

A Brief History of the Theosophical Society in Japan in the Interwar Period

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ABSTRACT: The article presents for the first time a brief, yet still quite detailed, history of the Theosophical Society (TS) in Japan based on research of primary sources, mainly in the headquarters of the Society in Adyar, a suburb of Chennai, India. Three decades after the first contacts made during the visits by the TS President, Colonel H.S. Olcott (1832–1907), in 1889 and 1891, the first TS lodge in Japan, the Tokyo International Lodge, was established by James Henry Cousins (1873–1956) in 1920. Cousins' initiative stimulated interest in the TS, and other lodges were established, although the duration of their activities was sometimes quite short: Orpheus and Mahayana launched in 1924, while Miroku (Maitreya) Lodge did the same in 1928. The analysis of the interwar history of the TS in Japan points to two key issues. One is the fact that the TS resonated with those Japanese who were committed to restoring Buddhism for modern Japanese society. Thus, the TS was an interim interest for them rather than something in which they desired permanent membership. Second, the impulse to establish the TS in Japan came from the Adyar headquarters, and the messengers were non-Japanese. This led to a persistent problem: namely a lack of study materials in Japanese language. This issue became the key obstacle in effectively spreading the Theosophical teachings. Only in the postwar period did translation activity come to the fore as key texts were translated into the Japanese language.

KEYWORDS: Theosophy, Theosophical Society, Theosophy in Japan, James H. Cousins, Mirra Richard/the Mother, Noemi Raymond, Daisetsu T. Suzuki, Beatrice Lane Suzuki.

The text was prepared with the financial support provided to the Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague by the Czech Ministry of Culture as part of its long-term development programme for research institutions (MK000023442).

Introduction

In her fundamental contribution to the field of history of the Japanese Theosophical Society (TS), the article “Beatrice Lane Suzuki: An American Theosophist in Japan,” Adele Algeo selected excerpts from writings and letters penned by the secretary of the Mahayana Lodge in Kyoto and energetic

Theosophist, Beatrice Lane Suzuki (1875–1939), materials preserved in the TS archives at its headquarters (HQ) in Adyar, India (Algeo 2005). In her last letter to the TS HQ, written in November 1928, Suzuki summarized the key difficulties concerning the establishment of Theosophy in Japan:

It seems difficult for Theosophy to make much growth here just for this reason that it is so similar in its teachings to Buddhism. There seems to be a general idea, especially among Theosophists, that the Japanese are not a spiritual people and do not care for spiritual things. In my opinion this idea is entirely wrong. I consider the Japanese very spiritual; all that is best in their culture is based upon religion. No one could pass through this period of the Emperor's coronation without feeling how near the spiritual world is to the Japanese. But with regard to Theosophy, Theosophy comes not as something new but as a variant of their own Buddhist teaching and for this reason they are slow to come to it. The appeal of Universal Brotherhood is the note that must be struck by Theosophists for the Japanese. It is just the same too in regard to the Order of the Star. Their own great teachers like Kobo Daishi [774–835, founder of the esoteric Shingon school of Buddhism], Shinran Shonin [1173–1262 or 1263, founder of the True Pure Land school of Buddhism], and others stand still too close to theirs in time and they feel that they have not yet fully absorbed the teachings of these great ones, and therefore they do not feel the call to look elsewhere. In my opinion it is not because of their unspirituality that they fail to do so but on account of their strong religious feeling for their own religious leaders. Personally I should like to have a larger membership for I am deeply interested in the Society, but at the same time I appreciate the reasons why it is more difficult than it is in Western countries (Algeo 2005, 12–3).

Based on archival research, the key problem of the TS in Japan at this early stage was therefore the imbalance between its significant foreign membership on one hand, and the lack of active Japanese members on the other. This situation also impacted on the lack of Japanese translations of the key Theosophical texts, and the slow speed of the translation process in general. As Algeo understood, the “international nature of the membership made it difficult to keep the group going, as members kept departing” (Algeo 2005, 14).

This difficulty in establishing an ongoing dialogue and the related problem of increasing the society's membership was apparent from the very beginning of the TS in Japan, when successful talks by Colonel Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907) in 1889, and another visit in 1891, did not immediately lead to the establishment of the Japanese branch of the movement [Figure 1] (Yoshinaga 2007). However, this brief introduction to Theosophical history in Japan will deal with the subsequent interwar period. The aim of this paper is to show the richness of activity triggered by interest in the TS, a wealth of activities that provided a

platform for extensive networking and collaborations. Further, this study should contribute to debates on the transnational impact of the TS, and its role in fostering fruitful intersections between non-Japanese expatriates and seekers of new spirituality and new arts within Japanese society and culture.



Figure 1. Col. H. S. Olcott standing in the group of seventeen, in the grove of Nagahama, April 22, 1889. (This photograph was published in *The Theosophist*, August 1932, with an incorrect date). Courtesy of the TS Adyar Archive.

James H. Cousins and the First TS Lodge in Japan

The founding figure of the TS in Japan in the interwar era was the Irish writer, poet, playwright, actor, critic, editor, and educator James Henry Cousins (1873–1956), who worked as a professor at Keio University in Tokyo for ten months in 1919–1920 (Cousins 1923; Cousins and Cousins 1950; Hashimoto 2013). During this short time, he managed to fulfil his mission and establish the first TS lodge in Japan, named the Tokyo International Lodge. In a letter to the headquarters dated February 15, 1920 [Figure 2], Cousins referred to the lodge as “a mother lodge” for foreigners and local members, who would then form a new lodge. In fact, an exclusively Japanese lodge, where discussions would be led

in Japanese, was apparently in the making, as translations of the literature into Japanese were being prepared. Cousins surmised that some current members, who were in Japan only temporarily, would transmit the message of Theosophy to their respective countries, such as two American educationalists, a Korean, a Greek, a Kashmiri, and a Bengali; and he also spoke of five permanent Japanese members, who guaranteed several more soon. The variety of nationalities and equal male and female representation were very important to the TS.

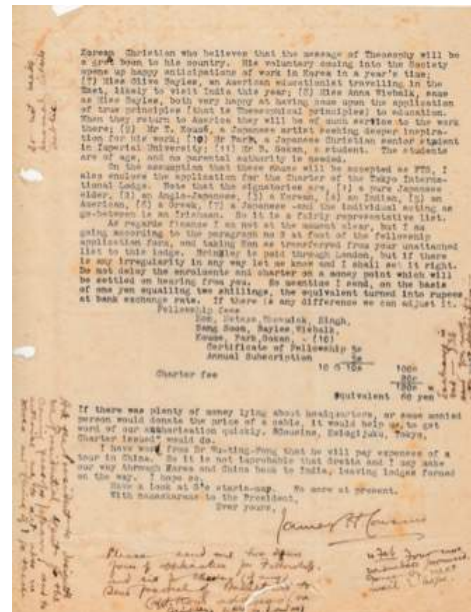
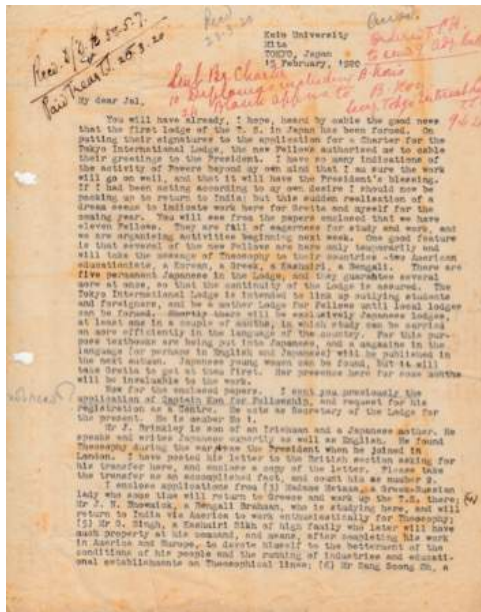


Figure 2. James Henry Cousins’ letter to the headquarters from February 15, 1920. Courtesy of the TS Adyar Archive.

The foremost member and an ongoing liaison with the Adyar headquarters was Buhei Kon (1867?–1936), more commonly known as Captain Kon. Kon was probably the only Japanese member who became friendly with Annie Besant (1847–1933) and senior members of the TS in Adyar, while his ship was docked at the port of Madras for ten years before. In the chapter “Early Days,” the lawyer, Japanese resident, and Theosophist Thomas Baty (1869–1954) characterized Captain Kon as a vegetarian and strict, but a likeable and good man. Kon and Baty travelled together to Japan in 1916 (Baty 1959, 88). Baty became an important figure in LGBTQ history and is referred to as transgender. Their commitment to feminism, the women’s liberation movement, and equality of the sexes permeates the book about their stay in Japan, and thus, evidently, they supported the feminist struggle in Japan as well (Baty 1959).

Other members included Jack Ronald Brinkley (1887–1964), an Irish/Japanese, who joined the Theosophical Society during World War I, in London. In his letter of February 14, 1920, Brinkley wrote to the British TS to ask for his membership to be transferred to Japan for the purposes of applying for the charter of the new lodge in Tokyo. Brinkley was the son of Francis Brinkley (1841–1912), an Irish-born military officer who adopted Japan as his home country, and his Japanese wife. Francis Brinkley was a prolific author of Japan-related literature, and an established advisor to the Japanese government (Johnson 2015, 27). Coincidentally, Jack's sister Ine was a model for another TS member, the accomplished modern abstract painter Tami Koumé or Tamijuro Kume (1893–1923) (Omuka 2001; Čapková 2019).

Another important member was Madame Ina Metaxa (1864–1946), who, according to Cousins' letter, was soon to return to Greece. However, Metaxa stayed in Japan for another few years, and continued to be an important member of the Society. A Russian of Greek antecedents and a refugee from Ukraine, Metaxa was born Countess Kapnist in Greece, but marriage to her Russian husband, a lawyer, brought her to his estate in Russia. As aristocrats and supporters of the Czar, they were driven out of the country after the revolution, and thus sought refuge in the US and subsequently in Japan (Metaxa 1918). Metaxa was an avid writer and political commentator; she published extensively about feminism and on art subjects. She provided accommodation to other TS members, the Łubienskis, the Raymonds, and Philippe Barbier Saint Hilaire (1894–1969) among others, at her home after the earthquake of 1923, and their spirits seem very much aligned, as confirmed by both Stefan Łubienski (1894–1975) and Saint Hilaire (Łubienski 1974, 161; Raymond 1972, 95).

In 1927, she published a book on Japan, *Le Japon mystique*, and in 1931 dedicated her second book, *Evening Glow*, to Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), who visited Japan three times in 1916, 1924, and 1929. Among her other publications, the article “Cultural Traits of East and West” was published in *Contemporary Japan: A Review of Far Eastern Affairs*, a propaganda vehicle of the Foreign Affairs Association of Japan, in November 1942. Countess Metaxa also became a close friend of Thomas Baty. They met through Theosophy and Cousins' circle. Baty recorded that she died suddenly in 1946 (Baty 1959, 126).

The future leading force of the TS in Japan, Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki (1870–1966) and his wife Beatrice Lane Suzuki, joined with her mother, Emma Erskine

Lane Hahn MD (1846–1927). They attended meetings six times between March and June. In 1921, D.T. Suzuki became a professor at Otani University, so the Suzukis left Tokyo for Kyoto (Yoshinaga 2013, 60).

TS and Japanese Pan-Asianism

Cousins' activities were by no means restricted to university education and the lodge business. Significantly, he established a close relationship with a right-wing Pan-Asianist group, the Black Dragon Society. The society's activities are often talked about in connection with Japan's expansionist policy in Manchuria, but we should not ignore the fact that the society was financially supported by the Osaka Chamber of Commerce, a group of industrialists who were intensely interested in maintaining the stability of Japanese-Indian relations, as India was the greatest market for manufactured silk and cotton goods. A sea-lane connecting the ports of Kobe and Calcutta was established as an export route for their major products. Much of this merchandise was transported by a steamer service maintained by NYK, the national shipping company Nippon Yusen Kaisha, and none other than Buhei Kon was the captain of its merchant fleet. Several Theosophists, including Cousins, visited and left Japan on board NYK vessels.

Cousins arrived in Japan when the discarding of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was being seriously discussed, and significant within our context is the fact that Japan was unable to officially support Indian independence as long as the Alliance was valid. Cousins' behaviour is remarkable in that he not only became friendly with the Black Dragon Society, where the unification of oppressed Asian countries was proclaimed aloud, but also he contacted both non-Japanese and Japanese alike who wrote regularly for a pro-British journal in Japan. His purpose may have been to access inside information in the British proxy publisher and, if possible, headhunt some of the contributors and win them to his side. Allegedly, several of the founding members of the International Lodge were recruited from there. The first membership group included three Indians:

J.N. Bhowmick, a Bengali Brahman who is studying in Japan, who will return to India via America, and Mr Gurcharan Singh, of noble birth, who will later have the means and property, after completing his work in America and Europe, to devote himself to betterment of conditions, industries and educational activities (Cousins' letter to the HQ, February 15, 1920).

The last Indian was Kesho Ram Sabarwal, who was then a journalist, a correspondent of the *Bombay Chronicle* and the *Japan Times*. In a confidential memorandum from 1919, Sabarwal is presented as complicit in an Indo-German conspiracy. In the report, Sabarwal is said to have acted as secretary to a well-known Indian revolutionary against the British Raj, Rash Behari Bose (1886–1945). Sabarwal had worked as a secretary of another Indian freedom fighter, Lala Lajpat Rai (1865–1928), and escaped to Japan to live and work with Rash Behari Bose (Rath and Chatterjee 1963, 551).

Bose settled in Japan in 1915 and found support among Japanese Pan-Asianists, the same network that was familiar to James Cousins and that had also supported Mirra (1878–1973) and Paul Richard (1874–1967) during their stay in Japan in 1916–1920 (Barnett 2004). The Richards and the ideas of Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950) were very influential in spiritual/nationalist circles in Japan, and through Kesho Ram Sabarwal they reached Singh and Saint Hilaire, who devoted most of his later life to Sri Aurobindo and his ashram. In the book *We Two Together*, Cousins wrote about spending time with the Richards. He remembered a conversation in their drawing room that was highly political, dealing with ideas of revolution and socialism, which were in fact at odds with the Japanese political regime of the time. Cousins noted that an unnamed Japanese revolutionary responded that “the darkest spot is under the lamp,” hinting at the fact that the network had reached as far as the Imperial Palace (Cousins and Cousins 1950, 352).

The Richards in Japan

The world of esotericism and the circles for national struggle or nationalist expansion were closely related, and produced active networks that linked the Eurasian continent with Japan. The Richards’ four years exile in Japan was filled with activities that fuelled Asian and Japanese radical nationalism. Paul Richard’s influential works include *Au Japon* (To Japan, 1917) and *To the Nations* (1917). Moreover, a sojourn in Japan was crucial for Mirra Richard, later the Mother of the Pondicherry ashram. As a trained artist, Mirra was acutely aware of the Japanese artistic sensibility, and the study of Japanese arts determined her long-term aesthetic preference. A vast collection of Japanese objects, ranging from artworks to ordinary objects, surrounded Mirra in her Pondicherry living quarters

throughout her long and productive life, and reminded her of the refinement and superior aesthetic experience that she found in Japan.

Crucially, it was the experience of Japan that shaped the way for Mirra to identify herself as the Mother. This was the turning point that shaped her future direction. Many quotes have survived that capture her observations and feelings about Japan, such as: “For four years, from an artistic point of view, I lived from wonder to wonder”; “Beauty rules over Japan as an incontestable master”; and Japanese art teaches “the unity of art with life” (Mother 2013). It was in Japan that Mirra became involved in her elaborate exploration of flowers and their spiritual significance. According to her friend Nobuko Kobayashi (1886–1973), with whom she practised still sitting meditation, Mirra started referring to herself as Fujiko (Wisteria). She was inspired by the wisteria flowers on the roof of an ancient Shinto shrine, Kasuga Taisha in Nara.

Fuji/wisteria belongs to a canon of Japanese flowers that bear special cultural significance and symbolism, and are used repeatedly in Japanese literature. The wisteria is associated with nobility and the classical age of the Heian period (794–1185), when several of the celebrated works of literature, such as the *Tale of Genji*, were written. The flower is also understood to represent love and, within a Buddhist context, prayer. Mirra later called the wisteria “a poet’s ecstasy,” with the comment: “Rare and charming is your presence!” (Van Vrekhem n.d.) Wisteria/Fuji is also a pun on fuji—undead or immortal—and points to Fuji, the sacred mountain. Another friend and collaborator of the Richards, Shumei Okawa (1886–1957), said of Mirra:

... You know Mount Fuji ... you can’t appreciate it in full when you are very near, when you are too close ... some distance is needed. ... from a distance, ah! it is grand, it is breath-taking, it is sublime! She was like Mount Fuji, Mirra was. ... (Iyengar 1952, 174).

Okawa and his wife lived with the Richards in Tokyo in order to facilitate the work they did together, primarily writing, translation, and publication of books and pamphlets. Okawa was a university professor, Zen practitioner, and active sympathiser with the Indian liberation movement. He was also a member of the Black Dragon Society and “the leading spirit of the Pan-Asiatic movement in Japan... a person of considerable influence, who is deeply interested in Indian affairs and is bitterly opposed to British rule in India”—according to a Government of India document reporting the publication of “a photograph of

Arabindo Ghosh [sic] and a eulogistic article on his work” by Okawa in *Asia Jiron* (Okawa 1994, 240).

Paul Richard’s work quickly proliferated among the Japanese intelligentsia especially, and placed the Richards on the cultural map of the Japanese capital. The couple and their friends met Tagore during his visits to Japan, which was commemorated in a photograph [Figure 3] (Szpilman 2011).



Figure 3. Paul and Mirra Richard with Rabindranath Tagore in Japan. From left to right; Tetsuo Hirasawa, William Winstanley Pearson (1881–1923), Rabindranath Tagore, Mirra Richard, Paul Richard. In the garden of Kyoto Hotel on February 5, 1917. Courtesy of a private collection.

A number of episodes are remembered from the meetings, such as an invitation from Tagore to Mirra to join him in his new school Santiniketan, Mirra’s sketches of him, and the story of how Tagore gave Mirra his typewriter.

Shortly upon arrival in Japan, Mirra was approached by a journalist from the *Fujoshinbun* newspaper for an interview, but instead she sent the manuscript *Woman and the War*, which was published on July 7, 1916 (Richard 1916). She

also sent her self-portrait, which was published in the same newspaper two months later, together with a text written by a journalist entitled “A Truly Dedicated Woman” (*Fujoshinbun* 1916) [Figure 4]. The article by Mirra conveyed her ideas related to feminism. She highlighted issues she was passionate about, such as the natural equality of the sexes, the importance of collaboration, and the specific roles each of the sexes have, such as female spirituality.



Figure 4. Recently re-discovered Mirra Richard’s self-portrait published in the article by an unnamed journalist, “A Truly Dedicated Woman,” *Fujoshinbun*, September 29, 1916, 1.

The connections between the Richards and the TS were quite loose, and became a footnote in their own spiritual project. Evidence suggests that Mirra frequented TS events in Paris, and that she stayed in the Adyar HQ before leaving for France and later Japan in 1915.

The Orpheus Lodge in Tokyo

In a letter to the HQ dated March 8, 1924, K.R. Sabarwal reported about a study group of four members and two non-members, who were meeting regularly and studying diligently in Tokyo. Prof. Dirk van Hinloopen Labberton (1874–1961), a Dutch Indologist who became the first General Secretary of the TS in

Indonesia, also joined them. On the other hand, Captain Kon was not interested in joining them and the local lodge. This evidence confirms that Sabarwal was a very keen Theosophist at that time.

The study group became the base for the new lodge Orpheus, established on May 22, 1924 and led by Saint Hilaire for a few months [Figure 5]. In the same year, on August 4, 1924 (according to a letter from Beatrice Lane Suzuki to the HQ from June 22, 1924), a charter was issued to another lodge convened by Mrs Lane Suzuki. In the letter from June 22, Mrs Suzuki confirmed the existence of the new lodge, Mahayana, created on White Lotus Day, May 8, of the same year, and she attached the membership list, which included Chijo Akamatsu (1886–1960), the grandson of Renjo Akamatsu (1841–1919), a friend of Colonel Olcott who, as mentioned before, had visited Japan to introduce the TS. One of the key members, who acted as treasurer of the lodge, was Nishu Utsuki (1893–1951).

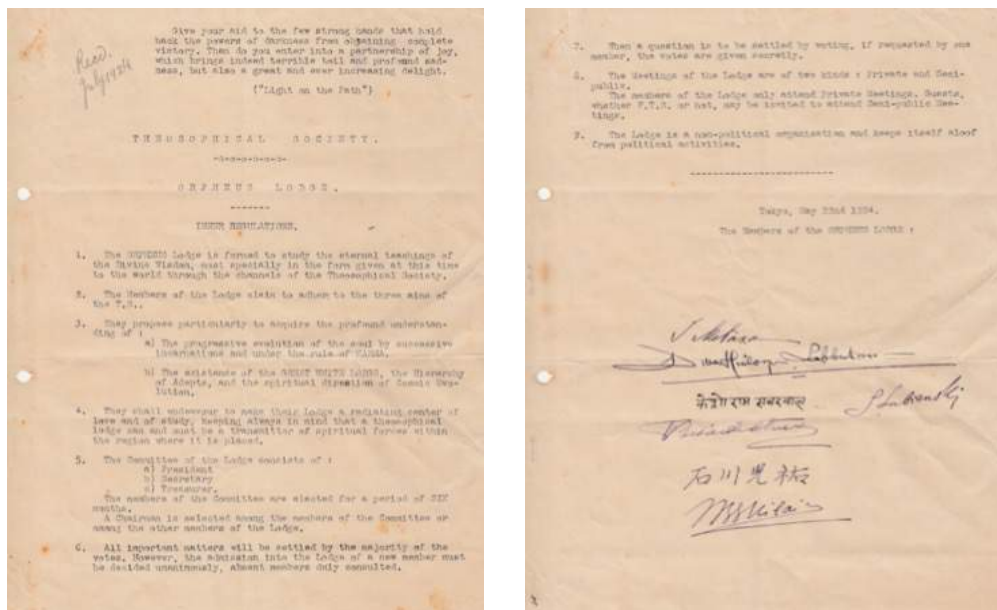


Figure 5. The “Inner Regulations” charter of the Orpheus Lodge (1924–1926).
Courtesy of the TS Adyar Archive.

In his important article, “Three Boys on a Great Vehicle,” Shin’ichi Yoshinaga used evidence from the archive concerning Nishu Utsuki to reconstruct the forgotten history of the transnational connection between the networks that were re-framing Buddhism for modern society and Theosophy. Utsuki is identified as the connecting link between the Mahayana Association and the Mahayana Lodge,

and thus offers a perfect case study to demonstrate the connections and differences between the perceptions of Theosophy and modern Buddhism in Japan (Yoshinaga 2013).

The two lodges existed in parallel, Mahayana in Kyoto and Orpheus in Tokyo. They collaborated and organized events together. According to the archival evidence, on October 11, 1924, the Indian member of the Orpheus, K.R. Sabarwal, gave a lecture on Arya Samaj for the members of the Mahayana Lodge. The secretary and later leader of the Orpheus was Professor D. van Hinloopen Labberton, and the treasurer was K.R. Sabarwal. Labberton led the lodge until his departure from Japan in 1926, when the lodge's operations were suspended. The charter was also signed by Stefan Łubienski, Madame Metaxa, and others. Saint Hilaire left Japan in the summer of the same year and became only loosely involved with the TS until he immersed himself in the teachings of the integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo. Unexpectedly, in summer 1925, he briefly returned to Tokyo, stayed with Łubienski, and planned to go to the convention in Adyar in December (Saint Hilaire and Saint Hilaire 2001, 117–26).

Stefan Łubienski, the composer, fine artist and educator, was a Polish nobleman who learned about Anthroposophy from his mother and her family, and as a youth became attracted to Theosophy. This set of esoteric teachings became a lifelong inspiration for him and led him East. It was a search for superior culture and arts that brought him to Japan, where he and his partner Zina stayed from 1921 to 1926. He focused mainly on learning about Noh theatre, and taught music and composition to support his stay. Upon his arrival back in Poland, he published the book *Między Wschodem a Zachodem: Japonja na straży Azji. Dusza mistyczna Nipponu, etc.* (Between the East and the West: Japan as a Guardian of Asia. The Mystical Spirit of Japan, etc.) in 1927.

The Łubienskis became intimate friends with the designers Antonín (1888–1976) and Noémi (1889–1980) Raymond, and with the French ambassador in Japan, the poet and playwright Paul Claudel (1868–1955). From diplomatic circles, it was only a small step to the network of successful industrialists who received both inspiration and profit from their experiences abroad. One of them was Raymond's client, Hajime Hoshi (1873–1951), who founded a pharmaceutical school in 1922 that complemented his growing pharmaceutical empire, and he commissioned the young Antonin Raymond to build the campus. The monumental, concrete building of the auditorium was a ticket to success for

the young architect. Hoshi also supported a number of exhibitions showcasing foreign artists' works in Japan in the gallery on one of the floors of his trendy pharmaceutical shop in Tokyo's fashionable central district of Ginza. To make the connection even tighter, he employed the aforementioned chemist Philippe Barbier Saint Hilaire. By then, however, as noted by Łubienski, Philippe's view of his life and career was changing, and soon, following an invitation to visit a monk, he went to Tibet in 1924 and then, via Theosophical circles, to Pondicherry to begin work with Sri Aurobindo Ghose [Figure 6].



Figure 6. Several members of the Orpheus are in this picture from the early 1920s. From the left: S. Łubienski, A. and N. Raymond, P. Saint Hilaire, Z. Łubienska, K.R. Sabarwal, and two Japanese. Courtesy of a private collection.

Noémi Raymond, Theosophy, and Art

The outstanding French painter and graphic designer Noémi Pernessin Raymond was educated at the avant-garde Teachers College in New York City, where she joined the New York circle of the Theosophical Society in 1919 and commenced her lifelong study of esoteric thought and religions. Her best friend from art school, painter St. Clair Breckons LaDow, was a TS member, and the

network around St. Clair and her husband, New York stockbroker Stanley LaDow (1892–1945), became crucial to the Raymonds' careers. The Ladows introduced the Raymonds to Miriam Noel (1869–1930), the partner of Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959), and later to the great architect himself. Wright thus became Antonin Raymond's teacher in his laboratory in Taliesin, and later his employer. The Raymonds travelled with Wright to Japan to work on his major project there, the Imperial Hotel, and this eventually led to their creating a famous architectural firm in Japan.

An important source of information about Noémi and Antonín's spiritual and creative dialogue is their correspondence during the 1920s and 30s. Noémi always reported about her visits to the Theosophical meetings during her stay in New York. In a letter from December 1923, she noted the split and struggle that was taking place in the Society, and stated that only an explanation from Dr. Archibald Keightley (1859–1930) convinced her that joining the Besant's Society would be wrong. From this letter, we know that Noémi was a member of the Theosophical Society in America (TSA) formed by Ernest Temple Hargrove (1870–1939), Jirah Dewey Buck (1838–1916), and others, which had its headquarters in New York City until 1942, when it eventually disbanded. The TSA published a periodical, *Theosophical Quarterly*. Dr. Keightley, who was mentioned frequently in the correspondence, was very active in this branch of the Society. The reference to the Besant Society indicates the split within the organization, which took place in the Theosophical Society in 1895. The correspondence also refers to the doubts Noémi had about the different treatment of women in the various Theosophical circles.

Even more relevant correspondence in relation to Noemi's search for spiritual fulfilment is contained in the letters exchanged with Saint Hilaire, later known as Pavitra. Correspondence with Pavitra started in 1927, and lasted for many decades. In her letters from New York, Noémi refers to visits to the TSA and conversations with Dr. Keightley. Pavitra's Japanese friends seemed very pleased that he was in the salon of Dr. Gose (Sri Aurobindo), while on the other hand they spoke with suspicion of the actions taken by the Mme Besant society in Adyar. Unlike Pavitra, Noémi continued exploring Theosophy, but not exclusively, and addressed questions to Sri Aurobindo, which Pavitra communicated, later posting the answers back to her in Japan. Another spiritual partner to Noémi Raymond was another member of the TS, Sardar Gurcharan Singh (1898–1995).

Singh is regarded as “the father of studio pottery in India” (Mago 1995), who became a self-conscious artist working on industrial ceramics in India in the 1920s, and a founding member of the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society in 1928. He also actively contributed to the activities of the All India Handicrafts Board (AIHB), founded in 1952, which promoted the activities of artist-crafts and designer-craftsman (Mago 2000, 139–40). As a young student, he was invited to Delhi to work for his father’s friend’s pottery business, where he learned throwing, moulding, glazing, etc.

It was his father’s friend who sent Singh to Japan to learn about commercial ceramics. He set off in 1919 for Yokohama, where he took a two-year course in industrial ceramics at the local technical school. He had to learn Japanese in order to study, and upon the successful completion of his language studies he enrolled in a course at the Higher Technological School in Tokyo, now known as the Tokyo Institute of Technology. Gurcharan Singh was a member of the Tokyo International Lodge in 1920, as reported by Capt. Jack Brinkley in his letter from September 1920.

In his book, *New Japan*, James Cousins mentioned two Theosophists-artists; Tamijuro Kume, in the chapter on Japanese painting and painters, and Gurcharan Singh, whom he met in Kyoto on his way back to India. He describes him as a personification of the ideal Asian man of the future:

The tall Indian put his farewell into the palm-to-palm salutation of his race. When the crowd on the quay had become a human blur, and my little group was lost among it, I could still see, above the dark turban, the hands of blessing, hands that were destined to mould a thing of beauty, symbolizing the cultural unity of Asia, in the shape of a vase, Chinese in model, Japanese in substance, Indian in craftsmanship.[...]” (Cousins 1923, 322).

Gurcharan Singh actually spent time with Cousins in Kyoto and Nara. Singh introduced Cousins to Horyuji Temple, “where Indian idealism entered the Japanese imagination in the seventh century through the introduction of Buddhist thought and art.” They saw Horyuji Temple as “the fountainhead of Japanese culture,” where Korean masters decorated walls with frescos inspired by the art of Ajanta (Cousins and Cousins 1950, 367).

The participation of the artists in Japanese TS lodges in the early 1920s is remarkable. The significance of art for Theosophical work has been described elsewhere. In the Japan file we can find a discussion of this topic in a text written

by the fourth TS President, Curuppumullage Jinarajadasa (1875–1953), during his 1937 visit to Japan [Figure 7] and published in the November 1950 issue of *The Theosophist*, in the column “On the Watch-Tower.” Jinarajadasa mentioned some of the active members, such as Miss Maria Marsoff, and the achievement of the Japanese translation of the *First Principles of Theosophy*. In relation to the text, he stated that there was a need for such a Theosophical manual for artists

to outline the true basis of all Art, and point out how the more an artist—poet, sculptor, painter, dancer, craftsman—knows of Theosophy, the more lovely and permanent his creation will become. We need to present Theosophy not only as Wisdom, but also, as did the Greeks, as the True, the Good and the Beautiful (Jinarajadasa 1950, 79–80).

He subsequently noted the architects Claude Bragdon (1866–1946) and Jacobus Johannes van der Leeuw (1893–1934) as examples of Theosophical artists, and we can now add the Raymonds, Kume, the Łubienskis, and Singh to the list.



Figure 7. The TS President, Curuppumullage Jinarajadasa, in Japan, 1937.
Courtesy of the TS Adyar Archive.

The Kyoto Mahayana Lodge and Beatrice Lane Suzuki

The head of the Kyoto Mahayana Lodge was the aforementioned enthusiastic student of Buddhism and spiritual matters, Beatrice Lane Suzuki, wife of D.T. Suzuki. Her energetic handwritten notes and several-page letters dominated the Japan file in the TS HQ Adyar archive in the interwar period. The Mahayana Lodge was formed in Suzuki's Kyoto house, and the majority of the fourteen members were from the Buddhist universities in Kyoto: Otani and Ryukoku.

In her letter of May 8, 1924, Beatrice Suzuki explained why she was not considering becoming president of the lodge, even though Prof. Labberton had informed the HQ of this. She stated that she had chosen not to become the president, because she “was a woman and a foreigner” in what was still the very patriarchal society of Japan. This is a significant moment, considering that members of the international feminist movement and emancipated women in general had historically been particularly attracted to the TS.

In the same letter, she credited James Cousins with bringing the spark of Theosophy to Japan, and establishing a transnational Theosophical space that was inspiring but sadly extinct by 1924.

In her letter from November 9, 1925 [Figure 8], Suzuki referred to the lodge's participation in the annual convention and in the planned Arts and Crafts exhibition. Unfortunately, she could never attend the conventions in person, but reported on the activities in writing.

The main contribution to the convention of 1925 was the painting sent to the exhibition, and later donated to the Blavatsky Museum and the library. The donor was a French TS member of Russian origin, Madame Irma de Manziarly née Luther (1878–1956), who visited Japan in 1923 and was familiar with Saint Hilaire and Mirra Alfassa/the Mother, with whom she stayed in Pondicherry (1921–1922). The painting, which is still currently housed in the museum in Adyar, depicts the iconographic motif of the Shaka triad (the Buddha Shakyamuni flanked with two Bodhisattvas, Manjushri and Samantabhadra). Suzuki claimed that it was an old and valuable copy of a well-known painting from the Enryakuji Temple on Mt. Hiei near Kyoto.

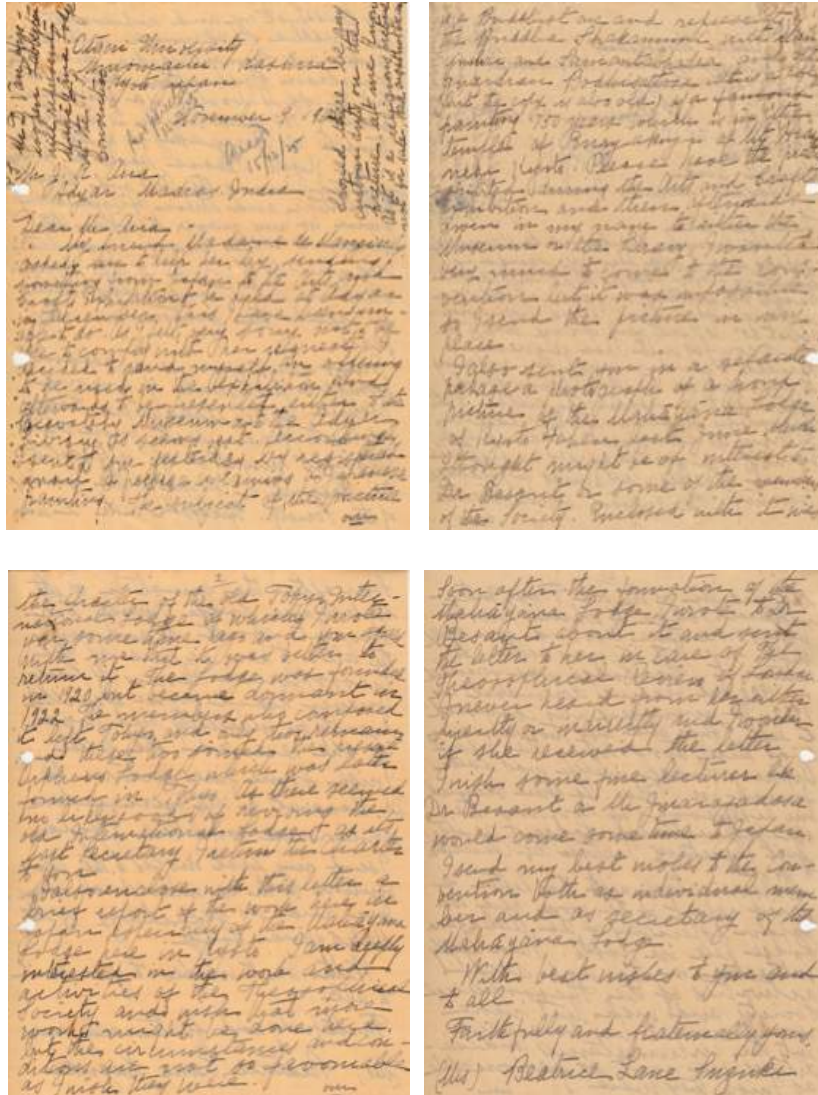


Figure 8. Letter from B. Lane Suzuki to HQ Adyar November 9, 1925. Courtesy of the TS Adyar Archive.

The charter of the Tokyo International Lodge (1920–1922) was returned. In sum, Suzuki confessed that she was most interested in the Theosophical work, but that the situation in Japan was not favourable. She was also involved in the Order of the Star in the East formed by Besant and C.W. Leadbeater (1854–1934) in 1911 to prepare the international community for the arrival of a great spiritual teacher, Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986). The Kyoto Lodge ceased its activity in 1929, the same year that Krishnamurti dissolved the Order of the Star in the East. In the same year, Utsuki and other professors resigned from Ryukoku University, owing to the opposition between the conservative authorities and the liberal group, whose members were almost identical to the members of the

Mahayana Association or the Mahayana Lodge. Thus, even if it had not been for the dissolution of the Order of the Star in the East, the Mahayana Lodge would have come to an end (Yoshinaga 2013, 62).



Figure 9. Photo Mahayana Lodge 1925 in June 1925, in D.T. Suzuki's home: left to right sitting, Prof. Utsuki, Prof. Morikawa, Mrs. Beatrice Suzuki, Mrs. Erskine Hahn, Mrs. Matheysen, Prof. Hadani, Prof. Uno, Prof. Izumi. Standing left to right: Prof. Kiba, Prof. Yamabe, Mr. Kotani, Prof. Suzuki, Mr. Matsui, Mr. Ikeda, Mr. Sabarwal, Mr. Matheysen. Insert: Prof. Nisoji. Courtesy of the TS Adyar Archive.

A TS Lodge for the Japanese—the Miroku Lodge in Tokyo

A parallel development to the two lodges in Tokyo and Kyoto was the initiative of the longstanding member Capt. B. Kon. In a letter from January 20, 1921, he stated clearly the reason why he did not want to be part of the current TS lodge life in Tokyo/Japan: namely, due to the language problem. He was not able to follow the discussions well, and he suggested that if and when there was a lodge for Japanese people, then he would join it. Otherwise, he preferred to be alone, but a member of the Adyar circle.

In 1922, Kon confirmed that the situation had still not changed, but that they were expecting a new impulse with the arrival of Miss Dorothy Arnold from

Shanghai, who later worked at the Yokohama Standard Oil Company. A connection with the Shanghai Lodge existed also through members who had moved from Tokyo to Shanghai, Maurice A. Browne and his wife (May 27, 1922). At that time, Kon testified that the secretary of the Tokyo International Lodge was Captain Jack Brinkley, who however had not been present in Japan for a long time, and that the most active member of the lodge was Madame Metaxa. Even then, Kon insisted that he was not involved and not a member of this Lodge.

Nonetheless, he remained in communication with the HQ in Adyar, reporting about the payments and his safety during the Great Kanto Earthquake of September 1, 1923. Although he was not involved in the TS meetings, he sporadically mentioned active members such as the other foreigner, Maria Marsoff, a Russian member of the Society. Miss Marsoff was an especially energetic member, a music teacher who remained involved in the Lodge after World War II.

Even in Kon's letter of February 15, 1928, the great issue that faced the Japanese TS remained unchanged. According to him it was twofold—a lack of good leaders-teachers and the persistent language problem. In the same year, Kon established the Miroku Lodge in Tokyo with Miss Eileen M. Casey. The Lodge became primarily focused on attracting Japanese members [Figure 10].

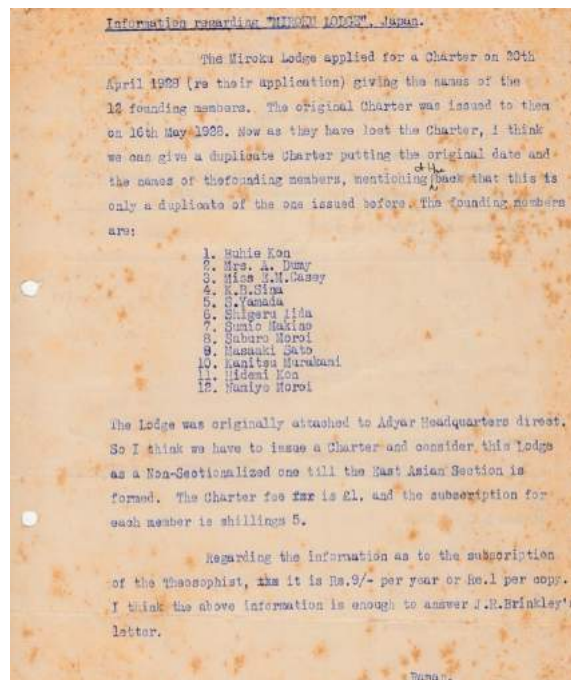


Figure 10. Information about the Miroku Lodge. Courtesy of the TS Adyar Archive.

Conclusion—Transwar Transformation

On August 13, 1936, Capt. Buhei Kon passed away, as reported in a letter from the Miroku Lodge; he was about 68 years old. His son Toko Kon (1898–1977) became associated with the TS in the postwar years. He was formerly a Communist writer, who later converted to Buddhism and became a Buddhist priest and publisher. The President of the TS, C. Jinarajadasa, visited Japan in 1937. He was welcomed by the secretary of the Miroku Lodge, Miss Eileen M. Casey, and gave two lectures in Tokyo. The report was published in *The Theosophist* in November 1950. The lectures were translated into Japanese by D.T. Suzuki. During the war, the secretarial role was transferred from Miss Casey to Dr. C. Rodriguez, according to the letters to the HQ Adyar in 1945.

In the postwar era, the TS work was restarted in Japan by writer and occult practitioner Sekizo/Kanzo Miura (1893–1960) and by Major Pieter Roest (1898–1968), a Dutch-American sociologist and Theosophist who was a member of General Douglas MacArthur's (1880–1964) staff. He played an important role in writing the Constitution of Japan and in arranging the first postwar elections. According to Thomas Baty in his letter from January 31, 1949, the Miroku/Maitreya Lodge existed in Tokyo during World War II. In a letter Baty wrote on August 3, 1949, from the Romanian Embassy summer villa in Nikko, he asked the HQ about the whereabouts of Miss Arnold. The information would be for the benefit of the TS in Japan, he claimed. He exchanged letters with Helen Zahara (1917–1973), the international secretary of the TS based in Adyar. The letters document that Baty was not involved in the new Theosophical work based around Capt. Brinkley. Miss Maria Marsoff remained an instrumental member in the postwar period [Figure 11]. She was enthusiastically involved in what proved to be a key activity in ensuring the success of the TS in Japan—translation.

The challenge of creating an enduring base for the Theosophical work was taken up by the postwar leaders of the TS in Japan: namely by a prolific writer, translator and spiritual healer, Sekizo/Kanzo Miura, and his daughter, the energetic Theosophist and translator Emiko Tanaka (1913–1995).



Figure 11. Japan, 1946?, photograph with Miss Maria Marsoff, Miss Emiko Tanaka, Mr. Takagi, and Mr. Nagano. Courtesy of the TS Adyar Archive.

Miura described his journey to Theosophy in his letter to the President of the TS, C. Jinarajadasa dated February 21, 1949. He informed the president about his 35 years long study of Theosophy, which began when the works of H. P. Blavatsky (1831–1891) stimulated his interest in spirituality. After this discovery, he published widely on “mysticism and culture,” and conducted lectures in Japan, Korea, Manchuria, and even in the US, in Point Loma. In 1935 he began a lecture series in Shanghai and eventually became the leader of the local international group called All Religions Fellowship Society. As the war on the Asian mainland intensified, Miura returned to Tokyo and restarted the TS meetings, including a Wesak/Vesak ceremony in 1945. Tokyo members included American soldiers, Indians, Chinese, and Russians. Lastly, he presented seven focuses of the future work for the Theosophical movement in Japan, with the core again being translation and publication activity. Thus, he asked for free rights to publish the TS publications in Japanese. After his return to Japan, Miura also established Ryuokai (Dragon King Society), a spiritual group that studied ideas by modern spiritual leaders such as the post-Theosophical thinkers Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) and Alice Bailey (1880–1949), as well as local Asian mysticism, including esoteric Buddhism. Under the leadership of Miura’s daughter Tanaka, a new TS Nippon Lodge was established in 1971, and has

coexisted with Ryuokai ever since. Subsequently, lodges in Osaka and Nagoya were established. The Osaka Lodge is still active. The list of translations kept on growing. Tanaka's colleague and fellow translator, American Theosophist Jeff Clark, led the Nippon Lodge for many years, and the group remains active today.

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