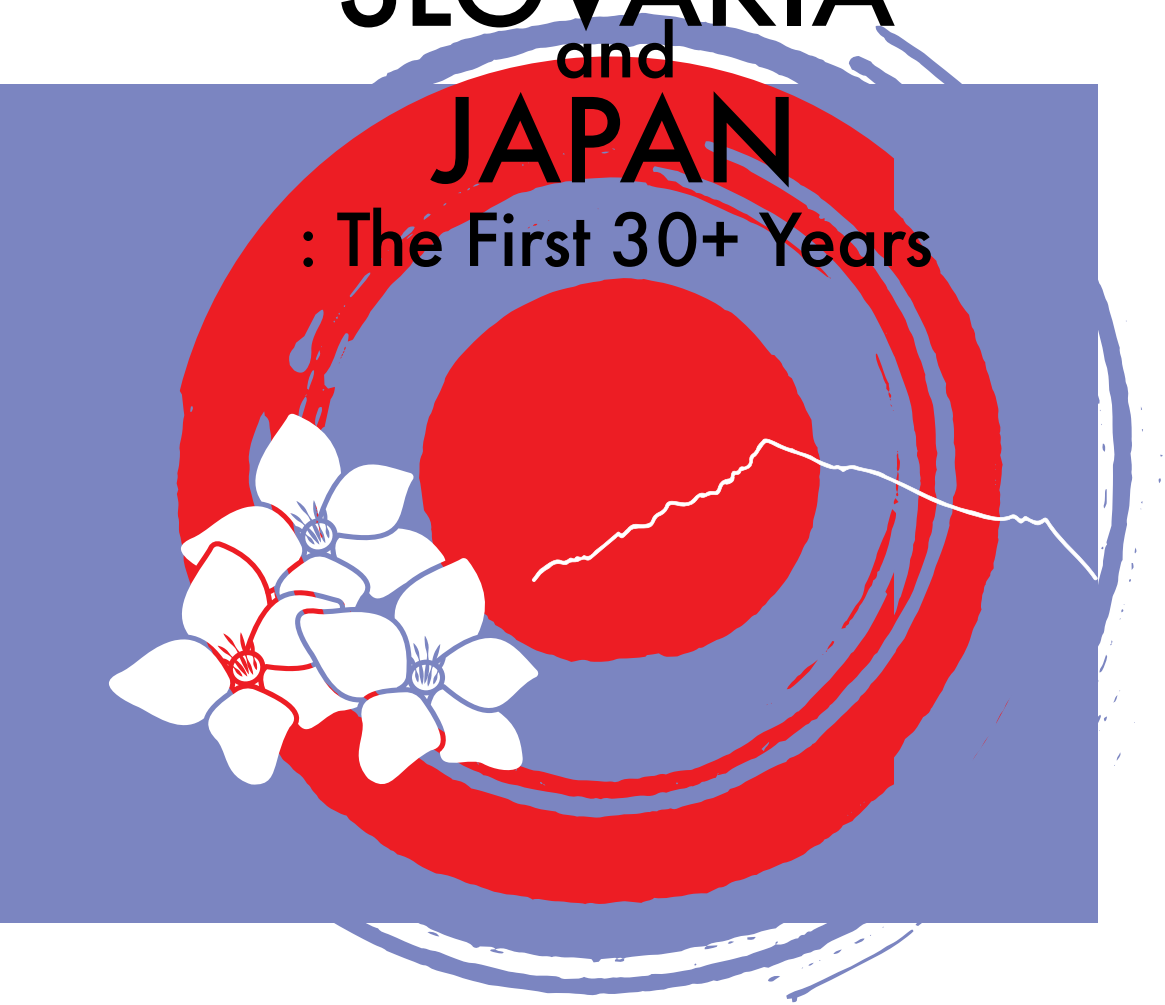
Pavol Demeš

SLOVAKIA and JAPAN

: The First 30+ Years



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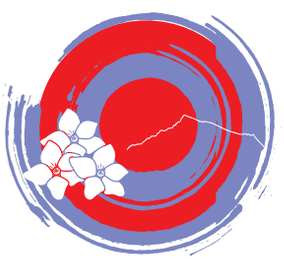

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The First 30+ Years

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Pavol Demeš is an independent foreign policy analyst, columnist and civil society expert based in Bratislava. He has published numerous articles and books, including books on Slovakia's relations with the United States, Canada, Israel and the United Kingdom. He has had many photography exhibitions at home and abroad.

He has been involved in foreign policy since the beginning of the Slovak Republic. In 1991–1992 he was the Minister of International Relations of the Slovak Republic and in 1993–1997 he served as a foreign policy advisor to the first President of the Slovak Republic, Michal Kováč. He has a long-term cooperation with the Slovak foreign policy community.

He is the recipient of several awards, including: the EU–US Democracy and Civil Society Award (1998), Royal Dutch decoration Knight of the Order of Orange Nassau (2005), Yugoslav Star of First Class (2005), the Czech and Slovak Transatlantic Award (2017), and the Medal of Merit for Slovak Diplomacy (2023).

The Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA), founded in August 1993, is an independent, nonpartisan and non-profit organisation. It is the oldest foreign policy think tank in Slovakia. Throughout its program of meetings, seminars, workshops and publications, the SFPA disseminates information about international relations. It has published hundreds of opinions, expert studies, policy briefs, policy papers and books.

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Foreword by Yasuhiro KAWAKAMI,

Ambassador of Japan to the Slovak Republic

I am extremely pleased with the publication of this book by Mr. Pavol Demeš, which comprehensively records the history of mutual relations and exchanges between Japan and Slovakia in various fields. I am also impressed by the efforts he has made on this journey of collecting facts, and on behalf of the Japanese people, I would like to express my gratitude to him.

More than 30 years have passed since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Slovakia, but so far, such a comprehensive compilation of the history and trajectories of our mutual relations and contacts has never been created. I am convinced that this book will be a truly valuable textbook that will help deepen mutual understanding between the people of both our countries.

I believe that the Expo 2025 World Exhibition, which is being held in Osaka this year, will bring new opportunities for Slovaks to visit Japan. In that case, I would very much like them to first become at least a little familiar with the history of relations between our two countries through this book.

As the Ambassador of Japan to the Slovak Republic, let me once again express my heartfelt thanks to Mr. Pavol Demeš for his book.

Foreword by Miroslav Lajčák,

Ambassador of the Slovak Republic to Japan in 1994–1998 and former Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic

Probably everyone in Slovakia knows where Japan is located and has some idea of this exceptional and, from our point of view, exotic country. However, few people know what a significant role Japan played in the first years of the existence of the Slovak Republic. It is worth remembering that it was Japanese financial institutions that were the first to give Slovakia a credit rating and thus enabled our entry into international financial markets. It is no coincidence that the very first contacts at the intergovernmental level were made by representatives of the National Bank of Slovakia and the Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic. It is also worth mentioning that several hundred employees of our state administration who, in the first years of independence, completed training for civil servants, which was offered and paid for by the Japanese government through its development assistance agency.

I had the honor of representing the Slovak Republic as Ambassador to Japan in the first years of our state's existence (1994–1998) and I can confirm that my Japanese partners at the government level, as well as ordinary citizens, showed a sincere and genuine interest in getting to know Slovakia as a new member of the international community; without lecturing, criticizing or any displays of superiority (which we enjoyed more than enough in other parts of the world at that time).

The first "ambassadors" of Slovakia in Japan were our artists. Japan values and knows how to appreciate top art. Peter Dvorský, Ondrej Lenárd, Lúčnica, but also many others can confirm this from their own experience.

I am glad that Slovak–Japanese relations have developed positively from the first day and have gradually gained in quality, content and intensity both at the political level and in the areas of economic cooperation, culture, science, education, sports and interpersonal contacts. These relations have long been asked to be mapped and documented—for future generations, for students, for researchers or for those interested. I am very pleased that this call has been heard, and the reader is receiving a very competently prepared, literally encyclopedic overview of Slovak–Japanese relations. On the initiative of Pavol Demeš, many personalities who were part of the formation of these relations contributed to the individual chapters, which gives this publication a special authenticity.

When we look at a world map, it seems that Japan is somewhere on its edge. However, the moment you step off the plane at Tokyo airport, you immediately feel that you have found yourself at the center of world events—political, economic and cultural. Simply put, Japan is a superpower. And Slovakia has exceptionally high-quality and intensive relations with this superpower. I would like to thank the author Pavol Demeš and everyone who contributed to the creation of this publication, thanks to which information about the breadth and quality of these relations will reach the public.

Introduction

Japan is about 9,000 kilometers away from Slovakia, but we share a surprising number of bonds and inspirations with it. This successful and innovative island country with a unique ancient culture and traditions has significantly helped our young state in the heart of Europe to establish itself in the family of democratic countries and is attracting the attention of an increasing number of people. On the contrary, the Japanese are primarily attracted by our culture and its creators.

In this book, I tried to discover and uncover the multi-layered nature of relations between a country that is one of the world's great powers and a much smaller Slovakia, which appeared on the map of Europe only about three decades ago. I have visited the Land of the Rising Sun repeatedly and have been cooperating with the Japanese Embassy in Slovakia for a long time.

I obtained data for this book project from various archival sources, classical and social media, websites and, in particular, numerous interviews with diplomats, representatives of culture, education, science, economics and sports. I am grateful to them for their help in putting together this mosaic, which I plan to enrich.

My special thanks go to the current Japanese ambassador Yasuhiro Kawakami and members of his team, who were enthusiastic about this book project and supported it financially.

Many people helped me in preparing the text and reviewing the manuscript, for which I thank them. I would like to express my gratitude to the following of them: Erik Lenhart, Vladimír Grežo, Jana Součová, Zuzana Ondrejková, Viera Polakovičová, Magdaléna Rollerová, František Paulovič, Štefan Pech, Michal Horvat, Simona Jurkovičová, Slavomír Michálek and Jana Kadlecová. Many thanks for the translation and editing of the text to Michal Bróska and Ann Johnson.

The publication is being published in the year of the World Exhibition EXPO Osaka 2025, in which the Slovak Republic is also participating (https://slovakiaexpo.sk/). On September 10, EXPO 2025 will be the National Day of the Slovak Republic. I believe that the publication will contribute to better mutual understanding and presentation of Slovakia.

Pavol Demeš

The Beginnings of Slovak–Japanese Relations

(Before the Establishment of the Slovak Republic in January 1993)

The roots of Slovak–Japanese relations reach deep into history.

The Hungarian nobleman, Móric Beňovský (a native of today's Slovak town of Vrbové) landed briefly on the Japanese island of Shikoku in the town of Sakinohama in 1771 during his escape from exile on the Russian Kamchatka Peninsula. Benovsky's arrival on this island is also recorded in the Japanese chronicles.

In April 1918, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, the politician and the future first President of Czecho-Slovakia, visited Japan on his way from Russia to the USA. In Tokyo, he established contacts with the American, British, and French Embassies and held talks with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the issue of the Czecho-Slovak Legions and their transfer through Siberia.

The journey of General Milan Rastislav Stefaik, the future Czechoslovak Minister of War to Japan in October–November 1918 was of great significance. He was there during the Czechoslovak Declaration of Independence (October 28, 1918). Štefánik's Japanese mission was mapped in the Slovak magazine *Historická revue* (2007) by the Japanese historian and the Slovak Studies scholar Susumu Nagayo (who also wrote the book *Czechoslovak Legions and Japan* 1918–1920 which was presented at the Embassy of the Slovak Republic in Tokyo in April 2023).

Štefánik travelled to Japan with a French military delegation led by General Maurice Janin on his way from the United States to Vladivostok. In Japan, they arranged military and logistical assistance for the Czechoslovak Legionnaires as the Japanese party recognized the Legions as an Allied army, and its navy was helpful in their subsequent evacuation from Russia (as evidenced by a monument in Tokyo's Yasukuni shrine which is dedicated to soldiers and civilians who died fighting for the Japanese Emperor). The delegation was also received by the Japanese Emperor which sparked public interest in Czechoslovakia. The Legionnaires have their monument in Japan dedicated to four Czechs and one Slovak. In 2015, it was unveiled at Fuchū Cemetery in Tokyo by the Czech Minister of Defense Martin Stropnický.

M. R. Štefánik was also present at the birth of the Czecho-Slovak–Japanese diplomatic relations. Before leaving Japan, on November 8, 1918, he authorized and appointed Václav Němec as a temporary military attaché and a diplomatic representative of the Czecho-Slovak Government to the Japanese Imperial Government. Němec presented his credentials to the Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs on December 21, 1918, which is considered as the establishment of the Czecho-Slovak–Japanese diplomatic relations.

Official diplomatic relations between the newly-formed Czecho-Slovakia and Japan were established on January 12, 1920, when the first Czecho-Slovak Ambassador Karel Pergler presented his credentials to Crown Prince (later Emperor) Hirohito. Japan opened the Embassy Prague in October 1921.

The diplomatic relations were interrupted in 1939 by World War II when Czecho-Slovakia was divided by Hitler into the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and the Slovak Republic (until 1945). As one of the Axis powers the Japanese Empire recognized the wartime Slovak State on June 1, 1939. The Japanese

Ambassador to Berlin, Hiroshi Ōshima, was also accredited to the Slovak Republic.

As a result of the bipolar division of the world, diplomatic relations between the Czechoslovak Republic and Japan were not restored until 1957, the same year when relations between the Soviet Union and Japan were also restored.

During the socialist period the relations between Czechoslovakia and Japan were underdeveloped. Besides the commercial sphere they deepened in fields defined by the Agreement on Cultural Cooperation between the Government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the Government of Japan from 1976. In this agreement, the governments of both countries agreed to cooperate primarily through the exchange of researchers, scientists, technicians, students, artists, athletes, and other persons involved in cultural activities through governmental bodies; by awarding scholarships to the nationals of the other country for study and research at universities or other educational institutions; by organizing lectures, art exhibitions, and other cultural events organized by state administration bodies; and by disseminating information materials published by governmental bodies.

The historic high level visit of President of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic Ludvík Svoboda to Japan took place in 1970 when the President Svoboda visited Japan. In Tokyo, he was received by the Japanese Emperor Hirohito, and subsequently, the President viewed the Czechoslovak Pavilion at the World EXPO '70 in Osaka. He was accompanied by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ján Marko, a native of Slovakia.

The renewal of political contacts at the level of the foreign ministers occurred in 1973 when Bohuslav Chňoupek made an official visit to Japan. The reciprocal visit of the Japanese Foreign Minister Sunao Sonoda took place five years later. Until 1989,

several other visits to Japan at the ministerial level were made, and in 1979, the Prime Minister of the CSSR, Lubomír Štrougal, visited the country.

In February 1989, the First Deputy Prime Minister of the Federal Government, Pavol Hrivnák, originally from Slovakia, represented the CSSR at the funeral of Emperor Hirohito.

The Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia in November 1989 ended the era of communism and opened the doors for free and intensive cooperation between Czecho-Slovakia and Japan in all fields. During this period, the representatives of the now democratic Czecho-Slovakia began to travel to Japan.

Alexander Dubček, then Chairman of the Parliament of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic (CSFR), attended the enthronement of the Emperor Akihito in November 1990. A significant milestone in the bilateral relations was the five-day visit of the Czecho-Slovak President Václav Havel to Japan in April 1992. His delegation included the Deputy Prime Minister of the CSFR Jozef Mikloško and the Deputy Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic Anton Vavro. During the visit, a new trade agreement was signed, and the Japanese Government promised loans to help with economic transformation.

Diplomatic Relations and Bilateral Visits

Diplomatic relations between the Slovak Republic (SR) and Japan were established on February 3, 1993, with effect from January 1, 1993.

The Slovak Republic opened its embassy in Tokyo on January 1, 1993. Japan diplomatically covered Slovakia from its embassy in Prague for the first nine years and opened a separate embassy in Bratislava on January 22, 2002.

• SLOVAK AMBASSADORS TO JAPAN TO DATE

Slovakia has had nine ambassadors in Japan since 1993:

Ján Dömök (1993–1994), Miroslav Lajčák (1994–1998), Mikuláš Sedlák (1998–2001), Július Hauser (2001–2004), Peter Vršanský (2004–2009), Drahomír Štos (2009–2013), Michal Kottman (2013–2017), Marián Tomášik (2017–2024), Ivan Surkoš (2024–present).

The first eight Slovak ambassadors presented their credentials to the Emperor Akihito (the imperial Heisei era) who ascended to the throne in 1989, and the ninth–the current ambassador–presented his credentials to the Emperor Naruhito (the imperial Reiwa era) who ascended to the throne in 2019.

• BUILDINGS OF THE SLOVAK EMBASSY AND AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE

After the establishment of the Slovak Republic, the Embassy of the Slovak Republic in Japan had its headquarters in the rented premises of the Embassy of the Czech Republic. It was also the residence of the first four ambassadors. (Address: 2-16-14, *Hiroo, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo*.)

The Embassy of the Slovak Republic moved to a new independent and representative building constructed by the construction company *Asahi Tatemono Kabushiki Kaisha* in August 2004. In addition to the administrative part the embassy premises also include the ambassador's residential apartment. (Address: 2 *Chome*-11-33 *Motoazabu, Minato City, Tokyo*.)

• HONORARY CONSULATES OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC IN JAPAN

In 2008 the Honorary Consulate of the Slovak Republic was established in Kirishima City, Kagoshima Prefecture (headed by the Honorary Consul Masahiro Yamamoto). In 2012 the Honorary Consulate of the Slovak Republic was established in Utsunomiya, Tochigi Prefecture (the Honorary Consul Eiichi Ishikawa), and in October 2014, the Honorary Consulate of the Slovak Republic was established in Osaka, Osaka Prefecture (currently closed following the passing of Honorary Consul Shiro Murai on March 11, 2025. The SIIX Corporation, which hosted the consulate, has announced that it is in the process of applying for a new Honorary Consul to continue the legacy and connections built by Mr. Murai).

• JAPANESE AMBASSADORS TO SLOVAKIA TO DATE

Japan has had twelve ambassadors to Slovakia since 1993:

Kuniaki Asomura (1993–1994), Nobuo Miyamoto (1994–1997),

Shunji Maruyama (1997–1999), Hiroto Ishida (1999–2002), Toyojiro Soejima (2002–2005), Makoto Washizu (2005–2008), Yoshio Nomoto (2008–2011), Akira Takamatsu (2011–2013), Akio Egawa (2013–2016), Jun Shimmi (2016–2020), Makoto Nakagawa (2020–2023), Yasuhiro Kawakami (2023–present).

The first four ambassadors covered Slovakia from the Embassy in Prague. Only after the opening of the Japanese Embassy in the historic centre of Bratislava on the Main Square did Ambassador Toyojiro Soejima become the first resident ambassador to Slovakia.

• RESIDENCES OF THE JAPANESE AMBASSADOR

The first residence of the Japanese ambassador was from 2002 to 2019 in a villa near Horský Park on 27 Gorazdova Street. Since 2020 the Japanese ambassador has had a residence near the embassy in a historic residential building on 8 Laurinská Street.

• DECORATIONS

In September 2005 the President of the Slovak Republic Ivan Gašparovič awarded the state decoration the Order of the White Double Cross, 3rd Class, to the first resident ambassador of Japan to the Slovak Republic, Toyojiro Soejima, for his personal contribution to the comprehensive development of the Slovak–Japanese relations.

In November 2022 the Japanese Emperor Naruhito awarded the former Slovak Ambassador to Japan Miroslav Lajčák the *Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun* for his contribution to deepening the relations between Slovakia and Japan.

It is interesting to note that two former Slovak ambassadors to Japan also dedicated themselves to this country in book publications: Mikuláš Sedlák prepared the scholarly book *Japanese Economy Yesterday and Today* (Wolters Kluwer (Iura Edition),

2004), and Ján Dömök described his experiences from the capitalize Land of the Rising Sun in a separate chapter in the memoir *Diplomat on Four Continents* (Ikar, 2007).

• BILATERAL VISITS AT THE GOVERNMENT LEVEL

Over the three decades of bilateral relations, a relatively large number of visits by Slovak official representatives to Japan have taken place, including visits by Presidents Michal Kováč (1998), Ivan Gašparovič (2012), and Zuzana Čaputová (2019), Prime Ministers Vladimír Mečiar (1997) and Mikuláš Dzurinda (2005), and Parliament Speakers Ivan Gašparovič (1994) and Jozef Migaš (2000).

Among the Ministers of Foreign Affairs there were visits by Jozef Moravčík (1993), Pavol Hamžík (1997, accompanying the Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar), Eduard Kukan (2000, 2005), Ján Kubiš (2007), and Miroslav Lajčák (2009, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2019).

Japan was also visited separately by ministers of other departments: Ladislav Pittner, Minister of Interior of the SR (1994), Jozef Macejko, Minister of Transport, Posts and Telecommunications of the SR (2002), Pavol Prokopovič, Minister of Transport, Posts and Telecommunications of the SR (2004), László Miklós, Minister of Environment of the SR (2007), Peter Kažimír, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance of the SR (2013), Peter Žiga, Minister of Economy of the SR (2016, 2019), Denisa Saková, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy, and the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Environment Tomáš Taraba (2024). Several other ministers were part of delegations of the highest constitutional officials.

For the sake of interest, we note that the following Slovak political figures were received by the Japanese Emperor (in chronological order): Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar (1997), President

Michal Kováč (1998), Parliament Speaker Jozef Migaš (2000), Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda (2005), President Ivan Gašparovič (2012), President Zuzana Čaputová (2019), and former Minister of Foreign Affairs Miroslav Lajčák when receiving a state decoration (2022).

• OFFICIAL VISITS FROM JAPAN TO SLOVAKIA

Significantly fewer official visits have come to Slovakia from Japan since the establishment of the independent state.

From the imperial court, there was a visit by Princess Sayako in 2000 and Prince Fumihito and Princess Kiko in 2013.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was the first prime minister to visit Slovakia in 2019.

The first official visit to the Slovak Republic was made by the Foreign Minister Taro Aso in 2007.

The Minister of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport, Kazuo Kitagawa, visited Bratislava in 2006.

Among parliamentary visits, one can mention the delegation in 1995, led by the Lower House member and the Chairman of the Japan–Slovakia Parliamentary Friendship Group Kiyoshi Mizuno, and further delegations of the Speaker of the Lower House of the Japanese Parliament Tamisuke Watanuki (2001), the Chairman of the Japan–Slovakia Parliamentary Friendship Group Naokazu Takemoto (2018), and the Deputy Speaker of the Upper House of the Japanese Parliament Hiroyuki Nagahama (2024).

• PARLIAMENTARY FRIENDSHIP GROUPS

Within the Japanese Parliament, the Japan–Slovakia Parliamentary Friendship Group has been operating since 1993. Since December 2020 its chairwoman has been prominent

Member of Parliament from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (the former minister of several times) Seiko Noda. The group consists of a total of 16 members of the Japanese Parliament. Among the prominent members is Minoru Kiuchi, Minister for Economic Security.

In 1994, after joining the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the partner Friendship Group with Japan was established in the National Council of the Slovak Republic (NC SR). Its chairmen in individual electoral terms were: Dušan Slobodník (1994–1998), Peter Weiss (1998–2002), Jirko Malchárek (2002–2006), Boris Zala (2006–2010), František Šebej (2010–2018), Tibor Bastrnák (2018–2020), Peter Osuský (2020–2023). In the current 9th electoral term of the NC SR, the group has not yet been renewed.

• INTERESTING FACTS FROM BILATERAL VISITS

The first Slovak official representative to visit Japan immediately after the establishment of the state was the State Secretary of the Ministry of Finance of the SR and, from June 1993, the first Governor of the National Bank of Slovakia, Vladimír Masár. This was the first in a series of his business trips related to the creation of the Slovak currency and the difficult economic transformation of the new state (this is covered in the chapter on Economic Cooperation).

An important impulse for bilateral economic cooperation was the historically first official trip of Prime Minister of the SR, Vladimír Mečiar, to Japan in 1997. During five days, in addition to presenting the new state, it focused on the economic dimension of cooperation and new investment opportunities. The Prime Minister's delegation included, besides the Foreign Affairs Minister Pavol Hamžík, also the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Integration and the Finance Minister Sergej Kozlík, the Economy Minister Karol Česnek, the Agriculture Minister Peter Baco, and the NBS Governor Vladimír Masár.

The Slovak Prime Minister negotiated with the Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto. The Prime Minister was also received by the Japanese Emperor Akihito. During his stay in Japan, he also met with representatives of business circles.

President Michal Kováč visited Japan in connection with his participation in the opening of the XVIII Winter Olympic Games Nagano 1998. He was accompanied on the trip by the author of this book who was an advisor to the President on foreign policy and had previously visited Japan twice. The Nagano Olympics also served as an important presentation of Slovakia. The Slovak Embassy invited important Japanese partners, including members of the extended imperial family, to dinners and a cultural program at the Slovak House.

In Tokyo the President was received by the Japanese Emperor Akihito. In addition, the President had several other meetings, he also visited an elementary school and met with the representatives of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation and Nippon Foundation whom he thanked for their help to Slovakia. President Kováč also visited the historic city of Kyoto, where he saw its sights, and participated in a tea ceremony.

The first official visit of the head of the Slovak state to Japan was made in 2012 by President Ivan Gašparovič with his wife. He was accompanied by the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Miroslav Lajčák, the Minister of Economy Tomáš Malatinský, a large group of Slovak entrepreneurs as well as an entourage of university and scientific workers.

In the capital city of Tokyo, they were received at his residence by the Japanese Emperor Akihito with the Empress Michiko. The imperial couple especially appreciated the gesture of President Gašparovič who personally visited several places in the tsunami-affected area in the Tohoku region. They also discussed cooperation in trade, culture, and sports.

The head of state also met with Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda at a working meeting, with whom they discussed primarily economic cooperation. The President Gašparovič opened the Japan–Slovakia Business Forum in Tokyo.

The three-day working trip of Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda to Tokyo and Osaka in 2005 was of significant political and economic importance. Dzurinda met with the Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, with whom he discussed the possibilities of deepening cooperation between the two countries in the economic field. He also visited the Japanese Parliament where he was received by the Chairwoman of the Upper House, Chikage Oogi, and the Speaker of the Lower House, Yohei Kono, and he was also honored with a reception by the Japanese Emperor Akihito.

The Slovak Prime Minister negotiated with important representatives of business circles in Tokyo and Osaka.

President Zuzana Čaputová attended the ceremonial enthronement of the Emperor Naruhito in October 2019. The dynasty of Japanese emperors is the longest-ruling dynasty in the world: emperors from this family have ruled the country for at least 1,500 years. In Japan the term “coronation” is not used for the emperor’s accession to the throne as this process has deeply rooted historical and religious meanings. Instead, the term “enthronement” is used which encompasses a series of rituals and ceremonies.

President Čaputová held talks in Tokyo with the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe discussing challenges and innovations in the field of environment. She also visited the city of Fujisawa Sustainable Smart Town which is a concept of innovative and ecological living.

Among Slovak politicians, Miroslav Lajčák visited Japan most frequently, serving there as the Slovak Ambassador from 1994 to

1998. Later, as Minister of Foreign Affairs, he visited Japan five times between 2009 and 2019 (officially or unofficially). The Japanese Emperor Naruhito awarded him the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun in Tokyo in November 2022 for his contribution to deepening relations between Slovakia and Japan.

Princess Sayako, the only daughter of Emperor Akihito, officially visited Slovakia in October 2000. In Bratislava, she was received by Speaker of the NC SR, Jozef Migaš, and Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda. She visited BIBIANA, the International House of Art for Children, Arena Theatre, Devín Castle, and Comenius University. She also visited the Little Carpathian Museum in Pezinok. Princess Sayako also held discussions with Japanese Studies students and faculty at Comenius University. The Rector of Comenius University Ferdinand Devínsky presented her with the Grand Gold Medal of Comenius University as a sign of respect and gratitude for how the Japanese Government contributed to the development of Japanese Studies at Comenius University, and for how Japanese society strives for understanding between nations.

The representatives of the Japanese Imperial Family, Prince Fumihito and Princess Kiko made an official visit to the Slovak Republic from June 23 to 25, 2013. They came to Slovakia at the invitation of the Slovak President Ivan Gašparovič on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the diplomatic relations between Slovakia and Japan.

Their Imperial Highnesses were first welcomed in Bratislava by the President Ivan Gašparovič and his wife. This was followed by meetings with the Speaker of the NC SR Pavol Paška, the Prime Minister of the SR Robert Fico, and the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Miroslav Lajčák. The distinguished guests were also received by the Mayor of the Capital of the SR, Milan Ftáčnik, and they also visited the academic grounds of Comenius University. In

the Botanical Garden of Comenius University, Prince Fumihito and Princess Kiko symbolically planted a Japanese cherry tree. During the visit, the representatives of the Japanese Imperial Family viewed Devín Castle and the Gate of Freedom Memorial, a monument to the victims of totalitarianism. In Eastern Slovakia, they visited the Botanical Garden of the Tatra National Park in Tatranská Lomnica, the Slovak Library for the Blind of Matej Hrebenda in Levoča and toured Spiš Castle.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe made the first visit of a Japanese Prime Minister to Slovakia in April 2019. After talks with the Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini at Bratislava Castle, a summit of the Prime Ministers of the V4 countries + Japan was held. (The summit of the V4 Prime Ministers with Shinzo Abe was previously held in Brussels in October 2018).

The main topics of the meeting between the Slovak Prime Minister and his Japanese counterpart were deepening investments of Japanese companies in Slovakia, agreements that remove trade barriers between countries, and the situation on the Korean Peninsula.

According to both Prime Ministers, another impulse for the development of trade relations is the Social Security Agreement which entered into force on July 1, 2019, as well as the EPA agreement between the EU and Japan from February 1, 2019, which removes trade barriers. In addition to strengthening cooperation in the economic field, they also discussed the development of bilateral relations in the field of culture. Shinzo Abe said he was looking forward to the performances of Slovak athletes at the XXXII Summer Olympic Games Tokyo 2020. Peter Pellegrini, in turn, promised Slovakia's participation in the EXPO Osaka 2025 Exhibition.

Japanese governmental and non-governmental assistance to Slovakia

Japan also expressed its support for the newly established democratic Slovak Republic with significant development assistance in the form of loans, donations and knowledge transfer, which helped consolidate its statehood, currency stability and transition to a market economy.

Japanese financial institutions were the first to give Slovakia a credit rating, thus enabling our entry into international financial markets (see the chapter Economic Dimension).

Thanks to the generous assistance of the Japanese Development Agency, up to 349 employees of the Slovak state administration completed short-term training for civil servants in the first years of independence.

In the years 1993–2005, the Japanese government awarded a cultural grant to several Slovak institutions for the purchase of technical equipment and musical instruments according to their needs (see the chapter Culture).

SASAKAWA CENTRAL EUROPE FUND OF THE SASAKAWA PEACE FOUNDATION

In 1991, the Japanese private foundation Sasakawa Peace Foundation (SPF) created the Sasakawa Central Europe Fund (SCEF) with the aim of assisting the countries of Central Europe—Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia (since 1993 the Czech Republic and Slovakia)—in their transition to democracy and a market economy. The fund ended its activities a few years after these countries joined the EU (2004).

However, the prestigious international conference Forum 2000 in Prague has survived to this day, founded in 1996 by the prominent Japanese philanthropist Yohei Sasakawa, together with President Václav Havel. This is an annual conference where prominent world thinkers, writers, politicians and academics meet to discuss global problems.

The SPF Foundation's grantmaking activities focused on supporting the transition of Central European countries to a market economy, environmental protection, third sector development, and learning about Japan. It encouraged cooperation within the Central European region and collaborated with leading American foundations and specialized organizations, such as the Environmental Partnership for Central and Eastern Europe, the Center for Civil Society Studies at Johns Hopkins University, and the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law.

The SCEF Japan program in Slovakia was launched by SPF Foundation Board Member Kotaro Kohata with Regional Representative Iveta Mozsnyaková. Subsequently, until the end of the Fund's operation, its activities in Slovakia were coordinated by Jana Kadlecová Čalfová.

Thanks to the support of the SCEF Fund, a 9-part television series about the Japanese economic miracle *Prosperity Made in Japan* was created in 1994, directed by Ivonne Vavrová. Several experts, journalists and representatives of the non-profit sector traveled to Japan. The Fund supported projects and cooperated with non-governmental organizations such as the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, SAIA—Service Center for the Third Sector, Institute for Public Affairs, Selective Educational Association, Children of Slovakia Foundation, Pontis Foundation, or with the University of Economics in Bratislava. It awarded the SPF Environmental Award.

At the end of the SPF Foundation's work in Central Europe, a regional international meeting of about 40 participants from the V4 countries and Japan was held in Bratislava in March 2008 under the title *Fostering dialogue to enhance mutual understanding between Central European Countries*.

Economic Dimension

BEGINNINGS AND DEVELOPMENT OF ECONOMIC COOPERATION

It is relatively little known that Japan played an extraordinary role at the beginning of Slovak independent statehood. This is confirmed by the first Governor of the National Bank of Slovakia (NBS), Vladimír Masár. As State Secretary of the Ministry of Finance and the Government's Plenipotentiary for the establishment of the NBS (from June 1993, the Governor of the NBS), he was the first official representative of Slovakia who visited Japan several times in 1993 to address fundamental monetary and economic issues with political and economic leaders.

Thanks to this effort, Slovakia obtained its first international investment rating from the Japanese rating company JBRI, which allowed the NBS to issue securities worth over 500 million dollars in cooperation with the Japanese bank Nomura International. These financial resources played a key role in building the foreign exchange reserves of the NBS and the subsequent stabilization of the Slovak economy. Additional resources were provided by the Japan Export Import Bank to support business projects in the private sector.

Nomura International, which is among the most significant investment banks in the world, subsequently acted as an advisor to the NBS for international financial and capital markets.

Further significant financial resources followed from Nomura, which were provided to the cities of Bratislava and Košice, as well as to other financial and business entities. Cooperation with Nomura continued with another successful issue of NBS bonds in the Japanese market.

Vladimír Masár participated in the establishment of the inter-parliamentary Slovak–Japan Friendship Group, which played an important role in building Slovak–Japanese relations.

During this initial period, the global company Yazaki, specializing in the production of automotive cable harnesses, invested in Slovakia. The Japanese investor came to Prievidza in 1994 and gradually built workshops in Partizánske and a branch in Michalovce. At the time of its greatest expansion, it employed over 4,500 employees. In May 2024, its production in Slovakia ended after three decades.

An important impulse for bilateral economic cooperation was the first official trip of Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, Vladimír Mečiar, to Japan in 1997. His delegation included, besides government representatives, an expert on Japan, the Governor of the National Bank of Slovakia, Vladimír Masár. In addition to presenting the new state, it focused on the economic dimension of cooperation and new investment opportunities. Besides official state representatives, the Prime Minister also met with representatives of the Japanese bank Nomura and Toyota Motor Corporation.

The main goal of Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda's three-day working trip to Tokyo and Osaka in 2005 was, in addition to meetings with Japan's highest representatives, to present Slovakia as a country that has undergone fundamental reforms, is improving its business environment, and realizes that an orientation toward a knowledge economy is essential for building long-term competitiveness, which in turn requires investments in science, research, education, and building an investment society.

The Slovak Prime Minister also held talks in Tokyo with representatives of the Japanese Federation of Business Organizations Nippon Keindaren and visited the Japanese–Slovak Economic Forum. The Prime Minister met with the managements of large corporations Sony and Matsushita and with entrepreneurs in Tokyo and participated in an investment seminar in Osaka.

From the perspective of economic cooperation, two trips by Finance Minister Peter Kažimír (from 2019 the Governor of the National Bank of Slovakia) to the Land of the Rising Sun in 2012 and 2013 also played a significant role. Minister Kažimír met with the local Finance Minister Taro Aso and held talks with other political and business leaders. Slovakia subsequently managed to sell bonds in Japan, which contributed to the diversification of its debt. Peter Kažimír, as the Governor of the National Bank of Slovakia, has in recent years been a regular speaker and moderator at the Bank of Japan's annual conference in Tokyo, which brings together governors and central bankers, Nobel Prize winners in economics, and representatives of leading world universities.

The Slovak Investment and Trade Development Agency (SARIO) has been engaged long-term in developing economic cooperation between Slovakia and Japan. Since 2010, in cooperation with the Embassy of the Slovak Republic in Japan, it has organized about ten investment seminars, as well as several visits of Slovak entrepreneurs to Japan and Japanese investors to Slovakia.

The SARIO agency was also part of the first official visit of Slovak President Ivan Gašparovič to Japan. As part of this, an investment seminar was held in Tokyo, attended by 50 entrepreneurs from Slovakia and Japan. The seminar included a presentation by SARIO's Director General Robert Šimončič focused on the advantages of the Slovak business environment and the signing of a memorandum of understanding between SARIO and JETRO (Japan External Trade Organization).

CURRENT STATE OF ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Despite the geographical distance, Slovakia and Japan are developing dynamic relations based on the complementarity of their economies. Japan, as currently the fourth largest economy in the world, is a technologically advanced market with a high degree of innovation and a stable legal environment. Slovakia, as a member of the European Union and the V4 region, offers a strategic location in the heart of Europe, a skilled workforce, and favorable conditions for foreign investments.

The Japanese economy is export-oriented with high added value. Its main sectors include electronics, the automotive industry, pharmaceutical research, and renewable energy sources. Slovakia, on the other hand, benefits from a developed automotive industry, which accounts for more than 50% of its exports. This complementarity creates a solid foundation for mutually beneficial cooperation.

An important milestone in bilateral relations was the Economic Partnership Agreement between the EU and Japan (EPA), which entered into force in 2019. The EPA agreement eliminated tariffs on most goods and simplified access to the markets of both parties. Although trade with Japan still represents only a small share of Slovakia's total foreign trade (exports 0.27%, imports 0.55%), the growth potential is considerable.

TRADE COOPERATION

Trade relations between Slovakia and Japan are characterized by the exchange of products with high added value. Slovakia exports to Japan mainly automobiles, components for motor vehicles, and specific engineering products. Conversely, imports from Japan include electronics, chemicals, and specialized machinery.

The value of Slovak exports to Japan shows a long-term growing trend. Since 2014, exports have almost tripled, representing an average annual increase of approximately 14.6%. The most significant growth was recorded between 2018 and 2023, when exports increased from 135 million EUR to 357.4 million EUR. This trend confirms the gradual deepening of trade relations and is in line with overall efforts to diversify Slovak exports.

Imports from Japan to Slovakia have also developed unevenly. In 2014, it reached a value of 764.8 million EUR and gradually decreased to 479.8 million EUR in 2018. However, since 2020, we have again observed a growing trend in imports, which reached a value of 706.3 million EUR in 2023. The increase can be attributed to the gradual recovery of the global economy after the pandemic and the increase in energy and raw material prices, of which Japan is a significant importer. However, in the first 11 months of 2024, imports again fell to 594.7 million EUR, which represents 90.4% of the value from the same period in 2023. This decline may be related to the overall slowdown in Japanese exports, which was also recorded in other markets.

One of the most significant aspects of trade relations between Slovakia and Japan is the long-term deficit in the trade balance on the Slovak side. In 2014, the deficit reached a record 660.2 million EUR, but over the years it gradually improved to reach the lowest level of 221.9 million EUR in 2020. This positive change was the result of a combination of declining imports and growing exports. However, since 2021, the deficit has again slightly increased to 348.9 million EUR in 2023. According to available data for the first 11 months of 2024, a slight improvement in the trade balance can be observed, albeit at the expense of a declining total volume of trade.

• FACTORS AFFECTING BILATERAL TRADE RELATIONS

The development of trade relations between Slovakia and Japan was significantly influenced by the EPA agreement, which entered into force in February 2019. This agreement removed most tariffs and non-tariff barriers, facilitating access for Slovak exporters to the Japanese market, especially in the automotive industry. The automotive sector, which accounts for more than half of Slovak exports, saw a significant increase in exports to Japan, with the elimination of tariffs and simplification of regulatory requirements enabling better competitiveness for Slovak manufacturers. The development of technological sectors in Slovakia, supported by Japanese investments such as Panasonic Industrial Devices, Minebea Access Solutions Slovakia, and Minebea Slovakia, has contributed to strengthening trade ties between the two countries. Despite these successes, Slovak companies still face challenges related to adapting to strict Japanese quality standards and certifications, which emphasizes the need to diversify the export portfolio into promising areas such as IT services, biotechnology, and food products.

• INVESTMENTS

According to SARIO data, 74 Japanese companies with almost 10,000 employees currently operate in Slovakia. Of these, 22 companies are manufacturing (8,256 employees), 10 are in information and communication technologies (443 employees), and 42 are in services, retail, and wholesale (1,217 employees).

Investments are distributed throughout Slovakia, with significant representation in the automotive and electrotechnical industries. Many of the Japanese companies entered the Slovak market through acquisitions of companies.

Among the most important companies is Panasonic Industrial Devices Slovakia in Trstená and Stará Ľubovňa, which

manufactures electronic components. Nidec Global Appliance operates in Spišská Nová Ves, specializing in the production of compressors, while Minebea Access Solutions Slovakia and Minebea Slovakia in Košice produce automotive parts. In the brewing sector, Plzeňský Prazdroj Slovensko (Pivovar Šariš), which is part of the Japanese group Asahi Group, is a significant player. Akebono Brake Slovakia operates in Trenčín, focusing on the production of brake calipers for automobiles, in Nitra SIIX EMS Slovakia specializing in the production of electrical components for the automotive industry, and G-TEKT Slovakia focused on the production of components for car bodies and transmission parts for automobiles. To support the data and digital needs of Takeda's business units, the modern Takeda Pharmaceuticals Slovakia Innovation Capability Center was established in Bratislava.

Japanese cars and cameras are very popular in Slovakia. Toyota has long been the best-selling Japanese cars. Other successful brands include Mazda, Subaru, Suzuki, Lexus, Nissan and Honda. Best-selling Japanese camera brands include Canon, Nikon, Sony, Fujifilm and Olympus (OM System).

An example of bilateral economic cooperation is the construction of the 1,440 meter long Bratislava highway tunnel Sitina which was implemented by the Japanese–Czech consortium Taisei Corporation—Skanska DS, a. s. The tunnel was built over 3.5 years and was ceremonially handed over for use in 2007. The final costs increased to 4.5 billion Slovak crowns. Of this, 18% was covered from the state budget and the rest from a loan from the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC).

A transaction worth $14.9 billion (€13.61 billion) was blocked by former President Joe Biden in January 2025. U.S. Steel and Nippon Steel filed a lawsuit against Biden's decision in the USA. President Donald Trump also communicated his disagreement with the sale of the company in the long term. After

a February 2025 meeting at the White House with Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, President Trump stated that the Japanese steel concern should not continue its effort to buy U.S. Steel. Conversely, according to Donald Trump—without specifying further details—the Japanese company should make a significant investment in the American company. Nippon Steel has finally completed its acquisition of U.S. Steel, becoming its sole owner. The transaction was completed on June 18, 2025, after an 18-month arduous process.

During her trip to Japan, Minister Saková signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Japanese chemical company Sekisui Chemical, which has developed modern photovoltaic panels.

Slovak companies have so far operated only in a limited way in Japan, but some have achieved significant success. ESET, which is among the leading providers of security software, entered the Japanese market in 2003 as part of a collaboration with its partner Canon IT Solutions, and in 2018, the branch of ESET Japan Inc. was opened in Tokyo. In the last 15 years, ESET has become the fastest-growing company in the field of IT security in Japan and is the fourth largest seller.

Novesta, a manufacturer of handmade sneakers, has gained popularity throughout Japan. Slovak winemakers are also gradually establishing themselves in the Japanese market.

Tours to Japan are becoming increasingly popular in Slovakia. Currently, they are organized by several travel agencies, such as: BUBO, VICTORY TRAVEL, SATUR and others.

FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

The prospects for future cooperation are promising, especially in the areas of electromobility, hydrogen technologies, and renewable energy sources. The transition to sustainable transport provides new possibilities for joint projects in the automotive industry and energy sector.

According to SARIO's experience, products with high added value have a chance to succeed in the Japanese market: innovative, technologically advanced or unique, fashionable/trendy, luxurious, high-quality, and interesting products. Regarding prospective export commodities, for Slovak companies, these include, besides computer programs, IT services, cars, and parts for them, also food (wines, cheeses, branded alcohol, organic food, chocolate, sweets), components for the electronic and electrotechnical industry, organic chemicals, plastics, branded clothing and footwear, cosmetics, artistic production—classical music as well as some folk-art products. SARIO currently also records demand for wood and wooden semi-finished products, and there is also interest in patents for sophisticated technologies.

The EXPO 2025 event in Osaka represents a unique opportunity for Slovakia to present its innovative solutions and attract new investors. Equally important is cooperation within the V4+Japan format, which enables broader regional projects in the areas of infrastructure, research, or energy.

Culture

Culture is one of the most prominent areas in the development of Slovak–Japanese relations. It is supported by the governments of both countries and is also a subject of interest at the level of private institutions, artists, creators, and organizers. Slovaks are fascinated by Japanese traditions and art forms, and on the other hand, the Japanese appreciate traditional or modern Slovak culture.

NIPPON CLUB

An important impulse for the development of Slovak–Japanese cooperation in the field of culture was brought after the Velvet Revolution by artist and sculptor Peter Roller, who, with his wife, art theorist and historian Magdaléna Rollerová, founded the Nippon Club, Society of Friends of Japanese Culture, in Bratislava in 1990 (until 1998 it was led by Peter Roller as president, subsequently until 2002 by Magdaléna Rollerová; Zuzana Jezerská significantly helped them as vice president). For over ten years, the club organized various events that brought Japanese traditional and contemporary culture closer to the Slovak audience. In cooperation with the Embassy of Japan in the Slovak Republic, the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, and other partners, they organized six richly represented Japanese Culture week festivals between 1995 and 2000. The club gradually scaled down its activities after 2000.

CULTURAL GRANT OF THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT AWARDED TO SLOVAK INSTITUTIONS

Between 1993 and 2005, the Japanese government awarded generous financial support to several Slovak institutions for the purchase of technical equipment and musical instruments according to their needs. The grant amount ranged from approximately 270,000 to 300,000€ (converted using the NBS exchange rate from February 3, 2025; 1€ = 158.87¥). It was awarded to the following institutions: Comenius University in Bratislava, Department of Languages and Cultures of East Asian Countries, 1993; Slovak Philharmonic, 1994; State Opera in Banská Bystrica, 1996; Slovak Television, 1998; Slovak National Theatre, 1999; University Library in Bratislava, 2000; State Theatre Košice, 2001; Slovak Library for the Blind Matej Hrebenda in Levoča,

2002; Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava, 2003; Monuments Board of the Slovak Republic, 2004; State Chamber Orchestra in Žilina, 2005.

BRATISLAVA CULTURAL AND INFORMATION CENTER (BKIS)

This contributory organization of the city of Bratislava, under the leadership of its founder and director Vladimír Grežo, established intensive cooperation with the Embassy of Japan in the Slovak Republic from 2009 and implemented numerous projects in the capital city. These primarily involved the promotion of traditional Japanese culture through concerts and performances by Japanese artists, presentations, and lectures. These programs and performances were repeatedly included in the significant Slovak summer festival Bratislava Cultural Summer and Castle Celebrations, as well as in the programs of the Pavol Országh Hviezdoslav City Theatre (DPOH), which was part of BKIS. It also actively supported and promoted many significant Japanese–Slovak cooperation projects of national institutions, such as the benefit concert *Artists for Japan* with the Slovak National Theatre (SND) and others.

After the tragedy at the Fukushima nuclear power plant, in April 2011, Vladimír Grežo initiated the project *100 Hours for Fukushima* at DPOH, which included exhibitions and a benefit concert by Japanese and Slovak artists.The concert featured Chihiro Yazaki (soprano) and Ayako Ono (piano), Anna Takeshita (piano), Marine Oi & Erika Funada (violin) & Nao Tsutsui (piano), Ayano Yano (soprano) and Mayuko Takine (piano), dancers from the Slovak Folk Art Collective (SĽUK), the dance group Petronella, the city orchestra Capella Istropolitana, and other guests. The project was prepared by BKIS with the city of Bratislava in cooperation with partners JETEC.EU, SĽUK, and the Asian Info Center.

In 2012, as part of the International Bratislava cycle, Japanese Week was held. BKIS was also part of the preparations for the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the establishment of CzechoSlovak–Japanese relations in 2020.

JAPANESE TRADITIONS AND CULTURE IN SLOVAKIA

Although Japan is thousands of kilometers away from our country, it has long enjoyed great interest. The Land of the Rising Sun is attractive for its culture and history, martial arts, tea ceremony, gastronomy, ceramics, traditional and modern art, ikebana, bonsai, Shintoism, and Buddhism.

Throughout history, Japan has absorbed many foreign influences in the areas of technology, customs, or forms of artistic expression. By integrating foreign elements, it has created a unique culture. Today's Japanese way of life is a fusion of traditional culture influenced by Asia and modern Western culture.

JAPANESE DAY—NATSUMATSURI

The annual event Japanese Day—Natsumatsuri in Bratislava has become a significant contribution to building Slovak–Japanese relations. This summer festival, as we know it today, was established in 2016 as a joint project of the Embassy of Japan in the Slovak Republic and the Bratislava Cultural and Information Center, led by Vladimír Grežo. It built on the fruitful and lasting cooperation that had been established between these partners since 2009. In the past, the Japanese Embassy also organized one-day events according to the Natsumatsuri concept (performances, lectures, and workshops) in Banská Bystrica, Nitra, Košice, and at Trenčín Castle.

Seven Japanese Days—Natsumatsuri have been held in the historic center of Bratislava (courtyard of the Old Town Hall, Main Square, Hviezdoslav Square) to date (the COVID pandemic caused their interruption in 2020 and 2021). The event with a rich program, featuring Japanese and Slovak representatives of Japanese culture and traditions, meets with extraordinary audience interest.

The Natsumatsuri festival traditionally begins with the ritual of ceremonial opening of a sake barrel, Kagamiwari, featuring the Japanese ambassador and his Slovak guests, and a tea ceremony performed by Japanese masters. Spectators can admire the art of Japanese music, dances (kamigatamai), theater, kimono dressing, learn about flower arrangement in the ikebana style, bonsai creation, try origami folding, the art of calligraphy, or play board games like shogi and go, and see a presentation of the Japanese dog breed Shiba Inu. Demonstrations of Japanese martial arts such as karate, aikido, judo, and traditional iaido fencing are very attractive. In stalls, visitors can taste Japanese gastronomy (sake, sushi, ramen and yaki udon).

TRADITIONAL JAPANESE CULTURE

Japanese Tea Ceremony (Sadō or Chadō)

It is a highly elaborate method of preparing green tea. However, Sadō is not just the ritual preparation and serving of tea. It is an art that requires sensitivity and extensive knowledge. Sadō is also a way of seeking the meaning of life and teaches respect for nature. One of the three main schools of the Japanese tea ceremony is Urasenke. In Bratislava, visitors to various events could experience public presentations of the tea ceremony performed by Mr. Takamatsu or Ms. Somei Führmann, who live in neighboring Austria.

Bonsai

The Japanese art of miniaturizing trees and growing them in bowls is becoming increasingly popular in Slovakia. The professional center BONSAI SLOVAKIA—TEA HOUSE OF GOOD PEOPLE is the oldest bonsai and tea center in Slovakia. It was founded in Nitra in 1990 by Alena and Vladimír Ondejčík. With their long-term organizational and publishing activities, they became pioneers of bonsai in our country.

In 2000, the Bratislava Danubius Bonsai Club and the Slovak Bonsai Association (SBA) were established on the initiative of Cyril Tatranský. A year later, it became a member of the European Bonsai Association. Currently, Lukáš Jančina is the president of the SBA.

The association organizes the National Exhibition of Bonsai and Suiseki annually, and its members also participate in international exhibitions.

Suiseki

Suiseki are small naturally occurring stones that are appreciated for their beauty and power to evoke a natural scene or object. The traditional art of suiseki is closely linked to the Japanese art of bonsai.

The first collectors and creators of suiseki in Slovakia began meeting in the 1990s in Bratislava and its surroundings, among them Michal Šebo and Ján Lobík, Ján Zágoršek, and Ella Görnerová. Among the most active current members of the association are especially Ľuboš and Martina Vyhlidal (Bojničky) and Vladimír Kamocsai (Okoličná na Ostrove).

In 2002, the civic association Slovak Suiseki Association was founded. It was led by Michal Šebo as president until 2017, and after him by Vladimír Kamocsai. Today, about 20 people in Slovakia are dedicated to this art.

The association organizes annual exhibitions in various Slovak museums and galleries (often together with bonsai), and its members also exhibit their works abroad.

Cultivation and Admiration of Japanese Ornamental Cherry Trees (Sakura)

In recent years, sakura have become very popular in Slovakia. We can encounter and admire their flowers in parks or private gardens. In 2020, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the former Czechoslovakia and Japan, Slovakia received an exceptional gift from Japan through its embassy in Bratislava—500 sakura trees. The trees were planted in cities throughout Slovakia: in Bratislava, Košice, Banská Bystrica, Trenčín, and Levice. Japanese jazz singer Masumi Ormandy was among the sponsors of the planting of sakura in Bratislava's Karlova Ves, and her name is also on the memorial plaque installed in the park.

In 2022, on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of relations between the independent Slovak Republic and Japan, 30 Japanese cherry trees were planted in the Bratislava district of Dúbravka, creating the Garden of Sakura and Art. It was a private initiative of Vladimír Grežo and Pavol Demeš, which was financially supported by representatives of the cultural, diplomatic, and civic community.

The Sakura Garden project was also followed by the Festival of Sakura and Art, initiated by the Bratislava Cultural Hub, o.z. (originally the civic association Media). In 2023–2024, it was held in cooperation with the Embassy of Japan and with the support of the Bratislava districts of Dúbravka and Karlova Ves, as well as civic associations focused on Japanese traditions.

The Eugen Suchoň Elementary Art School on Batkova Street in Bratislava has played an important role in activities in the Garden of Sakura and Art in Dúbravka, organizing the festival and

art competition since their inception. In 2023, students of this school created a musical greeting and video from Bratislava as a response to a video greeting from students from the Japanese city of Gifu.

In cooperation with the Facebook group Bratislava in the Viewfinder and Rudolf Baranovič, a photo competition Sakura in My Eyes was created (2023, 2024). The announcement of results took place with the participation of the Japanese ambassador. In the spring of 2025, another photo competition is being prepared, initiated by the Bratislava Culture Hub (Vladimír Grežo) and the Club of Good Photography (Rudolf Baranovič).

In 2023, the Bratislava Tourism Board also joined in the public interest and admiration for sakura (a version of the Japanese holiday Hanami) when it created a digital application for sakura maps in Bratislava.

Origami

This ancient Japanese art of paper folding began to be cultivated in Slovakia in the late 1990s. The most significant personality dedicated to origami and its presentation here is Assoc. Prof. Jaroslav Jaroš from the Faculty of Mathematics, Physics, and Informatics at Comenius University. On International Origami Day, November 11, 1999, he founded the Slovak Origami Society with his students and became its president.

Japanese Art of Flower Arrangement (Ikebana)

Ikebana, whose origin is often derived from flower offerings in Buddhist temples, has a 700-year tradition. This art evolved from the purely decorative use of flowers. Each element is selected very carefully (plants, container), the arrangement of

each twig, leaf, or flower must be in harmony with the container and surroundings. In Slovakia, it is taught, for example, at the Japanese Center.

CLASSICAL MUSIC AND THEATER

In Japan, there are many schools with music faculties where they strive to adopt as much knowledge as possible from Western musical culture. The country has many acoustically high-quality concert halls where artists from all over the world perform.

Over the past decades, many Slovak artistic ensembles and prominent interpreters have performed and worked in Japan.

SLOVAK PHILHARMONIC (SF)

The Slovak Philharmonic and its artistic ensembles have long cooperated with Japan and have achieved remarkable results. This cooperation began before 1989. It mainly involves tours to Japan, performances, and guest appearances by artists.

The first tour took place in 1980. By 2024, the Slovak Philharmonic had performed in Japan 30 times. The last tour was in 2024, and the next one is being prepared for 2026.

Concerts of the Slovak Philharmonic Artistic Ensembles in Japan

The Slovak Philharmonic, symphony orchestra of the SF, completed fourteen concert tours between 1980 and 2023, with a total of 139 concerts. The Slovak Chamber Orchestra completed thirteen concert tours between 1976 and 2018, with a total of 138 concerts. The Slovak Philharmonic Choir completed three concert tours (1994, 2003, 2013), with a total of 13 concerts.

Guest Japanese Orchestras at Slovak Philharmonic Subscription Concerts

Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra, conductor: Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos, soloist: Mayumi Fuzikava, violin, 1981; Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra, conductor: Ken Ichiro Kobayashi, soloist: Mitsuko Ushida, piano, 1981; Japan Shinsei Symphony Orchestra, conductor: Ondrej Lenárd, soloist: Eitetsu Hayashi, wadaiko (large heavy vertical drum), 1995; Orchestra Ensemble Kanazawa, conductor: Hiroyuki Iwaki, soloist: Ľudovít Kanta, cello, 2004.

Japanese Conductors at Concerts in Bratislava and at Slovak Philharmonic Performances Abroad

Ken Ichiro Kobayashi, from 1977 to 2013, 16 concerts; Hideaki Muto, from 1984 to 1999, 20 concerts; Kazuhiko Komatsu, from 1999 to 2000, 4 concerts; Keiko Mitsuhashi, in 2012, 8 concerts.

Dozens of Japanese musicians and singers have performed as guests at the Slovak Philharmonic. An extraordinary symphonic concert in honor of the hundred years of Czech–Slovak–Japanese diplomatic relations was held in September 2022 under the baton of SF chief conductor Daniel Raiskin, featuring Japanese violinist Daishin Kashimoto, concertmaster of the Berlin Philharmonic. The Slovak–Japanese Friendship Concert was held in cooperation with the Embassy of Japan in the Slovak Republic under the auspices of the Minister of Culture of the Slovak Republic, Natália Milanová.

Works by Japanese Composers Interpreted by Slovak Philharmonic Ensembles

Yasushi Akutagawa: *Triptych for String Orchestra*; Takeichiro Hirai: *Kiso, Fantasy on Japanese Folk Motifs*; Ryohei Hirose: *Festive Overture*; Akira Ifukube: *Violin Concerto No. 2*; Yasuhide Ito: *Gloriosa (Guriyoza), Symphonic Poem*; Yui Kakinuma: *The Glass Bead Game*; Yoko Kanno: *Hana wa Saku (Flowers Will Bloom)*; Masanori Katoh: *Slovak Rhapsody for Alto Saxophone and Orchestra*; Koichi Kishi: *Japanese Suite for Orchestra*; Shigeaki Saegusa: *Requiem for the Catastrophic Earthquake*; Toru Takemitsu: *A Flock Descends into the Pentagonal Garden*; Toru Takemitsu: *Requiem for Strings*; Kosaku Yamada: *Akatombo (Red Dragonfly)*; Takashi Yoshimatsu: *And Birds Are Still... for String Orchestra, Op. 72*; Takashi Yoshimatsu: *Lament to the Toki for Piano and String Orchestra, Op. 12*; Joji Yuasa: *Scenes from Basho*.

Over a period of almost 50 years, numerous joint recordings have also been made, the first in 1976 with Bohdan Warchal, the last with the Slovak Philharmonic and Slovak Philharmonic Choir in 2020.

• SLOVAK NATIONAL THEATRE OPERA

Tours in Japan

The SND Opera has made two tours in Japan. In 1997, it was with the operas *Tosca* and *La Bohème*, conducted by Ondrej Lenárd. Among the stars were tenor Peter Dvorský, Japanese soprano Shinobu Sato, and baritone Sherill Milnes from the USA. They performed in 15 shows in Tokyo, Osaka, Hiroshima, and other cities. In 2004, it was a tour with the opera *La Traviata*, conducted by Rastislav Štúr and Shigeo Genda. The main roles were sung by Maria Guleghina and Peter Dvorský. They performed in 16 shows in Tokyo, Osaka, Fukuoka, and other cities.

Guest Appearances by Japanese Opera Artists at the SND Opera

From 1999 to 2004, soprano Nao Higano performed in several productions at the SND Opera (*Aida*, *Werther*, *Don Giovanni*,

Carmen, *Expectation*, *La Traviata*), and in 2006, tenor Satoshi Mizuguchi performed in the opera *Turandot*.

Benefit Concert Artists for Japan in Bratislava

On the initiative of SND Opera Director Peter Dvorský, a benefit concert titled *Artists for Japan* was held at the SND in May 2011 in honor of the earthquake victims. It featured Eva and Dalibor Jenis, Miroslav Dvorský, Peter Mikuláš, and conductor Rastislav Štúr, who had repeatedly performed in Japan. Together with them, Eva Hornyáková and Monika Fabiánová performed, as well as Japanese singers Kazuki Ohara and Keitaro Mizufune. The concert, which was held under the auspices of the President of the Slovak Republic Ivan Gašparovič, was also attended by the Ambassador of Japan, Yoshio Nomoto.

Selection of Guest Performances by Slovak Opera Soloists in Japan

Soprano Edita Gruberová (†2021) was one of the world's top representatives of operatic art—*primadonna assoluta*, who performed many times in Japan. In 2012, she excelled with the Vienna State Opera in the role of Anna Bolena, with Slovak pianist and conductor Peter Valentovič; with the National Theatre Prague, she performed as Norma in 2016; and with the Budapest Opera under the baton of Peter Valentovič, she appeared as Lucia di Lammermoor in 2017. She completed two tours, a series of gala concerts, and song recitals around Japanese cities.

Peter Dvorský, the most significant Slovak tenor, was a repeat guest on Japanese stages. His first visit to Japan took place in 1981, when he performed with the La Scala ensemble from Milan in the opera *La Bohème* in the role of Rodolfo under the leadership of the famous conductor Carlos Kleiber. In 1988, he returned to Japan with La Scala and *La Bohème*.

With the Vienna State Opera, he completed a tour with the opera *Manon Lescaut* in 1986. With the SND Opera and conductor Ondrej Lenárd, he performed in 1997 on a tour with the works *Tosca* and *La Bohème*, appearing on stage with Japanese soprano Shinobu Sato. Memorable was his guest appearance in Tokyo with the Prague National Theatre under the baton of Jiří Bělohlávek in 1999 with the opera *Jenůfa* (*Her Stepdaughter*). Peter Dvorský appeared as Laca, his brother Miroslav Dvorský as Števa, and another Slovak soloist, soprano Gabriela Beňačková, as Jenůfa.

He also had a series of solo concerts (1989, 1990, 1997). In 1997, he performed before an audience of six thousand in Tokyo with world-renowned soprano Montserrat Caballé, where they sang opera and operetta duets.

Tenor Miroslav Dvorský has completed more than twenty tours in many Japanese cities as a soloist with the Vienna orchestras Wiener Symphoniker and Volksoper. He also performed independently at the Tokyo New National Opera and has stood many times on the stage of the famous Tokyo Suntory Hall.

• SND BALLET

Currently, there are six Japanese dancers in the SND Ballet, including one soloist. In the past, more than 15 dancers were members of this ensemble.

Guest appearances from Japan: Tokyo Metropolitan City Ballet, 2004. Individuals: Kentaro Morita, Sayuri Ikami, *Swan Lake*, 1993; Kimoto Masayu, *Swan Lake*, 2015; Uchiumi Muri (choreography assistant), *Cinderella*, 2021.

Japanese choreographer Reona Sato received the opportunity to contribute as an author to Ravel's one-act ballet *Daphnis and Chloe* on the stage of the SND Ballet in 2017. In the performance

Beatles go Baroque by music composer Peter Breiner from 2018, she is the author of the choreography *Fool on the Hill*.

• SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA OF SLOVAK RADIO

This oldest Slovak orchestral ensemble (established in 1929) completed a three-week concert tour in Japan in 2014, where it had already performed in the past (1992, 1994, 1997, 2010). In three weeks, the artists performed 11 concerts under the baton of Mário Košík. Local artists also performed with the orchestra—pianists Ingrid Fuzjko Hemming and Harumi Hanafusa, and pianists Shinya Kiyozuka and Koki Nakano; in Beethoven's 9th Symphony with the "Ode to Joy," a quartet of Slovak opera singers collaborated: soprano Mária Rychlová, mezzo-soprano Alena Kropáčková, tenor Ľudovít Ludha, and bassist Peter Mikuláš, as well as a 200-member Japanese choir. They performed in the cities of Niigata, Chigasaki, Ina, Musashino, Matsudo, Tokyo, Hamamatsu, Tokushima, and Osaka. This orchestra last performed in Japan in 2018.

• BRATISLAVA BOYS' CHOIR

This ensemble in Bratislava was founded and is led by Magdaléna Rovňáková together with her son Gabriel Rovňák. The ensemble has been active on the Slovak artistic scene since 1982 and has performed practically all over the world. It performed in Japan in 1997 when it participated in a major artistic tour together with the SND Opera.

• STATE CHAMBER ORCHESTRA ŽILINA (SLOVAK SINFONIETTA)

This musical ensemble completed four tours in Japan between 1992 and 2024: 1992 (9 concerts), 1996 (6 concerts), 1998 (6 concerts), 2008 (10 concerts). The first three tours were conducted

by Japanese conductor Tsugio Maeda, honorary chief conductor of the State Chamber Orchestra Žilina (ŠKO) from 1996 to 2012, and the fourth tour was conducted by Czech conductor Petr Vronský.

The mutual introduction of works can be considered important. Between 1993 and 2024, eight compositions by Japanese authors were performed: Toru Takemitsu: *How Slow the Wind*; Toru Takemitsu: *Nostalghia*; Sadao Bekku: *Three songs on the poems of Takuji Ote*; Harida Tei: *Hiruno Jume*; Mamiya Michio: *Composition III.*; Yumi Akimoto: *Romance*—world premiere (Tokyo Casals Hall, 1998; in 1999 two concerts in Žilina and a concert in Martin); Makino Yutaka: *Fantasy for piano, percussion and strings*; Niimi Tokuhide: *Inori*.

During ŠKO concert performances in Japan, the dramaturgy was predominantly focused on works by world authors.

Almost 50 Japanese artists have performed as guests with the ŠKO over 32 years. Most frequently, these were pianists, violinists, singers, and conductors.

• STATE OPERA IN BANSKÁ BYSTRICA

The State Opera has been performing in Japan annually since 1999. To date, it has completed 40 tours and several hundred concerts throughout Japan. Its concerts are organized predominantly in cooperation with local self-governments, education committees, and local interest associations. A significant partner is the Slovak–Japanese Association.

Japanese Events at the State Opera in Banská Bystrica

Japanese Shinto dance Kagura performed by a group from Nagano Prefecture (Choyo city), 2000; Performance by the Chura

dance ensemble from Okinawa, 2005; Premiere of the original opera (musical-dramatic poem) by Vladimír Godár *Under the Blooming Sakura* based on the literary work by Ango Sakaguchi, 2008; Japanese Days—traditional Noh theater, 2016; Evening of Japanese Song—singer Nao Higano and soloists of the State Opera, 2016.

• KOŠICE STATE PHILHARMONIC

The Košice State Philharmonic also had contacts with Japan, with its co-founder Bystrík Režucha as chief conductor from 1993 to 1995. This significant conductor performed as a guest at the head of symphonic ensembles not only at home but also abroad, including Japan.

The State Philharmonic (ŠF) presents works by Japanese composers in the concert season and at festivals it organizes (e.g., Ars Nova). To date, 17 Japanese artists have performed as guests. Since 1993, the ŠF has collaborated with the following Japanese artists. Violin: Shizuka Ishikawa, Ayako Yonetani, Yuko Kawami, Ryoko Yano, Keisuke Okazaki, Noé Inui, Seiji Okamoto; piano: Mayuko Kida, Yuka Nishimoto, Sachiko Murakami, Shoko Kawasaki; cello: Yuki Inada; soprano: Nao Higano, Sayuri Okumura; conductors: Tsugio Maeda, Chuhei Iwasaki, Eugene Tzigane.

The ŠF collaborated within the project Košice—European Capital of Culture 2013 with the organization EU–Japan Fest Japan Committee for hosting the Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra.

In January 2019, the composition *Musica per orchestra sinfonica* by Japanese composer Yasushi Akutagawa was performed in the Slovak premiere at the Košice State Philharmonic under the baton of young Japanese conductor Chuhei Iwasaki.

• KOŠICE STATE THEATRE (FROM 2023 KOŠICE NATIONAL THEATRE)

Cooperation is carried out within the framework of guest appearances, especially in the ballet ensemble, where several female artists from Japan have long worked. These include soloists Ami Marčinský, Shoko Yamada, Kei Hirozane, and Miyu Kitabatake, as well as ballet ensemble member Su Tanaka.

In addition to these artists, sopranos Hisaki Hidaka and Hinoko Yamane, who captivated in the role of Cio-Cio-San in *Madame Butterfly*, have performed as guests at the Košice Opera.

• TRNAVA HIGH SCHOOL CHOIR CANTICA NOVA

In September 2019, the 38-member choir, led by its choirmaster Gabriel Kalapoš, represented the city of Trnava, the Trnava region and Slovakia at the East European Music Festival in Tokyo, organized by the Microcosmos art agency.

• VIVA MUSICA! FESTIVAL

Japanese pianist Maki Namekawa has performed repeatedly at the Bratislava Viva Musica! Festival. In 2015, she performed at the Bratislava Reduta alongside composer Philip Glass with the program *The Complete Piano Etudes* by American pianist and conductor Dennis R. Davies and Austrian visual artist Cori O'Lan. In 2022, she performed in the *Pianographique* project with Dennis R. Davies and Cori O'Lan. *Pianographique* represents the connection of art with new technologies, specifically with the visual representation of music, which is created in real time based on the interaction of music, performers and a computer system.

SLOVAK MUSICAL ARTISTS WHO HAVE WORKED IN JAPAN FOR A LONGER PERIOD

Ondrej Lenárd, a prominent Slovak conductor, has been the chief conductor of the Symphony Orchestra of Slovak Radio again since 2019. His cooperation with Japan began in 1979. Since than, he has been a permanent guest conductor of the Japan Shinsei Symphony Orchestra in Tokyo, where he was its main guest conductor, chief conductor, and honorary conductor / music advisor from 1993 to 2001. Since 2000, he has been the honorary conductor of the Tokyo Philharmonic, of which he was a permanent guest conductor.

Jozef Špaček (†2015), a long-time soloist of the SND Opera, worked as a singing teacher at Mukogawa Women's University in Nishinomiya from 1992 to 1997.

Cellist Ľudovít Kanta has been working in Japan for a long time. This former concertmaster of the Slovak Philharmonic was the concertmaster and leader of the cello section in the Orchestra Ensemble Kanazawa from 1990 to 2018. From 1995, he taught at Aichi Prefectural University of Fine Arts Nagoya. For his performance, he received the state decoration Order of the Rising Sun—Silver Rays in Tokyo in 2023.

Violinist and conductor Ewald Danel worked as a teacher at Aichi University of the Arts Nagoya from 1999 to 2009 and from 2008 to 2014 was the main guest professor at the Hiroshima Symphony Orchestra.

Violinist and concertmaster Pavel Bogacz (†2012) worked as a concertmaster in the Orchestra Ensemble Kanazawa from 1990 to 1999.

Other musical artists who work or have worked in Japan include: violinist Henrich Tatar, who permanently settled in

Japan and plays in the Sendai Philharmonic; Milan Radič was the first violist in the Century Orchestra Osaka from 1994 to 1998; flutist Daniel Janikovič (†2013) worked in the Orchestra Ensemble Kanazawa; cellist Peter Baran also worked in the Orchestra Ensemble Kanazawa, furthermore from 1998 to 2000 in the Kyoto Symphony Orchestra and the Japan Virtuoso Orchestra, and from 2003 to 2007 was a guest solo cellist of the Tokyo Symphony Orchestra.

JAPANESE MUSICAL ARTISTS WHO HAVE BEEN WORKING IN SLOVAKIA FOR A LONG TIME

This is primarily conductor Tsugio Maeda, honorary conductor of the State Chamber Orchestra Žilina. Soprano Nao Higano has been working in Slovakia and the Czech Republic for a long time. She inspired a well-known Slovak composer Juraj Beneš to compose a piece on Japanese poetry *Haiku—12 Songs for Soprano and Cimbal* (1999), which she also performs on foreign stages.

THEATRE INSTITUTE

The Theatre Institute cooperates with Japanese partners, especially with the international platform Yokohama International Performing Arts Meeting (YPAM), in presenting Slovak performative art and contemporary drama. The cooperation includes international festivals, exchange of experiences, and organization of events aimed at promoting Slovak theatrical art in Japan. For example, the Theatre Institute participated in the International Theatre Festival and Fair TPAM Yokohama in 2015. The project Keep PACE with Japan presented contemporary Slovak dance art and physical theater, with Slovakia represented by Šárka Ondrišová (elledanse Theatre), Radoslav

Piovarči (choreographer and dancer), Petra Fornayová (Nu Dance Fest, Contemporary Dance Association), and Miroslava Kovářová (Bratislava in Motion festival). The program included dance improvisation, video projections, a round table, and an information stand of the Theatre Institute.

The president of the Setagaya Arts Foundation and the Japanese ITI Center, Ms. Taeko Nagai, visited the New Drama Festival in 2019 with the aim of preparing the performance of the play *Vodka and Chrome* by Viliam Klimáček (GUnaGU Theatre) in Japan. The performance was canceled due to the global COVID pandemic.

The Theatre Institute continues to support international cooperation, with Japanese partners playing a significant role in promoting Slovak theater and dance on the international scene.

• SLOVAK FOLKLORE

For the relatively introverted Japanese, Slovak dance is fascinating. The visual aspect of Slovak folklore is also interesting for them. Our ensembles Lúčnica and the Slovak Folk Art Collective (SĽUK) have repeatedly and always successfully represented Slovakia in Japan. The folklore ensembles Železiar from Košice, Šarišan from Prešov, and Jánošík from Svit have also resonated in Japan.

Lúčnica

The Lúčnica ensemble performed in Japan in 1970 during EXPO '70 Osaka and was on a major tour in 1996 (director Tetsu Matsunaga).

In spring 2012, the ensemble made another successful six-week tour in Japan. The dancers offered 26 performances there under the leadership of choreographer Štefan Nosáľ, artistic director Ervín Varga, and producer and director Tetsu Masunaga.

Lúčnica presented Slovak folk dances and songs to the Japanese audience on the islands of Shikoku, Kyushu, and Honshu; on the latter, they performed in the vicinity of Tokyo and at benefit performances in the cities of Ishinomaki, Sendai, and Fukushima, which were hit by a devastating earthquake in March 2011. The proceeds went to the reconstruction of these cities. The Japanese tour also included dance workshops for students at Japanese schools.

On the occasion of the visit of Japanese Prince Fumihito and his wife Princess Kiko to Slovakia, a special ceremonial performance of the Lúčnica artistic ensemble took place on June 24, 2013, in the Constitution Hall of the County House in Bratislava. The President of the Slovak Republic Ivan Gašparovič hosted this ceremonial evening. Lúčnica performed a selection of dances by Štefan Nosáľ, and the Slovak song "Horela lipka, horela" was also heard, the melody of which is known throughout Japan.

Slovak Folk Art Collective

SĽUK performed in Japan in 1970.

In 1993, an artistic tour of SĽUK took place together with artists from the Mladé srdcia ensemble and the Ghýmeš ensemble. They presented a program called SLOVAKIA. Independently, SĽUK presented itself in 2006 as part of its artistic tour in 26 cities of Japan, when Ervín Varga was the artistic director and tour leader. During the six-week tour, it successfully presented Slovak musical and dance folklore composed of choreographies by Ervín Varga, Ján Blaho, Pavol Pitoňák, Juraj Kubánka, and Jaroslav Moravčík, and musical arrangements by Štefan Molota, Svetozár Stračina, and Ivan Dubecký.

In cooperation with the Embassy of Japan in the Slovak Republic, in May 2023, a workshop of the Japanese traditional

dance Nihon Buyo was held at SĽUK for the dance component of SĽUK, led by Hazuki Nishikawa.

Japanese Ensembles Influenced by Slovak Folklore

A remarkable chapter in Slovak–Japanese relations is the admiration for Slovak folk dances and costumes. Performances by Lúčnica, SĽUK, and other ensembles in Japan fascinated several Japanese enthusiasts so much that they established independent ensembles that actively engage in Slovak folk dances. In doing so, they relied on the help of artistic director and choreographer Ervín Varga and later (after his death in 2013) on his student at the Academy of Performing Arts (VŠMU), dancer, teacher, and choreographer Vlado Michalko and dancer Linda Luptáková. They repeatedly traveled to Japan and taught Japanese ensembles. The first ensemble, Krásna Hôrka, was formed around 1993, later followed by the ensembles Polka, Chorovody, Valaška, and Kuriatko.

There are also a few other interesting Slovak–Japanese folklore connections. The creators of the TV show *Zem spieva* even invited the folklore ensemble Valaška from Tokyo to Bratislava in February 2018. The leaders of the folklore ensemble Lipovec from Vranov nad Topľou, Anna and Miro Jenčo, have been making traditional Slovak costumes for more than two decades, which have reached various countries around the world, including Japan. The Slovak National Museum received a financial contribution of 1,000€ in 2013 for the restoration of the fire-damaged Krásna Hôrka Castle from the folklore ensemble Krásna Hôrka from Tokyo.

• JAZZ CONNECTIONS AND MODERN MUSIC

The internationally known drummer, Martin Valihora intensively collaborated with the famous Japanese jazz pianist and composer Hiromi Uehara (her work contains elements of classical music, rock, and jazz) and visited Japan many times. They recorded four albums together.

They completed their first joint tour in 2003, performing in various cities at some 20 concerts. They also performed together as part of the prestigious Blue Note Tour. As part of the Hiromi Trio formation, where they were joined by the famous American bass guitarist Anthony Jackson, they played annually from 2013 to 2018 at significant festivals such as the Tokyo Jazz Festival and Fuji Rock Festival, also performing in other cities. As an exceptional talent, Martin Valihora is a company player for Yamaha.

With Hiromi Uehara, they also repeatedly performed in Slovakia—at the Bratislava Jazz Days in the Park of Culture and Recreation and at the One Day Jazz Festival and Pohoda Festival (with the group Hiromi's Sonicbloom).

Also remarkable is the collaboration of the most famous Slovak jazz singer Peter Lipa with Japanese jazz singer Masumi Ormandy. They already performed together in Slovakia and the Czech Republic in April 2017. Their joint concert in Tokyo in 2018 met with great audience success. A year later, she was a guest at Lipa's concert in Bratislava and released his new album *Good Name*. Masumi Ormandy performed at the famous Bratislava V-klub in January 2020 at a concert on occasion of the 100th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and former Czechoslovakia. Peter Lipa with his accompanying band was a guest of the concert.

Slovak singer and songwriter Tomi Popovič released two CDs in Japan: Tomi in 2008 (Toys Factory) and For You in 2010 (Sony

Music). Both CDs were among the best-selling titles and several songs from these CDs appeared in the top ten of the Japanese charts. He performed in concert, both independently and in collaboration (as an opening act) with the legendary American group Backstreet Boys on Fuji TV and in the cities of Tokyo, Nagoya, Kobe, Osaka and Yokohama.

• FILM ART

Showing Japanese Films in Slovakia

Regular screenings of Japanese films are organized by the Embassy of Japan in the Slovak Republic under the name "Japanese Film Festival." In 2020, it was held at Kino Lumière in Bratislava, and in 2023–2025 at Kino Mladosť in Bratislava and Kino Úsmev in Košice. Films by giants of Japanese cinema Akira Kurosawa, Yasujiro Ozu, Masaki Kobayashi, and Nagisa Oshima are regularly included in the Film Archive program at the Kino Lumière.

Anime (animated films), which have been entertaining Japanese children since the 1960s, are now exported worldwide. Among the most popular are "Astro Boy," "Doraemon," "Sailor Moon," and "Dragonball Z." In 2003, director Hayao Miyazaki won an Oscar for his animated film "Spirited Away," and the film "Howl's Moving Castle" won the Osella Prize at the Venice Film Festival in 2004. In 2009, the film "Tsumiki no Ie" (The House of Small Cubes) by Kunio Kato won the Academy Award for Best Animated Short Film.

Showing Slovak Films in Japan

Several films have been shown in Japan through the Slovak Film Institute (SFI). For example, in 2020, as part of the Slovak

Classic Cinema Online project, the films "Copper Tower" and "Eagle Feather" by director Martin Hollý and "Juro the Outlaw" by director Viktor Kubal.

In 2022, SFI provided rights for cinema and home distribution of the film "Pictures of the Old World" by director Dušan Hanák to the Japanese distribution company Pandora for a period of 7 years.

• FINE ARTS

Slovak–Japanese Inspirations and Presentations of Works

The beginnings of presenting works by Slovak fine artists in Japan date back to the second half of the 1950s and early 1960s and are associated with Vincent Hložník, the founder of Slovak modern graphics and illustration. Hložník in 1957 exhibited in Tokyo at the 1st International Biennial of Graphics organized by the National Museum of Modern Art Tokyo (MOMAT) and in 1962 similarly presented a selection of his graphic work in the premises of the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum.

At the World Exhibition EXPO '70 Osaka, Slovak artists Štefan Belohradský, Rudolf Uher, Milan Dobeš, and Alojz Klimo collaborated within the Czechoslovak pavilion.

Artist Jozef Jankovič participated in Japan with his works at several significant exhibitions: "Discovery of Harmony" at the Museum of Fine Arts in Osaka (1970); "11th International Biennial of Prints" at the National Museum in Tokyo (1979); "International Impact Art Festival '83" at Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art in Kyoto (1983); "12th International Independent Exhibition of Prints" at Prefectural Gallery in Kanagawa (1986).

Conceptual artist Stano Filko exhibited in Japan at these events: "Contemporary Trends" at EXPO Museum of Fine Arts in Osaka

(1970); “International Festival of Contemporary Art” at Municipal Art Museum in Yokohama (1970); “Correspondence Art” at Ai Gallery in Tokyo (1979).

In Japan, at international exhibitions of glass art in Kanazawa (from 1984), Slovak glass artists Ján Zoričák, Askold Žáčko, Štěpán Pala, Zora Palová, Palo Macho, and others regularly exhibited.

Sculptor Peter Roller participated in three sculpture symposiums in Japan—in 1981 and 1984 in the city of Hagi, and in 1992 in the city of Aio, he created the sculpture Samurai. Thanks to him and his wife Magdaléna Rollerová, with whom they founded the NIPPON CLUB—Society of Friends of Japanese Culture in 1990, an international Slovak–Austrian–Hungarian sculpture symposium was held in 1992 in the Bratislava district of Rusovce, which was attended by two Japanese artists, Hiroshi Koyama and Kenichi Mashita. Their monumental sculptural works can still be admired at a unique geographical location (triple border point)—the intersection of the borders between Slovakia, Hungary, and Austria.

The well-known artist, illustrator and initiator of BIB Miroslav Cipár had an exhibition and presentation at the Athens Gallery in Osaka in 1992, thanks to the invitation and efforts of cultural manager and Japanese foreign language teacher Yuko Nakamura. The impetus for this connection was the book of fairy tales by Mária Ďuríčková, The White Princess, with illustrations by Miroslav Cipár, which Yuko Nakamura discovered in a bookstore in Paris (the book was published in more than ten languages and, thanks to Yuko Nakamura, also in Japanese). Ms. Nakamura visited Slovakia in 1991, became acquainted with Cipár’s work and subsequently prepared an entire stay in Osaka. Miroslav Cipár’s drawings and the presentation of Slovak tinkering in Japan resonated extremely well. Yoko Nakamura

had small graphics and postcards made from the exhibited works. The artist was accompanied on his journey to Osaka by his wife Vilma Cipárová, a member of the International Women’s Club of Bratislava, who later used the proceeds from the sale of reproductions of the illustrations to purchase a special computer for the Slovak Association of the Visually Impaired and Blind. In the following years, Yuko Nakamura made a significant contribution to the presentation of Slovakia.

Painter Dušan Kállay has significantly contributed to strengthening cultural exchanges between Japan and Slovakia, for which he received the Japanese Ambassador’s Award in 2022. He has visited Japan several times, where he exhibited, created works inspired by Japanese traditions and culture. In 1998, in collaboration with the Japanese publishing house Fukuinkan Shoten, he published a children’s book “Cheerful Concert,” which he wrote and illustrated himself. An internationally awarded book of Andersen’s fairy tales with his illustrations was also published in Japan. Under the guidance of prof. Kállay at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava, many students from abroad, including Japan, were educated. These include the well-known Japanese illustrator and children’s literature author Nana Furiya as well as Koichi Yamamoto, Tomoya Uchida, Shiho Dono, Nanako Ishida, and Shinji Takine. Dušan Kállay’s student, Slovak painter and graphic artist Igor Piačka, participated in an international project at Art Studio Itsukaichi in Tokyo in 1999.

A notable example of Slovak–Japanese connections are the activities of the Šicko family of sculptors in the city of Mine (Yamaguchi Prefecture), where there are three white marble sculptures by Slovak sculptors. In 1998, sculptor Jaroslava Šicková-Fabrici created a 3-meter work called *Power (Honour to bamboo)* at the II. International Sculpture Symposium. Her husband, sculptor Ján Šicko, created a 3-meter sculpture called

Alpha and Omega—Sundial at the III. International Sculpture Symposium in 2000. Their son Filip Šicko (then a sculpture student) created a 3-meter sculpture called *Knowledge* in 2002 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the founding of Mine City High School. In addition, in 2002 he also created a 3.5-meter marble work called *Sunflower*, which is located in the city of Hachinohe in front of the Rotary Club.

In October–November 2008, Jaroslava and Ján Šicko worked as volunteer art therapists at the invitation of the orphanage director and artist Kojima Sajiro in the city of Takanabe. At the same time, they created their own works of stone and ceramics, which they presented at a solo exhibition in a local gallery; most of them were subsequently donated to the orphanage. Later, they published a book from their research on drawings about the values of teenagers in the era of globalization called *Suitcase*, which includes drawings from children from Japan as well as drawings from children from other parts of the world.

In 2009, Jaroslava and Ján Šicko exhibited their chamber sculptures at an international collective exhibition held at the international airport in the city of Miyazaki.

Thanks to Jaroslava and Ján Šicko and the association of artists and therapists Terra Therapeutica, which was established in 2000, Japanese sculptors visited and created in Slovakia. At the international sculpture symposium in the spa town of Dudince in 2000, Yoshin Ogata created the marble fountain *Spring*, which is located in the Diamant spa house. In 2001, the married couple of sculptors Goto and Kioko Hideki created works from local travertine at the sculpture symposium in Vyšné Ružbachy and called them *Lizard by the Spring* and *Spiral*. They are located in the spa park. Sculptor Hitoshi Tanaka created the work *Moon dance* at the international sculpture symposium in Topoľčianky in 2004. His sculpture made of white Bulgarian marble is located in the local park.

A student of Dušan Kállay, Slovak painter and graphic artist Igor Piačka participated in an international project at Art Studio Itsukaichi in Tokyo in 1999.

Well-known Slovak sculptor Ján Ťapák was inspired by Japanese history and created 21 remarkable bronze sculptures of samurai. These works were first presented at an opening in the exhibition hall of the Clarissine Church in 2010, which was held under the auspices of the Japanese ambassador Yoshio Nomoto.

Artist Roman Ondák from Bratislava has currently established himself in Japan. In 2004, he completed a stay in Kitakyushu and had a solo exhibition at the Center for Contemporary Art in Kitakyushu. In 2022, he participated with his work at the Aichi Triennale.

Japanese culture has had a strong influence on the work of several contemporary Slovak artists, especially on Marko Blažo from Košice (1972—2021), who was captivated by the famous painting by Katsushika Hokusai "The Great Wave off Kanagawa" (woodcut from 1831). After 2010, he created several variants of this work—digital prints and large-scale paintings, and a whole cycle called "Hokusai" emerged. The work "The Great Wave off Kanagawa" served Blažo to discover new meanings and connections. These works are in the collections of the Slovak National Gallery (SNG) and private collections.

Artist Erik Šille (1978), working in Bratislava, completed several residency stays in Tokyo. In 2013, he exhibited "The Adventures of Junshi and Stillborn" at Youkobo Art Space in Tokyo, and in 2013, "Made in Japan" at Krokus Gallery in Bratislava.

Slovak artist Luka Brase visited several Japanese cities in 2019 and 2024, where he created several works that he exhibited in Slovakia and abroad. He plans to visit Japan again this year in connection with the EXPO Osaka 2025 World Exhibition.

A remarkable achievement at the beginning of 2025 was the collective exhibition "9,000 km: Japanese Inspirations in Slovak Art" by the curatorial duo Patrik Krajčovič and Žaneta Húsková at the Ján Koniarek Gallery in Trnava, where Milan Adamčiak, Karol Baron, Marko Blažo, Dominika Brečková, Peter Cako, Palo Čejka, Svetlana Fialová, Patrícia Koyšová, Mária Maxová, Stanislav Ondruš, Ester Sabik, Boris Sirka, Jozef Sušienka, Erik Šille, Tatiana Takáčová, and Dezider Tóth exhibited their works.

Photography

The prominent Slovak photographer Ľubo Stacho won the 1995 Photography Biennial Prize at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, which purchased his works for its collection.

BIBIANA, International House of Art for Children

This cultural institution has been actively cooperating with Japanese institutions and artists for a long time. The Biennial of Illustrations Bratislava (BIB) and the Biennial of Animation Bratislava (BAB) festivals play an important role in this cooperation. Japanese artists and experts have regularly been guests in Slovakia, participating in juries, symposiums, screenings of animated films, and organizing traveling exhibitions of BIB in Japan. The prestigious Grand Prix BIB award has been won by these Japanese artists: Yasuo Segawa, Etsuko Nakatsuji, and Iku Dekune.

Exhibitions with Japanese Themes

In September 2016, an exhibition of works by Japanese illustrator Shiho Dono titled "Little Library" was held at BIBIANA under the auspices of the Embassy of Japan in the Slovak Republic. In 2018, BIBIANA prepared an interactive exhibition

"World of Japanese Fairy Tales." In 2020, visitors had the opportunity to visit the representative exhibition "In the Colors of the Rising Sun," which offered 39 illustrations by Japanese artists who won awards at BIB since 1967. The exhibition was enriched with books in Japanese and English and various interactive elements.

Other implemented programs with Japanese themes include: the performance "The Tale of the Little Crane" by puppeteer Naoko Taniguchi (2010), the project "From Hand to Hand"—an exhibition to support areas affected by the disaster in Fukushima (2013), the workshop "Sweet Tastes of Japan" with Natsumi Kakita (2015), the Japanese International Children's Day including puppet theater, martial arts, calligraphy, and more (2016).

Traveling Exhibitions of BIB in Japan

Exhibitions in Japan were held at Nara Prefectural Museum of Art (2020), Chiba City Museum of Art (2021), and in 2023 in Chiba, Osaka, Ashikage, Urawa, and Niigata. The traveling exhibition of BIB with the subtitle Masters of Slovak Book Illustration (2002–2003) presented in the cities of Urawa, Echigawa, Kiyo, and Iida a representative selection of illustrative work by Ľudovít Fulla, Vincent Hložník, and Albín Brunovský.

Slovak National Gallery

The collection of graphics at SNG includes colored woodcuts depicting the lifestyle of the new bourgeoisie from the Japanese Edo period (1603–1868), which stylistically influenced European Impressionism and Post-Impressionism of the late 19th century. All are available for download in high resolution.

Slovak National Museum

This museum has long-term cooperation with the Embassy of Japan in the Slovak Republic and the Japan Foundation and has held several exhibitions and workshops in its premises, such as The World of Japanese Dolls (2014), Contemporary Japanese Design/100 (2017), Artistic Crafts of the Tōhoku Region of Japan (2018), Japanese Gardens—Art Inspired by Nature (2021), an exhibition of photographs by Tamara Reháčková (2021) and Netsuke (2022).

Education and Science

JAPANESE STUDIES AND JAPANESE LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN SLOVAKIA

Japanese Studies is part of Oriental studies focused on researching the Japanese language, literature, history, and culture of Japan. It has a more philological-historical orientation and makes Japanese language sources accessible. An important part of Japanese Studies is the research of intercultural communication. In Slovakia, the **Department of Oriental Studies (now the Institute of Oriental Studies) of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (SAS)** was established in 1960.

From 1961 to 2002, it was directed by the founder of Slovak Japanese Studies at SAS, **Viktor Krupa**, who, along with his rich scientific and publishing activities in the field of Oriental linguistics, language, and culture, also published translations of Japanese literature. Among the significant Slovak Japanese scholars is also Karol Kuťka, who focuses on studying modern Japanese history and researching and translating modern Japanese literature. The history of Slovak Japanese Studies is covered in the chapter by František Paulovič in a book publication about Slovakia, which was published by Akashi publishing house in 2023.

In 1986, Štefan Pecho established the study of the Japanese language for the first time at the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University (CU) in Bratislava. In the beginning, the aforementioned Viktor Krupa and Karol Kuťka also participated in teaching as external lecturers. Štefan Pecho first established the department of Japanese Language and Intercultural Communication and subsequently founded the Department of Languages and Cultures of East Asian Countries. In 1994, the department was renamed to the **Department of East Asian Studies**, which is currently the only academic workplace in Slovakia where one can study the Japanese language. In 2014, Štefan Pecho founded and still leads the professional civic association **Japanese Center**, where his son Štefan Pecho Jr. also works and teaches. In addition to teaching Japanese, the center specializes in intercultural education and counseling in the field of professional communication with Japanese people. It provides courses in calligraphy and ikebana and co-organizes Japanese cultural events. It cooperates with the Japan Foundation and the city of Gifu. After receiving the Japanese Ambassador's Award (2015) and the Japanese Foreign Minister's Award (2016), Štefan Pecho Sr. was honored by the Japanese Emperor with the Order of the Rising Sun with Gold Rays and Rosette for his merits in supporting and spreading the teaching of the Japanese language in the Slovak Republic and his contribution to deepening mutual understanding between Japan and the Slovak Republic (2018).

Today, the **Japanese language** is taught in Slovakia at one university (CU in Bratislava), at the Japanese Center in Bratislava (where foreigners living in Slovakia, children from mixed families, and Slovaks living abroad through online format also study), at two secondary schools in Nitra and Krupina, as well as in state and private language schools in Bratislava, Trnava, Trenčín, Považská Bystrica, Nitra, Košice, Spišská Nová Ves, and Poprad. According to a survey by the Japan Foundation in 2024,

318 students and other interested individuals were studying Japanese in Slovakia.

Among the current Slovak translators of Japanese literature are poet Eva Luka (real name Eva Lukáčová), who translates Japanese poets; Dana Hashimotová (a Slovak woman who has been living in Hokkaido for over 40 years), who focuses on Japanese modern fiction; František Paulovič, who is a prolific translator of Japanese prose and poetry; Ivan Rumánek, who specializes in classical Japanese poetry; and Lucia Preuss, who has translated three books of prose.

In 2004, Jana Šoucová wrote the work *Sociolinguistic Aspect of Polite Communication in Japanese: Textbook of Japanese Honorific Language*, which was published by CU in Bratislava.

The spread of the Japanese language and Japanese culture in Slovakia has long been supported by the government foundation **Japan Foundation**. It offers grants for training and educational stays for Japanese language teachers at the Japan Foundation's educational center in Kitaurawa (almost all Slovak Japanese language teachers have undergone these training stays; the long-term stay is currently six months and the short-term is 6 weeks); it supports the acquisition of book donations for Slovak institutions and the organization of events related to the Japanese language and Japanese culture, as well as translations of original Japanese literature.

Slovak language in Japan is currently taught by emeritus professor Susumu Nagayo at the Faculty of Political Science and Economics at Waseda University and Professor Hideaki Kimura at the Research Institute of World History at the same university.

STUDY AND SCIENTIFIC STAYS IN JAPAN

After 1990, new opportunities were created for Slovak individuals interested in studying or researching in Japan, which are supported by governmental or private (foundation) sources. Some Slovak universities and SAS have concluded agreements with leading Japanese universities and scientific workplaces.

SLOVAK ACADEMIC INFORMATION AGENCY (SAIA)

After 1990, SAIA has been regularly announcing regular or ad hoc scholarship and exchange programs with Japan.

The Japanese Government Monbukagakusho Research Student Program scholarship allows for completing entire master's/doctoral studies in the fields of natural, technical, medical, agricultural, social, and human sciences and arts. It lasts for two years.

The Young Leaders Program of the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) provides a one-year scholarship for employees of public institutions at the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS) in Tokyo. It is intended for teachers and research workers.

The Japanese Government Monbukagakusho Undergraduate Student Program scholarship is intended for 5-year university studies for high school graduates.

In the list of scholarship recipients, SAIA currently has 153 people who studied in Japan with the support of various scholarships—MEXT, JASSO (Japan Student Services Organization), Matsumae International Foundation, Japan Foundation, Nakajima, and others. Regarding the governmental MEXT, about 80 of them received scholarships through SAIA (the rest were covered by inter-university exchanges and other grants).

• COMENIUS UNIVERSITY

CU currently has concluded agreements with the following Japanese universities: Shizuoka University (since 1996), Waseda University (since 2002), Josai University Educational Corporation (since 2014), and Kobe University (since 2019).

The exchange takes place in both directions—about five Japanese students come to Slovakia annually, and two to three Slovak students travel to Japan. CU in Bratislava is preparing further agreements with Chiba University and Nanzan University.

The Department of East Asian Studies at the Faculty of Arts of CU in Bratislava has independent relationships with Japanese universities. These include: Waseda University (Tokyo), Josai University (Tokyo), Tokyo University of Foreign Studies Japanese (Tokyo), Ferris University (Yokohama), Shizuoka University (Shizuoka), Ryukoku University (Kyoto), Kobe University (Kobe), Akita University (Akita), Ibaraki University (Ibaraki). Students can travel for either one or two semesters, and at the same time, some Japanese universities also send their students to CU in Bratislava based on bilateral agreements.

In the current academic year 2024/2025, 12 students in the master's program and 36 in the bachelor's program are studying Japanese Studies as part of the East Asian Languages and Cultures program at the Department of East Asian Studies.

Between 1991 and 2024, almost 100 master's and almost 100 bachelor's degrees were completed in Japanese Studies.

The Sasakawa Young Leaders Fellowship Fund (SYLFF) scholarship program, intended for students and doctoral candidates, has annually since 1995 provided selected students with a sum that allows them to use scholarships either for a stay abroad (three scholarships for three doctoral candidates) or as

financial support (scholarship for three master's students) during the last two semesters of study at CU in Bratislava. So far, it has been used by about 150 students from five faculties of CU: Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Management, Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences, and Faculty of Education.

The establishment of this program was initiated by a financial gift (intended to create a foundation) from Japanese philanthropist Yohei Sasakawa, who visited CU in 1995. In addition to representatives of the university and the Japanese delegation, Dagmar Havlová (sister-in-law of President Václav Havel, who mediated the grant) and the wife of the President of the Slovak Republic, Emília Kováčová, also participated in the meeting. During the ceremonial act, Rector Juraj Švec awarded Yohei Sasakawa the Gold Medal of CU. Currently, the financial resources for the SYLFF program are administered by the Japanese foundation Tokyo Foundation for Policy Research.

CU was honored with two visits by members of the Japanese imperial family. **Princess Sayako**, during her official visit to Slovakia in 2000, also visited CU, where she held talks with the school's leadership and with students and teachers of Japanese Studies. At the end of the meeting, CU Rector Ferdinand Devínsky awarded Her Imperial Highness the Grand Gold Medal of CU. **Prince Fumihito and Princess Kiko** officially visited Slovakia in 2013 and also met with Japanese Studies students from the Department of East Asian Studies at the Faculty of Arts of CU. CU Rector Karol Mičieta presented them with the Grand Gold Medal of CU for strengthening friendly relations between Japan and Slovakia, as well as for developing cooperation in the field of science, research, and education, and for supporting the study of Japanese Studies at CU.

• UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS IN BRATISLAVA (EUBA)

EUBA has been developing long-term cooperation with Japan. One of the pillars of this cooperation are bilateral agreements concluded with leading Japanese universities: a memorandum of understanding was signed with Tokyo International University in 2012, and since 2017, a student exchange agreement has also been added to the contractual base. Equally successful cooperation is with Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, with which EUBA concluded a memorandum of understanding and a student exchange agreement in 2018.

As part of student exchange mobility, three students from Japan have studied at the University of Economics in Bratislava since 2019. EUBA has sent 13 students to Japan during the same period.

Japan plays an important role also within the subject Diplomacy in Practice, where ambassadors and other staff of the Japanese embassy in Slovakia regularly appear.

• COOPERATION OF OTHER UNIVERSITIES AND SCIENTIFIC INSTITUTIONS

Other universities and scientific institutions have also established cooperation with Japanese partner universities and scientific institutions to varying degrees of intensity:

Slovak University of Technology (cooperation agreement with Aoyama Gakuin University, Kanazawa University, Nagoya University, Ochanomizu University, Human Life and Environmental Sciences, Osaka University, University of Tokyo, Tokyo Institute of Technology, Tokyo Metropolitan University, Meiji University Educational Foundation); **University of Prešov** (cooperation agreement with Josai University Education Corporation, Daito Bunka University); University of Fine Arts

(cooperation agreement with Tokyo University of Arts); **Matej Bel University**—(contracts with Yamanashi Gakuin University and Asian University Academy Tokyo); **Slovak University of Agriculture** (has a cooperation agreement with Kagoshima University); **University of Žilina**; **Technical University of Košice**, **Welding Research Institute**.

In 2024, Slovak startup SPACEMANIC, operating in the field of space research and industry, achieved extraordinary success in Japan. It was among the four winning companies from Europe in the First European–Japanese Space Startup Competition 2024. The aim of this competition is to identify startups with potential application in the Japanese market and possible partnerships with Japanese companies. The winning startups received sponsorship to participate in Nihonbashi Space Week 2024, one of Asia's largest space-related business meetings.

• SLOVAK ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

SAS workplaces and scientists have long-term bilateral and multilateral cooperation with Japan. Currently, it is implemented mainly through the cooperation of SAS with the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS). Until 2014, it was based on the Memorandum of Understanding on the Exchange of Scientists, which was signed in Tokyo on October 6, 1993, by Štefan Luby, Vice-President of SAS, and Hitoshi Osaki, Director General of JSPS. In March 2014, JSPS decided to end the previous system of cooperation based on the individual exchange of scientists and proposed a system based on joint projects.

JSPS offers SAS a year-long internship for scientific workers of all scientific disciplines who have completed doctoral studies. The internship stays are focused on natural, technical, and social sciences. JSPS covers the stay costs. The condition for the success of the proposal is an invitation from a Japanese host, which is preceded by cooperation or at least has an acceptance letter.

Multilateral cooperation is implemented within the European Interest Group (EIG) CONCERT-Japan. This is an international initiative to support and develop scientific, technical, and innovation cooperation between European countries and Japan, which builds on the successful ERA-Net type program called CONCERT-Japan. It currently brings together 14 permanent member organizations, including SAS, and allows for the connection of other members for the purpose of implementing workshops, networking events, and others.

The central activity of the initiative is the organization of calls for multilateral research project proposals with the participation of partners from Japan and other participating countries. The products of these calls are multilateral research projects, the costs of which are covered for individual partners by the member organizations at the national or regional level from their own budget. Applications for EIG CONCERT-Japan calls are submitted jointly by the partners of the research consortium, with all applications going through a single independent international evaluation. SAS, as one of the funding organizations, covers the costs of the SAS partner from its own budget. The SAS Presidium decides on entry into individual calls. The maximum duration of projects is 3 years.

As part of this scientific and technical cooperation between European partners and Japan, projects have been carried out since 2020 with the participation of the following SAS institutes: Institute of Forest Ecology, Institute of Hydrology, Institute of Molecular Biology, Institute of Materials Research, and Institute of Materials and Machine Mechanics.

In 2014, a Memorandum on Scientific and Technical Cooperation between the countries of the Visegrad Group and Japan was signed. Based on the memorandum, a joint research program in the V4–Japan format was agreed upon. Between 2015

and 2024, the following SAS institutes were involved in this cooperation: Institute of Electrical Engineering (two projects), Institute of Physics, Institute of Geotechnics, Institute of Inorganic Chemistry, and Polymer Institute.

Exceptional results in cooperation with Japanese scientists were achieved by inorganic chemist Assoc. Prof. Zoltán Lenčéš, who focuses on structural and functional ceramic materials. From 1997 to 2007, he completed longer stays at the National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology (AIST) Nagoya and is the author of fifteen publications in renowned world journals and four patents granted in Japan. The cooperation with AIST was also utilized by Tomáš Plachký, a doctoral student of the SAS President prof. Pavol Šajgalík.

Juraj Bujdák, a scientist from the Institute of Inorganic Chemistry of SAS, now a professor at the Faculty of Natural Sciences of CU, created long-term cooperation between SAS and the National Institute for Materials Science (NIMS), where, in addition to him, Adriana Czímerová, Peter Boháč, and Marian Matejdes also took long-term stays.

As an interesting note, we mention that at today's Institute of Oriental Studies of SAS, an independent scientific field of Japanese Studies was established in 1960; inorganic chemist prof. Pavol Šajgalík was on a three-week scientific stay in Nagoya, Osaka, and Kyoto in October 1998 through the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science Fellowship; the Institute of History of SAS has long-term cooperation with Japanese Slovak studies scholar and historian Susumu Nagayo from Waseda University. In December 2024, he was solemnly presented with the Plaque of the Slovak Historical Society at SAS for his extraordinary contribution to the development of research on Slovak history abroad.

Delegation of the Slovak Ministry of Education visited Japan in the spring of 2025

A delegation of the Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth of the Slovak Republic, led by State Secretary Róbert Zsembera, visited Japan from 22 to 30 April 2025. It also included representatives of Slovak universities and the Slovak Academy of Sciences. The working trip aimed to establish new contacts and strengthen existing cooperation.

The program included visits to leading Japanese research institutions Riken—Institute of Physical and Chemical Research and JST—Japan Science and Technology Agency. In Tokyo, the delegation participated in an official meeting at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan. An academic roundtable was held at the Slovak Embassy, which brought together more than thirty representatives of Slovak and Japanese universities. At the end of the working trip, the delegation visited the EXPO 2025 exhibition in Osaka.

THE WORK OF SLOVAK MISSIONARIES IN JAPAN

Currently, two Slovak Catholic missionaries from the Society of the Word of God (Verbists—SVD) are working in Japan.

Jakub Rajčáni SVD comes from Bratislava. He arrived in Japan in 2005 as a seminarian, studied theology in Nagoya and was ordained a priest in 2011. After completing his doctoral studies in Rome in 2012–2016, he returned to Nanzan University in Nagoya (a private Catholic university run by Verbists), where he teaches moral theology. Father Rajčáni does not work directly in pastoral care but helps with English masses.

Pavol Filadelf SVD comes from Považská Bystrica. He was ordained a priest of the Society of the Divine Word in 2009 in Nitra

and traveled to Japan in 2009. In 2009–2012, after completing his studies of Japanese and preparations for the mission in Nagoya, he worked as a chaplain in Akita and Tajima, and since 2020 he has been a parish priest in the Nanzan parish in Nagoya. He is also engaged in pedagogical work.

In the past, five important Slovak Salesians worked in Japan (four of them are also buried there): Jozef Figura SDB came to Japan in 1932, died in 2001 and is buried in the city of Beppu; Jozef Forner SDB worked in Japan since 1936, died in 1983 and is buried in Tokyo; Štefan Foltin SDB lived in Japan for over 60 years (1949–2010), died in 2010 and is buried in Beppu; Ľudovít Suchán SDB came to Japan in 1954, died in 2005 and is buried in Beppu; internationally renowned biblical scholar prof. Jozef Heriban SDB, who after completing his studies in Rome worked for almost 20 years (1957–1976) in Japan as a university professor and priest, returned to Rome after 1976, where he died in 2009. He is buried in his native Šelpice.

František Sirovič SVD came to Japan in 1948 and stayed there till 1953. He was teaching at Nanzan University in Nagoya. In 1993, after long years abroad, he returned to Slovakia and was still active as teacher and parish priest to the English language community in Bratislava. He passed away in 2014 and is buried in Nitra.

Sports

Japanese martial arts such as judo, karate, aikido, iaido, jodo and kendo, Daito-ryu aiki-jujutsu, or traditional board games go and shogi have found thousands of enthusiasts in Slovakia, with karate being by far the most widespread among them. Japanese masters often stood at their beginnings, and through them, natural mutual acquaintance between Slovakia and Japan takes place.

Slovak athletes in the era of independence participated in two Olympic and Paralympic Games in Japan—the Winter Olympic Games (WOG) in Nagano (1998) and the Summer Olympic Games (SOG) in Tokyo (2020), which were postponed to 2021 due to the COVID pandemic.

JAPANESE MARTIAL ARTS

JUDO

Among Japanese martial arts, judo has the longest tradition in our country. Alongside it, personalities in karate and aikido also emerged. It became established in Slovakia in the 1950s—the first club, Slavoj Vinohrady Bratislava, was established in Slovakia thanks to Róbert Binder in 1954.

In 1960, master and judo teacher sensei Nagaoka from Japan came to Czechoslovakia. At a seminar in Klanovice near Prague he introduced Slovak and Czech trainers to new modern elements of sports training in judo.

The founding conference of the Slovak Judo Association (SJA) took place in 1969 in Žilina (Ondrej Adamov became the chairman). Slovak competitors began to significantly assert themselves in the highest European and world competitions in the late 1970s.

Currently, the SJA has over 70 clubs throughout Slovakia. It is practiced by over 4,000 people in various age categories. Since 2024, Anton Pospíšek has been the chairman of the association (before him Jozef Tománek Jr.). The highest level of technical proficiency in judo in Slovakia—7th Dan—is currently held by Anton Pospíšek.

SJA athletes visit Japan annually, especially the cradle of judo KODOKAN in the capital city of Tokyo, but also Japanese university centers of judo. The participation of Japanese trainers in the training of Slovak clubs, especially in Banská Bystrica and Pezinok, has a significant contribution to sports preparation.

Remarkable is the judo club in Pezinok, which was founded by Jozef Tománek in 1983. His son Jozef follows in his footsteps.

His daughter Patrícia (1st Dan) has achieved extraordinary results in recent years in the youth category, including gold medals from the European Championships and World Championships, and ten first places at European Cup events.

Among Slovak judoists, Miroslava Jánošíková, Marek Matuszek, Semir Pepic, Zoltán Palkovács, Milan Randl, and Márius Fízeľ participated in the Olympic Games.

Jozef Krnáč (3rd Dan) achieved medal success when he won a silver medal at the XXVIII Summer Olympic Games Athens 2004.

The Ambassador of Japan to Slovakia is a regular guest at the annual ceremonial announcement of the results of the Slovak Judo Association.

KARATE

Karate has contributed in an exceptional way to the interest in Japan and the development of Slovak–Japanese relations. In Slovakia, tens of thousands of people of all ages have been practicing it since the turn of the 1960s and 1970s. Thanks to it, many Slovaks visited Japan after 1990 and at the same time welcomed masters of this traditional Japanese sport (almost exclusively from Okinawa) to Slovakia.

Today, four umbrella organizations of karate operate in Slovakia: Slovak Karate Union (1990, since 2002, Daniel Líška has been the president, a member of the executive of the Slovak Olympic and Sports Committee, before him Martin Čulen, the honorary president is Tibor Mikuš); Slovak Federation of Karate and Martial Arts (1993, president Daniel Baran); Slovak Federation of Okinawan Karate and Kobudo (2000, led by Ladislav Klementis); Slovak Union of Okinawa Karate and Kobudo (chief instructor Igor Vakoš). The number of people who currently practice karate in Slovakia is estimated to be up to 10,000.

Slovakia is among the exceptionally successful countries in this martial art. Slovak male and female karate practitioners have won and continue to win awards at European and world levels.

Among others, František Šebej (8th Dan; since 2018 laureate of the Japanese Order of the Rising Sun with Gold and Silver Star) and Ladislav Klementis (9th Dan and holder of the title Hanshi; since 2008 laureate of Okinawa Goodwill Ambassador) stood at the beginning of this martial art in our country, who as trainers, judges, and promoters of this martial art influenced several generations of our karate practitioners.

A special role in the development of karate in Slovakia was played by Japanese master and teacher sensei Takeji Ogawa (10th Dan), who first came to Bratislava from neighboring Austria, where he worked as a trainer, at the age of 27 in 1971. He began to come to Slovakia regularly and brought not only knowledge, practical and organizational skills, but thanks to his charisma, he imprinted a sporting and value stamp on Slovak karate. He still comes to Slovakia today and enjoys great respect here.

Since 1997, Slovak karate practitioners began to regularly travel to Japan for training stays and at the same time invite master instructors to Slovakia, such as Choyu Kiyuna, Eiki Kurashita, Seitoku Matayoshi, and Akira Gushi from Okinawa. In March 2025, the well-known Bratislava karate master Ľudovít Divinec received his 9th Dan and the Hanshi title in Okinawa.

Significant figure in Slovak karate Rastislav Mráz (8th Dan) has been cooperating for a long time with Master Seiichi Fujiwara, president of the Seiwakai International organization from the town of Omagari.

Roman Volák (5th Dan) gained many world titles in various categories of karate. His journey in martial arts began in the early 1990s, when he first devoted himself to kung-fu, later switched

to competitive kickboxing, and finally to modern freestyle karate. Among his most significant achievements is winning the world championship in full-contact karate in the Dominican Republic in 2014.

Since 2017, the Slovak Karate Union has had a cooperation agreement with the Japanese city of Gifu, where 4-time world champion Atsuko Wakai lives, and its practitioners have already completed several training stays there. A symbolic connection between Slovakia and Japan is karate master Andrea Klementisová (5th Dan), daughter of karate masters Ľubomíra (7th Dan) and Ladislav (9th Dan) Klementis, who has been living and training in Okinawa for 8 years and has become a world champion in karate and kobudo.

• AIKIDO

This Japanese martial art began to develop more widely in Slovakia only in the 1990s. The first aikido club was founded in Bratislava by Štefan Kurilla in 1989 (before that, he practiced judo, in which he is currently a holder of the 6th Dan). Later, he founded the Slovak National Aikido Federation.

Štefan Kurilla first learned from Japanese masters Nobuyoshi Tamura, Morihiro Saito (who was the longest-practicing student of aikido founder Morihei Ueshiba) and later from his son Hitohiro Saito. Štefan Kurilla regularly visits Japan, where he not only improves, but also gives demonstrations and leads training sessions. In 2019, he received the 7th Dan Aikido Iwama Shinshin Aiki Shurenkai in the birthplace of aikido in Iwama and became the holder of the second highest technical degree in aikido in Europe within this international organization.

Master Kurilla later also began to practice the martial art of Daito-ryu aiki-jujutsu. He achieved the 5th Dan in it and achieved remarkable results in world demonstrations in Japan: 1st place

in 2017 and 2nd place with his team in 2019. In 2024, Sombucho Katsuyuki Kondo awarded him the title of shihan (master teacher) during his visit to Slovakia. He thus became the first bearer of this title in Daito-ryu aiki-jujutsu in a direct line outside of Japan.

In 1992, Aikido Dojo Trnava was established (club leader and main teacher Tibor Bokor), which a year later stood at the birth of the Slovak Aikido Association (SAA). Its first president was Ferdinand Čuperka (followed by Matej Galba, Roman Ilavský, and currently Miroslav Palát). In 1995, the SAA was internationally accredited. Today, it has 11 dojos (clubs) in Slovakia. Japanese teacher Masatomi Ikeda, who came to Slovakia in 1995 and a year later became the technical director of the Association (he held this position until 2002), stood at its birth. Until his death in 2021, he regularly came to Slovakia twice a year to teach aikido. After him, Japanese aikido master Katsuaki Asai began to regularly come to Slovakia and lead seminars.

Among the main personalities of this association is Mário Černý (6th Dan Aikikai, Shidoin), the main teacher of Aikido Dojo Trnava, secretary of the technical commission, who began practicing aikido in 1993 (previously he practiced karate). He is also the contact person for the world headquarters of aikido Aikikai Hombu Dojo Tokyo/World Aikido Headquarters and International Aikido Federation. He leads seminars in Slovakia and abroad. Other protagonists are Roman Ilavský (5th Dan, Aikikai, Shidoin), the main teacher of children, member of the SAA technical commission, who headed the SAA for 17 years; Lukáš Nitriansky (5th Dan Aikikai, Shidoin), member of the technical commission and SAA council. Their teachers are masters Ikeda Masatomi (7th Dan, Aikikai, Shihan) and Michele Qaranta (7th Dan, Aikikai, Shihan).

Currently, several hundred people practice aikido in Slovakia and about 10 people practice Daito-ryu aiki-jujutsu.

• MARTIAL ARTS WITH WEAPONS—IAIDO, JODO, AND KENDO

The history of teaching martial arts using Japanese weapons—the Katana sword, the Shinai bamboo sword, and the 128 cm long Jo stick, began in Slovakia in the 1990s. A pioneer of iaido (the art of quick sword drawing) was Juraj Váňa from Bratislava.

Among the first who began to practice kendo in our country were also practitioners in Liptovský Mikuláš and Košice under the leadership of Blažej Gál and Miroslav Mihalovič. The founding of the Slovak Kendo Federation (SKF) in 1993 in Košice is also tied to this period.

In the initial period, the activities of Roman Behro (Watanabe), who began to travel abroad including Japan for seminars and bring new knowledge, were very important. He subsequently connected with Juraj Váňa and began to cooperate with him in Bratislava's Hidari Dojo, which covered the martial arts of iaido and jodo. He also met the significant British teacher of these martial arts, Victor Cook, a student of Japanese teacher Ishido Shizufumi, who regularly came to Slovakia. Roman Behro (Watanabe) received from his teacher Victor Cook, who left a unique mark in Slovakia, the right to use the name Shinbukan for his dojo.

At the same time, the history of organizing international seminars in iaido and jodo began. This period also brought the entry of SKF into the European Kendo Federation (EKF) in 2001.

Kendo martial art is a separate chapter. Along with practices in Liptovský Mikuláš and Košice, with the arrival of Rastislav Pazdernatý to Shinbukan Dojo, the history of kendo in Bratislava began to be written. Significant help was provided by master Tetsushi Abe, operating in Budapest. Further development brought division into Iaido-Jodo Dojo (Shinbukan Dojo) and the independence of Kendo Dojo (Furinkazan Dojo).

Rastislav Pazdernatý has been the president of SKF since 2010 (before him, the presidents were Blažej Gál and Juraj Váňa). Currently, the federation is integrated into the international structures of kendo, iaido, and jodo, and its practitioners regularly participate in seminars and competitions in Europe, where they have also received significant awards.

Currently, about 50 people practice these martial arts.

JAPANESE GAMES

BOARD GAME GO

Go is the oldest strategic board game in the world. It originated about 2500 years ago in China, from where it spread throughout the world, but mostly to Japan and Korea.

Go has been played in an organized manner in Slovakia since 1974, thanks to Ivan Oravec, Milan Kolesár, and Ján Popovyc. The Slovak Go Association (SGA) was founded in 1991, and its first president for 20 years was Miroslav Poliak; today, the president is Martin Lukáč. Since 1994, SGA has been a member of the International Go Federation (IGF) and since 2008 of the World Pair Go Association (WPGA). In 2021, SGA received a certificate of recognition as a national sports association.

The Slovak go ranking has up to 400 registered players who have ever played a tournament, of which 120 are active members. Every year, a series of Grand Prix Slovakia tournaments is organized. The main centers are in Bratislava and Košice. Among the more prominent go personalities in our country are the founder Ivan Oravec, Slavomír Králik, Xaver Gubáš, Pavol Lisý, and Miroslav Poliak. Several Slovak go players have participated in tournaments in Japan.

In 2014, the European Professional System was established, and our Pavol Lisý Jr. became the first European professional.

SHOGI (JAPANESE CHESS)

Shogi is a board game with more than a thousand-year tradition, which is still popular in Japan. The Japanese can watch this sport on television every Saturday morning.

Its enthusiasts in Slovakia created the Slovak Shogi Association in 2009 (Adam Skalný became the first chairman, since 2019 it has been Lukáš Vyletel). In 2019, this association received the Japanese Ambassador's Award, and in 2023, the Japanese Foreign Minister's Award for spreading and promoting Japanese culture in the Slovak Republic and deepening Slovak–Japanese relations.

Today, about 20 people actively practice shogi in Slovakia, however, through various workshops, clubs, and presentations, over 1,000 Slovaks have tried the game. In 2013, the Slovak Shogi Association cooperated within the European Capital of Culture Košice project with the Japanese organization EU–Japan Fest Japan Committee. In 2019, Bratislava hosted the European Championships and Open World Championships in shogi. In 2024, a player from Slovakia, Eduard Paňko, placed second at the prestigious international tournament International Shogi Forum in category B in Tokyo.

OTHER SPORTS

At the end of their careers, coach Jozef Vengloš and excellent player Ľubomír Moravčík worked in the Japanese football club Ichihara United in 2002.

Japanese male slalom canoeist Takuja Haneda, a graduate of the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports of Comenius University in Bratislava, trained in Slovakia for years. Under the guidance of Slovak coach Milan Kubáň, he achieved many victories and the most valuable of which was the bronze medal at the XXXI Summer Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro (2016). Haneda's and Kubáň's contribution to deepening Slovak–Japanese relations were recognized at a ceremony by the Ambassador of Japan to Slovakia, Jun Shimmi, who awarded them the Ambassador's Award in 2017.

XVIII WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES NAGANO 1998

At these games, our biathletes were the most successful. In the women's 7.5 km race, up to three Slovak women made it into the top ten. Soňa Mihoková finished fourth, Martina Schwarzbacherová-Jašicová seventh, and Anna Murínová ninth. This trio, expanded by Tatiana Kutlíková, finished fourth in the 4×7.5 km relay. The Slovak delegation thus left Nagano without any medals but with six Olympic points. Luger Mária Jasenčáková recorded her record fifth Olympic participation at the 1998 Winter Olympics.

VII WINTER PARALYMPIC GAMES NAGANO 1998

Slovakia was very successful at these games, winning 10 medals—six silver and four bronze. They were won by four athletes and two guides: Róbert Ďurčan, Jozef Miština, Miroslav Jambor (guide Marián Večerek), and Štefan Kopčík (guide Renáta Karamanová).

Silver medals were won by: Róbert Ďurčan—para-alpine skiing (slalom), Miroslav Jambor—para-nordic skiing (biathlon 7.5 km), Jozef Miština—para-alpine skiing (giant slalom), Jozef Miština—para-alpine skiing (slalom), Štefan Kopčík, para-alpine skiing (giant slalom), Štefan Kopčík—para-alpine skiing (slalom).

All these won bronze medals: Jozef Miština—para-alpine skiing (downhill), Jozef Miština—para-alpine skiing (Super-G), Štefan Kopčík—para-alpine skiing (downhill), Štefan Kopčík—para-alpine skiing (Super-G).

XXXII SUMMER OLYMPIC GAMES TOKYO 2020

At the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo, which were held a year later due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Slovakia won four medals. Zuzana Rehák-Štefečeková shot for gold in sport shooting. On the wild water, Jakub Grigar won silver in the K-1 discipline, as did golfer Rory Sabbatini, a native of South Africa with Slovak citizenship. The bronze medal on the 500-meter track was won by the four-man kayak crew consisting of Samuel Baláž, Denis Myšák, Erik Vlček, and Adam Botek.

XVI SUMMER PARALYMPIC GAMES TOKYO 2020

The most successful Slovak in Tokyo was boccia player Samuel Andrejčík, who won two gold medals—among individuals and in the pairs competition with Michaela Balcová and substitute Martin Strehársky. The most medals (three) were won by para-cyclist Jozef Metelka—he defended gold in the 4 km pursuit, was silver in the time trial, and won bronze on the track in the

1-kilometer sprint. Patrik Kuril won gold in the time trial. Para-shooter Veronika Vadovičová won her fourth gold medal in her career in the small-bore free rifle discipline. Alena Kánová added a silver medal to the collection in para table tennis, and para-athlete Marián Kuřeja won a bronze medal in club throw.

Literature

BOOKS ABOUT JAPAN AND TRANSLATED LITERATURE

So far, several books about Japan have been published in Slovakia and quite a few works by Japanese authors have been translated into Slovak.

LITERATURE ABOUT JAPAN

The Birth of Modern Japan (Ian Buruma), SLOVART, 2004. Translated by Marína Terenová.

Matcha. About super tea, its origin and drinking methods + many recipes and other interesting facts (Louise Cheadle, Nick Kilby), IKAR, 2017. Translated by Eva Budjačová.

Kakeibo: The Japanese Art of Saving (Fumiko Chiba), IKAR, 2018. Translated by Zuzana Angelovičová.

The Art of Ordinary Life. 100 Daily Practices from a Japanese Zen Monk to Achieve a Peaceful and Joyful Life (Shunmyó Masuno), IKAR, 2019. Translated by Anna Rácová.

This is Japan (Yutaka Yazawa), IKAR, 2020. Translated by Martin Katuščák and František Paulovič.

Japan. The Art of Japanese Life (Dorling Kindersley), IKAR, 2020. Translated by Martin Katuščák and František Paulovič.

Hiroshima. The Terrifying Catastrophe that Changed the World (John Hersey), IKAR, 2021. Translated by Henrieta Hatalová.

Japanese Cuisine: Recipes for Every Day (Stevan Paul, Andrea Thode), IKAR, 2021. Translated by Terézia Šinková.

Banzai: This is Japan for Kids (Zofia Fabjanowska-Micyk), Centipede, 2023. Translated by Ladislav Holiš.

Japanese Cuisine: Vegetarian Recipes for Every Day (Paul Stevan), IKAR, 2023. Translated by Terézia Šinková.

Japanese Myths: Gods, Heroes, and Ghosts (Joshua Frydman), IKAR, 2023. Translated by Zuzana Trstenská.

Yokai: Japanese Supernatural Phenomena and Beings (Andreas Marks), IKAR, 2024. Translated by Martin Katuščák and František Paulovič.

Shogun (James Clavell), IKAR, 2024. Translated by Jozef Petro.

Gai-Jin (James Clavell), Kalibr, 2025. Translated by Viktor Krupa.

Japanese Myths and Legends, Gavin Blair, SLOVART, 2025. Translated by Klaudia Dyttertová.

• JAPANESE TRANSLATED LITERATURE

Ryunosuke Akutagawa: *Watermen*, Slovenský spisovateľ, 1958. Translated by Imrich Zálupský.

Teru Takakura: *Waters of Hakone*, Slovenský spisovateľ, 1959. Translated by Imrich Zálupský.

Sakae Tsuboi: Twenty-four Eyes, Mladé letá, 1961. Translated by Viktor Krupa.

Tomiko Inui: *Penguins Puck and Kook*, Mladé letá, 1967. Translated by Viktor Krupa.

The Peach Boy: A Selection of Japanese Fairy Tales, Mladé letá, 1969. Compiled and translated by Viktor Krupa.

Yasunari Kawabata: *Sleeping Beauties*, Slovenský spisovateľ, 1971. Translated by Viktor Krupa.

Tomiko Inui: *Man and Bear at the North Pole*, Mladé letá, 1975. Translated by Viktor Krupa.

Japanese Myths: Kojiki, TATRAN, 1979. Translated by Viktor Krupa.

It's late, don't leave: Selections from Man'yōshū, an anthology of old Japanese lyrics, TATRAN, 1984. Translated by Mila Haugová and Fumiko Kawahara.

Yukio Mishima: *Thirst for Love*; The Surf, TATRAN, 1988. Translated by Karol Kuťka.

Shuntaro Tanikawa: *Noon of the Soul*, Slovenský spisovateľ, 1988. Translated by Mila Haugová and Fumiko Kawahara.

The Tale of the Crane, Mladé letá, 1990. Translated by Viktor Krupa.

Smoke Above the Pure Fire: Selections from Man'yōshū, an anthology of old Japanese lyrics,

Solitudo, 1998. Translated by Mila Haugová and Fumiko Kawahara.

Kokinshū: Songs from the Imperial Poetry Office, Petrus, 1998. *Translated by Karol Strmeň.*

Flowers of the Heart: A Selection of Japanese Poetry from the 10th and 11th Centuries, Petrus, 2004. Compiled and translated by Ivan Rumánek.

Haruki Murakami: *Sheep Hunt*, SLOVART, 2004, 2019. Translated by Lucia Preuss.

Banana Yoshimoto: *Goodbye, Tsugumi*, IKAR, 2005. Translated by Lucia Preuss.

Haruki Murakami: *Dance, Dance, Dance*, SLOVART, 2006, 2019. Translated by Lucia Preuss.

Haruki Murakami: *The Little Bird's Chronicles I.: The Magpie Thief*, SLOVART, 2010. Translated by Dana Hashimoto.

Haruki Murakami: *The Little Bird's Chronicles II.: The Little Bird's Clairvoyant*, SLOVART, 2011. Translated by Dana Hashimoto.

Sachiko Yoshihara: *Summer Grave*, Knižná dielňa, 2011. Translated by Mila Haugová and Fumiko Kawahara.

Haruki Murakami: *Chronicle of a Bird on a Key III.: Birdman*, SLOVART, 2012. Translated by Dana Hashimoto.

Haruki Murakami: *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and the Years of his Wandering*, SLOVART, 2014. Translated by Dana Hashimoto.

Haruki Murakami: *Listen to the Song of the Wind*; Pinball 1973, SLOVART, 2019. Translated by Dana Hashimoto.

Matsuo Basho: *Haiku, Rock Rose*, 2019. Translated by Ján Zambor and František Paulovič.

Hiro Arikawa: *Notes of a Traveling Cat*, Lindeni, 2020. Translated by František Paulovič.

Mieko Kawakami: *Summer Story*, ODEON, 2021. Translated by František Paulovič.

Sósuke Natsukawa: *The Cat Who Saved the Books*, IKAR, 2022. Translated by František Paulovič and Veronika Šokyová.

Haiku in Pictures: Classic Japanese Poems, IKAR, 2022. Translated by Ján Zambor and František Paulovič (both translators won the Literary Fund Award for 2022 in the category of artistic translation).

Haruki Murakami: *Blind Willow and Sleeping Woman*, SLOVART, 2023. Translated by Dana Hashimoto.

The Miracle of Four Ages, Marenčin PT, 2023. Compiled and translated by Ivan Rumánek.

Takashi Hiraide: *Cat Guest*, Modrý Peter, 2023. Translated by Eva Luka.

Immortal Sakuras: A Selection of Old Japanese Poetry, Matica slovenská, 2024. Translated by Ľubomír Feldek in collaboration with Viktor Krupa.

An interesting work is the book *Through Masahiko's Eyes* by the Japanese journalist Masahiko Shiraki (published in 2014 by IKAR Publishing House), who married the popular actress Oľga Belešová and settled in Bratislava. It consists of a selection of articles that he published for more than ten years in the daily SME and later in the weekly TV OKO. He focused on the differences between Slovakia and Japan.

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