

## About the Project

### Japanese Graves in the Hong Kong Cemetery

In 2020, the Hongkong Japanese Club's Cemetery Preservation Committee, which was established in 2000, initiated a project to document selected graves in the Hong Kong Cemetery. Eight individual graves and one major monument dedicated to the victims of the 1918 Happy Valley Racecourse fire were selected. Through these stories, the project aims to shed light on the early Japanese community in Hong Kong.

Bilingual readers will notice a difference between the Japanese and English versions of the texts. This is to reflect slightly diverging approaches in the use of references and other primary materials, as well as a need to provide explanations of various practices and social structures with which non-Japanese readers may not be familiar.

Hongkong Japanese Club Cemetery Preservation Committee:

IWAMI Takeo (Chair)  
EBIHARA Tsuyoshi  
KAWAI Kosaku  
KIDO Takafumi  
MIZUKAMI Shunichiro  
NAKANO Yoshiko  
SUGIMURA Tomoko  
TODA Jun  
YAGYU Masakazu

Project Leader: NAKANO Yoshiko (The University of Hong Kong)  
English Writer: Georgina CHALLEN  
Japanese Writer: SUGIMURA Tomoko (The Hongkong Japanese Club)  
Photographer: KUME Miyuki

Acknowledgements:

Consulate-General of Japan in Hong Kong  
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Government Records Service, Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region  
The Births and Deaths General Register Office

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## Japanese Graves in the Hong Kong Cemetery, 1878-1918

The Hong Kong Cemetery, which was originally known as the Protestant Cemetery and then the Colonial Cemetery, was officially opened in 1845. It currently contains over 7,000 recorded graves, of which approximately 470 belong to members of, or are somehow connected to Hong Kong's Japanese community. However, the number of interments in the Cemetery is likely to have been much higher; some gravestones were lost through neglect or theft, and many graves were relocated to make way for the Aberdeen Tunnel in 1976. The Japanese initially had no burial ground of their own, and early Japanese graves can, therefore, be found scattered among those of the deceased Protestants for whom the Cemetery was established. It was not until 1910 that the British colonial

government explicitly set aside sections for Christians and non-Christians within the Cemetery, thereby paving the way for the Japanese community to create a dedicated area for its graves.

Around 80% of the Japanese graves are those of civilians who died during the Meiji era (1868-1912), a remarkable period of modernisation and opening up of Japan that saw thousands of its people travel to other parts of the world and establish themselves there, including in Hong Kong. From just 13 residents recorded in 1875, the community had grown to over 1,000 by 1911. Many of the graves belong to merchants, Japanese company representatives and their family members, or sailors and students who succumbed to illness on their way to or from Japan. The oldest identifiable Japanese tomb in the Cemetery is that of a 22-year-old second lieutenant returning home after military training in France in 1878.

	<b>Years</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Unknown</b>	<b>Estimated Total</b>
<b>Meiji Era</b>	1868-1912	174	121	88	383
<b>Post-Meiji era</b>	1913-	34	30	23	87
<b>Estimated Total</b>		208	151	111	470

Women made up a large percentage of the Japanese population in Hong Kong in the late nineteenth-century. Many of them were prostitutes from the southern island of Kyushu, who came to be known as *karayuki-san*. The term *karayuki-san*, literally “person travelling overseas,” initially applied to both male and female migrant workers; only later was it used to exclusively reference female sex workers. One of the most noteworthy graves in the Japanese section of the Cemetery belongs to a *karayuki-san* who died in 1884. Her comparatively prominent headstone includes the names of the 62 women who erected it, but there are many more whose graves are marked by a simple stone that bears a plot number rather than a name.

The Hong Kong Cemetery lies just across the road from the Happy Valley Racecourse, which, on February 26, 1918, was the scene of what remains one of Hong Kong’s worst human-made disasters. Over 600 people, including 22 members of the Japanese community, lost their lives in a devastating fire that ripped through temporary structures that had been built to accommodate spectators for one of the most important dates on the racing calendar. Several of the Japanese graves belong to victims of the conflagration. On February 26, 1919, the Japanese Benevolent Society unveiled a grand monument dedicated to all those who perished in the fire, with a calligraphic inscription by ŌTANI Kōzui, the 22nd Abbot of the Nishi Hongwanji, a major school of Japanese Buddhism. Initially situated next to the Japanese Crematorium in So Kon Po, the Memorial to Ten Thousand Souls was moved to its present location in the Japanese section of the Hong Kong Cemetery in 1982.

The colony’s sanitary conditions in the late nineteenth century were poor and disease was rife. Malaria, cholera and smallpox were all endemic, and “fever” was a major cause of death. Hong Kong had its first major outbreak of plague in 1894 and the disease would remain an issue for the next twenty-five years. The city’s hygiene gradually improved at the beginning of the twentieth century, however, and it became more common for Japanese expatriates to be accompanied by their families and raise their children in Hong Kong. This all came to a halt with the Japanese invasion of Hong Kong in December 1941 and Japan’s subsequent occupation of the colony. Upon Britain’s resumption of authority over Hong Kong in August 1945, any Japanese citizens remaining in the territory were ordered to leave. They would not start returning until the early 1950s; the Japanese Consulate reopened its doors in 1952 and the Bank of Tokyo established its Hong Kong Branch in 1953.

The Japanese section of the Hong Kong Cemetery does not contain the remains of any Japanese soldiers killed during the Second World War. With no family member to care for them, the graves were left unattended for over thirty years after the War, and only one headstone for three members

of the same family has been added since 1946. In 1982, at the request of the Hong Kong government, the Hongkong Japanese Club undertook the necessary arrangements to move the Memorial to Ten Thousand Souls from So Kon Po to the Hong Kong Cemetery. This marked the beginning of the Club's efforts to preserve the Japanese graves, and, in 1992 and 2000, with the support of the Japanese Foreign Ministry, it was able to secure the resources needed to carry out extensive restoration work.

The Club eventually established a Preservation Committee and has since 2000 conducted an annual ceremony to remember these early members of the Japanese community. In August 2002, a respected Kabuki actor travelled to Hong Kong for two performances at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre. He and his wife suggested planting trees in locations important to the Japanese community, including the Cemetery. Of the original fourteen cherry blossom trees of the *Kawazu-zakura* variety that were planted on February 14, 2004, eight remain. This planting of ornamental trees was very much in line with the colonial government's original intentions for the Cemetery, which was envisaged as both a memorial garden and a public park, in keeping with the design of European cemeteries like the Père Lachaise in Paris.

These early graves and the stories of those who are buried in them provide us with invaluable insight into what daily life would have been like for members of the Japanese community in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Hong Kong. They allow us to rediscover events and people that might otherwise be forgotten, and offer a very personal connection to the past of this vibrant and multicultural city.



The Club conducts an annual commemorative ceremony in the Japanese section of the Cemetery.  
Photo by The Hongkong Japanese Club

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## 1. YUKAWA Onsaku died 5 August 1878, aged 22

Grave #4372 Section 27 / Row 2 / Number 14

The oldest identifiable Japanese grave in the Hong Kong Cemetery is that of YUKAWA Onsaku. Born in the Chōshū domain (now part of Yamaguchi prefecture) in the mid-1850s, Yukawa was awarded a scholarship to travel to France for military training in 1872. Yukawa was on his way back to Japan via Hong Kong when he succumbed to a brain infection on August 5, 1878, aged 22.

The Meiji era (1868-1912) marked the beginning of a period of great change and opening up of the country. Japan established relationships with several European powers with the aim of modernising the Imperial Japanese Army. Examples of these contacts include the IWAKURA Tomomi Mission to the U.S. and Europe (1871-1873) and the second French military mission to Japan (1872-1880).

Records show that in the autumn of 1872 there was a total of 58 Japanese students in France, including eight from the Chōshū domain. There is evidence that Yukawa received some French language training prior to his departure. He and several fellow students sailed from the port of Yokohama on November 12, 1872, aboard the Messageries Maritimes steamship *Phase* bound for Hong Kong. He arrived in the city on November 18 and transferred to the *Provence* for the remaining portion of the voyage, finally landing in Marseille, France, on December 16, 1872.

Yukawa spent close to six years in France, attending a number of French academic institutions before entering the prestigious *École Polytechnique* in Paris in 1877. Unfortunately, he fell ill and was unable to complete his first year, deciding instead to return to Japan. He and two companions, HIRO Toraichi and OSAKA Chihiro, left Marseille for Yokohama on the *Djemnah* on June 30, 1878. The Messageries Maritimes ship made a scheduled stopover in Hong Kong on August 4 and Yukawa passed away just a day later.

Yukawa's grave lies outside of the main Japanese section of the Hong Kong Cemetery, which was officially established in 1845. The tombstone includes a tall rectangular pillar (in this case an obelisk) and bears inscriptions in Chinese characters (kanji). This is in line with traditional Japanese Buddhist burial practices. Unusually, however, the lower part of the tombstone bears an epigraph in French. Yukawa's rank is listed as that of second lieutenant, an honour awarded posthumously. His interment was arranged by Hong Kong's newly established Japanese Consulate, which opened its doors on April 20, 1873, and was attended by a consular official, TERADA Ichirō.

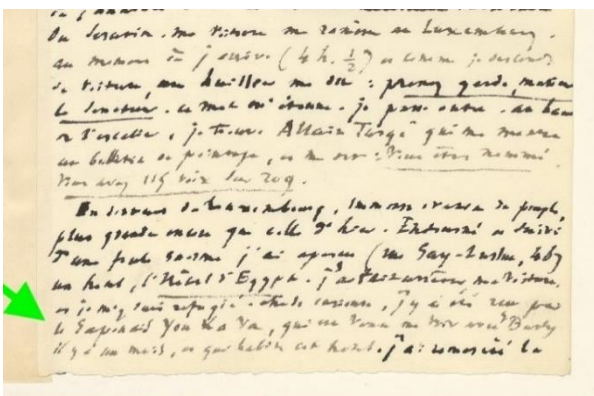
A Japanese scholar has posited that Yukawa met the acclaimed French politician and author Victor Hugo during his time in Paris. They may have been introduced by the art critic Phillippe Burty. Hugo and Burty were well acquainted and shared an interest in Japanese art, which had become popular in France following the 1867 Exposition Universelle in Paris. Burty was a keen collector of *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints and is credited with coining the term "Japonisme." An entry in Hugo's diary, dated January 30, 1876, reads, "A Japanese man, You Ka Va, welcomed me in. Burty brought him to see me a month ago, and he lives in the hotel." It is believed that Hugo, seeking relief from the crowds following his election to the Senate of the Third Republic, found refuge at l'Hôtel d'Égypte, 46 Rue Gay-Lussac, where Yukawa was staying, and encountered him there.

### The Meiji Era and the Opening of Japan



The Meiji era (1868-1912) marked the beginning of a remarkable period of modernisation and opening up of Japan. During the rule of the Tokugawa Shogunate (1600-1868), Japan's ports were closed to all but a few, predominantly Dutch and Chinese, traders, and the country lagged behind the West in its knowledge of science and technology. The tentacles of European and American imperialism eventually reached Japan on July 8, 1853, when Commodore Matthew Perry of the U.S. Navy sailed into the harbour of present-day Tokyo with a squadron of warships and a letter from the U.S. President that demanded the opening of Japan's ports. This incursion led to the Convention of Kanagawa in 1854, and the eventual downfall of the Tokugawa Shogunate and establishment of the Meiji government in 1868.

The Meiji government launched a series of initiatives aimed at bridging the country's technological gap with the West and safeguarding its political autonomy. These included abolishing feudal domains, setting up a modern political system, and reforming its institutions. It hired over 2,000 foreign engineers and teachers and led several overseas missions to more technologically advanced countries, including Britain, the U.S, and France. Japanese students were sent overseas between 1871 and 1873 to various training academies. The Ministry of Education was established in 1871 and the education system reformed to develop human capital. Nine Imperial Universities were created in 1886, in addition to Keio University (founded in 1858) and Hitotsubashi University (founded in 1875). Both Keio and Hitotsubashi were instrumental in providing the necessary training in economics, accounting and management required for the country's new breed of entrepreneurs.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des Manuscrits. NAF 13480

The entry in Victor Hugo's diary, dated January 30, 1876, which details his encounter with "You Ka Va." Original held by the Bibliothèque nationale de France.



Yukawa's grave, with inscriptions in Japanese and French.

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*Hong Kong Daily Press*, August 5, 1878.

## 2. HONDA Masajirō died 2 November 1880, aged 35

Grave #Nil Section 31 / Row 4 / Number 5

Under the leadership of IWASAKI Yatarō, the Mitsubishi Mail Steamship Company launched Japan’s first regular service overseas with a weekly operation between Yokohama and Shanghai in January 1875. The 1,096-ton Niigata-maru was one of four ships serving the route and was captained by an Englishman, Wilson WALKER (1845-1914). Both Walker and the Niigata-maru would later be involved in efforts to establish a regular service between Yokohama and Hong Kong, making the first run on October 4, 1879.

The Niigata-maru arrived in Hong Kong on October 12, 1879, amid considerable fanfare. There to welcome the inaugural sailing from Yokohama were HONDA Masajirō, Mitsubishi’s Hong Kong Office General Manager, and another company officer, MURAKAMI Hideshi. Eager to promote its business in the face of intense competition from British companies, such as the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P&O), Mitsubishi organised an onboard luncheon—or tiffin—on the service’s third run.

The November 13, 1879, issue of *The China Mail* carried a full report of the occasion. Over 60 guests, including the Governor of Hong Kong, Sir John Pope Hennessy, were ferried out to the Niigata-maru, where they were greeted by Honda and another Mitsubishi agent, Henry John Howard Tripp. A portion of the 27th Inniskillings Regimental Band played throughout the

luncheon, in a nod to the Governor's Irish roots. Following a toast to "The Queen," Pope Hennessy, who was recently returned from a three-month visit to Japan, proposed a toast to "H.M. the Mikado of Japan," adding that he believed that this was the first time the health of the Mikado had been proposed in Hong Kong. Glasses were then raised to "The Army and Navy," "The Bar," "The Merchants of Hongkong," and "The Managers and Directors of the Company, and Success to the Company." Honda made the only Japanese-language contribution, "Gentlemen, *macotoni arigato*" (I am really obliged to you).

Among the guests were several with strong ties to Japan. Commander Archibald Lucius Douglas had spent almost three years in Japan from 1873 to 1875 as part of the Meiji government's mission to modernise the Japanese navy, during which time he had assumed direction of the Imperial Naval College in Tokyo. The Consul General for Portugal, José da Silva Loureiro, had previously served as the Portuguese Consul in Nagasaki. Other dignitaries included the Consul of the United States, John Singleton Mosby, a former Confederate officer better known by his nickname "Gray Ghost," the Superintendent of Victoria Goal, Malcolm Struan Tonnochy, and Phineas Ryrie, who would become the first Chairman of the Hong Kong Jockey Club in 1884.

The Japanese Consulate co-hosted the event and Consul ANDŌ Tarō reported on its success to Japan's Foreign Minister, INOUE Kaoru. Andō had facilitated Pope Hennessy's 1879 visit to Japan and ensured that he had received a warm welcome there. He and his wife were passengers on the Mitsubishi Mail Steamship Company's first service between Yokohama and Hong Kong, disembarking in the city on October 12. In his speech at the tiffin, the Consul expressed his hope that the new line would lead to the growth of mutual trade between Hong Kong and Japan, and expansion of the service to other ports, such as Osaka.

Honda was living alone in the territory, and his situation was of such concern to Consul Andō that the latter wrote to IWASAKI Yanosuke, Mitsubishi's vice president and Yatarō's younger brother, to suggest that Honda's family be permitted to join him in Hong Kong. Unfortunately, Honda passed away from consumption on November 2, 1880, just over a year after the arrival of the first Japanese steamship. Though his gravestone gives his month of death as December, an entry in the November 4 issue of the *Hong Kong Daily Press* confirms that this should be November 2; the reason for this discrepancy is unclear. Honda's death was followed six months later by that of his Hong Kong branch office colleague, Murakami, who passed away from remittent fever on June 2, 1881, at the age of 21 and 8 months. Their graves lie next to each other in the Hong Kong Cemetery.

### **IWASAKI Yatarō (1835-1885) and the Founding of Mitsubishi**

IWASAKI Yatarō was born in the Tosa domain (renamed Kōchi prefecture) in 1835. Yatarō first developed his entrepreneurial ideas and skills under the tutelage of YOSHIDA Tōyō, a Tosa official in charge of trade and industry who advocated an outward-looking approach to learning and business. In 1866, Yatarō was appointed to the Tosa domain's Kaiseikan (Industry Promotion Agency) where he concentrated on trade and shipping. In 1870, part of the Agency was set up as a separate firm, Tsukumo Shōkai (Tsukumo Trading Firm), before finally becoming independent from the domain in 1872 and adopting the name of Mitsukawa (three rivers) Shōkai.

In 1873, under Yatarō's leadership and with the support of the new Meiji government, the company was renamed Mitsubishi Shōkai and adopted its now distinctive three-diamond crest, which is a blend of the Tosa and Iwasaki emblems. Shipping was its largest enterprise in the early 1870s, though it was also active in other areas, such as mining. The Mitsubishi Steamship Company (Mitsubishi Jōkisen Kaisha) was established in 1874, and renamed Mitsubishi Mail Steamship Company (Yūbin Kisen Mitsubishi) in 1875, before merging with Kyōdō Unyu Kaisha to form NYK Line (Nippon Yūsen Kaisha) in 1885.

Iwasaki Yatarō's foresight in recruiting skilled managers to oversee various aspects of his business is widely cited as one of the main reasons for his company's early success. Convinced of the need for qualified workers capable of operating in this new business environment, he established his own business school, the Mitsubishi School of Commerce, in 1878. Though short-lived—the school was forced to shut its doors after six years as its financial resources were needed elsewhere—it trained dozens of students in English, mathematics, economics, and geography. Yatarō's younger brother, Yanosuke, spent two years studying in the U.S. in 1872–1873. Upon his return to Japan, he became the leader of a “modern” group within the company. The group included university graduates and other highly educated members who quickly rose through the ranks to take up branch manager positions or head new company divisions.

Iwasaki Yatarō died in 1885 and was succeeded to the leadership of the company by his younger brother Iwasaki Yanosuke (1851-1908). After the Second World War, the original Mitsubishi organisation was disbanded to form independent companies.



Iwasaki Yatarō and Mitsubishi Executives, circa 1877. Honda is in the back row, second from the left. Photo courtesy of the Mitsubishi Economic Research Institute.



Honda Masajirō was the Mitsubishi Mail Steamship Company's first Hong Kong Office General Manager.

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*The China Mail*, October 12, 1879.

*The China Mail*, November 13, 1879.

*Hong Kong Daily Press*, November 4, 1880.

Births and Deaths General Register Office, Immigration Department, Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

### **3. KIYA Saki died 8 June 1884, aged 30**

**Grave #4713 Section 31 / Row 4 / Number 24**

One of the most noteworthy graves in the Japanese section of the Hong Kong Cemetery belongs to a 30-year-old woman from Nagasaki named KIYA Saki, who died on June 8, 1884. The base of the obelisk-shaped headstone bears the names of 62 women in the *katakana* syllabary rather than the usual *kanji* (Chinese characters). Knowledge of the make-up of the Japanese population in Hong Kong at that time points to this being the grave of a prostitute, a *karayuki-san*. The headstone refers to KIYA as a "commoner," an indication that she was not from the *samurai* class. While the Meiji government had been quick to abolish the four divisions of society—*samurai*, farmers, artisans, and merchants—to facilitate social mobility, these class distinctions persisted. Kiya's is the oldest known grave of a woman in the Japanese section of the Cemetery and this may be the reason why the character for "woman" was, somewhat unusually, included on the obelisk. Her tomb stands tall, a clear statement that its occupant is deserving of respect. An inscription in English at the foot of the monument indicates that it was erected by her friends, and must refer to the women whose names are inscribed on her gravestone.

A report in *The China Mail* dated June 10, 1884, speaks of the recovery of the body of a Japanese woman, aged about 22 years, from the waters near the "East of Tsim Tsa Tsui Wharf" the previous day. The woman was fully dressed except for her shoes, which were found later, and was wearing a loose jacket into which two heavy stones had been tied. Upon further enquiries by the police, it was determined that the deceased was named Osaki and an "inmate of an immoral house" at 27 Graham Street in Central. The brothel-keeper advised that Osaki had received a letter from her family a few weeks prior informing her that her father was ill and asking her to return to Japan. Not having the

means to do so, a second letter followed a little later with the news that her father had died. At seven o'clock on June 8, 1884, a Sunday, Osaki left the house, never to return. An inquest was opened, but with no further details available, the jury returned a verdict of "found drowned."

Women made up a large percentage of the Japanese population in Hong Kong in the late nineteenth-century. Many of them were prostitutes from the southern island of Kyushu, who came to be known as *karayuki-san*. Japanese consular records for 1886 put the number of Japanese residents in Hong Kong at approximately 150, with close to 100 women. Some of the women are listed as family members of Japanese men posted to the territory or as domestic helpers; there is also a *shamisen* player and a hairdresser. Nearly three quarters are described as working in *kashi-zashiki* (rental rooms), a euphemism for prostitution, and "cafés," or as concubines of Western men. Several of the women whose names appear on Kiya's grave are included in this list, with a few recorded as being from Nagasaki and domiciled at 27 Graham Street. This along with the name—"O" is a prefix frequently used in Japanese—and date of death, leaves us in little doubt that Kiya Saki is the woman whose tragic end is recounted in *The China Mail* article.

The colonial government's push to develop Hong Kong into a major trading port meant that the city was home to a growing number of predominantly male, transient workers, both Chinese and foreign. This population of soldiers, sailors, merchants, manual labourers, construction workers, and domestic servants created a demand for female sex workers, mostly from China, but also from other nations, including Japan. The Meiji government's opening up of the country and greatly enhanced maritime transportation links facilitated the traffic of Japanese women to Hong Kong, China, as well as other parts of the British Empire in Southeast Asia, including Singapore and Malaya.

Many of the early Japanese sex workers in Hong Kong were uneducated young girls from the rural parts of Kyushu, more specifically from the Amakusa Islands (Kumamoto prefecture), and Shimabara Peninsula near Nagasaki. In addition to the area's paucity of natural resources, inhabitants faced further hardship due to their embrace of Christianity during the Tokugawa Shogunate (1600-1868). Their unsuccessful revolt against high taxation known as the Shimabara-Amakusa Rebellion in 1637-1638 forced their beliefs underground and caused them to be subject to unfavourable policies and discrimination that added to their already desperate circumstances.

The installation of the Meiji government in 1868, lifting of the ban on Christian worship and the surveillance that it had engendered, and further opening of the port of Nagasaki, particularly for the export of coal, encouraged many in Amakusa and Shimabara to leave and find work overseas. The term *karayuki-san*, literally "person travelling overseas," initially applied to both male and female migrant workers; only later was it used to exclusively reference female sex workers. Whilst it has been argued that some women and girls left with the full knowledge of the nature of their work in Hong Kong, the vast majority, at least in the late nineteenth-century, were most likely tricked into believing that they would be employed as servants or shop assistants, abducted, or sold by their families to brokers.

Hong Kong's nineteenth-century colonial government was predominantly concerned with regulating the Chinese sex industry, as a further means of policing the territory's Chinese population, and with limiting the spread of venereal disease within the non-Chinese community. In 1857, it introduced an "Ordinance for checking the spread of venereal diseases," which required

brothels to be registered and, initially all, but later only prostitutes catering to non-Chinese customers to be subjected to a weekly examination by a Western doctor. This classification of establishments along racial lines into those catering to Chinese customers and those catering to non-Chinese customers would endure until the 1930s. Japanese brothels seem to have been comparatively less policed, with the colonial government paying lip service only to pleas from Japanese consular officials to regulate Hong Kong's *karayuki-san*.

In 1885, Hong Kong had eight licensed Japanese brothels with 52 prostitutes, and undoubtedly several unlicensed operations. Japanese prostitutes provided sexual services to mainly working-class residents of various nationalities, and visiting sailors and merchants. Most licensed Japanese brothels in the 1880s were located in Central, in the areas around Stanley Street, Hollywood Road, Graham Street, and Cochrane Street. The *karayuki-san* were part of an underground economy that benefitted not only the procurers who had arranged their passage from Japan, but also corrupt harbour officials, seamen, and other petty officials involved in their traffic. Furthermore, a whole local industry of small retailers, food stall owners, shopkeepers, tailors, kimono sellers, and hairdressers grew up around them and relied on their and their brothel's custom to prosper.

When a *karayuki-san* was sold to a brothel, she was expected to take on the price paid for her by the brothel-keeper as a "debt," which had to be paid off. Most of her earnings, therefore, went towards covering this "debt," as well as any other daily expenses she incurred, such as food and lodging. This effectively left many *karayuki-san* bound to their brothels for years, and once they had made remittances to their families in Japan, there was little left for their own future security. While some *karayuki-san* did eventually return to their hometowns, enjoy relatively more comfortable lives as concubines, or become brothel-keepers themselves, a significant number ended up sick and destitute, and died without ever seeing Japan again. Of the approximately 470 graves in the Japanese section of the Cemetery, over two hundred are identified by a plot number rather than a name. Among them may well be the resting places of *karayuki-san* who, like Kiya Saki, never left Hong Kong.



The character for "woman" is clearly visible on Kiya Saki's obelisk



The names of the 62 friends who erected Kiya Saki's tombstone.

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*The China Mail*, June 10, 1884.

*The China Mail*, June 13, 1884.

#### **4. FUKUHARA Kayo died 28 May 1892, aged 5 months**

**Grave #5434 Section 28 / Row 6 / Number 2**

The Mitsui Bussan Kaisha (Trading Co.)\* was officially established in Tokyo, Japan, in July 1876. Taking advantage of the Meiji government's new policy of openness and industrialisation, the company quickly expanded overseas, first to Shanghai and Paris, followed soon after by Hong Kong, New York and London. The Mitsui Bussan Kaisha (Sam Ching) Hong Kong office opened in August 1878 and operated until 1882, departing the territory briefly before returning in 1886 to trade in coal from the government-operated Miike mine in Kyushu.

Japan's Finance Minister, ŌKUMA Shigenobu, had been keen for Japan's first national bank, Daiichi Kokuritsu Ginkō, to have a presence in Hong Kong through the agency of Mitsui Bussan, as part of the country's efforts to modernise its fiscal system. These efforts included setting up the Japanese Imperial Mint in Osaka in 1871, with the *yen* as the country's first standard currency, and



lobbying to have the silver *yen* recognised as legal tender in Hong Kong.

The coinage circulating in Hong Kong during the mid- to late-nineteenth century included the Carolus or Spanish dollar, the Mexican dollar, Indian rupees, English sovereigns, and Chinese coins, with the Mexican dollar widely used for trade. The Hong Kong Mint was established in 1866 in an attempt to limit the number of currencies and proliferation of counterfeit coins in the territory, but was ultimately deemed a failure and ceased all operations just two years later. Japan saw the demise of the Hong Kong Mint as an opportunity, and purchased its machinery, as well as the expertise of its engineers and architects, to set up its own facility in Osaka.

The Hong Kong Governor Sir John Pope Hennessy visited the Osaka mint during his three-month trip to Japan in 1879. Though the visit seems to have been made at his own initiative, Pope Hennessy was welcomed by a Japanese government eager to renegotiate the unequal treaties that were a legacy of the Tokugawa period and advocate for the acceptance of the Japanese *yen* as legal tender in Hong Kong. Despite Pope Hennessy's support and intense lobbying by Chinese trading houses, the Lords of the Treasury in London decided against recognition of the *yen* in June 1881.

FUKUHARA Kayo's father, FUKUHARA Eitarō, landed in Hong Kong in February 1886 to head Mitsui Bussan's office in the territory, which, at the time, was a subdivision of the company's Shanghai operation. A graduate of Keio Gijuku (College, later Keio University), Fukuhara joined Mitsui Bussan in 1880 and was part of a new group of young executives with English-language and accounting skills that the company sent on overseas postings to further develop their talents. A quick learner, the Hong Kong sub-branch prospered under his leadership and sold coal and coke, a coal by-product, to customers such as the French steamship line, Messageries Maritimes, and the Hong Kong enterprise, Green Island Cement Company. He also extended the range of import items to Japanese-spun cotton yarn and rice, and expanded the firm's trade in matches.

In recognition of his success, Fukuhara was promoted to General Manager of the now standalone Hong Kong branch on April 30, 1892. He and his wife Ei had welcomed a baby daughter, Kayo, at their home in Lower Mosque Terrace on January 5, 1892. Though Kayo was a common name at the time, the combination of characters used—"香世"—was not. "香" is the first character in the Chinese name for Hong Kong "香港," and "世" means "world." While we can only speculate on the reasons for giving their daughter a name so connected with their situation, their choice is all the more poignant in that Kayo only lived for five months, sadly passing away on May 28, 1892. The Fukuhara family would leave Hong Kong, and Kayo's grave in the Happy Valley Cemetery, the following year. After postings in London, Osaka and Tokyo, Fukuhara was seconded to an affiliate of Mitsui Bussan, Onoda Cement, where he served as president from 1906 to 1916.

It would have been rather unusual for a Japanese executive to have his family with him in Hong Kong in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Records show that there may have been just 13 Japanese in Hong Kong in 1875, with that number increasing to 86 in 1880, and 243 in 1889. The colony's sanitary conditions were poor and disease was rife. Malaria, cholera and smallpox were all endemic, though a vaccine for smallpox was introduced in 1888. Hong Kong had its first major outbreak of plague in 1894 and it is estimated that over 2,500 people died. It is during this epidemic that both the Japanese bacteriologist, KITASATO Shibasaburō, and French-Swiss bacteriologist Alexandre YERSIN visited the territory and discovered the plague bacillus. The city's hygiene gradually improved at the beginning of the twentieth century, and it became more common for Japanese expatriates to be accompanied by their families and raise their children in Hong Kong.

\* Legally speaking, there has been no continuation between the former Mitsui & Co. and the current Mitsui & Co.



The Hong Kong Governor, Sir John Pope Hennessy, during his visit to Japan in 1879 (back row, third from right). Japan's Finance Minister, Ōkuma Shigenobu, is to Pope Hennessy's right, and Andō Tarō, Japan's Consul in Hong Kong, is second from left. Photo originally published in *Okuma-haku 100wa* [*One Hundred Tales*] in 1909.



Kayo was just five months old when she passed away from convulsions.

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Births and Deaths General Register Office, Immigration Department, Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

## **5. HIROTA Kōkichi died 30 July 1900, aged 29**

**Grave #6277 Section 6 / Row 3 / Number 12**

The Yokohama Specie Bank (YSB) opened its Hong Kong office on September 22, 1896, with the aim of advancing Japan's adoption of the gold standard. Amongst its first employees was HIROTA Kōkichi, a native of Ishikawa prefecture. Hirota initially worked as a clerk under NABEKURA Nao, before being promoted to sub-agent, or deputy general manager. He passed away on July 30, 1900, at the age of 29. Another young YSB employee, NAKASONO Shūgo, who died of the plague at the Government Civil Hospital on June 18, 1906, at the age of 27, is buried nearby.

The Meiji era's (1868-1912) modernisation drive included updating Japan's banking and financial sectors in order to compete with western powers on equal terms. Prior to 1868, the country had a quasi-banking system in place, but rice was still widely used for the payment of taxes, for example. The opening up of Japan to overseas trade beyond a couple of its ports demanded that it rapidly institute a modern banking system in order to avoid falling victim to the unequal currency exchange practices that had already led to the depletion of the country's gold reserves during the final years of the Tokugawa Shogunate.

The Meiji government inherited a multitude of gold, silver and copper coinage—or specie—along with a vast array of different banknotes, with almost every domain issuing their own version. Initiatives to standardise the Japanese currency included replacing the *ryo* with the *yen* in 1869 and the opening of the Osaka Mint in 1871. Initially, with the Mexican silver dollar recognised as the main form of payment in most treaty ports, the government had planned to base its new currency on the silver standard. However, after observing the transitioning of several major western powers to gold, the Japanese government officially adopted the gold standard with an Imperial Ordinance in May 1871. For a variety of reasons, not least a shortage of the metal, the adoption of the gold standard in Japan would remain nominal until 1897.

The modernisation of the banking system continued with the drafting of the National Bank Decree in 1872, and the establishment of Japan's first national bank, Daiichi Kokuritsu Ginkō, shortly thereafter. The Tokyo Stock Exchange was established in June 1878. Despite these initiatives, a large amount of paper money, often in the form of inconvertible banknotes issued by both official and quasi-banking institutions, remained in circulation. This state of affairs led to the founding of the Yokohama Specie Bank (Yokohama Shōkin Ginkō, YSB), which opened its doors in February 1880. The YSB's primary task was to act as a collection point for silver and gold specie or bullion from both within and outside of Japan, which could then be circulated in a more controlled way and used as the basis for the country's paper currency. The regulation of note issue was to be the responsibility of the country's new central bank—the Bank of Japan, founded in 1882 and modelled

on the Bank of Belgium.

Despite some initial hiccups, YSB proved to be extremely successful in capitalising on Japanese exports of silk and tea, in particular, to secure a net import of specie through the use of discounted foreign bills of exchange, for example. YSB collected payment for exports in foreign currency through the offices it had established in New York (1880), London (1881), Lyons (1882), and San Francisco (1886). The London office—branch from 1894 onwards—played a vital role in YSB’s endeavours to remit specie to Japan. It was into YSB’s London branch that China’s indemnity of 360,000,000 *yen* was paid in British pound sterling. This significant payment was made by China under the terms of the Treaty of Shimonoseki that ended the Sino-Japanese War in 1895. It amounted to three times Japan’s national revenue, and was what finally enabled Japan to adopt the gold standard, both officially and in practice, on October 1, 1897. It also led to the Bank of England authorising YSB to open an account, thereby signalling YSB’s admission to the international banking arena and recognising Japan as a commercial rival on the world stage.

YSB opened its Hong Kong office on September 22, 1896. Chinese merchants predominantly used silver for trade, and YSB played an important role in collecting and withdrawing Japanese silver specie from circulation through various financial transactions. It then melted them into bullion, which could be used to buy gold for the Japanese government or sold on. With the value of silver prone to major fluctuations, the Hong Kong YSB employees had to keep a keen eye on gold and silver prices, and maintain a delicate balancing act between buying and selling the precious metals. According to YSB archival records, its Hong Kong office held 500,000 dollars in silver assets when it opened in 1896, but this amount had risen to 2,390,000 dollars just three years later, a testament to the Hong Kong team’s hard work and banking skills. The Hong Kong office was promoted to a branch in 1900 and, its mission successfully accomplished, it handed over the collection and dealing of silver to the Shanghai YSB branch in May 1906.

Hirota was one of YSB’s first employees in Hong Kong, working as a clerk before his promotion to sub-agent or deputy general manager. His name appears twice on Hong Kong’s list of jurors, in 1898 and 1900. Since not being “ignorant of the English language” was a prerequisite for inclusion on the jurors’ list, we can safely assume that he had some knowledge of English. This would have been necessary to facilitate communications with his counterparts at other major banks in the territory dealing in foreign currencies, including the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation. His “abode” in the 1898 list is given as a house on Robinson Road, whereas by 1900 he had moved to a residence on Peak Road, possibly as a result of his promotion.

YSB’s Hong Kong office was originally located at 6 Praya Central (today’s Des Voeux Road Central) and Ice House Street. From 1901 onwards, the Hong Kong Directory lists YSB’s address as Prince’s Building. This brand new four-storey, fully electrified block was built for Sir C. Paul Chater and Sir Hormusjee N. Mody. Its construction was made possible by the Central Praya Land Reclamation that, upon its completion in 1904, added approximately 24.3 hectares of new land to the Central waterfront.

Japan effectively departed from the gold standard in 1917, briefly returning to it for nearly two years from 1930 to 1931 mainly as a consequence of the Wall Street Crash of 1929. YSB’s assets were frozen or confiscated under the orders of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, General Douglas MacArthur, after the Second World War. YSB was eventually reorganised as the Bank of Tokyo in December 1946, one of the precursors of what is today the Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group, Inc (MUFG). The Bank of Tokyo opened its Hong Kong branch at 1 Duddell Street on October 16, 1953.



銀塊處分の結末  
 我政府所有の銀塊ハ昨年以來香港及海峽殖民地等に於て大半處分せられ猶春來支那爲替を買入れ倫敦に於て金塊を爲し漸次現送せられ昨今の所にてハ臺灣銀行へ貸與の二百萬圓を除き殘餘ハ一千萬圓内外となり其内三百萬圓を正金銀行の手を以て紡績業者に融通せしめ居り他の香港上海銀行等に預託しある次第にて先頃民間の有力者某の手を以て之が始末方を爲さんとしたるも相款折合はず其儘に成り居れるが目下之を金塊に換ふるに最も便宜なる方法に就き計畫中なりと云へば遠からず全部の始末を終るべしとなり



Hirota was one of YSB's first employees in Hong Kong.

An article detailing the role played by YSB's Hong Kong office in the collection and withdrawal of silver specie from circulation was published in the *Tokyo Asahi Shimbun* on April 20, 1899.

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Births and Deaths General Register Office, Immigration Department, Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

## 6. HORII Yasaburō died 20 June 1904, aged 25

Grave #6831 Section 35 / Row 2 / Number 4

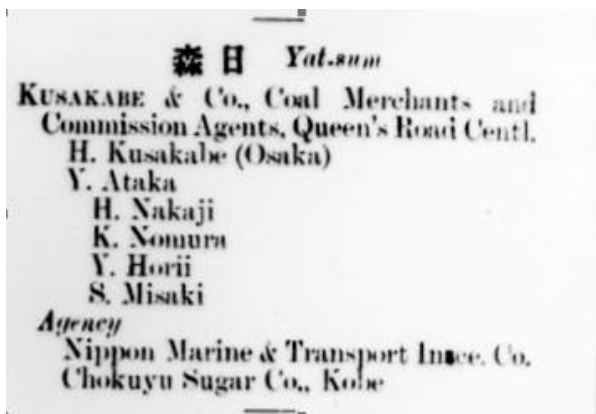
HORII Yasaburō, a native of Shiga prefecture, was working for the Japanese trading company Kusakabe & Co. (Yat Sum) in Hong Kong at the time of his death from typhoid fever at the Peak Hospital on June 20, 1904, aged 25. His tombstone was erected by and bears the names of the company's founder, KUSAKABE Heijirō, and its Hong Kong General Manager, ATAKA Yakichi. Both Kusakabe and Ataka had worked in Osaka before moving to Hong Kong to make their fortunes. Horii may have been looking to emulate their financial success had his life not been cut short.

Kusakabe Heijirō (1852-1899) was from Tanba (now part of Kyoto prefecture) and started his working life as a shop boy for a pharmaceutical wholesaler in Doshōmachi, Osaka, in the late 1860s. Keen to take advantage of the burgeoning trade ties between Osaka and Hong Kong, Kusakabe established his own trading company in the territory in the late 1870s. In its early years, the company, which would eventually be registered under the name of Kusakabe & Co. (Yat Sum), sold Japanese chinaware in Hong Kong and exported auction items to Japan. Kusakabe would later establish a branch office in Shanghai, while serving as the Hong Kong General Manager of another trading company, Kōgyō Shōkai, which specialised in the export of Hokkaido specialities, such as dried abalone, dried cod and agar, as well as matches and umbrellas.

Ataka Yakichi (1873-1949) was from Kanazawa, Ishikawa prefecture, and graduated from the Tokyo Higher Commercial School (today's Hitotsubashi University) in 1895. He joined Kusakabe's company in Osaka in 1901, before moving to Hong Kong to become the branch's General Manager. Ataka was key to developing Kusakabe & Co.'s lucrative sugar trade. He partnered with one of the most prominent Indonesian Chinese trading companies, Kian Gwan, and established his own network for purchasing raw sugar from Java.

In 1904, the year that Horii passed away, Kusakabe folded his Hong Kong business, which was ultimately acquired by Ataka's newly established company, Ataka Shōkai (later Ataka & Co). However, partly as a result of both the Tatsu Maru affair in 1908 (see the entry for TERUMINE Hirokichi) and the Nittō Case in 1909 (a corruption case involving members of the Japanese House of Representatives), Ataka decided to sell Yat Sum to Suzuki Shōten (one of the forerunners of today's Sojitz Corporation). Headquartered in Osaka, Ataka & Co. would grow to become one of post-war Japan's ten most prominent trading houses. Losses incurred during the 1973 oil crisis would lead to its eventual acquisition by Itochu Corporation in 1977.

Ataka is possibly best known outside of Japan for his patronage of SUZUKI Teitarō Daisetsu (aka D.T. Suzuki, 1870–1966). Ataka and Suzuki met while studying in Tokyo, where they lived in the same dormitory. A native of Kanazawa, Ishikawa prefecture like Ataka, Suzuki was a scholar and author who introduced several generations of English speakers to Zen Buddhism. He spent eleven years in the United States, from 1897 to 1909, during which time he became fluent in English. Upon his return to Japan, and with the support of his American wife, Beatrice Erskine Lane, Suzuki launched *Eastern Buddhist*, Japan's first English-language journal on Buddhism and Buddhist studies. Towards the end of his life, he spent several years teaching at Columbia University, where his students included the composer John Cage and the author J.D. Salinger. Ataka supported Suzuki's endeavours throughout his life and financed many of his publications.



Kusakabe & Co's entry in the 1904 *Directory & Chronicle*, published by the *Hong Kong Daily Press*.

Horii's tombstone was erected by the company's founder, Kusakabe Heijirō, and its Hong Kong General Manager, Ataka Yakichi.



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Births and Deaths General Register Office, Immigration Department, Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

## 7. TERUMINE Hirokichi died 28 March 1908, aged 33

Grave #7323 Section 34B / Row 1 / Number 7

On February 5, 1908, the Japanese ship Daini Tatsu Maru (hereafter Tatsu Maru) was boarded by Qing officials in the waters off the then Portuguese colony of Macau under suspicion of purveying arms to anti-Qing revolutionaries in Southern China. The ship, which belonged to the Japan Shipowners' Union and was captained by TERUMINE Hirokichi, had departed Kobe on January 26. Upon boarding the ship, the officials discovered at least 1,500 rifles and 40,000 rounds of ammunition (accounts vary on the actual numbers). They proceeded to replace the Japanese flag with the Qing ensign and towed the ship to Whampoa, near Canton (present-day Guangzhou) where the vessel and its cargo were placed in custody.

The Japanese government responded with outrage, stating that the arms had been shipped with all proper legal documentation by Mr. Awaya in Osaka to a Macanese firm through the intermediary of the Ataka Company. Furthermore, they claimed that the ship was not in Chinese territorial waters

when it was boarded and that the removal of its Japanese flag was an insult. The incident led to intense and increasingly acrimonious negotiations between the two sides, with both relying on various documents and testimonies to justify their actions. The situation was discussed in newspapers around the world, and various suggestions were put forward, including appointing British or American intermediaries or referring the case to The Hague Arbitration Court.

Ultimately, the Japanese government, threatening military action, put forward a five-point solution on March 13, 1908, which was accepted by the Chinese government two days later. The five conditions for a peaceful settlement, as reported in the March 14 issue of the *London Times*, included an apology; the unconditional release of the vessel; payment of the cost of the arms under detention; China to investigate and take suitable measures against those responsible; and an indemnity for actual losses. As a conciliatory gesture, Japan undertook to cooperate in the task of preventing the smuggling of arms into China. However, many people in Southern China were unhappy with the Qing government's backing down and acceptance of Japan's terms for the resolution of the Tatsu Maru incident. Their dissatisfaction led to a boycott of Japanese goods that would last at least eight months.

Unfortunately, the agreement over the fate of the Tatsu Maru came too late for 33-year-old Terumine Hirokichi. A native of Akō in Hyōgo prefecture, Terumine was on his tenth voyage as the well-respected captain of the Tatsu Maru and was planning to get married on his return to Kobe. The climate of Southern China did not suit him and he became sick, eventually passing away from acute pneumonia on March 28, 1908.

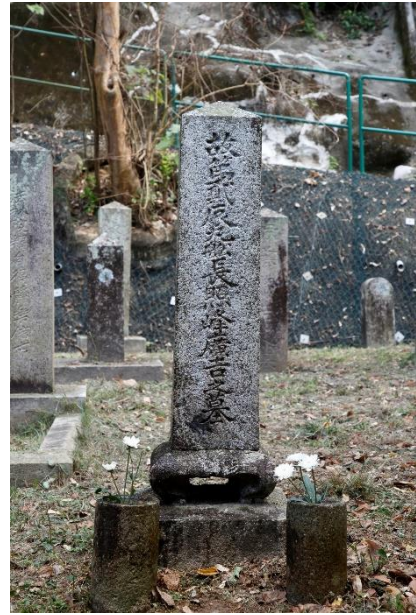
The Tatsu Maru incident took place in the context of extremely tense relations between Japan and China, and just thirteen years after the signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki, which had brought an end to the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895. Chinese anger at the Qing government's inability to resist foreign encroachment prompted the formation of a large number of anti-Qing organisations, which evolved into revolutionary activity following the foundation of the underground resistance movement Tongmenghui (Chinese Revolutionary Alliance) by Sun Yat-sen and others in Tokyo in August 1905. A series of uprisings would eventually lead to the demise of the Qing regime in 1911. Sun served as the first provisional president of the Republic of China in 1911-1912, and became known as the "founder of modern China."

Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) and his supporters were indeed rumoured to have been potential recipients of the arms and ammunition aboard the Tatsu Maru, though there is no conclusive evidence of this. Sun completed much of his education in Hong Kong and, in 1892, became one of the first Chinese students to graduate from the Hong Kong College of Medicine. During his sixteen years in exile, Sun travelled around the world raising funds for and awareness of his cause. He had several friends and financial backers amongst the Japanese community in Hong Kong and they helped him flee to Japan following the failure of the Guangzhou (Canton) Uprising in 1895. Of particular note is UMEYA Shōkichi (1868-1934), an entrepreneur from Nagasaki, who arranged for Sun's passage to Kobe. Umeya (also transcribed into English as Mumeya) had moved to Hong Kong from Singapore in 1894 and set up a photography studio. It was there that, on January 4, 1895, he was to receive a visit from Sun, following their introduction at a party by Sir James Cantlie, a co-founder of the Hong Kong College of Medicine where Sun had been his pupil. Umeya himself would return to Japan in 1905 and establish the film promotion and production company, M. Pathé, which would eventually merge with three others to form Nihon Katsudō Shashin Kabushiki-gaisha (Nikkatsu). Sun and Umeya would remain lifelong friends.





Umeya Shōkichi and his wife pose for a photograph with Sun Yat-sen (seated) in Tokyo in March 1914.



Terumine was the well-respected captain of the ill-fated Daini Tatsu Maru

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## 8. MATSUBARA Jisaburō died 7 March 1918, aged 54

Grave #8285 Section 31 / Row 4 / Number 1

MATSUBARA Jisaburō was the owner of the Matsubara Japanese Hotel. Located at 18 Connaught Road on the Central waterfront, it opened its doors in 1905 and was one of a handful of *ryokan*-style inns in Hong Kong at the time. Its customers included Japanese migrant workers headed to Thursday Island, one of 274 islands that lie between the tip of the Australian state of Queensland and Papua New Guinea in the Torres Strait, to work as divers in the lucrative pearl-shell industry. It is also likely that the Matsubara Hotel was connected to the traffic of *karayuki-san* to other parts of

Southeast Asia, at least in the early years of the lodging house's operation.

Amongst other frequent guests were students of the Tōa Dōbun Shoin (East Asia Common Culture Academy) in Shanghai. Inaugurated on May 26, 1901, the Shanghai Academy was an offshoot of the semi-governmental Tōa Dōbunkai (East Asia Common Culture Association). Founded three years earlier in Tokyo by Prince KONOE Atsumaro (1863-1904), the Association's stated aims included enhancing Sino-Japanese relations, promoting trade, and countering Western ambitions in the area. Students at the Tōa Dōbun Shoin received training in both English and Chinese languages, as well as business practices and research methods, and were required to undertake extensive fieldwork throughout China. The investigation reports that the students produced were channelled to several Japanese government departments, and a number of the Academy's graduates went on to serve in Japan's intelligence services. These field trips, sometimes referred to as *dai ryokō* or "Big Trip" in the tradition of the "Grand Tour," often took the students to Hong Kong, and their reports mention their accommodation, in the form of a large, shared tatami room, at the Matsubara *ryokan*.

In addition to the running of his hotel, Matsubara's food and beverage industry skills would eventually see him put in charge of the restaurant at the premises of the recently opened Japanese residents' club in Ice House Street. Originally developed from Yamato Kai, a Japanese association founded by two executives in 1903, the Japan Club—or Nippon Club, as it was known at one point—was officially established in 1905 with the help of a significant donation from ŌTANI Kōzui (1876-1948). Ōtani, who became the 22nd Abbot of the Jyōdoshinshū Hongwanji Temple in Kyoto in 1903, made the donation of HK\$500 during his 1899 visit to Hong Kong. Jyōdoshinshū Hongwanji, commonly known as Nishi (West) Hongwanji, was, and remains, one of the largest and most influential schools of Buddhism in Japan, and facilitated the establishment of several Japanese overseas resident associations. Early membership of the Japan Club in Hong Kong was confined to government employees, bank and shipping executives, as well as the managers of the city's leading commercial houses. The Ice House Street premises featured games rooms, dining and reading facilities, and the Club organised numerous sports and other social activities.

Matsubara and his wife perished in what remains one of Hong Kong's worst human-made disasters, the Happy Valley Racecourse fire of February 26, 1918. The disaster left over 600 people dead, many burnt beyond any formal identification, including 22 members of the Japanese community. Matsubara was there in his capacity as chief accountant for the Japanese Benevolent Society. Established in 1890, the Society was a charitable organisation that aided the sick and those in need, including pregnant girls, and occasionally provided funds for burials and funeral ceremonies. Starting in 1909, a large portion of the Society's revenue came from its booth at the annual "Derby Day" horse races in Happy Valley, a major date on the racing calendar with 10,000 spectators attending. The booths, which were auctioned off each year by the Department of Public Works, were temporary structures, or matsheds, made of bamboo and palm leaf matting. These were to supplement the existing permanent Grand Stand that was predominantly open to members of the Hong Kong Jockey Club and other local dignitaries.

In 1918, the Japanese Benevolent Society had successfully bid HK\$1,280 for booth no. 15, and had a two-floor plus basement matshed erected from which it sold sweepstake tickets. Its matshed could hold anything up to 200 people at any one time. Due to unseasonably dry weather that February, the contractor responsible for putting up the 19 matsheds had been unable to sink the support poles firmly into the ground, a contributing factor to the sudden collapse of the comparatively flimsy structures just before the start of the fifth race. Many of the booths offered refreshments such as hot tea, and had rudimentary charcoal stoves, or chatties, for the purpose of boiling water. The falling poles and matting not only trapped the booths' visitors, but also rapidly caught fire, burning them to death or causing them to suffocate from the fumes.

The colonial government opened an enquiry into the tragedy on March 7, with the proceedings

concluding on April 12, 1918. While no criminal negligence was attributed, the enquiry highlighted the Department of Public Works' lack of oversight of the matshed construction process, the insufficient police presence, and the inadequacy of fire fighting provisions at the site; it also made several recommendations. As a result of the fire, the Governor, Sir Francis Henry May, permanently banned matsheds from the racecourse and ordered the building of new permanent stands.

Matsubara's date of death is given as March 7, 1918, which would indicate that he might have died from his injuries, rather than on the actual day of the conflagration. His age is also engraved on the headstone—54 years old. These same details are lacking for his wife, however. Though they are buried together and we believe that she perished in the fire, there is no mention of her date of death or age. UETSUKI Kakuzō, the proprietor of the Tokyo Hotel and Sei Foo Row Annex, and principal of a provisions company, was another of the Japanese victims. A member of the Japanese Benevolent Society, he had been recognised for his charitable activities by the Japanese government with a medal of honour. His funeral was held on February 28 and his body cremated at the So Kon Po crematorium, which had been built by the Society in 1912 to serve the Japanese community.

On February 26, 1919, the Society unveiled a grand monument dedicated to all the victims of the fire, with a calligraphic inscription by Ōtani Kōzui. Initially situated next to the crematorium, it was moved to its present location in the Japanese section of the Hong Kong Cemetery in 1982. Another memorial to those who perished in the fire erected by the Tung Wah Hospital sits over the hill in So Kon Po, near the Hong Kong Stadium. Its original site was selected in an area known as the Coffee Garden and, with the benefit of public donations, construction on two pavilions, a memorial arch, and two pagodas started in 1922. The Race Course Fire Memorial was declared a monument on October 23, 2015, and is protected under the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance.



The Happy Valley Racecourse fire left over 600 people dead, including 22 members of the Japanese community.



Matsubara was the owner of the Matsubara Hotel on the Central waterfront, which first opened its doors in 1905.

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## 9. The Memorial to Ten Thousand Souls

Unveiled 26 February 1919, Section 35 / Row 2 / Number 31

The focal point of the Japanese section of the Hong Kong Cemetery is a grand monument dedicated to the victims of the February 26, 1918, Happy Valley Racecourse fire: the Memorial to Ten Thousand Souls. Over 600 people perished in the fire, including 22 Japanese. First unveiled near the Japanese Crematorium in So Kon Po on February 26, 1919, the monument was moved to its present location in 1982. The tall rectangular pillar is shaped like an obelisk and is engraved on one side with three characters written in the style of an ancient Chinese seal. The calligraphic inscription, which can be translated as "memorial to ten thousand souls," is the work of ŌTANI Kōzui (1876-1948), the 22nd Abbot of the Jyōdoshinshū Hongwanji, commonly known as Nishi Hongwanji, a major school of Japanese Buddhism.

In 1868, the newly installed Meiji government issued a series of decrees ordering the dissociation of Shintō and Buddhism, which negatively impacted Japanese Buddhists. This, together with a desire to demonstrate that Buddhism was the equal of other religions and respond to the sudden influx of Christian missionaries, prompted Ōtani's father, the 21st Abbot, to institute a number of much-needed reforms. He reviewed the Nishi Hongwanji organisational structure, updated the educational system to include the study of geography and English, and encouraged overseas travel to learn from other faiths and philosophical traditions, and promote a more modern image of Japanese Buddhism.

Ōtani received both traditional Buddhist and modern educations. He shared his father's outlook and travelled widely. He spent two and a half years in London, arriving in the city in March 1900. During his stay, he published an account of his travels in China, which led him to be made a Fellow



of the Royal Geographical Society. In Japan, he is best known for the three expeditions he organised and financed to explore Central Asia and India between 1902 and 1914, with the purpose of excavating Buddhist sites and collecting archaeological material. Keen to spread the Nishi Hongwanji message, Ōtani actively supported the setting up of Japanese overseas resident associations and the establishment of temples. His HK\$500 donation made during a visit to Hong Kong in 1899 financed the creation of the city's Japan Club.

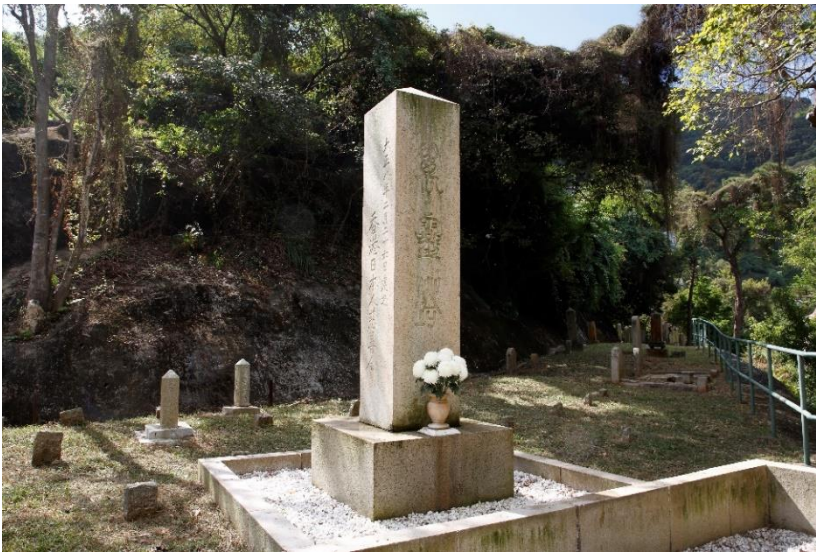
Hong Kong's Hongwanji centre officially opened in February 1907. However, as early as 1902, the Nishi Hongwanji priest TAKATA (sometimes transcribed as TAKADA) Seigan was engaged in missionary work in Hong Kong. He is credited with opening a small operation at 117 Wanchai Road where he taught history and the philosophy of Mencius to children. This would later evolve into a Japanese primary school, the management of which was eventually taken over by the Japanese Benevolent Society.

In addition to performing Buddhist rituals, the Nishi Hongwanji set up a woman's group, and offered cooking and knitting classes to its followers. Among them was UMETSU Sami, who passed away on April 10, 1910, aged 42, and is buried in the Hong Kong Cemetery. Her posthumous name—or *kaimyō*—starts with "*Shakuni Myōshin*," in line with Hongwanji tradition. *Kaimyō* are assigned to the deceased for use in the afterlife, and their meaning is closely connected to a person's accomplishments and rank in society. Originally from the Shimabara Peninsula near Nagasaki, Umetsu may well have first come to Hong Kong as a *karayuki-san*. An English inscription at the base of her tombstone gives her occupation as "nurse," though she may also have been a "nanny." Several of the early Japanese graves have bilingual engravings, a meaningful testament to the intersections between the Japanese and other communities in Hong Kong at that time.

It is believed that the majority of the early Japanese graves in the Hong Kong Cemetery contain bones, despite a growing preference among the Japanese community for cremation. Japanese Buddhism advocated cremation, which it saw as purifying the body of the deceased, and, unlike bones, the ashes of deceased loved ones could be transported back to Japan. However, Confucians and the members of several Christian faiths, Catholics in particular, were vocal opponents of this practice. With the number of Japanese residents in Hong Kong rising at the start of the twentieth century, the government agreed in 1911 to grant a lot of 30,000 square feet in So Kon Po (Inland Lot 1879) to the "Japanese Consul for the Japanese Community as a site for a Crematorium." A second lot of 75,170 square feet (Inland Lot 1920) was granted in 1912 as a site for a Buddhist Temple, and there is evidence that the Nishi Hongwanji, working with a close collaborator of Ōtani, the architect ITŌ Chūta (1867–1954), drew up plans for a Hong Kong *Betsuin* (branch temple). Due to a lack of funds, the temple was never built, though the Nishi Hongwanji did perform ceremonies and death rituals at the Crematorium. The Memorial to Ten Thousand Souls was erected next to the Japanese Crematorium in February 1919 and, though the Crematorium itself was demolished well before that, the Memorial remained there until 1982.

The Japanese community is responsible for the beautiful cherry blossom trees that can be found dotted along the path leading to the Japanese section of the Hong Kong Cemetery. In August 2002, the Kabuki actor ICHIMURA Manjiro (1949-) travelled to Hong Kong for two performances at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre. He and his wife Kiyoko suggested planting trees in locations important to the Japanese community, including the Cemetery. Arrangements were made with the support of the Kasumi Kaikan in Tokyo, an association that promotes traditional Japanese culture, and a total of 25 trees of the *Kawazu-zakura* variety were brought to Hong Kong from Shizuoka prefecture. On February 14, 2004, Japanese Consul-General YOKOTA Jun and his wife officiated at the planting of fourteen trees in the Cemetery. Of the original fourteen, eight remain and continue to greet visitors with their bright pink blossoms every spring.

This image of Miura Seiichi's funeral in 1919 depicts the Memorial in its original location next to the Japanese Crematorium in So Kon Po. Photo courtesy of Mr. Ko Tim-keung.



The Memorial was moved to its present location in 1982.

Fourteen cherry blossom trees were planted in the Cemetery in 2004, of which eight remain.



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