

# A Recipe for a New *Madame Chrysanthème*: Alois Svojsík's Critique of Czech Stereotypical Portrayals of Meiji Japan

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## Introduction

The end of Japan's long-standing policy of isolation and its opening to the world in the 1860s sparked widespread interest in the West. Newspapers and magazines began reporting on the country's political changes and its rapid transformation from what was perceived as a medieval society to an emerging Great Power. The lack of reliable information about Japan at the time led, however, to many oversimplified and exaggerated portrayals in the periodicals. Over the following decades, many Western travellers, drawn to the distant archipelago, shared their experiences in travel books, also often contributing to the creation and perpetuation of enduring stereotypes about Japan.

After Japan's victory over China in 1895, another dimension was added to the already complex Western perception of Japan, as the country began to be perceived as a formidable military power capable of threatening European interests. While the press raised alarms about the so-called *yellow peril*, romanticised depictions of Japan continued to flourish in literature, giving rise to numerous conflicting narratives that in their different ways influenced the Western understanding of Japan and its role in the world.

As in other European countries, interest in Japan began to grow in the late nineteenth century in the Czech-speaking regions of Bohemia, Moravia, and Austrian Silesia, which were then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1867–1918). Brief reports about the latest developments in Japan's modernisation, published in Czech periodicals during the final decades of the nineteenth century, were gradually replaced by more detailed reflections on Japanese society after the turn of the twentieth century. Special attention was given to the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), which elicited concerns about Japan's potential threat to Europe and its possible implications for Czechs.

Starting in the final decade of the nineteenth century, Czech writings about Japan were gradually enriched by accounts from several Czech travellers, particularly Josef Kořenský (1847–1938), Enrique Stanko Vráz (1860–1932), and

Joe Hloucha (1881–1957). Following in the footsteps of other European adventurers, they journeyed to Japan and provided some of the earliest Czech-language first-hand insights into the country. Each traveller approached their topic from a different angle, offering a range of narratives, from encyclopaedic information and humorous anecdotes to fictionalised recountings of their experiences.

In 1913, the priest and traveller Alois Svojsík (1875–1917) published *Japonsko a jeho lid* (Japan and Its People).<sup>1</sup> Drawing on his two journeys to Japan and a thorough study of European literature, the work provided such a wealth of information that, according to Vasiljevová, it surpassed “everything that had been written about Japan in the Czech Lands” and became “the definitive guide on the subject written in Czech.”<sup>2</sup> The scope of the book is comprehensive, addressing topics ranging from Japanese geography and landmarks to religion, literature, and customs. In addition to the factual content, the book includes a prologue and epilogue, which offer Svojsík’s personal reflections, particularly in relation to the stereotypes of Japan found in Czech and Western writings. These sections also provide valuable insights into Svojsík’s views on Japan and the socio-historical context of the Czech Lands in the early twentieth century. The primary objective of this essay is to analyse and interpret the key ideas presented in these sections within the context of contemporary writings on Japan, and identify the targets of Svojsík’s criticism among Czech writers.

### Japan in the Czech Press and Travel Writing: Between Fascination and Fear

Before Czech travellers first visited Japan, information about the country in the Czech language was primarily provided by the press.<sup>3</sup> Most of the

<sup>1</sup> The initial citation for Czech publications will be provided in Czech, accompanied by an English translation of their titles. Subsequent citations will be presented only in English. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professors Adrian J. Pinnington and Graham Law for providing insightful comments and valuable suggestions for improvement.

<sup>2</sup> Zdeňka Vasiljevová, “Rozvoj poznání Japonska v českých zemích na přelomu 19. a 20. století,” *Acta Universitatis Carolinae – Philologica, Orientalia Pragensia* 12 (1989): 49, 54.

<sup>3</sup> Apart from periodical articles, references to Japan appeared in the Czech language for the first time in the two most important Czech encyclopaedias, *Slovník naučný* (Encyclopaedia) (1865) and *Ottův slovník naučný* (Otto’s Encyclopaedia) (1898). The first Czech academic book about Japan was *Japan – zeměpisný nástin* (Japan – A Geographic Survey), written in 1888 by the renowned Czech geographer, university professor, and politician, Jan Palacký. For further information about the earliest references to Japan in the Czech language, see Vasiljevová, “Rozvoj poznání Japonska,” 16–21.

newspaper articles about Japan in the second half of the nineteenth century were brief reports, typically anonymous and translated from foreign sources. References to Japan often centred on imported goods, curiosities about the country such as exotic animals, and the changes brought about by the Meiji Restoration.<sup>4</sup> An example of such a report can be found in the 6 January 1872 issue of *Národní listy* (National Papers), which discussed changes to the Japanese penal code: "Japan continues with its restoration. [...] Cruel tortures and the rack are almost completely abolished, and beating with bamboo sticks and brooms has been considerably reduced."<sup>5</sup> The focus on the practices of pre-Meiji Japanese justice highlights the sensationalised nature of early references to Japan in the Czech press.

In reports about Japan's Restoration, the inhabitants were often referred to as "little Japanese" (*Japončáci*) in the Czech periodicals.<sup>6</sup> The use of diminutives for the Japanese was common in the Western media. This was noted by the English author Douglas Sladen in 1892, who explained that the Western influence on Japan's Restoration contributed to the perception of the Japanese as "a nation of children," often portraying them as immature and ignorant compared to Westerners. In doing so, the West positioned itself as both superior and paternalistic, using this insult to assert dominance over the Orient.<sup>7</sup>

The most significant attention in the Czech press, however, was given to Japan's conflicts with other countries, initially the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and later, the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). The Sino-Japanese War likely contributed to the increased mentions of Japan in the press, but the coverage was usually brief and merely descriptive. It can be assumed that Czech journalists believed that the outcome of this conflict between two distant countries would have little or no impact on Czechs. In contrast, the Russo-Japanese War, as a conflict between Japan and a major European power,

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<sup>4</sup> The Meiji Restoration marked the beginning of the Meiji Period, which lasted from 1868 to 1912 and during which the country, under Emperor Meiji, underwent rapid modernisation and industrialisation. This transformative era marked the end of feudal rule and the beginning of Japan's emergence as a major global power. See the recent reassessment by Shinichi Kitaoka in the 2018 article "The Significance of the Meiji Restoration," *Asia-Pacific Review* 25 (1): 5–18.

<sup>5</sup> *Národní listy*, 6 January 1872, 1.

<sup>6</sup> We find the use of the diminutive *Japončák* and its plural form *Japončáci* mostly in *Národní listy* (4 March 1880, 3; 7 April 1880, 1; 20 January 1884, 1; 20 November 1886, 5), in *Světobzor* (2 June 1882, 276) and in *Zlatá Praha* (10 October 1917, 15).

<sup>7</sup> Douglas Sladen, *The Japs at Home*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (London and New York: Ward, Lock & Bowden, 1895 [1892]), 63.

attracted significant attention, reflected in the notable increase in references to Japan in Czech periodicals.<sup>8</sup>

The Czech press did not have a unified or even predominant opinion regarding the Russo-Japanese War, primarily reporting on its progress without taking sides. One of the most influential Czech right-wing political parties at the time, however, *Mladočeši* (The Young Czechs), exploited the idea of a threat posed by Japan in a campaign run through the newspaper *National Papers* against the leading left-wing party, *Československá strana sociálně demokratická* (The Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party, hereinafter ČSSD).<sup>9</sup> The campaign, tied to the infamous racist ideology of the *yellow peril*,<sup>10</sup> aimed to persuade Czech society that European civilisation faced a Pan-Mongolic, Pan-Buddhist, and Pan-Asian threat unlike “anything Europe had ever seen.”<sup>11</sup>

Interestingly, Japan became the battleground of the political struggle between these two parties. Those who denied the existence of the yellow peril and other Asian threats were labelled *Japanophiles*, a term used as a synonym for traitors to the Czech Lands by The Young Czechs to attack the ČSSD. In response, as pointed out by Vasiljevová, the ČSSD rejected both the accusation of being Japanophiles and the threat of the yellow peril in the Czech Lands in an article in *Právo lidu* (People's Right). They also organised a demonstration in February 1904 to protest the Russo-Japanese War and any European involvement in the conflict.<sup>12</sup>

In contrast to the Czech press, conflicts involving Japan did not receive significant attention in Czech travel writings and works of fiction by travelers who visited Japan, either as part of their journeys around the world or as their primary destination. One of the pioneering Czech travellers to Japan was the educator and explorer Josef Kořenský (1847–1938), who visited the

<sup>8</sup> This sudden increase in attention to Japan in the Czech press is evident in the case of *Národní listy* (National Papers), one of the most important Czech daily periodicals at the time. The number of references to Japan rose from around 400 in 1903 to nearly 1,900 in 1904, and approximately 1,350 in 1905. In 1906, however, the number dropped to around 680 references.

<sup>9</sup> For information on Czech political parties during the Austro-Hungarian Empire, see Dalibor Roháč, “Why Did the Austro-Hungarian Empire Collapse? A Public Choice Perspective,” *Constitutional Political Economy* 20, no. 2 (2009): 161–76.

<sup>10</sup> The expression *yellow peril* originated in the perceived threat of Chinese expansion into the West over the nineteenth century. After Japan's victory in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), however, the term also came to be associated with Japan. For further information about the expression *yellow peril*, see Stanford M. Lyman, “The ‘Yellow Peril’ Mystique: Origins and Vicissitudes of a Racist Discourse,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 13, no. 4 (Summer 2000): 683–747.

<sup>11</sup> *Národní listy*, 14 January 1904, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Vasiljevová, “Rozvoj poznání Japonska,” 44.

country twice, in 1893 and 1900. In his books, which included chapters on Japan or were focused entirely on it, Kořenský emphasised didactic content aimed especially at young readers.<sup>13</sup> His work was supported with abundant illustrative material, including photographs, reproductions of Japanese paintings, drawings, and other materials collected during his visits.

While Kořenský's goal was in all likelihood to provide an accurate portrayal of Japan, his works tend to praise the beauty of traditional, pre-Meiji Japan while adopting a critical stance toward the country's embrace of Western material culture. During his travels, Kořenský expressed a desire to immerse himself in experiences as far removed from Western culture as possible. He noted that he "longed for everything Japanese" and found "each little object of European origin in the Japanese household insulting," as he sought to "luxuriate only in the magic of the Japanese East."<sup>14</sup> His disenchantment with the growing influence of Western culture in Japan at the turn of the twentieth century is even more evident in his writings based on his second visit in 1900, where he laments that "everything has changed" in Japan since his first visit seven years earlier.<sup>15</sup>

A different perspective on Japan was presented by another well-known Czech traveller, Enriqué Stanko Vráz (1860–1932), who visited Japan as part of his journey to East and Southeast Asia in 1896. Vráz shared his impressions mainly through lectures, but his view of Japan can be found on about forty pages of his 1898 travel book, *Z cest E. St. Vráze* (From the Voyages of E. St. Vráz). He argues there that his readers did not demand a "thorough or scholarly" account of Japan, a task already undertaken by Kořenský, but rather something more engaging and entertaining.<sup>16</sup>

Vráz's travel book seems to meet his readers' expectations by offering a series of curiosities and emphasising vivid imagery, many of which align with Western stereotypes of Meiji Japan:

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<sup>13</sup> Following his first journey around the world in 1893–1894, Kořenský published *Cesta kolem světa: 1893–1894* (Journey Around the World: 1893–1894) (1896). The chapters on Japan were expanded in other publications, such as *Asie: kulturní obrázky pro mládež* (Asia, Cultural Pictures for Young People) (1896), *Cesta kolem světa. Žaponsko* (Journey Around the World. Japan) (1896), and *Josefa Kořenského Cesty po světě. Žaponsko. Vydání pro mládež* (Journeys of Josef Kořenský. Japan. Edition for Young People) (1902).

<sup>14</sup> Josef Kořenský, *Josefa Kořenského Cesty po světě. Žaponsko* (Vydání pro mládež; Prague: J. Otto, 1902), 88.

<sup>15</sup> Josef Kořenský, *K protinožcům II* (To the Antipodes II) (Prague: J. Otto, 1904), 501–502. apart from this publication, Kořenský depicted his second journey to Japan in *Nové cesty po světě. Po druhé v Žaponsku* (New Journeys Around the World. For the Second Time in Japan), published in 1910.

<sup>16</sup> Enriqué Stanko Vráz, *Z cest E. St. Vráze* (Prague: Bursík & Kohout, 1898), 219.

Delightful landscapes, temples in the shade of ancient ginkgo trees, pines, camphor trees, tea houses, and coquettish, ever-smiling Japanese women – whether dancers, singers, musicians, or ordinary waitresses; serious, with a sly expression on their bronze faces; begging monks, naked and ungainly wrestlers, farmers, and strikingly European-looking types. All of this forms a flickering, colourful carousel around me!<sup>17</sup>

It appears as if Vráz aimed at portraying Japan as an exotic and bewildering spectacle, a perception he reinforced through his use of short sentences marked by frequent exclamation marks. It is also clear that Vráz focused only on aspects that intrigued him. An example of this is a conversation he recalls with a friend who asked him to describe Japanese men, to which he replied that he preferred Japanese women.<sup>18</sup> This serves to illustrate the subjective nature of his narrative, reflecting his personal experiences and preferences.

Although Kořenský and Vráz approached their writings differently, both portrayed Japan as a fairy-tale-like country. This was a typical Western perception in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, often involving idealised depictions of Japanese landscapes, gardens, and art.<sup>19</sup> Kořenský and Vráz featured these elements in their works, while also reinforcing another common stereotype, that Japanese people were always cheerful.<sup>20</sup> This is illustrated by Kořenský's statement: "It is true that a Japanese girl smiles from the New Year to New Year's Eve."<sup>21</sup>

While Kořenský aimed to provide a didactic portrayal of Japan and Vráz sought to entertain his readers with brief, humorous descriptions of Japanese culture, Joe Hloucha (1881–1957), Kořenský's nephew, opted for a fictionalised narrative style. Hloucha wrote about Japan before his first visit, both in articles for the journal *Czech World* and, most notably, in his debut novel, *Sakura ve vichřici* (Sakura in the Storm), published in 1905, a year before his journey. The novel, which revolves around a tragic romance between a Czech traveller and Sakura, the daughter of his host, became a bestseller and was reprinted twelve times during the first half of the twentieth century alone.

<sup>17</sup> Vráz, *Z cest E. St. Vráze*, 217–18.

<sup>18</sup> Vráz, *Z cest E. St. Vráze*, 219.

<sup>19</sup> Ian Littlewood, *The Idea of Japan* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), 61–69; Peter Pantzer, "The Far East in the Eyes of Two Austrian Travellers in Early Meiji Period," *Civilizations* 20 (2015): 17–21.

<sup>20</sup> This idea can be seen, among others, in Josef Kořenský, *Asie: kulturní obrázky pro mládež* (Prague: A. Štorch syn, 1896), 162; Vráz, *Z cest E. St. Vráze*, 217.

<sup>21</sup> Kořenský, *Asie: kulturní obrázky pro mládež*, 162.

In 1906, Hloucha travelled to Japan to bring his fiction to life, albeit in a different way. Inspired by the French naval officer and novelist, Pierre Loti (1850–1923), who depicted his relationship with a geisha named Kiku, meaning “chrysanthemum” in Japanese, in the celebrated 1887 novel *Madame Chrysanthème*, Hloucha wanted to live “in the Japanese way” and experience “at least what Loti did.”<sup>22</sup> Shortly after his arrival in Japan, he consequently entered into a three-month paid arrangement with a geisha named Tama, whose name means “gem” or “jewel” in Japanese.

Hloucha's experiences from his stay in Japan are recounted in the 1908 autobiographical collection of eleven short stories, *Vzpomínky na Japonsko* (Memories of Japan). This mixed-genre book blends travel writing with fiction, and unlike Kořenský's fact-based approach, Hloucha's stories emphasise his emotions and personal experiences in Japan. Some stories in the collection, for instance “Vějíř” (Fan), resemble fairy-tales, while others, like “Zavřená brána” (Closed Gate), offer a more realistic perspective, recounting the rather mundane incident of how Hloucha was denied entry to the Imperial Palace in Tokyo for not having the necessary authorisation. Hloucha's intention could have been to convey the impression that reality and fantasy often intersected in Japan, as seen in the story “Vino” (Wine), in which he falls asleep after drinking wine and dreams about the Japanese girls painted on his fan.

Hloucha's relationship with Tama is portrayed in the short story “Moje paní Chrysanthema” (My Lady Chrysanthema), which is part of this collection. The story directly alludes to Loti's novel and is dedicated to Loti himself.<sup>23</sup> It also appears to replicate the same stereotypes Loti made use of to describe Japanese women, including referring to them as dolls or toys.<sup>24</sup> It is clear from the narrative that Hloucha was more interested in the beauty of Tama's kimonos and hairstyle than in her as an individual. He displays little enjoyment of her company, often complaining about her slow pace and frequent tiredness.<sup>25</sup> At one point, he even remarks, “If she did not seem so decorative, so exotic, and so adorable, I would be angry with her, honestly.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Joe Hloucha, *Vzpomínky na Japonsko* (Prague: F. Šimáček, 1908), 39–40.

<sup>23</sup> Hloucha, *Vzpomínky na Japonsko*, 37.

<sup>24</sup> Pierre Loti, *Madame Chrysanthème* (Paris: Calmann Levy, 1887), 3, 18, 26, 31, and *passim*; Hloucha, *Vzpomínky na Japonsko*, 41, 73. For further information about the portrayal of Japan in Pierre Loti's *Madame Chrysanthème*, see Irene L. Szyliowicz, *Pierre Loti and the Oriental Woman*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988. Concerning the stereotypical portrayal of a geisha in Western literature, see Yoko Kawaguchi, *Butterfly's Sisters: The Geisha in Western Culture*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010.

<sup>25</sup> Hloucha, *Vzpomínky na Japonsko*, 55.

<sup>26</sup> Hloucha, *Vzpomínky na Japonsko*, 62.

By the time Svojsík's *Japan and Its People* was published, Hloucha had written two additional books with Japanese themes: the 1906 novel *Zátopa* (Flood) and the 1913 short story collection *Polibky smrti* (Kisses of Death). Similar to *Sakura in the Storm*, the plots in these stories appear to be less significant than the depiction of traditional Japanese houses, their furnishings, everyday items, and the physical characteristics and clothing of women. The most common themes in these works are tragic love and violent death, these being particularly prominent in *Kisses of Death*, where they appear in each of the seven short stories. While it can be argued that Hloucha addressed some of the darker aspects of Japanese society, such as suicide and prostitution, he tended to present them in a romanticised manner. These depictions therefore seem detached from historical reality, lacking a critical, disapproving, or judgmental perspective on these typically problematic issues.

### Alois Svojsík's Japan

The name Alois Svojsík is currently overshadowed by that of his brother, the educator Antonín Benjamin (1876–1938), who achieved fame as the founder of the Czech scouting movement, *Junák*.<sup>27</sup> Alois Svojsík (1875–1917) was a priest and catechist, as well as an avid traveller. His interest in travel appears to have developed early in life, as his diary reveals that in 1898 he made a brief trip to Africa, in 1902 spent nearly three weeks in the United States, and in 1904 visited the Middle East.<sup>28</sup> Svojsík's travels may have been facilitated by his impressive linguistic abilities, as various accounts suggest he knew at least eight languages: Czech, German, English, French, Italian, Spanish, Latin, and Greek.<sup>29</sup> He used these skills to translate religious and educational texts from various languages, many of which were published in popular Catholic

<sup>27</sup> To my knowledge, no academic research on Alois Svojsík has so far been published. His work is mentioned by Vasiljevoá (1989), 47–55, and pieces of information about his life appear in works focused on Antonín Benjamin Svojsík, for instance, Šimánek's *A. B. Svojsík* (1946) and Plajner's memoirs (2001). A. B. Svojsík's legacy has been preserved in the Junák archive in Prague, which includes documents related to Alois, such as notebooks, correspondence, and photographs. I would like to sincerely thank the archivist of the Junák archive, Roman Šantora, for granting me access to these materials.

<sup>28</sup> Alois Svojsík's diary, Junák Archive, without call number.

<sup>29</sup> "Výtah ze žádosti o faru," Junák Archive, without call number; J.E.N., "Alois Svojsík," *Junák* 4, no. 1 (January 1, 1918): 8–11.



magazines.<sup>30</sup> Apart from *Japan and Its People* and a few short articles, Svojsík did not document his travels extensively in literary form. He gave numerous lectures, however, about the places he visited, which, according to his biographical account, helped raise funds for charity and also contributed to financing his subsequent journeys.<sup>31</sup>

Svojsík visited Japan twice, the first time in 1906, as a companion to a group of Czech musicians called *České pěvecké kvarteto* (Bohemian Vocal Quartet) on their worldwide tour from 1905 to 1906.<sup>32</sup> Antonín Benjamin was one of the quartet's members and Alois likely chose to accompany him. The quartet was also joined by their brother František, who acted as the group's legal representative.<sup>33</sup> During this journey, something extraordinary happened – on 7 March 1906, fifteen Czechs gathered in Japan. Among them were the members of the quartet, Alois Svojsík and his brother František, as well as the engineer Karel Jan Hora (1881–1974), one of the first Czechs to settle in Japan, who had also married a Japanese woman. It was a memorable day for Svojsík, as he dedicated an article to it entitled “Český den v Japonsku” (Czech Day in Japan).<sup>34</sup>

Svojsík made his second visit to Japan in 1908 as part of an 80-day journey to Australia. He spent about a month in Japan this time, taking trips around Tokyo with Karel Jan Hora and the architect Jan Letzel (1880–1925).<sup>35</sup> In addition to sightseeing, Svojsík served as Letzel's witness during the signing of a contract for the construction of the “Sacre Coeur” school and boarding house

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<sup>30</sup> Examples of Svojsík's translations are “Dies irae. Fantastické mysterium,” *Vlast'* (Homeland), May 1894/95, 707–13; and *Od ateismu k plné pravdě* (Edgar). Prague: V. Kotrba. An example of Svojsík's original work related to religious themes is the 1899 article “Návrat ku křesťanství” (Return to Christianity), *Časopis katolického duchovenstva* (Journal of the Catholic Clergy) 40, no. 9: 570–71.

<sup>31</sup> “Výtah ze žádosti o faru,” Junák Archive, without call number.

<sup>32</sup> *České pěvecké kvarteto* (Bohemian Vocal Quartet) was established in 1899. By 1905, it consisted of four vocalists: Karel Šeferling, Rudolf Černý, Antonín Benjamin Svojsík, and Jan Novák. According to Vasiljevová, their concerts in Japan were among the earliest introductions of Czech music culture to Japanese audiences, which later became very popular in Japan (Vasiljevová, “Rozvoj poznání Japonska,” 31).

<sup>33</sup> *Čech*, 5 February 1907, 4.

<sup>34</sup> Alois Svojsík, “Český den v Japonsku,” *Český svět* 2, no. 21 (1906): 478.

<sup>35</sup> Jan Letzel (1880–1925) is best known for designing the administrative building of the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Hiroshima, a structure that gained international fame for surviving the atomic bombing of the city in 1945.

in Tokyo.<sup>36</sup> In *Japan and Its People*, Svojsík wrote that the days spent in Japan with his compatriots were among the most beautiful of his life.<sup>37</sup>

Following his two visits to Japan and extensive research on the topic, Svojsík composed two works. In 1912, he contributed a six-page chapter entitled “Vzory českých junáků – Ideál muže v Japonsku” (Models of Czech Boy Scouts – The Ideal of Man in Japan), to the publication *Základy junáctví* (The Foundations of Scouting), coordinated by his brother Antonín.<sup>38</sup> In his chapter, Alois Svojsík drew on ideas from the influential 1899 publication *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* by Inazō Nitobe and adapted them to the Czech context to depict the virtues of the perfect man.<sup>39</sup> He enumerated the key qualities of a samurai, such as fairness, devotion, and bravery, and presented them as ideals for young boys to emulate.<sup>40</sup>

It can be assumed that the ideals of the new Czech scouting organisation aligned with Alois Svojsík's own efforts, particularly his nationalist endeavours. Throughout his life, Svojsík worked to promote the Czech language and culture, both in the Czech Lands and during his travels. He also supported Czech political goals, mainly aiming for some form of independence for the Czech Lands within the Austro-Hungarian Empire.<sup>41</sup> In light of the fact that

<sup>36</sup> Stanislav Bohadlo, *Japonsko – země, kterou jsem hledal: Edice dopisů architekta Jana Letzela (1880 Náchod – 1925 Praha) z let 1907–1924* (Náchod: Gate, 2000), 67–68. Jan Letzel probably referred to the private women's school named *Seishin Joshi Gakuin*, which might be translated as Sacred Heart School.

<sup>37</sup> Svojsík, *Japonsko a jeho lid*, 74–75.

<sup>38</sup> This manual was designed to define the aims and concepts of the newly founded organisation, *Junák*, which Antonín Benjamin Svojsík established in 1911, inspired by the example of Robert Baden-Powell's Scout Movement, founded four years earlier in Britain. The manual drew on Baden-Powell's publication *Scouting for Boys: A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship* (London: Horace Cox, 1908).

<sup>39</sup> Nitobe's book introduced the concept of the samurai code to the Western world, highlighting principles such as loyalty, honour, and self-discipline. Nitobe framed *bushidō* as a guiding moral philosophy for Japan's warrior class and presented it as an essential part of the nation's identity. Generally, on Nitobe and his work, see Oleg Benesch, *Inventing the Way of the Samurai* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>40</sup> Alois Svojsík, “Vzory českých junáků – Ideál muže v Japonsku,” in *Základy junáctví*, coordinated by Antonín Benjamin Svojsík (Prague: J. Springer, 1912), 96.

<sup>41</sup> Alois Svojsík's nationalistic zeal is clear, for instance, from his membership in *Národní Jednota Pošumavská* (National Union of Pošumava), *Československá národní rada* (Czechoslovak National Council), and the underground organisation called *Maffie* (Maffia). These organisations, among others, sought to defend the interests of the Czech population in regions of the Czech Lands heavily inhabited by Germans and represent Czech resistance against the Austrian government, particularly during the First World War. See Jiří Kořalka, *Češi v Habsburské říši a Evropě 1815–1914* (Prague: Argo, 1996).

*Junák* received significant support from nationalist Czech politicians, including Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, who would later become the first president of Czechoslovakia,<sup>42</sup> it can be assumed that *Junák* served as a means for him to spread Czech nationalist ideals among Czech youth.

Svojsík's second, and main, work on Japan is the comprehensive 556-page publication *Japan and Its People*, which he self-published in 1913. The book consists of forty-six chapters, a prologue and epilogue, a bibliography of the literature used, and a list of illustrations. The book features 220 photographs, of which Svojsík stated that approximately two-thirds were taken by himself or his brother Antonín, while the remaining photographs were by Japanese professionals.<sup>43</sup>

The book chapters can be broadly divided into three thematic groups. The first, encompassing chapters two to fifteen (the prologue is designated as chapter one), primarily focuses on geographical themes and showcases Japan's most popular travel destinations. Svojsík depicts various locations in Tokyo and its surrounding tourist sites, such as Kamakura, Nikko, and Mount Fuji, as well as Nagoya, Kyoto, and Nara – places he likely visited during his second stay in Japan.

The second thematic group, spanning chapters sixteen to twenty-nine, focuses on Japan's history and contemporary political climate, including its wartime policies. In these chapters, Svojsík also examines the main Japanese religions, Buddhism and Shintoism, and the presence of Christianity in Japan. Interestingly, despite being a Catholic priest, he refrains from promoting Christianity in his book, as the chapters on Japanese religions are mostly purely descriptive.<sup>44</sup> It also seems that Svojsík showed no inclination to actively promote Christianity during his stays in Japan. Jan Letzel noted in his correspondence that Svojsík did not seem overtly religious, observing that his only non-secular aspect was his clerical collar.<sup>45</sup>

The third and most extensive thematic group, covering chapters thirty to forty-seven, provides a detailed portrayal of the physical appearance, behavioural tendencies, moral standards, and customary practices of the Japanese. In these chapters, Svojsík expresses his admiration for various virtues of the

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<sup>42</sup> Svojsík, *Základy junáctví*, 9.

<sup>43</sup> Svojsík, *Japonsko a jeho lid*, 11.

<sup>44</sup> The only aspect that could be interpreted as a critique of Japanese religions is Svojsík's comment that the status of women in Japan "cannot be compared at all to the seriousness and equality that women in Christian countries can enjoy" (Svojsík, *Japonsko a jeho lid*, 380). It is possible, however, that by "Christian countries," he is simply referring to Western countries rather than emphasising the importance of religion.

<sup>45</sup> Bohadlo, *Japonsko – země, kterou jsem hledal*, 67–68.

Japanese people, noting that these qualities benefit not only the individual but also the entire nation. One of the aspects he particularly values is the emphasis the Japanese place on national unity: “[The Japanese] always feel the love of compatriots, and they support each other in different necessities and misfortunes.”<sup>46</sup> This sentiment appears to align with his nationalistic beliefs and the ideology of the scout organisation.

When addressing Japanese customs, Svojsík not only described the distinctive practices that might have captivated other travellers, but also examined the difficulties faced by modern Japanese society. One such issue was the changing status of women in Japan, to which he dedicated an entire chapter entitled “Žena v Japonsku” (Woman in Japan). His main concerns in this chapter were their education, role as mothers, and the problem of prostitution.

The most interesting topic in this third group of chapters, however, is Svojsík’s critique of Japan’s path towards modernisation, this being most apparent in the chapter, “Jiné prameny výživy” (Other sources of subsistence), where Svojsík contrasts his preconceptions of Japan, shaped by travel literature, with his own observations:

What has capitalism done with the Japanese fairy-tale? Where are those adorable Japanese children, dressed in radiant colours and smiling with inner happiness? Where are those beautiful girls, *musmé*,<sup>47</sup> whose only work, according to the travellers’ descriptions, was to smile and love? In only a few years, industrial progress has transformed them into pale and dying creatures, closed in dank workshops and bullied by insensitive wardens and factory owners. Where is the fairy-tale Japan?<sup>48</sup>

This passage seems to suggest that Svojsík believed the fairy-tale version of Japan had once existed, but only during the pre-Meiji era. In contrast, modern Japan had been corrupted by the adoption of a Western lifestyle. His depictions of this Westernised Japan primarily portray the Japanese people as impoverished and forced to work under miserable conditions, which he attributes mainly to the introduction of capitalism and the rapid pace of Japan’s modernisation.<sup>49</sup> This passage might also serve as an indirect critique of the inaccurate

<sup>46</sup> Svojsík, *Japonsko a jeho lid*, 231.

<sup>47</sup> The term *musmé* (in regular type in the original) transcribes the Japanese word *musume*, meaning “daughter” or “girl.”

<sup>48</sup> Svojsík, *Japonsko a jeho lid*, 412.

<sup>49</sup> The limited information available about Alois Svojsík’s life makes it difficult to determine his political views. His work *Japan and Its People* displays, however, a clear dislike of capitalism,

and misleading portrayals of Japan presented by earlier travellers, which often created idealised and unrealistic images of the country that collapsed when confronted with personal experience.

## The Inner, Hidden Truth of Japan

Svojsík's opinions about Western portrayals of Japan are expressed in the prologue to *Japan and Its People*, entitled "Místo předmluvy" (Instead of a Preface). In this section, he reflects on the difficulty of writing about Japan and explains that to truly do the subject justice, one has to spend many years in the country, acquire a deep understanding of its people, and master the Japanese language and writing system.<sup>50</sup> He states that among Czechs, only Karel Jan Hora would be able to meet these requirements, if he had not been too occupied with work to take on such a project. As a result, books about Japan tend to be written by travellers like himself, who can only provide a limited and superficial view of the country.<sup>51</sup>

It seems that Svojsík believed earlier Czech travellers lacked sufficient understanding of Japan, and thus, their works should not be viewed as reliable sources of information about the country. He noted that his own study of Japan relied heavily on the insights of "experienced and sober experts on Japan."<sup>52</sup> He included a three-page-long list of sources he consulted at the end of the book, referencing seventy-four authors from different countries, mostly British, French, German, and Japanese. The works span a wide range of genres, from encyclopaedic volumes like *Things Japanese* (1890) by the British academic and Japanologist Basil Hall Chamberlain (1850–1935), whom he regarded as the foremost Western authority on Japan,<sup>53</sup> to books on Japanese art, such as *Art and Art Industries in Japan* (1878) by Rutherford Alcock, studies on Japanese society, like *Home Life in Tokio* (1910) by Inouye Yukichi, collections of essays like *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* (1894) by Lafcadio Hearn, travel books like *Japan nach Reisen und Studien* (Japan after Travels and Studies) (1888) by Johannes J. Rein, and even a collection of fiction stories, *Ancient Tales and Folklore of Japan* (1908) by Richard G. Smith.

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which may imply a left-wing ideology that he perhaps could not express openly because of his role as a Catholic priest.

<sup>50</sup> Svojsík, *Japonsko a jeho lid*, 7.

<sup>51</sup> Svojsík, *Japonsko a jeho lid*, 7.

<sup>52</sup> Svojsík, *Japonsko a jeho lid*, 10.

<sup>53</sup> Svojsík, *Japonsko a jeho lid*, 144.

The list, however, does not include any works by the aforementioned Czech travellers.<sup>54</sup> This omission can be more easily understood in the cases of Vráz and Hloucha, although the list mentions works based on personal impressions of the country, such as Hearn's *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*. It seems strange, however, that Svojsík did not mention Kořenský, a well-known Czech traveller and the author of a number of travel books who aimed to provide a fairly comprehensive description of Japan. This suggests that Svojsík deliberately chose not to mention them, possibly as a sign of disapproval of their works.

The first issue Svojsík addresses, regarding the lack of understanding among writers about Japan, is the exaggerated and idealised portrayal of the country and its people:

Travellers who relied too much on their own opinions and superficial knowledge of Japan almost all fell into an inappropriate and exaggerated overestimation of both the country and its people when writing about Japan. The reader who reads their travel books gets the impression that Japan is a fairy tale, where a nation of blissfully happy people live, whose only concern is to smile kindly at foreigners, play the shamisen, and paint verses with a brush.<sup>55</sup>

For Svojsík, one of the fairy-tale aspects of Western portrayals of Japan was the idealised view of the beauty found in Japanese landscapes, gardens, and everyday objects. In fact, the concept of Japan as a work of art, with the Japanese depicted not only as passive figures within this artistic scene, but also as its creators, was one of the most prevalent stereotypes of Meiji Japan.<sup>56</sup> Japanese art was curiously sometimes regarded in the West as more advanced than its Western counterpart, even during a time when Japan was still viewed in the West as a backward country from an economic and social perspective.

<sup>54</sup> The only works in the Czech language included in the bibliography in *Japan and Its People* are *Ottův slovník naučný* (Otto's Encyclopaedia) (1898) and the 1912 book coordinated by his brother, *The Bases of Scouting*.

<sup>55</sup> Svojsík, *Japonsko a jeho lid*, 7–8. The *shamisen* is a traditional Japanese three-stringed musical instrument, commonly used in folk, classical, and theatrical music.

<sup>56</sup> Ian Littlewood, *The Idea of Japan*, 66. Japanese art played a particularly significant role in shaping the Western image of Japan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The widespread popularity and influence of Japanese art and aesthetics in the West, known as *Japonisme*, has been extensively explored in various studies. For a comprehensive analysis of the impact of Japanese art on Western art, see Siegfried Wichmann, *Japonisme: The Japanese Influence on Western Art Since 1858* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999); for a focused study of this phenomenon in the Czech Lands, see Markéta Hánová, *Japonisme in the Fine Arts of the Czech Lands* (Prague: National Gallery, 2010).

In an article in the journal *Zlatá Praha* (Golden Prague) issued in 1898, for example, one reads that “we, Europeans, who believed that our art was at the peak, [...] have to recognise that the ‘inferior’ nation of the Japanese, according to our silly pride, taught us to look at nature in an artistic way.”<sup>57</sup> Joe Hloucha, who asserted that “everything that the Japanese created was artistic,” was an advocate of this idea.<sup>58</sup> According to Svojsík, however, a genuine expert on Japan should be capable of looking beyond the initial, idyllic impression these elements evoke.<sup>59</sup>

Svojsík expands on his critique of travellers who claimed to seek an authentic Japanese experience, but who focused only on surface-level attractions, neglecting what he described as the “inner, hidden truth” of life in Japan.<sup>60</sup> For Svojsík, this inner truth was seemingly connected to the harsh reality of life in Japan, which lay beneath the commonly depicted image of Japanese happiness. He argues that the “tourists” (*turisté*) – a term he used for those who visited Japan briefly and wrote about it without sufficient knowledge – failed to grasp the harsh realities faced by most of the population, who endured poverty and led monotonous, bleak lives.<sup>61</sup>

Several illustrative examples of this “hidden truth,” as pointed out by Svojsík, are the following: the smiles of Japanese children, which, he explains, are the result of “long and laborious drill;” the life of a destitute farmer unable to afford the rice he has grown and forced to survive on meagre oat bran; and the female factory worker, depicted as a prisoner within the factory walls, where her health and beauty quickly deteriorate.<sup>62</sup> Svojsík’s view of daily life in Japan presented here is so negative that he even asserts, “a writer who enthusiastically exalts the beauty and fairy-tale-like quality of Japan would surely rather shoot himself than be condemned to live for just one year completely in the Japanese way.”<sup>63</sup>

Svojsík not only criticised authors of travel writings for their inaccurate portrayals of Japan, but also despised works of fiction with Japanese settings. He referred to them as “sentimental fictional stories with a pseudo-Japanese colour” and noted that they were typically based on an old, tried-and-tested recipe:

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<sup>57</sup> *Zlatá Praha*, 13 May 1898, 322.

<sup>58</sup> Hloucha, *Polibky smrti*, 32.

<sup>59</sup> Svojsík, *Japonsko a jeho lid*, 8.

<sup>60</sup> Svojsík, *Japonsko a jeho lid*, 8.

<sup>61</sup> Svojsík, *Japonsko a jeho lid*, 8.

<sup>62</sup> Svojsík, *Japonsko a jeho lid*, 8–9.

<sup>63</sup> Svojsík, *Japonsko a jeho lid*, 8–9.

One takes a few islands, puts some blue, though salty, water in between, adds a bright blue sky, wooden houses, meditative temples, smiling men, beautiful girls, then comes up with a few adventures, mostly of an erotic nature, sprinkles it all with Japanese words that the author himself does not know, having first looked them up in another book, and which, of course, the reader does not understand either, adds a few flowers, fans, lanterns, and a bit of tea, and the Japanese idyll, a new *Madame Chrysanthème*, is ready.<sup>64</sup>

In his “recipe”, outlining the most commonly held stereotypes about Japan, Svojsík critiques authors whose stories followed the model of Loti’s *Madame Chrysanthème*. Among Czech writers, this critique seems particularly directed at Hloucha, who travelled to Japan to replicate Loti’s experiences and even entitled his story in order to evoke Loti’s novel. Beyond the obvious erotic intrigue of a paid relationship with a geisha, many of the stereotypes listed in Svojsík appear as early as the first pages of Hloucha’s “My Lady Chrysanthema”.<sup>65</sup> These same tropes also appear in Hloucha’s other works, especially in the stories included in the collection *Kisses of Death*, which explore appealing yet somewhat sensational topics such as prostitution and suicide, all wrapped in the stereotypical elements of a fairy-tale Japan.

### The Last Remaining Living Fairy-tale

In the prologue, Svojsík critiques the idealised portrayal of Japan in other Western accounts of the country. He reminisces in the afterword, however, about the archipelago as a land of stunning natural beauty, exquisite art, and charming people which he presents as the dominant images that came to his mind when recalling his journey to the Far East.<sup>66</sup> At the end of the afterword, he even refers to Japan and its people as “perhaps the last remaining living fairy-tale among humankind in the world.”<sup>67</sup> The contradiction between Svojsík using the image of Japan as a fairy-tale country, after criticising others for doing so, can be explained as his effort to present a more sympathetic view of Japan, especially considering that a central theme of the afterword is the

<sup>64</sup> Svojsík, *Japonsko a jeho lid*, 10.

<sup>65</sup> Only in the first seven pages of the story, can one find motifs such as camellia flowers, wooden stairs and halls, lanterns, and tea (Joe Hloucha, *Vzpomínky na Japonsko*, 41, 43, 47).

<sup>66</sup> Svojsík, *Japonsko a jeho lid*, 553.

<sup>67</sup> Svojsík, *Japonsko a jeho lid*, 556.



portrayal of Japan as a threat to the West in Czech and European texts. In this context, Svojsík expresses his surprise and perhaps a sense of disillusionment at the swift change in Western attitudes towards the Japanese – from viewing them as childlike and artistic to being regarded as a nation bent on conquering the West. This idea, linked to the yellow peril ideology and reflected in contemporary Czech periodicals, likely contributed to shaping the prevailing opinion about Japan at that time:

Speak in the Far East with anyone you like – if you get worked up discussing Japan and perhaps use a few superlatives, you will surely be cooled down with an icy, sarcastic remark: “Don’t trust their smile, politeness, or admiration for European and white civilisation; don’t trust anything you see or hear in Japan! They are cat-like people, false in nature, people who exploit not only our cultural achievements but also our weaknesses. They are people who will never be grateful to Europe and America for transforming them, once neglected Asians, into a civilised state and nation. Instead, with a meticulously planned scheme, they will try to turn the tables and, one day, dominate those who were once their teachers.” The yellow peril in its most explicit form!<sup>68</sup>

Not only does Svojsík regret the contemporary perception of Japan as a threat, but also criticises the hypocrisy of the West, which claims to fear Japan’s expansion while maintaining its own colonies in Asia. He recounts a conversation with a Japanese person who asserted that “Asia will never, not even in the most distant future, go to Europe,” and that, instead, Asians would attempt to “drive the whites out of Asia” to allow the continent to realise its potential as the ancient cradle of human culture, with its rich history, material wealth, and talented people.<sup>69</sup> Svojsík argues that the Western fear of an Asian invasion of Europe overlooks the possibility that Japan may not have been interested in conquering Europe. Instead, Asians might have wanted Europeans to leave Asia, and just as Westerners perceived a yellow peril, Asians may have felt threatened by a *white peril*.<sup>70</sup> He also questions the common Western narrative that the West brought culture to Asia. He does it indirectly by referencing a Japanese person who argues that rather than bringing

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<sup>68</sup> Svojsík, *Japonsko a jeho lid*, 553.

<sup>69</sup> Svojsík, *Japonsko a jeho lid*, 554.

<sup>70</sup> Svojsík, *Japonsko a jeho lid*, 554. The concept of the Japanese perspective on the *white peril* is explored by Peter Duus, “Nagai Ryūtarō and the ‘White Peril’, 1905–1944,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 31, no. 1 (November 1971): 41–48.

culture, Westerners have turned free nations into slaves, presenting themselves as “leaders and protectors of nations that may be healthier and more cultured than their self-proclaimed teachers.”<sup>71</sup>

Svojsík finally acknowledges that the yellow peril may exist for the English, Americans, Russians, and other nations with territories in Asia. He states, however, that the Czechs, who have no “selfish or self-centred” interests in the Far East, can admire and appreciate the Japanese without fear.<sup>72</sup> This observation not only highlights the distinction between colonial powers and the Czechs, but also underscores the difference between the Czech Lands and the rest of Austria-Hungary, which, from Svojsík’s perspective as a nationalist, may have been seen as a colonial power that dominated his own nation.

A similar idea was interestingly already expressed as early as 1904 by a certain “Candide” in an article entitled “Barevná a jiná nebezpečí” (Of Colour and Other Types of Danger), published in the journal *Rozhledy* (Outlook). The author, one of the few in the Czech press to take a sympathetic stance toward Japan at the time, criticised the Western powers and argued that the yellow peril was, in fact, a rhetorical construct created by colonial powers:

The only “yellow peril” that jeopardises Europe is the omnipresence of the expert knowledge about the Far East when reading or talking. It is clear that the East has much more right to complain about the white danger felt by the Japanese because of the Europeans. [...] We, the Czechs, can await calmly the collision of the white and yellow races because our economic and industrial situation is so bad that [...] nobody can take anything from us.<sup>73</sup>

In this passage, written during the Russo-Japanese War, it is apparent how “Candide” aligns with Svojsík in several aspects. Firstly, both authors claim that if there is any real “coloured danger,” it is the “white danger” posed by the Europeans in Japan. Similarly to Svojsík, “Candide” condemns the large number of self-proclaimed experts on Japan in this period, but also the exaggerated concerns of Czech political parties about the yellow peril, urging them

<sup>71</sup> Svojsík, *Japonsko a jeho lid*, 554–555.

<sup>72</sup> Svojsík, *Japonsko a jeho lid*, 555–556.

<sup>73</sup> *Rozhledy*, 2 July 1904, 939–940. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find any further information about this “Candide”. This name likely refers to the main character of Voltaire’s satire *Candide* (1759), whose eponymous hero shared the optimistic, liberal, and anti-colonialist views expressed in the article.

to focus on more immediate and pressing issues, such as the economic and industrial challenges facing the Czech Lands at the time.

While "Candide" satirically invites the Czechs to await the "collision of the white and yellow races," Svojsík concludes his afterword with an invitation to the Czech people to travel to Japan, encouraging them to form their own opinions and correct any potential inaccuracies that may have been unintentionally conveyed in his own travel writing.<sup>74</sup> He notes that the modern advancements in transportation transformed a long journey to Japan into a "mere excursion that can be undertaken during school holidays."<sup>75</sup> The reference to school holidays suggests that, as a catechist working with children and youth, Svojsík may have been aiming in particular at capturing the interest of the younger generation, whom he saw as the future hope of the Czech nationalist movement.

## Conclusion

Similarly to other European countries, portrayals of Japan in the Czech Lands during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were marked by sensationalism and frequent contradictions, primarily due to the limited availability of accurate information. In the last three decades of the nineteenth century, the Czech press focused in particular on Japan's modernising efforts, while expressing support for Japan's assimilation into the Western world. Following Japan's military victories, however, particularly its triumph over Russia in 1905, the country began to be portrayed in Czech periodicals as a potential threat to Western nations, including the Czech Lands.

The pioneering Czech travellers to Japan, Josef Kořenský, Enrique S. Vráz, and Joe Hloucha, contributed to the perpetuation of enduring stereotypes about Japan in their travel books, although each presented a different perspective with distinct aims. Among these enduring images were the picturesque beauty of Japanese landscapes, the ever-smiling Japanese women, and the omnipresence of art in everyday Japanese life.

In 1913, when the priest and traveller Alois Svojsík published his book *Japan and Its People*, a work that would become one of the most influential Czech publications on Japan of its time, he addressed the lack of accurate information in existing Czech sources on Japan. While drawing on information from other languages, he notably omitted references to earlier Czech

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<sup>74</sup> Svojsík, *Japonsko a jeho lid*, 556.

<sup>75</sup> Svojsík, *Japonsko a jeho lid*, 556.

travellers, in all probability expressing thereby his disagreement with the prevailing Czech representations of Japan at that time.

In the prologue and epilogue of his publication, Svojsík critically examined the prevalent stereotypes about Japan and the tendency to overlook or downplay the social problems arising from the implementation of industrial capitalism within the country. He also condemned the rapid shift in Western perceptions of Japan, which had initially supported Japan's efforts towards modernisation, but which were later transformed into fear and hostility, particularly following Japan's military achievements. In this context, Svojsík criticised the double standards and hypocrisy of Western nations, which propagated the narrative of Japan as a threat to the Western world while simultaneously maintaining their own colonies in Asia.

While offering critical observations rooted in his political ideology and critique of capitalism, Svojsík also expresses a profound affection for Japan and its culture, and admiration for various aspects of Japanese society. He particularly emphasises elements tied to patriotic values, reflecting his strong commitment to the Czech nationalist movement. The fact that he dedicated his most extensive work to Japan underscores the special place the country held in his heart. His book may not have been, however, solely an expression of his admiration for Japan or a critique of Western colonial powers in Asia; it was likely also an effort to provide Czechs with a comprehensive account of Japan in their native language.

## Abstract

After Japan opened to the world in the 1860s, Czech depictions of the country, like those in many other European nations, were often sensationalised and contradictory, largely due to the scarcity of reliable information. Early Czech travellers to Japan, such as Josef Kořenský, Enrique Stanko Vráz, and Joe Hloucha, played a significant role in perpetuating stereotypes about Japanese society. This paper examines Alois Svojsík's influential 1913 work *Japonsko a jeho lid* (Japan and Its People), with particular attention paid to the prologue and afterword. In these sections, Svojsík critiques Czech and Western portrayals of Japan, discussing the dramatic shift from initial admiration for Japan's modernisation to the rise of the *yellow peril* ideology following Japan's military successes. He also emphasises, from a more general perspective, the hypocrisy of Western powers, which, while maintaining colonies in Asia, expressed fear of Japan encroaching on their territories.

**Keywords:** Japan; Meiji Period; Czech travellers; Travel writing; Alois Svojsík; Stereotypes; Orientalism; Nationalism

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