

BALKAN VIEW OF A JAPANESE SCIENTIST: TRAVELOGUE OF NAKANOME AKIRA

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Introduction

Akira Nakanome was born on May 23, 1874, as the second son of Yasutomi Nakanome, into a samurai family in Sendai. He graduated from the German Literature department of Tokyo University with a great success in 1899 (Ishida, 2000: 46). Nakanome, studied at the University of Vienna under the famous geographer A. Penck with a scholarship from the Japanese Ministry of Education in 1903 (Katayama, 2018: 239).

Nakanome had the chance to observe the situation and geography of the Balkan Countries during his Balkan trip in 1906, when he was 32 years old. He made his trip between 2 July 1906 and 22 September 1906 and recorded the events he experienced in his diary. In addition, the *Balkan Travel Additional Records* consist of articles published by Nakanome in Japan's Tohoku Newspaper, in which he wrote down his thoughts throughout his travels.

The Tour of Danube River

Nakanome's diary consists of three parts: Records of the Danube River Travel, Records of Russia and Records of Turkey. Nakanome started his Danube River voyage from Budapest and used the "Hildegard" ship up to Orşova, and the "Carl Rudolf" ship after Orşova. He states that the reason why he spent most of his trip on the Danube was that he had a great influence on his readings of German Literature and that he was influenced by the Song of the Nibelungs. "When I first



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came to this river in Vienna, I once thought, the idea occurred to me. I wanted to go down this river to its mouth and see it (Nakanome, 1916: 1-2)” It seems that he was attracted to the mystical charm of the Danube. These thoughts about the Danube are based on reading German literature. According to Nakanome, “Many of the people living on that coast do not know where the river starts and where it flows, but Danube controlled the rise and fall of many ethnic groups in ancient times, their history before the Middle Ages is unknown. There are many mystical aspects to the legends about the damage that occurred on that coast (Nakanome, 1916: 1).” He thinks that the fact that many civilizations were born and sank along the Danube River makes this river special. However, three weeks after Nakanome arrived in Vienna, the Russo-Japanese War broke out, so he had to postpone his planned Danube River trip for a while. After the Russo-Japanese War ended, he decided to travel despite the internal turmoil in Russia.

Nakanome was required to obtain approval from the embassies or consulates of the Balkan countries to travel. Nakanome writes at length on this subject. “In the civilized countries of Europe, there is almost no need for a passport, but in order to travel to countries such as the Balkans or Russia, one must go to the legation or consulate of that country to obtain proof of admission. This is what is called an inspection. But before that, we need give a paper called a route of travel. I thought a lot about this route. Because if you just write that I will take a short walk and see important places, it is difficulty to take (Nakanome, 1916: 2).” He states that developed countries do not cause any problems regarding passports, but the Balkan countries and Russia especially examine the travel route carefully. He received proof of admission in Vienna for his trip to Turkey and Romania, and decided to get this visa in Istanbul in case of going to Bulgaria.

Nakanome planned to take the morning train to Budapest on July 3rd of 1906, have dinner there and leave in the evening. However, his friend Sasaki Kichisaburo, in Budapest encouraged him to stay one night with him. Since he had almost finished the preparations, he left Vienna on 2nd of July. He decided to go to Budapest one day early upon the invitation of Sasaki. The person Nakanome mentioned was Sasaki Kichisaburo, who was appointed to teach the Japanese martial art judo in Budapest upon the request of Hungary (Miyagiken Kyōikukai, 1929: 263). After staying at Sasaki’s house for one night, Nakanome went to Budapest’s famous Rudas bath on July 3. “I took a bath in the Rudas bath, and behind it I rested at the monument to St. Gerard, killing time by reading a Roman dictionary. After that I crossed the river by boat and went to Drechsler hall. This morning, the three of us had promised to eat breakfast here (Nakanome, 1916: 4).” In addition to Sasaki, Asahi also attended the breakfast.

Nakanome states that he ate bandit roast at the restaurant in the evening and ordered this dish because it seemed for him interesting as he thought there are many bandits in the Balkans. He comments about this dish, "It tasted good, similar to the Caucasian dish shashlik (Nakanome, 1916: 5)." After the dinner, at 21:30, he boarded Hildegard and started her Danube River journey. When he gets on the ship, it seems that the feeling of loneliness gives way to curiosity. "The electric lights on both banks were reflected beautifully in the river water, and looking to the right, the moon appeared from among the clouds that had broken up over mountain block. It was summer, but the weather was just right for wearing a coat, and it reminded me of the mid-autumn moon (Nakanome, 1916: 6)." While the ship leaving the port of Budapest, he spent about an hour on the deck and slept.

The ship reached Mohács on July 4, 1906. Nakanome made the following comments about this place: "This area is famous for being inhabited by the Cumans, a tribe of Turkic-Tartars, who lived between the Danube and Tisza rivers. They have been here for over 600 years and have mixed with the Magyar people to some extent, but they still retain their Mongolian style. The boat stops at Mohács for an hour, and there is a coal mine nearby, so that this city little lively. But this place is more famous in history than anything else (Nakanome, 1916: 7)." He especially wrote about the Cumans and emphasized the Asiatic side of Hungary. Nakanome also mentions the Battle of Mohács due to its historical importance. "In 1526, a decisive battle took place here, in which the Austrian army was defeated and King Louis II (II. Lajos) was killed in battle. The Turkish army then advanced northward with great force, covering thousands of miles, and came to control most of Hungary until the end of the 17th century (Nakanome, 1916: 7)." He noted that the Ottoman Empire's victory at the Battle of Mohács remains a significant event in the collective memory of the Hungarian people. Even the impact of this event on the Hungarians; "Although this incident occurred 400 years ago, the memory of it still remains in the minds of the Hungarian people, and even today, when a mistake is made, the proverb "More was lost at Mohács" is used (Nakanome, 1916: 7)." He noted that it is also mentioned in Hungarian expressions. Regarding the geography of Mohács, he indicated that the area behind the city is mountainous, while the other side consists of extensive plains. He observed that from Budapest to Mohács, the right side of the river features long plains, which sometimes turn into marshes, making it very difficult for large armies to advance through this region.

Another point of Nakanome's journey is Bezdan. He documented that Bezdan is the confluence of the Danube and Tisza rivers, with trees along the riverbanks

submerged in water, a sight that reminded him of the landscape he encountered when leaving Singapore and entering the Malacca Strait. Nakanome noted that from this point onward, the mountains were no longer visible. In his diary, Nakanome mentioned that he did not particularly like the Hungarians and that he traveled with a sullen expression to avoid speaking with them. Upon reaching Erdut; “I saw a temple on top of the mountain. It was called Ilok and appears to have been there since the Roman period, and books say that items from that period are being excavated in the future (Nakanome, 1916: 9).” he noted the presence of a church dating back to the Roman era. Further along the river, he observed that the first railway bridge was constructed between Petrovaradin and Novi Sad.

After departing from Budapest, Nakanome noted several significant observations; “Leaving Budapest, one had the feeling that one was already in Asia or Africa inland, and this feeling was even stronger when one reached Karlovci, an official from the Zemun (Belgrade) police station came to the ship to inspect boarding tickets (Nakanome, 1916: 10).” He also remarked that the region reminded him of Asia or Africa. Furthermore, he was quite surprised by what he saw in Titel, located on the Tisza River. “Then, a third-class passenger at the bow of the boat, probably a descendant of the Hun, plays a Chinese tune on a wooden flute that looks like a “Fula”, you can hear (Richard) Wagner composition. There was something very Asian about this scene (Nakanome, 1916: 10-11).” he comments on Asian features of Hungary. Nakanome arrived at Zemun, the last port of Hungary, he had his passport inspected in the port of Zemun and passed the border. It was midnight when he arrived at Belgrade, Serbia.

On the morning of July 5, 1906, Nakanome woke up early to observe his surroundings and made several comments about Belgrade. “Last night, seeing the electric lights of the city from the ship, I thought that Belgrad was indeed the capital of a country, but when dawn broke, it looked like nothing more than a dirty provincial town, and at about four-thirty, gradually more and more guests began to arrive on the boat (Nakanome, 1916: 11).” It appears that Nakanome made overall negative comments about Belgrade.

In Nakanome’s diary, there are also historical details about the city. According to his entries; “The city of Belgrade was founded around 400 BC, when the Celtic people came from the northwest and invaded the Balkans. One of their tribes, the Scordisci, occupied what is now the northern part of Bosnia and Serbia, and, finding a fortified place where the Sava River meets the Danube, they made it their military base, built a fortress there, and named it Singidunum. However, this people were destroyed by the Roman Emperor Tiberius shortly after the birth of Christ, and for several hundred years afterwards, great waves of ethnic

migration swept across the land (Nakanome, 1916: 12).” He points out that the city was founded around 400 BC and it is a famous historical place. It draws attention to Belgrade’s geopolitical position as the meeting point of the Sava and Danube Rivers. Also, for the geographical features of Belgrade; “Below Belgrade, the right bank is the Serbian Mountains, but the left bank is flat land with nothing visible beyond the forest as usual. The river gradually grows larger and has a different atmosphere from the upstream areas of Vienna and Budapest, but flows slowly like a large river (Nakanome, 1916: 12).” He mentions that on the right side of the river, there are mountains, while on the left side, there are extensive plains.

When Nakanome arrived in Smederevo, he gives information about the ruins of the Roman Empire period. He commented about Smederevo as below; “A little after seven o’clock, looking downstream, you can see the imposing castle walls, and getting closer, you will see the village of Smederevo on the Serbian side. This was also a fortress in the Roman period, and in 1429 Branko Kicci built a large castle on the site (Nakanome, 1916: 12).” When Nakanome arrived; “There is an island called Ostrovo in the river. It is flat and lush with trees, and is the island of the protagonist in Hungarian novelist Mor Jokai book *The Golden Man* (Nakanome, 1916: 13).” He commented on the island of Ostrovo, referring to Jokai’s novel.

Nakanome also showed great interest to the Roma Empires old roads as Szechenyi road which Emperor Trajan made, located nearby Cazane Gorge. The ship arrives the port of Orşova which is the last port of Hungary. He needed to change the ship here. Nakanome felt, “When we disembarked at Orşova, the customs had changed again, and the Oriental style was more and more noticeable. There were many Turkish hats. It was very annoying to have to wait so long for passport inspection in the heat (Nakanome, 1916: 16).” being in Asia again when he disembarked at Orşova. And reset his clock as from there to on down it is Eastern Europe time.

Nakanome also showed great interest to the Iron Gate in which has been impassable for ships since ancient times because of the fast current and the rocks that jut out from the river. But at that time, he added that a canal was dug on the right bank to allow ships to pass through. Nakanome admits that, “This was a major construction project that was completed on September 27, 1896, and the emperors of the three countries of Austria, Romania and Serbia attended the opening ceremony. Today, steamships can pass from Passau in Germany to the Black Sea, making transportation very convenient (Nakanome, 1916: 18).” as three Balkan countries showed great importance to the project.

Nakanome commented only on important places he passed through, on the night of 5th of July he was on the Timok River, which is the border between Serbia and Bulgaria, and Calafat, which is famous for Crimean War. He also comments about Nikopol, "The towers of mosques can be seen here and there among mud huts and collapsing houses. In the afternoon, I arrived at a place called Ruse on the Bulgarian side, where it separates for a while from the Bulgaria (Nakanome, 1916: 20)." Nakanome emphasizes the Ottoman traces in the city.

Nakanome documented the cities along the Danube River and the historical events that occurred there during his journey. He also commented on the geographical features of the cities he passed through. Nakanome noted that downstream from Belgrade along the right bank of the river, there are many mountains where farming was predominantly practiced and lots of cattle. He also documented the cities and villages of Romania. "The towns and villages on the Romanian side is neat and somehow looks comfortable, but the villages in Serbia and Bulgaria are very shabby and do not seem in good condition (Nakanome, 1916: 22)." He compared the situations of the cities and villages of these three Balkan countries.

Nakanome has provided advice for travelers planning a journey along the Danube River. Based on his travel from Linz to Giurgiu, he offers insights into different segments of the river. According to his observations, the quality of passenger experience between Linz and Vienna is notably high, comparable to the cruise journey between Mainz and Cologne on the Rhine River. While the quality of passengers between Budapest and Belgrade may slightly decline, he notes no significant safety concerns. Further downstream from Orșova, however, passenger quality diminishes further. Additionally, Nakanome recommends Baja as an ideal starting point for river travel on the Danube. He highlights Baja's good train and ferry connections, emphasizing that the earlier stretch of the Danube lacks notable sights apart from long stretches of plains. Travelers boarding from Baja can disembark at Orșova or continue to Somovit for those heading towards Plevén. He also notes the possibility of visiting the Kazan Straits, which he considers a must-see during a European journey.

Nakanome also took interest in the traditional clothes worn in the Balkans. He notes that unlike Central Europe, traditions of this kind are observed along the Danube River beyond Budapest. According to his observations, Hungarian peasants and workers wear a traditional white garment thicker than a Chinese hakama but slightly narrower than a Japanese hakama (Nakanome, 1916: 24). He recalls seeing a different version, black and sleeveless, in a place called Guran, resembling the white sleeveless attire he saw in Moldova, which he likened to the traditional attire worn by Japanese during the "oyamamairi" ritual, a prayer for

a prosperous year (Nakanome, 1916: 24). In Moldova, these clothes are adorned with a black sash and worn with red leggings.

Nakanome also mentions that Bulgarians wear a traditional attire similar to Japan's "nobakama", characterized by three pleats and a narrow hem tailored for ease of movement, typically paired with a red sash and leather sandals (Nakanome, 1916: 24). According to Nakanome, such traditional garments can be observed in east of Hungary. He also notes in his journal that people in the region display diverse facial features, including some resembling Japanese or Chinese individuals.

Bucharest - Sofia

Nakanome laments the cumbersome nature of passport procedures throughout his travels, highlighting that Japan does not issue birth certificates or identity cards; "In individualistic Europe, there are no families, and individuals live, so everyone has things like a birth certificate or a certificate of identity (Nakanome, 1917: 1).", adding that individualistic Europe ensures that everyone possesses documents such as a birth certificate or a certificate of identity.

Nakanome touches upon the issue of strict passport controls in the Balkans in his article published in Japan's Tohoku newspaper on July 8, 1906. He was quite bored with passport controls until he reached Bucharest.

"When we arrived in Ruse (Rusçuk), all the passengers had their passports taken and were searched. Then I took a carriage from Romania to Russia, and were searched on the Romanian side once and also on the Russian side at the border. Then I boarded a boat at a town called Reni in Bessarabia, Russia (now Ukraine). I was searched there too. When I arrived in Odessa, nothing was there. But I filled a residence report and submitted it to the police again (Nakanome, 1917: 3)."

There are also some recommendations and warnings for Japanese who will travel to the Balkans. Nakanome states that it is easy to obtain a visa to countries such as Russia, where diplomatic relations are established with Japan. But regarding the Ottoman Empire and Romania; "Russia is fine, but I couldn't go directly from Japan to Turkey or Romania. Because these countries are not treaty countries of Japan and do not have diplomatic missions, so it is impossible to go to get passport certification in Japan. If you leave a capital like Vienna like me, you can easily get a passport because the envoys and consuls of those countries are there (Nakanome, 1917: 2)." Nakanome mentions that since the Ottoman Empire and Romania do not have diplomatic relations with Japan, it is difficult to obtain visas for these countries.

Nakanome arrived in Bucharest on July 6, 1906 by train from Giurgiu, the last stop of the Danube River journey, as part of his Balkan trip. Nakanome says that Vienna extends from western Europe to the east, and the Viennese always point to Mount Leitha, saying that the shadow of the mountain is already Asia, and that Vienna has a certain Asian atmosphere. Although he thought that the siege of Vienna by Asian Turks in 1683 had an impact on this, he concluded that the Asian culture had reached here before. According to Nakanome, “The tone of the popular songs is very Asian. Those who have heard Viennese folk songs sung to the playing of the czar will notice that the music is quite different in style from Western or Northern European music, and that there is a vaguely Eastern feel to it. The melody is slow and resentful, almost sad, and seems to predict the fate of the country (Nakanome, 1917: 19).” He found Asian emotions and tones even in Viennese music.

Nakanome compares Vienna and Budapest, “These Viennese and Southern Italian folk songs are quite similar to Japanese folk songs and are very tragic. Although the melody is the same, Vienna is still a Western capital, but when you come to Budapest, you will find even more Eastern elements” He emphasizes that there are more eastern elements in Budapest.

Nakanome notes that Romania, like other Balkan countries, gained its independence through the Treaty of Berlin. “This year marks 40 years since then. The country has made steady progress and has become something resembling a country, so this year they held a National Exhibition to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the founding of the country (Nakanome, 1917: 19-20)” Nakanome believes that hosting a fair to celebrate the country’s 40th anniversary will contribute to its progress. He observes that, while Balkan countries in Europe are generally perceived as underdeveloped, Romania has made significant progress compared to Serbia and Bulgaria, which have shown only minor development. Bucharest stands out in this regard. He also points out that, unlike other Balkan countries that use Arabic or Cyrillic scripts, Romania uses the Latin alphabet.

Nakanome likens Bucharest to Tokyo, citing its establishment on a flat plain, and the distinct architectural style of its houses, which differ from those in Berlin and Vienna. He notes the presence of manors and sometimes two-story villas, often surrounded by trees. Only in the dense parts of the city he has encountered three-story houses. Regarding the city’s architecture and general impression, he observes:

“There are some parts that seem somewhat like a capital. The architecture is also elegant, and the city is generally clean. In short, it is a neat little town. What is particularly impressive is how well the paving stones in the town are

well-arranged. The horse-drawn carriages are particularly impressive. Most are drawn by two horses, and these are cheaper than a single one in Vienna.” (Nakanome, 1917: 21)

Nakanome commends Bucharest for its urban development, architecture, and cleanliness. He observes that cafes in Bucharest carry newspapers from various countries, and that the city publishes two French and four German newspapers, which he believes facilitates ease of access to information for foreigners. Nakanome is intrigued by the fact that foreigners in Bucharest communicate primarily in German. Since his departure from Budapest, he has noticed that almost all conversations have been in German, even among Serbs and Bulgarians, who, despite their Slavic heritage, use German instead of Russian. He notes that while Romania initially looked to France for cultural influence, there has been a recent rise in German influence, making Bucharest particularly navigable for German speakers.

Nakanome also took some notes on his observations about Romanians. He thought that they seem to be aware that they are a small country and that they have a long way to go, so there are no people who are as arrogant as the Hungarians. According to Nakanome, unlike the Hungarians who act all high and mighty, the people of this country are very calm and well behaved. He doesn't think there is much difference in the level of civilization between Hungary and Romania, but while the Hungary people act like teachers to the Japanese, the Romanians tell the Japanese that their country is small and there is no way it can be like Japan, but they are not flattering themselves.

Nakanome also attended Romania's general exhibition. He notes that the fair, originally planned for April or May to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Romania's founding, was only able to take place in July. According to Shona, it was intended to demonstrate to the world the progress independent Romania had made under Carol's rule (Kallestrup, 2002: 147-162). It is clear that Romania's goal is to showcase its development to the world. Nakanome was critical of the fair. According to that; “Not only was the opening delayed, but there are many points that could be criticized if someone tried to criticize the outside world, but everyone is silent. In short, it is a new country, and it is like a child imitating an adult, so if it goes well, newspapers in each country will surely praise it highly, but it is natural that it will not go well, which is why the current organization is not saying anything about it. After all, Romania is still not of age (Nakanome, 1917: 24-25).” According to Nakanome, it is too early for Romania to organize such an organization. At the fair, which he stated was held in the south of the city, only, “However, the army alone is well-disciplined and, perhaps because

they are used to it, their exhibits are neatly arranged. It also looks like they are advertising the independence of weapons (Nakanome, 1917: 25)” he states that the army participated regularly. Besides, “Then there is a part of the agricultural hall on display. The domestic section is about this size, with Austria and Hungary added as guests. The Austrian section takes up quite a large space after the exhibition is complete. Across the hallway is the Hungary Hall, which, as usual, has something incomprehensible written on it, but it hasn’t opened yet (Nakanome, 1917: 25).” It is noted that Hungary and Austria were guests. According to Nakanome, for a fair to be successful, it must attract more foreigners. As the reason for this, “Generally speaking, exhibitions are not worthwhile because the expenses are greater than the income, but the reason they are being held in spite of this is because it advertises the progress of the country. Regardless of the cost, if many people can see the exhibits, then the purpose has been fully achieved (Nakanome, 1917: 26-27).” He thinks that the main purpose of fairs is to show the development of the country. In this respect, he suggested that it would be beneficial for Romania to abolish the passport control practice applied to foreigners in the Balkan countries.

Nakanome’s comments about Bulgaria, who also been to Sofia for a short time, are also interesting. According to Nakanome, everyone praises the Bulgarian capital of Sofia. Many people say that the development of Bulgaria is surprising, judging from the beauty of the city. I don’t think that the countryside has progressed as much as the city, but the city is certainly beautiful. He states that the rural area is not as developed as the city.

He observed that the natural beauty of Bulgaria reminded him of Aizu and Mogami, that it was similar to Japan because it was surrounded by mountains and forests on all sides, and that the mountains were getting higher along the Maritsa River. Nakanome adds “When I come here and see it, the idea of a small Russia naturally comes to mind. And it is not unreasonable (Nakanome, 1917: 49).” He calls it the miniature of Russia. He thought that in addition to the fact that Bulgarians were Slavs, the fact that the majority of the Bulgarian people understood Russian and that Bulgaria was geographically closer to Russia, unlike Serbia and Montenegro, had a great impact.

Nakanome’s comment on Sofia is, “Looking at the town of Sofia, the layout of the town is neatly laid out in a grid pattern. (...) There are high mountains nearby, and to the north you can see the Balkan Mountains in the distance (Nakanome, 1917: 49-50).” He thinks that creating a grid city plan contributes greatly to the appearance of the city. Although Nakanome praises the development of the city of Sofia, he concludes that the situation in Bulgaria’s rural villages and towns is deplorable.

Conclusion

Nakanome's observations provide valuable insights into the Balkans from a Japanese perspective of that time, experiences and the rich cultural traditions found in the region. Nakanome's diary contains historical details about the Balkans, providing a richer context for understanding the region's cultural and social dynamics. He provided detailed accounts of historical events he visited, focusing mainly on the relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Balkans.

Nakanome observed Asian elements in the Balkans, particularly noting that Vienna has an Asian atmosphere influenced by historical events and cultural exchanges. He found Asian emotions and tones in Viennese music, comparing Viennese and Southern Italian folk songs to Japanese folk songs for their tragic melodies and Eastern feel. He also noted that Budapest exhibited even more Eastern elements than Vienna. He also gives detailed descriptions of traditional attire in Hungary, Moldova, and Bulgaria reveal a fascinating blend of cultural influences. According to Nakanome, such traditional garments can be observed in the east of Hungary.

Nakanome also attended Romania's general exhibition and offered a critical perspective on its execution and impact. He noted that the fair as a whole fell short of effectively showcasing Romania's progress. He emphasized that for a fair to truly succeed, it must attract more international visitors, thus effectively promoting the country's development. He suggested that abolishing passport control practices for foreigners in the Balkan countries could enhance the success of such events.

Through his journal, Nakanome provided a Japanese perspective on the Balkans. He also provided Japanese readers with essential information on the geography, history, and socio-economic conditions of the Balkan Peninsula. Overall, Nakanome's insights emphasize historical context, and practical observations, offering a comprehensive Japanese perspective on the Balkans of that era.

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