

Eötvös Loránd University
Faculty of Humanities

SUMMARY OF PHD THESIS

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Two decades of Hungarian–Japanese diplomatic relations: 1944–1964

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Actuality and historiography of research topic

The history of the first two decades of the post-1945 Hungarian–Japanese diplomatic relations is still a poorly investigated area of Hungarian historiography. Since this bilateral relationship was never regarded as particularly significant in the Cold War era, there was no attempt for deeper exploration of this bilateral relation within the Hungarian or Japanese history of diplomacy. Major works dealing with the post-1945 period of Hungarian and Japanese diplomatic history have only very briefly mentioned the relationship between Hungary and Japan.¹ Similarly, previous research on the history of bilateral relations – together with the introduction of bilateral cultural exchanges between the two nations² – focused largely on Hungarian–Japanese interactions during the interwar period and the Second World War, and to a lesser extent on the relations between the Austro–Hungarian Empire and Japan.³

The pioneer work of Yuko Umemura Yuko – *A Japán-tengertől a Duna-partig. Imaoka Dzsúicsiró életpályája a magyar–japán kapcsolatok tükrében* [From the Sea of Japan to the Danube bank. The life of Juichiro Imaoka with regard to Hungarian–Japanese relations] – brought breakthrough in this field in 2006.⁴ A 2004 PhD Thesis by the history faculty member of the Institute for Oriental Studies at Eötvös Loránd University is in fact much more than just a simple biography of Imaoka. It is indeed the first comprehensive and scholarly overview of the history of the Hungarian–Japanese relationship in Hungarian. Previously, the most detailed summary in this field had been a Japanese conference volume of an academic workshop in 1981, and the German language PhD dissertation of Izabella C. Kovács from the University of Vienna from 1987.⁵ Umemura’s monograph was another important milestone with the localization and professional summary of previous research.

¹ Joshizava 1973: 393-397, Kido 1982: 236-239; Nagy M. 1993: 37; Fülöp–Sipos: 1998: 432, 474; Gazdag 1999: 32; Borhi 2000: 98; Szobolevszki–Vida 2001: 10.; Békés Cs. 2003: 17; Umemura 2006a: 22-23.; Békés Cs. 2007: 17-18; Vámos 2006b: 118. The only exception is the Japanese echo of the 1956 Hungarian revolution (Ieda 1982; Kodzima 1987; Umemura 2000b).

² Mezey 1939; Török 1941; Nagy Iván 1941; Nagy Iván 1943; Harangi 1982; Minamizuka 1982; Vida 1982; Kovács C. 1987; Tokunaga 1988; Farkas 1996; Uő 2001; Uő 2007; Uő 2009; Szerdahelyi 1996; Senga 1994a, Sato 2002; Kondo 1999.

³ Only some chapters of this history were researched previously: Haba 1982, Senga 1994a, Senga 1999, Szerdahelyi 1996. Umemura 2006a gives a synthesis of previous research on this field. Recently: Sallay 2006; Uő 2007.; Tóth 2010.; Tóth–Zsigmond 2011.

⁴ Umemura 2006a. About it see Wintermantel 2008.

⁵ *Nihon to tóó 1982*. Kovács C. 1987.

Perhaps it is no exaggeration to consider the historical chapters of the Overview of Japanese Studies in Hungary⁶ from 2007 as important and recent milestones. The two memorial volumes, one published in Budapest and one in Tokyo, for the double diplomatic anniversary of 2009 (the 165th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between the Austro–Hungarian Empire and Japan, and respectively the 50th anniversary of the renewal of diplomatic relations between Hungary and Japan in 1959) provide the most comprehensive and yet complementary description of Hungarian–Japanese relations.⁷

It is worth mentioning that from the Hungarian perspective, many other Asian relations are far ahead of Hungary in this matter, and many volumes have been published in the past years on post-1945 Hungarian–Chinese, Hungarian–(North-)Korean and Hungarian–Indian relationships..⁸

The renewal of diplomatic ties between the People’s Republic of Hungary and Japan is well-known and took place through exchanges of note verbales at the end of August 1959, following month-long expert level negotiations at the countries’ Prague embassies. The diplomatic representations in Budapest and Tokyo were restored the following year, first as Legations, later Embassies, with the elevation of diplomatic ties to the Ambassadorial level in 1964.

It is quite unfortunate that despite the widely known sequence of these past events – as we shall see later – the renewal of Hungarian–Japanese diplomatic ties, and the reopening of the diplomatic missions are, with almost no exception, falsely cited within the Hungarian historiography. In addition, there was no previous discussion about the antecedents of this relationship starting from the early 1950’s, particularly those contacts made through party channels and “progressive” mass society organizations, the ties conducted in the fields foreign trade, cultural and sport, nor any concrete details of normalization of this relationship and inner/outer drivers, like connectivity of this relationships with the Great Power diplomacy of the Cold War.

⁶ Szerdahelyi–Wintermantel 2007.

⁷ Farkas et al 2009; *A japán–magyar...* 2010.

⁸ On China see: Vida 1994; Csen 1996; Szobolevszki 1996; Szobolevszki–Vida, 2001, Vámos-Sárdy 2003; Vámos 2003; Vámos 2006a; Vámos 2006b; Vámos 2007; Vámos 2008; Sen 2007; on India: Vida 1994; Rahman 2006; Gáthy–Vida–Erdélyi 2006; On North Korea: Kocsis 2011; Csoma 2012; Szalontai 2005.

Methods and sources of research

Based on Hungarian and Japanese archival sources, and incorporating available domestic and international literature, this thesis intends to introduce the history of Hungarian–Japanese relationship from the endgame of the Second World War until the elevation of diplomatic representations to Embassies in 1964. By that time, we believe the general characteristics have clearly developed that defined respective segments of bilateral relations over the next quarter century, up until the turning point of World history in 1989–90. Although Hungarian–Japanese automotive negotiations in 1968–70 clearly extended the time horizon of this thesis, by taking into account the special significance of the car industry in the later period of the relationship, we found it useful to introduce it in a special chapter because of the general lessons learned from the failure of these negotiations. In a similar outlook we present history of civil society ties and Japanese–Hungarian Friendship Societies from 1964 to 1970, since they are especially relevant for showcasing the continuity on an individual level that existed between the prewar and post-1945 periods.

Research results

It is well known that after their defeat and occupation in the Second World War, the two former Axis allies found themselves on opposite sides of the Iron Curtain. Furthermore, when we examine the relationship between the People’s Republic of Hungary and Japan in the Great Power context, we are describing a relationship between two satellite states, surely with a different weight and importance within their own bloc of the two superpowers. As we will see from various examples, this impacted their relationship during Cold War times significantly.

There is no doubt that this bilateral relationship had only very modest importance during the interwar period. Also, we should bear in mind that belonging to the same Axis bloc did not automatically establish any direct political connection between individual members of the bloc.

In the expert eye, the media and political PR image (gradually more and more active cultural exchange, Japanese propaganda events organized in the newly “returned” Hungarian territories, the pop-up mirage myth of Turanism, or the wishful images of the diplomatically empty-handed Szálasi regime towards Japan) of this Axis alliance cannot

hide the inconsequential nature of Hungarian–Japanese diplomatic relations. Through Japanese related hints, accusations in the people's court trials, or by the many books on Japan listed among the banned Fascist literature of Hungary, the swift Sovietization following the collapse at the end of the Second World War had its own part in supporting the illusion of close pre-1945 Hungarian–Japanese relations.

Comparing the wartime period to the 1920-30s, the Hungarian–Japanese relationship has therefore changed considerably. This bilaterally and completely apolitical relationship has seemed to be replaced with a close alliance - at least in words and slogans. Previous triumphant ideas on the foreign trade front were overwritten by war economy conditions, so forming any meaningful cooperation in anti-Soviet intelligence cooperation was possible on just cultural and technical levels. Axis cooperation between 1939 and 1945 has only appeared within Hungarian Foreign Policy in the form of spectacular protocol elements and on the level of mandatory and empty rhetoric. Also, from the Japanese perspective, Hungary could attract attention in Japanese politics and public only when she was joining the two international agreements of the Axis countries. With the detailed description of the events from 1944–1945, we hope that we can visualize this network on a personal level and identify the thematic (and from the Japanese side partially personal) continuity that allowed the Hungarian–Japanese relationship to continue to exist and reemerge in the decades of Cold War confrontation.

By presenting the operation of the Hungarian Legation in Tokyo after 1944, we hope to enrich the previous image of the Hungarian Envoy Nicholas Vegh, who remained on his post even after the German occupation of Hungary, and add new elements for the judging his overall activity. It was previously unknown that the Royal Hungarian Legation in Tokyo refused to cooperate with the Hungarist puppet government in Budapest. By staying in Tokyo, these Hungarian diplomats were able to carry out and join important lifesaving activities, especially with regard to the Hungarian Jewish community in Shanghai.

When examining the ingredients of post-1945 normalization, we can state that as far as the superpowers are concerned, the re-establishment of relations was approved by the Soviets and the Chinese while supporting the just initiated process of Soviet–Japanese normalization at the same time. On the other hand, it also demonstrated quite well the Hungarian intention for compliance with the “active foreign policy” doctrine expected

from the Eastern European countries. If we believe a Japanese hint, the United States was applying the brakes at the beginning of Hungarian–Japanese rapprochement. However, later on, the emerging business exchanges between Kádár’s Hungary and the “paper tiger of Japanese imperialism” were perfectly fitting to the American endeavors aimed at loosening the Soviet economic dependence of the Communist Bloc countries. From an American point of view, any Japanese contact with smaller Communist countries would be favorable since in Washington one might have trusted that the first – and possibly smaller than expected – economic results of these relationships might be useful in easing excessive Japanese expectations towards Moscow.

When investigating the situation of this bilateral relationship, we can say that the deepening of Hungarian–Japanese bilateral relations were primarily motivated by external economic considerations from both sides. Growing foreign trade aspirations and the need for increasing the foreign exchange revenue were decisive factors for the Hungarian side, while the Japanese party initially viewed Hungarian relations as an opportunity for better access to Chinese goods under embargo.

It is important to stress that the initial steps on the Hungarian–Japanese line were made well before 1956, and it essentially already had begun after April of 1952, when Japan regained its sovereignty but in some cases even before that. It is essential that the Cold War detente detected around 1954 is evident in the Hungarian–Japanese relationship as well.

The Hungarian revolution of 1956 significantly slowed down the contacts. The effects of this – compared to other countries of the socialist block – continued until the end of the Kádár era. The gradual strengthening of economic relations and the increasing reliance of Hungary on Western capital and technology has become progressively free of ideologies. Outrage against Japanese Fascism and militarism became more and more rare, and Japan appeared in decision making materials and in the Hungarian media not as a nest of reviving aggression in the Far East, but rather as a model country for technological developments.

The relative insignificance of this relationship is clearly demonstrated by the low level of contacts made between experts and diplomats during the renewal of diplomatic relations. This is in clear contrast to Soviet–Japanese negotiations done at level of

Ambassadors and followed by meetings and visits of Foreign Ministers and Prime Ministers for example.

For the Hungarian side, the Soviet–Japanese normalization in the 1950s meant inherently a strong catalytic effect: all Japanese delegations visiting Hungary, with almost no exception, arrived in Hungary after and from the Soviet Union. Similarly, the Hungarian friendship society in Japan that was banned under the American occupation was relaunched (partly with unchanged membership of the prewar period) as a branch of the Soviet–Japanese Friendship Association, and under the patronage of the Japanese Socialist Party. Soviet influence on the Hungarian side could be detected at the initial approach for renewal of ties in 1956, later at the low-key management of relations at the beginning of the 1960's, while the American impact on the Japanese side could be felt at the upgrading of the diplomatic ties to Ambassadorial level.

As far as the increased level of diplomatic representations is concerned, the Hungarians advocated it since the renewal of relations in August 1959. This goal was masked as a sole Japanese intention in every internal Foreign Ministry document. However, quite soon after the normalization of Hungarian–Japanese relations, the aims of the Hungarian foreign policy makers were fulfilled, and in the atmosphere of “peaceful coexistence” the possibility of deepening these ties was provided.

It is remarkable that many ideas of the defining pillars of bilateral economic relations of the later decades – such as Japanese loans (1956) or the establishment of a Japanese car assembly plant – appear already in this early period of the relationship. Finally, it is noteworthy, that within a couple of years after the renewal of diplomatic relations – until elevating the level of diplomatic representations from Legations to Embassies in 1964 – the framework of the bilateral political contacts, economic relations and cultural exchange were established and remained valid in the following 25 years of bilateral cooperation (until the mid-1980's).

Publications and lectures on the topic of the thesis

1. A Szálasi-rezsim diplomáciai kapcsolatai Japánnal. In: Szerdahelyi István – Wintermantel Péter (ed.): *Japanológiai körkép. Emlékkönyv az ELTE BTK japán szakos képzésének húszéves jubileumára*. ELTE Eötvös Kiadó, Bp., 2007. 111-134.
2. *Adalékok a magyar–japán diplomáciai kapcsolatok 1959-es felújításának történetéhez.* = Lecture. A japanisztika interdiszciplináris kutatóműhelyiből. Konferencia a Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Japán tanszékén. Budapest, November 26, 2007.
3. Adalékok a magyar–japán diplomáciai kapcsolatok 1959-es felújításának történetéhez. In: Farkas Ildikó – Molnár Pál (ed.): *Japanisztika konferenciák a Károli Gáspár Református Egyetemen 2007-2008*. KGRE, Bp., 2009. 99-112.
4. A magyar–japán diplomáciai kapcsolatok felújításának története (1945–1959). *Külgügyi Szemle*, 2009/2. 117-149.
5. A magyar–japán diplomáciai kapcsolatok története, 1918-1945. (with Gergely Pál Sallay) In: Farkas Ildikó – Szerdahelyi István – Umemura Yuko – Wintermantel Péter (eds.): *Tanulmányok a magyar–japán kapcsolatok történetéből..*: ELTE Eötvös Kiadó, Bp., 2009. 115-176.
6. A magyar–japán diplomáciai kapcsolatok története, 1945–1964. In: Farkas Ildikó – Szerdahelyi István – Umemura Yuko – Wintermantel Péter (eds.): *Tanulmányok a magyar–japán kapcsolatok történetéből..*: ELTE Eötvös Kiadó, Bp., 2009. 277-293.
7. Adalékok a Japán–Magyar Baráti Társaság 1945–1975 közötti történetéhez. In: Farkas Ildikó – Szerdahelyi István – Umemura Yuko – Wintermantel Péter (eds.): *Tanulmányok a magyar–japán kapcsolatok történetéből..*: ELTE Eötvös Kiadó, Bp., 2009. 612-617.
8. *A magyar–japán diplomáciai kapcsolatok hét évtizede (1920-1990).* = Lecture. Magyar Japanológusok VIII. Tanácskozása. ELTE BTK, Budapest, October 28, 2009.
9. *A proaktív japán diplomácia lehetőségei a JDP kül- és biztonságpolitikai célkitűzéseinek tükrében* = Lecture. A japanisztika interdiszciplináris kutatóműhelyiből. Konferencia a Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Japán tanszékén. Budapest, November 25, 2009.
10. 日本ハンガリー友好協会の歴史についての考察—1945年—1975年. In: 日本・ハンガリー交流史 1869～2009. 日本ハンガリー友好協会・2009年 日本・ハンガリー国交回復50周年記念事業実験委員会、東京、2010. pp.32-36.
11. „Ez lett volna az első japán autógyár Európában.” *Az 1968-70-es magyar–japán autóipari tárgyalások kudarcáról.* = Lecture. Japán nap. Hadtörténeti Múzeum. Budapest, February 11, 2012.
12. „Ez lett volna az első japán autógyár Európában.” *Az 1968-70-es magyar–japán autóipari tárgyalások kudarcáról.* = Lecture. VII. Japanológiai konferencia, Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Japanológiai tanszéke. Budapest, April 23, 2012.