

The World Exposition in Vienna in 1873:

Japan's role and influence among all participating nations

New Sources

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The idea of establishing and organizing world expositions had many reasons. The foremost was obviously the industrialization started from the beginning of the 19th century. And within less than twenty years, boosted by economic and political interests, Japan became an internationally recognized partner and respected actor.

For Japan, the opening of their country towards the West made a distinguished progress in respect to compete with other nations, which changed Japan from an agricultural into an industrial society consequently.

It was the economy that encouraged Japan to develop themselves to an industrialized nation. Japan adjusted themselves to the values of the West in a perfect way for the shortest time without dismissing their own values. The Vienna World Exposition played an important role for the new government of Japan which aimed at modernizing their country: Japan was enough prepared in terms of economy to show their outstanding and excellent products.



1. Entrance into the Japanese exhibition hall

The Japanese Government received the official invitation from the Austro-Hungarian envoy in January 1872. Japan had not plenty of time for preparing their exhibition: Just one year and three months until the opening in Vienna. Nevertheless, Japan did it, and furthermore with much success. In case of the Vienna World exposition, Japan took part for the first time as a whole country, in other words as a unique entity. The committee was also accompanied by a large number of experts in respective arenas for the purpose of nailing one's colours on the mast. The West learned also a lot vice versa, unexpectedly from Japan.

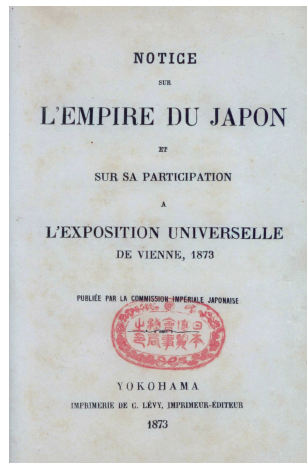
The most important task for the committee was to select Japanese showpieces and representative national

products as the exhibits in Vienna. To make sure, rehearsal exhibitions were held in Tokyo and Kyoto to see what could be attractive for visitors for the purpose of making a good impression on other countries over the sea.

What was exhibited?

The Japanese Exhibition Committee edited two publications for visitors who might become more interested in Japan and their exhibits. The «*Notice sur l'Empire du Japon et sur sa participation a l'Exposition Universelle des Vienne, 1873*» was already published in Yokohama in February 1873, which informs readers of the geography, history, commercial data, government of Japan, and all the names of the members who organized and accompanied the exhibition committee.

The catalogue, which listed the Japanese exhibits, a selection of art, crafts, and industrial as well as agricultural objects, was printed in German language and published in Vienna within quite a short time. There are no hints regarding who translated it from Japanese into German; nevertheless, we can guess that it might be Heinrich v. Siebold who accompanied the Japanese delegation and was quite fluent in colloquial Japanese. Furthermore, he may have started to translate the Japanese manuscript together with a native Japanese colleague on board of the ship to Vienna. They arrived in Trieste on the 21st March and two days later in Vienna by train. Time was not left enough for proof-reading and checking the accuracy of the manuscript before it was printed.



2. *Notice sur l'Empire du Japon*



3. Catalogue of the Imperial Japanese Exhibition

The World Exposition opened on the 1st May, which was only a few days after the Japanese delegation started to prepare the catalogue for printing, unpacked all exhibits, and arranged them whilst finishing laying out the Japanese garden on time. It required the Japanese team to work quite intensively.

The German catalogue entitled *Catalog der Kaiserlich Japanischen Ausstellung* was divided into 25 groups.¹⁾

I: Mining, Iron and Steel Works. II: Agriculture, Forestry, Wine, Fruit Growing and Horticulture. III: Chemical Industry. IV: Food and Culinary. V: Textile and Clothing Industry. VI: Leather Industry. VII: Metalworking Industry. VIII: Timber Production. IX: Earthenware and Glass Industry. X: Small Ware and Fancy Goods. XI: Paper Fabrication. XII: Graphic Arts. XIII: Engineering Industry and Transportation. XIV: Scientific Instruments. XV: Musical Instruments. XVII: Navy Matters. XVIII: Architecture and Construction Industry. XIX: Citizens' Residential Houses and Interior Decor. XX: Farmhouse. XXIII: Religious Arts. XXIV: Weapons and Antiquities. XXV: Paintings.

Since the translator did not have enough time for preparation, the publisher could not offer much information in details. For example, the size of the objects and the names of manufactures were not completely stated. And just "painting" [*Malereien*] and numbering consecutively from 1 to 42 together with the information of common names

such as *Watanabe* or *Shibata* do hardly help us to know which artists exhibited their objects in fact and which pieces of particular artists or manufacturers were displayed indeed. Therefore, it has turned to be a task for scholars today to explore the information on respective artists or manufacturers. In fact, they were the famous contemporary artists Watanabe Shōka 渡辺小華 (1835–1887) and Shibata Zeshin 柴田是真 (1807–1891), both of whom are well known as leading representatives of the so-called *Nihonga*-art of paintings today. Now we have easier access to such information – Watanabe was mentioned in the group XXV just as No. 1 & 2, Shibata in the same section as No. 35 – 38 without any concise amplifications. It requires scholars to studiously compare the mentioned items on this catalogue with more authentic sources.

The Japanese scholar Yokomizo Hiroko completed an accurate list entitled “Draft for Japanese Catalogue of Vienna Universal Exhibition (Sections of Arts and Crafts)” with detailed information. Prof. Yokomizo made use of a handwritten manuscript from the exhibition committee and published these documents in three consecutive issues in the periodical 『美術研究』 with the English subtitle *The Bijutsu Kenkyu. The Journal of Art Studies* by the Department of Fine Arts, Tokyo National Research Institute of Cultural Properties during 1993 and 1994.²⁾ This accurate list is a precise record of what Japan exhibited in Vienna. Those Japanese original drafts have been stored in the Tokyo National Museum which functioned as the Exhibition Bureau at its beginning in 1872, which was appointed to collect items from all over Japan and exhibit them in Vienna.

This Vienna World Exhibition exerted influence on the Japanese art and crafts in various ways and in many regards. “It functioned”, according to Prof. Yokomizo, “as a stimulus for the export of Japanese crafts and the import of the technique of western craft, along with organization of national exhibitions. And the word *bijutsu* was introduced as the translation of “art” for the first time.”

The reason why the West were so much impressed by the Japanese art and why Japan could bring the Japanese aesthetics into the European art was the perfection, both in terms for selling and catching the eyes.

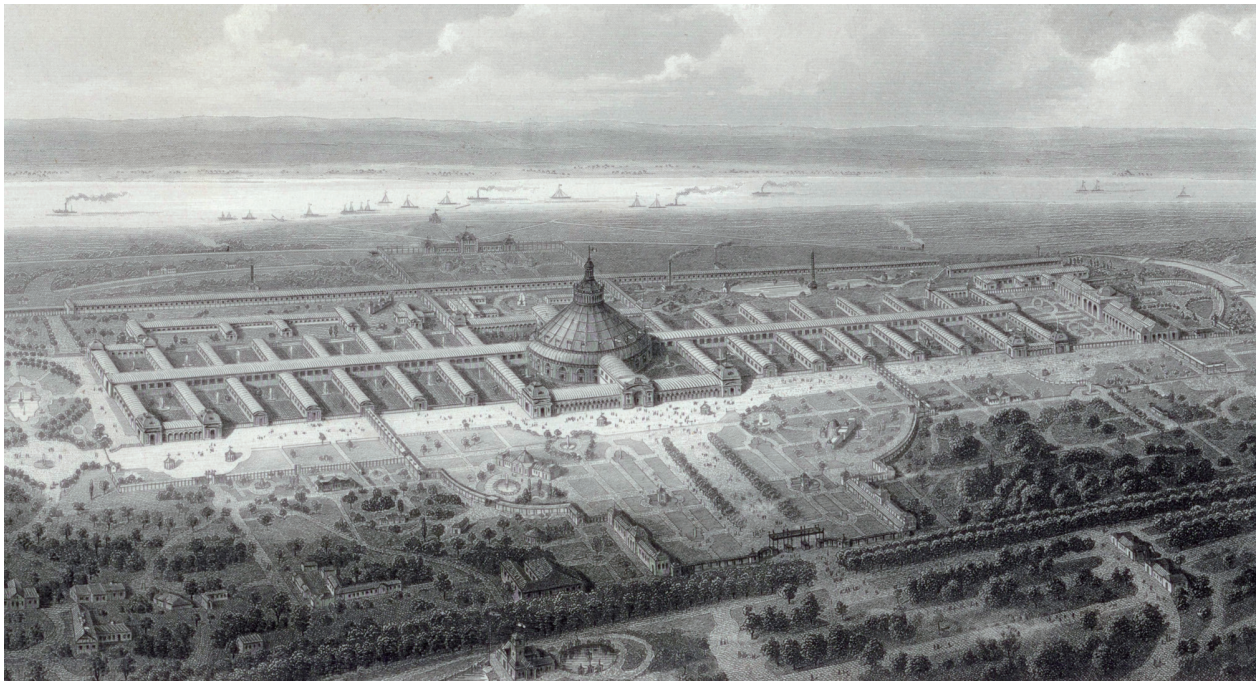
Between East and West

The Western nations focused on showing their economic and political strength but those countries, which participated in the World Exposition for the first time, had a different target. Of course, growing up their economy was in mind, but principally they wanted to present their own traditions and culture in order to show their long history, surely without missing the opportunities for relating to the Western economy. The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was situated in a perfect geographical place, since the former four world expositions (two in London, two in Paris) were oriented to the Western significantly. The countries of Eastern Europe and beyond were much attracted by the central location of Vienna.

A commentator pointed out the fact that Vienna mediated between the two worlds of the Orient and Occident as the cultural centre of the Monarchy where various historical roots and languages gathered all together. Besides Japan, Egypt, the Osman Empire, Persia, Thailand and China participated also in this exposition for the first time. Japan exhibited their items mainly for the purpose of showing their industry and culture. The Japanese delegation was the largest one, consisting of almost 70 members, who were experts in respective fields. They induced surprise, amazement and recognition within the contemporary media.

Japan was introduced on the title pages of many Viennese newspapers. The newspaper “*Illustriertes Wiener Extrablatt*” (= “Pictorial Viennese Special Edition”) showed the Japanese exhibits on the front-page for many times, and a number of other illustrations were introduced inside of this newspaper additionally. Looking through all these local newspapers, which were published in the capital as well in the countryside of all regions of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, enables us to know the fact that Japan was the country that was mostly reported and illustrated among all other nations in the Austrian newspapers during the exposition.

These illustrations fostered the curiosity and let journalists write extremely long comments which made



4. Main building of the exposition venue with the eastern and western wings.
Bird's-eye view.
(The utmost East of the exposition venue was reserved for Japan and the utmost West for America)

contribution to extend the knowledge about the country of Japan in many ways. Let us have a look into a citation from one Viennese newspaper, describing a sketch of the Japanese bazaar where some souvenirs were sold: The significance of what Japan demonstrated was “the neatness of the products” and “the rarity of such a design”. Therefore, this “longing(s) of the Viennese people for purchasing genuine Japanese items” were of much advantage for the Japanese sellers. And then we read: “Approximately about 3,000 Japanese fans were sold every day...”³⁾

What happened to all those valuable objects after the exhibition? Unfortunately, there are no exact records. But it is not too exaggerated to say that a really large scale of them were sold. A daily newspaper reported on the 29th May, even less than a month after the opening, that the King of Belgium visited the section of Japan at the venue. He requested the exhibitor of the precise information about particular exhibits through an interpreter, and thereafter expressed his delights to him. The King was now a good purchaser.⁴⁾ There were many more interested parties besides the King of Belgium who were delighted to acquire the products which looked exotic, new, and attractive.

Quite a few objects were donated to, sometimes exchanged with the objects from European museums, which were mostly artefacts such as lacquer ware, porcelain, paintings, and whatever represented Japanese art, taste and everyday life.⁵⁾ For the purpose of celebrating the 100th anniversary of Japan's participation in the Vienna World Exposition, all those items, which had been collected by the Austrian Museum for Applied Art (MAK) and the Museum of Ethnology (today “*Weltmuseum*”) in Vienna were displayed for wider audiences.⁶⁾ Many of these objects are nowadays displayed around the clock since they are a valuable witness of the Japanese past and its influence on European art.⁷⁾

The remaining part of the exhibits, valuable or historically important items such as the ridge turret (*shachihoko* 鯱鉾) from the roof of the Nagoya Castle and a giant drum (*dataiko* 大太鼓) from Nikko, a classical music instrument for playing the court music (*gagaku* 雅楽), were returned to Japan. Unfortunately, some items went lost because of a typhoon as the cargo ship sank on the coast along the Izu Peninsula just before arriving in Yokohama in the spring of 1874.

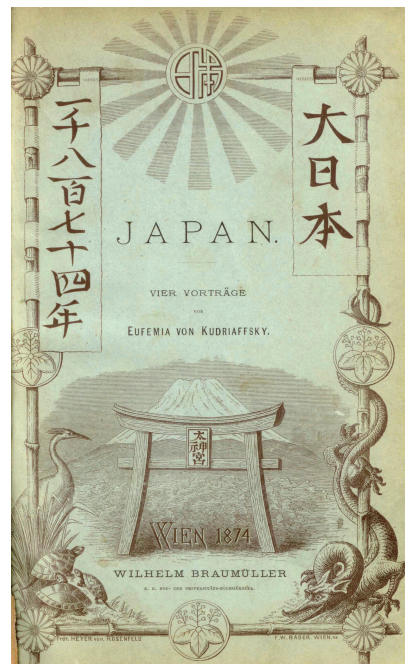
In short, Japan was quite successful in attracting the visitors of the Vienna World Exposition. Whatever came

from the Orient, was civilized. The economy of European countries had apparently more power. Their artefacts were produced plentifully in a huge scale. But all those products from the Far East were in no ways in an inferior position. Japanese products had style and represented the sense of Japan as well as their tradition of thousand years, which were all delighted with harmony.

When the world exhibition opened on the 1st May, neither the garden nor the exhibition hall was fully completed, but the visitors were not disenchanted since they could watch how the Japanese craftsmen and their superiors prepared professionally.

Eufemia von Kudriaffsky

A close witness of the Japanese Exhibition



5. Eufemia von Kudriaffsky, *Vier Vorträge*, 1874

There is a respectable source with much accuracy, which might not be well known yet. Just a few months after the Viennese world exhibition was closed, a book was published entitled „*Japan. Vier Vorträge*“ (“Japan. Four Lectures”). The book has been published by Wilhelm Braumüller, Imperial-Royal court-publisher and book-dealer in Vienna.

The authoress was a highly educated woman, poet and painter in Vienna, whose name was Eufemia von Kudriaffsky (1820–1881). She wrote this book on Japan shortly after the Vienna World Exposition, based on her own experience and her close connection to the Japanese representatives.

Kudriaffsky started her book by dealing with the topic of the Japanese culture, in particular in connection with the Vienna World Exposition as she visited on her own. In the preface, she mentioned it was two books what she had known about Japan before she visited the Vienna World Exposition for many times. One was entitled “*Nippon. Archiv zur Beschreibung von Japan und dessen Neben- und Schutzländern: Jezo mit den südlichen Kurilen, Krafu, Koorai und den Liukiu-Inseln, nach japanischen und europäischen Schriften und eigenen Beobachtungen bearbeitet. Ausgegeben unter dem Schutze Seiner Majestät des Königs der Niederlande*“ in 7 volumes by Philipp Franz von Siebold (Leiden, 1832–1858). The other book was entitled “*Tales of Old Japan*” by Algernon Bertram Freeman-Mitford (London, 1871). But she acquired all other knowledge in the meetings with the Japanese nationals who came in course of the world exposition to Vienna. She apparently learned a lot from her Japanese counterparts.

The manuscript of this book was based on the lectures for a women's society, in which she covered a wide

range of Japanese culture and society. And, to be underlined, drawn from information and personal conversations Eufemia von Kudriaffsky learned on the spot in Vienna. The second page of this book was dedicated to a Japanese lady, with whom the authoress met in Vienna, and apparently developed a close friendship.

*“My dear gifted student,
the wife of
Hiromoto Watanabe,
The First Secretary of the Imperial Japanese Legation in Vienna,
Lady
Tei Watanabe
In a sincere friendship”*

Who was this lady Tei Watanabe (渡辺貞)? She was the spouse of Watanabe Hiromoto. She accompanied her husband, who was sent for the newly installed Japanese Legation in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. According to some sources, she was the only woman among the Japanese high society who visited Vienna for the first time. It remains unknown under which circumstances Watanabe and Kudriaffsky met, but the Viennese lady had a good reputation as the daughter of a famous engineer and a very active journalist. She had already written a good number of essays in journals for many years. Her biography was then already incorporated into the renowned dictionary *“Biographisches Lexikon des Kaiserthums Oesterreich”*.⁸⁾ She was also fond of botany, which was apparently a further reason to be attracted by Japanese culture.⁹⁾

Kudriaffsky was quite keen on studying different cultures. According to her, non-European exhibits such as



6. Eufemia von Kudriaffsky with a Japanese umbrella

clothes, food products, tools, and of course arts and industrial products offer a clue for understanding the manners and customs of respective countries. “The countries outside Europe”, she cited in her book, “evoked much interest among visitors, from young people to old people, from common people to people of high society, from foreigners to local people.

She was, however, most attracted by Japan. “Japan won all visitors’ sympathies”. She evaluated what were represented among the Japanese exhibits in the following way. The Japanese nation possesses “Gesunden Verstand”



7. Longing for Japan. The first Austrian painter and the first Austrian industrialist on their trip to Japan (1873/74)

(Rational understandings), “Echte Moral” (Genuine sense of ethics) and “Frischen Humor” (comfortable sense of humour).

Kudriaffsky analysed the reason in her way: “Why”, was her question. Is it because of the attractiveness attributed to the art products in general? Or the amazing progress initiated by the Japanese government? Or the intelligence of the people from Japan? Or maybe the mysterious veil that steadily covered the country and its people in some way, although Japan was on the way to adjust themselves to the European customs and values? Or is it just all of them together?

On one point, Kudriaffsky cited the words of Mrs. Watanabe Tei: “The social rank of the women in Japan is on a high level, men and women respect each other.” “Japan” – Kudriaffsky concluded in her book – “is the logo and the slogan of this large-scale and extensive world-fair.”

The authoress, having a close connection to the Japanese committee, mentioned that this excellence of Japan, which was shown in the Vienna World Exposition, stimulated her to write a book on Japan and introduce Japanese culture to the Austrian readership.

She also kept records in this book about her meetings with some Japanese representatives, among others with Hirayama Seishin¹⁰⁾, with whom she conversed in French. She was invited by the Japanese delegates for their meetings at home. And with Sano Tsunetami.¹¹⁾ Sano was on the top of the legation as the principal, fulfilling the specific tasks during the exposition, and simultaneously as the first Japanese envoy to Austro-Hungary. Sano Tsunetami invited Miss Kudriaffsky (she remained unmarried) for the gathering on the 11th November in 1873 in respect to Meiji-Tenno’s birthday. She became fond of Japanese music: At this event three people sang a spring song about plum blossoms, and further two people played the music instrument *shamisen*; one of these two was Mrs. Watanabe. How interesting it would be, Kudriaffsky wrote on her quite optimistic view in her book, if she could listen to a complete Japanese concert. It should not be impossible, she cited, since the connections between Japan and Austria were assiduously developing.

Kudriaffsky wrote further essays on Japan. “Japan and literature” in the journal *Das Ausland* (1873)¹²⁾ and three consecutive feuilletons about Japan in the *Vorarlberger Landes-Zeitung* in the year after the world exposition closed.¹³⁾

Kudriaffsky died too early, on the 3rd January 1881. She was still 61 years old.¹⁴⁾ A few years later the lady Watanabe Tei (sometimes read Sada) visited Vienna again from Japan. Again as the companion of her husband Watanabe Hiromoto, who developed himself as a high ranked diplomat in the meantime and the new Japanese envoy to the Austro-Hungarian Empire.¹⁵⁾ How beautiful it would be, if those two ladies could have met each other

again, discussed on what the most positive achievement of the Vienna World Exposition was, and exchanged their opinions about the cultural dialogue between Austria and Japan.

The Popularity of Japan

Whenever we read the then newspapers reporting Japan during the World Exposition in Vienna, we find positive descriptions. Here, let us cite a short comment from the weekly newspaper *“Weltausstellungs-Zeitung des Floh”*.¹⁶⁾ “The heroes of our exhibition are indisputably the Japanese. Everybody is asking them. A lady leaving the exhibition site without wielding a Japanese fan or swinging a Japanese handkerchief, would think that her visit would have been failed. Neither at the Imperial Court nor in all circles of our society, no receptions were held without Japanese guests. And what is the reason for such a popularity?”

For one paper, it is the sagacity. For other papers, the aesthetic sense. And that was the reason why many visitors of the World Exposition longed to visit Japan by themselves. Since the Suez Canal opened, it was easier, especially for the natives of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy to get a short cut to the Far East geographically. And those who could not go there, for whatever reason, delighted themselves by admiring art objects from Japan or even collecting them with much ease and enthusiasm.

One of those who embarked on a trip to Japan was the industrialist and art collector Josef Baron Doblhoff-Dier in collaboration with his comrade, the famous painter Julius Blaas. They left Vienna for the Far East in the second half of October in 1873, even before the exhibition closed. In his published diary, Doblhoff wrote that all the impressions were gathered in this “temple of labour”. Doblhoff means the Vienna World Exposition “aroused my desire to travel to set forth on this journey in a vivid manner”.¹⁷⁾

Doblhoff and the painter Blaas were the first visitors to Japan from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. But not the last. Other artists and connoisseurs followed them. It was the birth of the delight and the attraction of Japan within the artistic world, either to see this country in person or to incorporate Japan and the Japanese sense of beauty into their own aesthetic sense, which is nowadays called Japonisme.

Notes

- 1) Actually 22 sections because three sections (XVI, XXI & XXII) are missing resp. not inserted in this catalogue.
- 2) 横溝廣子「ウイーン万国博覧会出品目録草稿（美術工芸編）」編集：東京国立文化財研究所美術部，I – III, No. 357 (July 1993), p. 38–74, No. 358 (Dec. 1993), p. 31–59 & No. 359 (March 1994), p. 30–68 (after Yokomizo’s marriage the family name changed to KUROKAWA Hiroko 黒川廣子；recent position *Tokyo University of the Arts - University Art Museum* 東京藝術大学大学美術館 教授).
- 3) *Illustriertes Wiener Extrablatt*. 2nd Vol., No. 170, 22 June 1873, p. 4
- 4) *Internationale Ausstellungs-Zeitung. Beilage der Neuen Freien Presse*. Nr. 3148, 29. Mai 1873.
- 5) „Die Erwerbungen auf der Weltausstellung“, in: *Mittheilungen des k. k. Oesterreich. Museums für Kunst und Industrie (Monatsschrift für Kunst und Kunstgewerbe)*, Wien, Vol. 5, 1. Jan. 1874, No. 100, p. 23/24; 1. Apr. 1874, No. 103, p. 77/79.
- 6) *Herbert Fux, Japan auf der Weltausstellung in Wien 1873*. Wien: Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst / Österreichisch-Japanische Gesellschaft, 1973 (26. Juli – 2. September), 98 p.
- 7) Anna Minichberger: *Die Japanischen Lackarbeiten der Wiener Weltausstellung von 1873 im Österreichischen Museum für Angewandte Kunst*. Wien, 2007 (master’s thesis, University of Vienna); accessible: <http://othes.univie.ac.at/400/> (http://othes.univie.ac.at/400/1/11-30-2007_0107426.pdf)
- 8) Constantin v. Wurzbach (ed.), Wien 1860, Vol. 13, p. 306/307
- 9) The Museum for Applied Art in Vienna keeps more than 500 water colours of plants she created, painted from nature, including Japanese plants f. e. flowering quince (*Cydonia japonica*) (3949/142 or 3949/445).
- 10) 平山成信 (1854–1929), Vorname auch Narinobu; Regierungsbeamter, 1924 Baron
- 11) 佐野常民 (1822–1902)；diplomat and politician, Founder of the Red Cross in Japan, Count.
- 12) „Japan und seine Literatur“, *Das Ausland. Wochenschrift für Erd- und Völkerkunde*. Vol. 46, 1873, No. 38, p. 741–746
- 13) „Japan“, *Vorarlberger Landes-Zeitung*. Bregenz, 1874, Nr. 92 (15. Aug.), S.1–2; Nr. 95 (25. Aug.), S.1–3; Nr. 101 (8. Sept.), S.1–2; u.a. weitere Beiträge: „Neujahr in Japan“, *Die Heimat. Illustriertes Familienblatt*. Vol. 2, 1877, Nr. 14, S.230–231; „Höflichkeit in

Japan“, *Das Ausland*. Vol. 50, 1877, No. 30, p. 592-594.

- 14) An obituary was published in the *Neue Freie Presse*, Vienna, January 5, 1881, p. 5 (“... Miss von Kudriaffsky, a modest, pleasant person ..., a spirited writer, a gifted painter of flowers, a scholar of art history, a peerless noble character has departed this life”).
- 15) Watanabe Hiromoto 渡辺洪基, also read as Watanabe Kōki (1848–1901); after his diplomatic service in Vienna during the world exposition he fulfilled quite a few important obligations in Japan, two years mayor of Tokyo, afterwards the first rector of the Imperial Tokyo University. Envoy in Vienna 1890/1892.
- 16) *Der Floh. Politische, humoristische Wochenschrift*. Wien, 1873, No. 46, Supplement.
- 17) Josef Freiherr von Doblhoff. *Tagebuchblätter von einer Reise nach Ostasien 1873–1874. Mit photographischen Abbildungen von J. Löwy nach Skizzen des Malers Julius Blaas*. Wien 1874/75, 3 Vols. (Japan is described in the 3rd vol. pp. 1–174 with 3 photographs after oil paintings by Julius Blaas done in Yokohama, March 1874)

Illustrations / photographs

- 1 *Entrance into the Japanese exhibition hall*. Albumen-Print, Josef Löwy (Vienna Photographic Association), 1873; 19,0 × 25,0 cm (36,0 × 48,0 cm) (from a private collection)
- 2 *Notice sur l'Empire du Japon*, 1873. Title page (private collection)
- 3 *Catalog der Kaiserlich Japanischen Ausstellung*, 1873. Cover (Private collection)
- 4 *Das Weltausstellungsgebäude in Wien. Aus der Vogelperspektive* (“The world exposition building in Vienna. Bird’s eye view; Copperplate print (Private collection)
- 5 Eufemia von Kudriaffsky, *Vier Vorträge*, 1874, Cover (private collection); the cover design was inspired by Friedrich Heyer von Rosenfeld (1828–1896) who also drew a proposal for the first Japanese decoration of the Rising Sun on behalf of Iwakura Tomomi
- 6 Eufemia von Kudriaffsky, portrait photograph (Wien Bibliothek / Vienna City Library). Legacy Euphemia von Kudriaffsky, collected by Jos. Böck, Wien; undated (about 1875), H.I.N.-92669 / Ia 115300, p. 3)
- 7 Julius von Blaas (1845–1922), „Zwei Japanreisende“ (“Two Japan Travellers”), pencil & chalk drawing, sign. “J. Blaas 1874” (sitting Josef v. Doblhoff, standing J. Blaas), 31,0 × 22,0 cm (private collection)