiles. The second part of the program was carried out by her daughter Miss Erika Skušek, who first showed slides of musical instruments and then played on the piano the songs *Spring Rain* and *The Song about the Lion*. (*Mariborski večernik* 1935)<sup>18</sup>

What kind of instruments they presented, the characteristics of the songs the Slovene public could hear, remain subjects for further research.

## Concluding Thoughts

Looking at the period of approximately 20 years, from the time Marija Skušek arrived in Slovenia in 1920 to the start of WWII, with a focus on her cultural engagement in presenting Japanese culture in the form of lectures, which was the main focus of the present paper, and taking into consideration the recently rediscovered archive on Marija Skušek as well as the Slovenian (and Yugoslav) media reports from this particular period, we could see the multiple activities she performed in public life.

With these she spread her knowledge, promoted or was engaged in cultural exchanges with Japan, and thus she brought “Japan” closer to the intellectual and cultural milieu of Ljubljana, and beyond. With a series of lectures given in 1930 and 1931, which were mostly presented in the public as *A Japanese about a Japanese Woman* (or in German *Eine Japanerin über die japanische Frau*), starting in Ljubljana and then travelling to different places in Yugoslavia, as well as Austria. These lectures revealed Marija Skušek as a polyglot presenting a diverse variety of facets of Japan, including culture, sociology, art and language.

Moreover, what Marija Skušek gave to the Slovene public in packed lecture halls, often so packed that she had to repeat some of the lecture multiple times, was a particular insight into Japanese women and the struggle for a better social and educational positions at the start of the 20th century, and the emergence of feminist

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18 “Pokazala je celo vrsto teh japonskih hiroglifnih znakov, potem pa predvajala tri japonske plesne, ki se je v njih odražala vsa milina, umerjenost, in fantastika iz dežele smehljaja. Drugi del sporeda je izpolnila njena hčerka Erika Skušekova, ki je najprej prikazala s skioptičnimi slikami glavne glasbene in godbene japonske instrumente, nato pa zaigrala na klavirju ‘Pomladansko deževje’ in ‘Pesem o levu’.”



movements. She also presented certain aspects of Japanese culture, some of which were no longer practiced, while some of her lectures included presentations of her dancing and singing. It is not wholly clear what kind of slides she would present to the public, but from her archive we can conclude that she was constantly gathering news and photos from Japan.

What attracted special attention as far as her lectures are concerned is that most of them were organized by various women's organizations, such as the one in Ljubljana in 1930 (24 January) when she was invited by General Women's Society (*Splošno žensko društvo*), or in Split (11 December) by the National Women's Cooperative (*Narodna ženska zadruga*) which also included a humanitarian campaign for children. Another example is her lecture given at Jesenice in 1936 (7 May), organized by a society called the Ring of Yugoslav Sisters (*Kolo jugoslovanskih sester*), yet another women's organization. The exhibition held within the framework of the "Exhibition of Set Tables" was, surprisingly, also promoted and organized by a women's society, specifically by the first Slovene women's gymnastics society, Atena.

Another interesting fact is that one of the most fully committed figures in the abovementioned organizations was Franja Tavčar (1868–1938), who was Marija Skušek's witness at her wedding to Ivan Skušek in 1927. Franja Tavčar, the wife of Slovene politician and writer Ivan Tavčar, was an active participant in the liberal women's movement and in a wide range of national consciousness and emancipatory events for women. If we mention just some of her relations with the organizations under the auspices of which Marija Skušek was invited to lecture, Franja Tavčar was the president of the General Women's Society, co-founder of Atena, and the founder of the Ring of Yugoslav Sisters in 1921 which cared, *inter alia*, for poor and sick children.

All of the above could perhaps explain why some journals referred to Marija Skušek as "a Japanese representative of feminism" or even "a well-known Japanese feminist" when writing about her, and as well as noting the contents of her lectures. This leads us to assume that Marija Skušek was an active member in many of Franja Tavčar's activities, and brings forward new data on the social circle in which she was actively engaged. Her overall activities, discussed in this article, show Marija Skušek as a figure in Ljubljana public life, where she played an important role in presenting, and transmitting Japanese culture, and taking steps to aid the dialogues in Slovene-Japanese cultural exchanges.

Of course, lectures were not the only of Marija Skušek cultural activities in the period, and not the only social circle in which she was engaged. To grasp her overall involvement and influence on the social and cultural life of Slovenes, we would have to also note that as early as 1929 she was engaged in correspondence with Oton

Zupančič (1878–1949), the Slovene playwright, translator and poet, known as the pioneer of modernism in Slovene literature, and from the 1929 manager at the National Theatre (today’s SNG DRAMA Ljubljana).<sup>19</sup> She was also active as an adviser in Ljubljana’s Opera House at the staging of the opera *Madame Butterfly*, and in this period the version performed in 1936, when the main role was played by a Slovenian soprano of Croatian descent, Zlata Gjungjenac (1898–1982).<sup>20</sup> Besides the connections to the high circles of society that Marija Skušek made in her first 10 years of being in Slovenia, we should not forget her lifelong efforts for Slovene-Japanese cultural exchange, the beginnings of which we can also trace to this period. One of the earliest Japanese people who she hosted in Ljubljana and took on a visit to the Slovenian artist France Sterle (1889–1930) was the Japanese zoologist Uchida Tōru 内田亨 (1897–1981), who travelled and researched in Europe from 1929 to 1931 (Makino 1957, ix). Another active role adopted by Marija Skušek made use of her language abilities. Marija Skušek was probably one of the first teachers of Chinese and Japanese in Slovenia.<sup>21</sup> However, all of these efforts need to be further researched and an appropriate place found in the history of Slovene-Japanese cultural exchanges, in both Slovenia as well as Japan.

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19 She was asked to help with the 1929 play *Battle* (after the work *La bataille* by Pierre Frondaie) by Marki Yorisaka Sadao, to lend “Japanese costumes” and “two Japanese instruments” (Župančič 1929).

20 At the time, *Madame Butterfly* was an opera with many performances, and had been a key part of the repertoire of the opera since 1908 (Lah 2014, 117). The version in which Marija Skušek assisted was a new staging in which the lion’s share of work was done by the composer and conductor Niko Štritof (1890–1944), who newly translated, studied and directed the work. Marija Skušek was credited with both offering advice on the staging and “on walking, gesture and the clothes of the Japanese” (*Slovenski narod* 1935).

21 Marija Skušek would work with private students (Chikako Shigemori, email to the author, January 25, 2021). In addition to Chinese and Japanese, she would also teach English (Hribar 2008, 203).

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