

Meiji Graves in Happy Valley

Stories of Early Japanese Residents in Hong Kong

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Contents

List of Illustrations	viii
List of Tables	xi
Preface	xii
Acknowledgements	xiv
Note on Romanisation	xvi
Chapter 1. A Community of Two Halves	1
Chapter 2. The <i>Karayuki-san</i>	22
Chapter 3. Boarding House and Restaurant Operators	40
Chapter 4. A Japanese Ship in Victoria Harbour	60
Chapter 5. A Developing International Business Elite	78
Chapter 6. Tradespeople and Professionals	98
Chapter 7. Conclusion	117
Brief Timeline	127
Annex: List of Japanese-Related Graves	129
Notes	136
Bibliography	172
Index	187

Preface

On November 13, 1879, the *China Mail* carried a full report of a luncheon – or tiffin – held to mark the launch of Japan’s first commercial service between Yokohama and Hong Kong by the Mitsubishi Mail Steamship Company. Over sixty guests, including the governor of Hong Kong, John Pope Hennessy, were ferried out to the *Niigata Maru*, which was anchored in the harbour and where they were greeted by Honda Masajirō (本田政次郎), Mitsubishi’s Hong Kong office general manager. Following a toast to ‘The Queen’, Pope Hennessy, who was recently returned from a three-month visit to Japan, offered a toast to ‘His Majesty 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. Honda made the only Japanese-language contribution to the speeches with ‘Gentlemen, *macotoni arigato*’ (I am really obliged to you).

Sadly, Honda would pass away from consumption less than a year after the tiffin. A monument erected to his memory survives in the Hong Kong Cemetery in Happy Valley, somewhat hidden behind larger English and German headstones and crosses. Eighteen graves to the left, in the same row, stands the obelisk of a Japanese sex worker, Kiya Saki (木谷佐喜), who died in 1884. Its base bears the names of the sixty-two women who paid for it.

These are just two of the approximately 470 Japanese graves in the Hong Kong Cemetery. Over 80 per cent of these graves belong to individuals who, like Honda and Saki, 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 to study, work, and settle. Who were these people and what were they doing in Hong Kong? How did they live? Furthermore, why were unbaptised Japanese buried in what was called at one time the ‘Protestant Cemetery’?

Little has been published in English about the city’s Japanese community prior to the two world wars, more specifically during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While much has been written and shared through memoirs and other first-hand accounts about the horrors of the occupation of Hong Kong by Japanese forces and Japan’s post-Second World War efforts to re-establish itself in the city, far less is known about these earlier residents. The official biographies of prominent Japanese businesspeople often deal very briefly with their operations in Hong Kong during the Meiji era and focus on Shanghai instead. Yet, by 1912, over a thousand Japanese resided in Hong Kong and advertisements for Japanese companies and services featured prominently in the English-language press. However, their contributions

to Hong Kong's diversity have been largely overshadowed by the traumatic historical events that followed and, therefore, left unexplored.

In 2020, the Hongkong Japanese Club, whose involvement with the Japanese section of the cemetery dates back to 1982, initiated a project to document a small number of these Meiji graves, including Saki's. As we began investigating the subject and searching for information, we realised that these were human stories that deserved to be told. Combing through the English-language newspapers of the time, we chanced upon an item in the *China Mail* that described the discovery in the harbour of the body of a Japanese woman who had committed suicide, Saki.

This heartbreaking find led us to expand the scope of our research beyond the club's project. We began to make connections between the names on the graves and a broader range of primary materials in English and Japanese, which increased digitisation has made more accessible. In addition to newspapers, government correspondence, official reports, and death registers, we drew from travellers' accounts and memoirs, many of which are only available in Japanese. Using our Japanese and English cultural perspectives and the names on the graves as a starting point, we pulled these fragments together to form an impression of the Meiji-era Japanese community in Hong Kong. We looked at how its members related to each other and to the wider society, as well as their roles in transnational networks that extended beyond the colony.

Most of all, we wanted to make these stories accessible in a way that they have not been before and throw some light on the more remote areas of the Hong Kong Cemetery that few people, even long-term residents like us, visit. By revealing the personal journeys of these mostly forgotten Japanese, we hope to add a further dimension to discussions of Hong Kong and its relationship with Japan during the Meiji era and increase recognition of their place in the development of this wonderfully diverse city.

Acknowledgements

When the Hongkong Japanese Club first approached us with this project in 2020, we never imagined the journey of discovery that awaited us. Our exploration of the Meiji graves in the Hong Kong Cemetery has been a fascinating and joyous shared experience – one that has enriched our understanding of the city both of us have called home for most of our adult lives.

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We have sought to build on previous work on the Hong Kong Cemetery and the city's early Japanese community by writers and researchers such as Chan Cham Yi, Lee Pui-Tak, and Patricia Lim. Chan Cham Yi taught in the Department of Japanese Studies at the University of Hong Kong until 2012 and his office was just two doors down from Yoshiko's. His compilation of accounts of Japanese travellers and residents in the city proved to be a precious resource that we returned to again and again.

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We end with a special thought for our own departed loved ones, Takashi, Yoko, John, Jane, and Sophie. We feel their loss every day. Peace. Perfect Peace.

A Community of Two Halves

In Hong Kong, I work for the publisher of a paper that reports news from many far-flung places. And I occasionally take care of drifters from Japan, who have found their way to the city. I have a wife and children there. Hong Kong treats me well and my life is comfortable, so I have no plans to leave and return to Japan.¹

[Former shipwrecked sailor Rikimatsu during a British expedition stopover in Hakodate in 1855]

One of Hong Kong's first documented Japanese residents following the island's cession to Britain in 1842 was a shipwrecked sailor. In 1835, the fourteen-year-old Rikimatsu (力松) was delivering sweet potatoes to Amakusa (天草) in Kyushu when his vessel encountered bad weather and sank. He and three companions drifted at sea for thirty-five days before finally coming ashore in the Philippines.² Despite surviving this ordeal, Rikimatsu could not return to Japan.

In 1635, the Tokugawa government – or *bakufu* (徳川幕府) – enforced a ban on overseas travel without official authorisation that was to remain in place until its rescinding in May 1866. Anyone caught trying to leave Japan without the *bakufu*'s permission faced the death penalty.³ This included unfortunate Japanese sailors shipwrecked outside the country's waters who then attempted the voyage home at their peril.

Rikimatsu eventually found his way to Macau, where he became a protégé of the influential German Lutheran missionary and sinologue Karl Gutzlaff (1803–1851). He converted to Christianity, adopting the name Adonia Rickomartz. Following a failed attempt by the American ship *Morrison* to return him and six other Japanese to Japan in 1837, Rikimatsu settled in Hong Kong.⁴ He served as an interpreter for the British and worked as a compositor preparing text for print for the English-language newspaper *Friend of China*. In 1849, he married an American woman, Henrietta Ambrook, in an Anglican ceremony with Gutzlaff in attendance. Together they had five children, though only two daughters, Louisa Jane and Henrietta Elizabeth or 'Bessie', and a son, Edward Adonia, appear to have survived into adulthood.⁵ Bessie later trained as a missionary and had hoped to travel to Japan but died before she could fulfil her wish of seeing her father's homeland.

Rikimatsu passed away on September 23, 1860, and was buried in the Hong Kong Cemetery. Following its opening in 1845, the Hong Kong Cemetery was under the

charge of the Anglican chaplain, who maintained a list of burials. Though the emplacement of his grave is lost, Rikimatsu is the first known Japanese man listed in this register and the only one interred during the Tokugawa – or Edo – period (1603–1868).⁶

It would be another eighteen years before the next Japanese burial in the cemetery. In August 1878, YUKAWA Onsaku (湯川温作) 's grave joined Rikimatsu 's in Happy Valley. Yukawa 's is the first of the Meiji era (1868–1912), which immediately succeeded the Tokugawa shogunate. Indeed, over 80 per cent of the approximately 470 recorded Japanese graves in the cemetery – from a total of at least 7,000 – belong to individuals who died during this era.⁷

These early graves belonged to Japanese residents and visitors from different walks of life. They are often the only remaining record of their presence in the city and offer a lens through which to gain a greater understanding of the make-up of a community of two halves that occupied an ambiguous space in Hong Kong 's colonial society and was too fragmented to demand its own, dedicated burial ground. The nine Japanese graves after Yukawa 's were for a barber, two infants, two employees of the Mitsubishi Mail Steamship Company, three seamen, and a student who, like Yukawa, was on his way home from Europe.⁸

The final column in the Anglican registers listed who conducted the funeral ceremony, if there was one. For the majority of Japanese burials, this entry simply read 'no ceremony', that is, no Christian ceremony. Since none of the Japanese religious sects

Table 1.1: First ten Meiji-era Japanese graves in the Hong Kong Cemetery

Burial Date	Name	Profession	Age	Cause
August 6, 1878	YUKAWA Onsaku (湯川温作)	Overseas student	22	Consumption
October 27, 1878	HIRASAWA Rokujirō (平澤録二郎) aka Jorio Kitchey, Christian convert	Barber	33	Unknown
May 23, 1879	SHIMIZU Masanosuke (清水政之助)	Navy sailor	22	Diarrhoea
July 24, 1879	Infant son of HATSU (ハツ)	–	–	Debility
March 18, 1880	Stillborn child of Mr & Mrs TERADA Ichirō (寺田一郎), Japanese Consulate	–	–	–
November 2, 1880	HONDA Masajirō (本田政次郎) ¹	Mitsubishi general manager	35	Consumption
February 21, 1881	YAMAGUCHI (山口某)	Seaman	21	Diarrhoea
June 8, 1881	MURAKAMI Hideshi (村上秀士)	Mitsubishi clerk	23	Fever
September 11, 1881	'KAUSTIONI, Oto'	Seaman	32	Diarrhoea
December 29, 1881	KONDŌ Kizō (近藤貴蔵)	Overseas student	27	Tuberculosis

Sources: Burial Registers 1853–1930, Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui Archives, PRO HKMS44–1. Additional details from the Hong Kong Births and Deaths General Register Office and 奥田 [Okuda] (1937), 202–7.

1. For more on Honda 's grave, see Chapter 4.

had a presence in the city at that time, they had no one to officiate at the interment. This record of early burials is indicative of the overall make-up of the Meiji-era graves in the Hong Kong Cemetery. Other than individuals passing through, such as students and sailors, most belong to Japanese residents in lower-class occupations in the colony, such as small retailer or prostitute.

These names and dates offer unique opportunities for further investigation. The infant son of Hatsu, for example, was born aboard the Messageries Maritimes steamship *Anadyr* that was taking UENO Kagenori (上野景範; 1845–1888) home after his five-year stint in London as Japanese Minister to Britain. Hatsu was a maid travelling in his entourage and must have lost her child either just before arriving in Hong Kong or during the ship's stopover in the city.⁹ The other infant on the list was the stillborn child of Hong Kong consular official Terada Ichirō and his wife. Of the ten entries recorded above, only six monuments, including Yukawa's, are still identifiable.¹⁰

As mentioned previously, Yukawa Onsaku's was the first Meiji-era Japanese grave in the Hong Kong Cemetery. The twenty-two-year-old military cadet was returning to Japan after six years spent studying at various educational institutions in France. He left Yokohama for Marseille in 1872 as part of a wave of students sent overseas to acquire direct experience of novel technologies and practices from Europe and the United States. After two hundred years of managed contacts with the outside world during the Tokugawa period, Yukawa and hundreds like him were to provide the new Meiji government with the necessary tools and expertise to modernise Japan's infrastructure and institutions.

Re-engaging with the Outside World

The Tokugawa ban that meant Rikimatsu risked death should he return to Japan did not preclude foreign contact altogether. However, what interaction did take place was strictly regulated and private travel without official approval was almost impossible. The Dutch were permitted to remain, though they were later confined to the small artificial island of Dejima in the Nagasaki harbour (長崎出島). The *bakufu* also maintained its trading relationships with China and Korea throughout the Tokugawa period.¹¹

By the mid-nineteenth century, the behaviour of Western powers in the East Asian region had grown increasingly predatory. China's defeat at the hands of the British in the First Opium War (1839–1842) and regular forays by foreign ships into Japanese waters highlighted Japan's vulnerability and technological deficiencies.¹² On July 8, 1853, Commodore Matthew Perry of the US Navy sailed into the harbour of present-day Tokyo with a squadron of warships and a letter from the US president that demanded the opening of Japan's ports to trade. This incursion led to the Convention of Kanagawa in 1854 and a further agreement in 1858. These documents, together with the commercial treaties signed with Britain, France, Holland, and Russia around the same time, formally established Hakodate, Niigata, Yokohama, Kobe, and Nagasaki (函館, 新潟, 横浜, 神戸, 長崎) as treaty ports, and Tokyo and Osaka as open cities.¹³

The treaty-port and open-city system, to some extent modelled on the First Opium War settlement with China, created enclaves in which the Japanese government had to surrender both its tariff autonomy and legal jurisdiction over foreign residents living in the cities covered by the treaties. These systems were a form of 'informal imperialism'

that gave Europeans and Americans access to Japan's resources on their own, advantageous terms.¹⁴ Despite this humiliating loss of sovereignty, the *bakufu* did succeed in its demand that the opium trade, so crucial to Hong Kong's early prosperity, be outlawed in Japan.¹⁵

With the opening up of the country's ports and the unprecedented arrival of foreign traders and diplomats, the *bakufu* realised that overseas travel could no longer be avoided. The ban was officially rescinded in 1866.¹⁶ Japanese individuals were now free to venture abroad for study or trade, seamen to work on foreign ships, and merchants to associate with foreigners at the treaty ports without government interference.¹⁷

The unequal treaties further weakened the Tokugawa regime's already ailing grasp on power. The negative economic impact of the treaty-port arrangement caused domestic unrest, and powerful *daimyō* [大名; provincial lords], particularly those of Satsuma, Chōshū, Tosa, and Hizen (薩摩, 長州, 土佐, 肥前), called for reforms. In December 1867, following years of turmoil, the armies of Satsuma and Chōshū marched on Kyoto. In January 1868, the newly anointed Emperor Meiji, who had ascended the throne in February 1867, proclaimed the end of the Tokugawa shogunate. A government of nobles and *daimyō* under the emperor replaced the *bakufu* and signalled the beginning of the era known as the Meiji Restoration.¹⁸

Learning from Western Technology and Expertise

Meiji officials, several of whom had clandestinely travelled overseas during the 1860s, understood that the study and selective incorporation of foreign practices and technology into virtually every aspect of Japanese society were vital to resisting the encroachment of Western interests and preserving the country's resources. To this end, they accelerated a number of outward-looking initiatives that the Tokugawa regime had, somewhat reluctantly, undertaken in the final decade of its rule: the hiring of foreign experts to act as advisors and provide instruction in Japan, the deployment of fact-finding missions abroad, and the sending of Japanese students to train at overseas institutions of learning, mainly in Europe and the US.¹⁹

The Iwakura Embassy of 1871–1873 was the most famous of all Meiji-era foreign delegations. The Embassy, headed by Prince IWAKURA Tomomi (岩倉具視; 1825–1883), left Japan bound for San Francisco on December 23, 1871, and did not return until September 13, 1873. At the time of its departure, the eminent group counted forty-six official members, fifteen other participants, and forty-two students, including five young women. Accompanying Prince Iwakura were several other significant players in the Meiji regime, among them ITŌ Hirobumi (伊藤博文; 1841–1909), who would become Japan's first prime minister under a newly introduced cabinet system in 1885.²⁰ ANDŌ Tarō (安藤太郎; 1846–1924) was one of the mission's junior secretaries.²¹ Originally from Yotsuya (四谷) in Tokyo, Andō had fought for the forces loyal to the last *shōgun* but switched sides following the latter's defeat.²² He later served as Japan's most senior consular representative in Hong Kong from 1874 to 1882.

The expedition spent close to seven months in the US before leaving for Britain, where it was received by Queen Victoria. Delegates then embarked on an extensive tour of various European countries, meeting dignitaries and visiting military

installations, shipyards, prisons, factories, sewage plants, banks, schools, and cultural landmarks.

The mission had a diplomatic agenda as well: the renegotiation of the unequal treaties that the *bakufu* had signed with foreign powers. Though unsuccessful in this regard, it had a lasting impact on Japan's development and the overhaul of its institutions.²³ Articles in Hong Kong's English-language press debated the Embassy's accomplishments, including an editorial in the *China Mail*, which recognised the value of the endeavour in raising Japan's profile on the world stage.

Granted that the envoys and their suite have returned no wiser than they went after spending a mint of money, they have achieved something which no other device could possibly have achieved in visiting Europe. They have removed Japan from the list of *terra incognita* to the average Briton or Continental. They have personally demonstrated that their country boasts men of fair intelligence . . . and have shown that they understand diplomatic usages, can appreciate western appliances, and desire to encourage foreign enterprise amongst their countrymen. These, be it noted, are things which all the books in the world, and all that could be done in their own country could never have achieved.²⁴

The Iwakura Embassy stopped for two nights in Hong Kong on its way back to Japan from Europe. Members of the delegation arrived aboard the Messageries Maritimes ship *Ava* on August 27, 1873, just four months after the opening of the city's Japanese Consulate.²⁵



Figure 1.1: Andō Tarō during the Iwakura Embassy's visit to Paris in 1873. Andō later served as Japanese Consul in Hong Kong. (Source: National Diet Library Digital Collections.)

A Japanese Consulate for Hong Kong

Britain first occupied Hong Kong Island in 1839, as part of its efforts to establish a base from which to promote its trade with China. Portugal had Macau, Spain Manila, and Holland Jakarta [Batavia], but the closest British-controlled territory to the Chinese mainland of any significance was in India. The latter was also the source of Britain's main export to China: opium. The Qing government ceded Hong Kong Island to the Crown during the First Opium War. The Convention of Peking [Beijing] signed at the end of the Second Opium War (1856–1860) extended British territorial rights to include the Kowloon Peninsula.²⁶

The bustling colony's population tripled to over 20,000 people within just five years – the majority Chinese arrivals from neighbouring Guangdong – and imposing, European-style office buildings made their appearance along the harbourfront. Yet Britain's remote outpost was better known for its high crime rates, deadly diseases, and pirate-infested waters. The situation improved in the 1850s, with Hong Kong attracting a more affluent class of Chinese migrants seeking refuge from the ravages of the Taiping Rebellion (太平天国の乱; 1850–1864) and the city profiting from the transit of Chinese labourers to the US. Increasing numbers of European and American companies, along with Jewish, Armenian, and Indian, including Parsee, merchant houses, opened offices in Hong Kong to capitalise on its status as a free port and the growth in the transshipment trade with China, particularly in opium. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, which greatly reduced sailing times to European destinations, further boosted Hong Kong's position as a commercial and migratory hub connecting China, India, Southeast Asia, the US, Europe, and even Australia.²⁷

Japan's lifting of the two-hundred-year travel ban and change to the more outward-looking Meiji regime made it possible for previously unseen numbers of Japanese to go abroad for work and study in the early 1870s. The voyage to Europe aboard the steamships of commercial shipping companies such as the British Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P&O) and its French competitor Messageries Maritimes always involved a stopover or change of vessel in Hong Kong.²⁸

The Meiji government selected Hong Kong as one of five cities in which to establish a diplomatic presence in 1872, along with Shanghai, New York, Fuzhou, and Venice.²⁹ Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs official Ueno Kagenori, who would later serve as resident minister in London from 1874 to 1879, announced the decision in a letter to the British Minister to Japan, Harry Parkes (1828–1885). Ueno explained that in view of the rise in the number of his compatriots travelling to Hong Kong, the ministry had appointed HAYASHI Michisaburō (林道三郎) as Japan's vice-consul in the colony. The letter caused something of an upset, with Parkes complaining that Hayashi had not followed proper procedures with regard to the notification of his appointment. Parkes blamed the latter's insufficient grasp of English for the confusion, commenting that it was 'very likely that Mr. Hayashi's knowledge of English may not have been sufficient to appreciate what was said to him exactly'. This was despite the Japanese government selecting Hayashi for this important post precisely because of his English- and Chinese-language abilities.³⁰ English-language competency would, indeed, prove a challenge for many of the Japanese living and working in the colony.

Japan finally opened its consulate in Hong Kong on April 20, 1873, with the thirty-year-old Hayashi at its head.³¹ His duties included intelligence gathering, reporting to

Tokyo on Hong Kong's growing Japanese community, and handling issues connected to the transit passengers arriving and departing 'nearly every week'.³² Despite his knowledge of the language, Hayashi had little overseas experience and clearly found managing the Hong Kong mission a challenge. With the funding provided by the Foreign Ministry insufficient to cover the consulate's high staffing and rental costs, Hayashi was soon in debt. He committed suicide on September 22, 1873, while on home leave in Tokyo.³³

First Encounter with a Modern Colonial City

Japanese travellers going overseas in the early 1870s had limited knowledge of the world outside Japan. They could only rely on translated books, newly published guides on Western-style clothing and manners, and encounters with foreigners in the open ports for an idea of what to expect once they left home.³⁴ Hong Kong was their first experience of a comparatively modern city. Some recorded their impressions of the colony in the diaries that they kept of their travels. Much like today, visitors were awed by views of the city at night, comparing the multitude of gaslights to fireflies.³⁵ Sailing into the harbour on his way to France in September 1872, the writer NARUSHIMA Ryūhoku (成島柳北; 1837–1884) was moved to pen a verse:

In the tall buildings along the waterfront, ten thousand lights;
The passenger and trade vessels call and answer one other.
Here in the southern seas, the ninth month is still fiery hot;
Everyone races to buy a few pieces of ice from a silver bowl.³⁶

Furthermore, these narratives convey a sense of the ambiguous feelings that the British colony inspired. In addition to its adoption of modern technology, such as the telegraph, and European-style architecture, Hong Kong provided an opportunity to view the workings of British imperialism up close. The discriminatory treatment of the city's Chinese inhabitants shocked Japanese visitors. However, rather than empathising with the former's plight, they blamed them for it. This disdain for a country previously admired for its scholarship emerged in the 1860s as increasing numbers of Japanese officials and students transited through the treaty port of Shanghai and Hong Kong.³⁷ In their diaries, they condemned the inability of the Qing government to resist or at least manage foreign encroachment and ban the trade in opium, as Japan had. They sought to distance themselves from the Chinese by commenting on the extent of their addiction to the drug and their unsanitary living conditions. Journal entries on the high rates of robbery and the unhygienic environment in the predominantly Chinese quarters of the city portrayed Hong Kong's Chinese population as dirty and dishonest.³⁸ They contrasted a China in decline with the visible successes of British colonial power.

While Britain's advanced technology, commercial ambitions, and military might were to be admired, they were also to be feared. If a vastly outnumbered foreign power could submit the local population to its rule, what was there to prevent it from doing the same in Japan? The race was on to match Britain's achievements and join it as one of 'the two great Island Empires'.³⁹



Figure 1.2: The Hong Kong Central waterfront in the late 1860s. (Photograph by John Thomson. Source: Wellcome Collection.)

Occupations of Hong Kong's Meiji-Era Japanese Residents

Not all Japanese passed through Hong Kong merely on their way to somewhere else. Though just a handful at first, the number of Japanese living in the city would exceed a thousand by 1912. Despite achieving this milestone, the Japanese in Hong Kong remained a community of two halves throughout the Meiji era: one centred around the sex industry and the other focused on advancing Japan's technology and commerce to a level where it could compete with the Euro-American powers dominating global trade, with tradespeople and professionals falling somewhere in between.

Prior to 1897, Hong Kong's official census reports divided the population into three main categories: Europeans and Americans, Chinese, and a third grouping for anyone who did not fit into the other two, which included the Japanese.⁴⁰ This lack of distinction makes it difficult to estimate the number of Japanese residing in Hong Kong during the 1870s with any precision, though there were certainly less than a hundred. Japanese and later colonial government sources provide a clearer indication of the make-up and spatial configuration of the city's Japanese community from the 1880s onwards and highlight issues that would cause friction and division within it for several decades to come.

Table 1.2: Number of Japanese residents in Hong Kong, 1880–1911

Year	Japanese Residents					Total Civilian Population as per HK Government Census
	Female	%	Male	%	Total	
1880	60	70%	26	30%	86	
1881						153,544
1886	96	66%	50	34%	146	
1889	142	58%	101	42%	243	
1891						215,194
1901	224	53%	197	47%	421	281,794
1906	379	44%	478	56%	857	315,843
1911	483	44%	616	56%	1,099	450,098

Sources: Hong Kong Government Censuses for 1881, 1891, 1901, 1906, and 1911, totals exclude the navy and military establishments, and the mercantile marine; 奥田 [Okuda] (1937), 111, 189–200, 270, 313–16; and 外務省通商局編 [International Trade Bureau, MOFA, ed.] (1917), 348.

The Japanese Consulate counted eighty-six short-term or long-term Japanese residents in the city on April 7, 1880, with 30 per cent men and 70 per cent women. The majority of men were sailors or involved in the trade and retail of seafood and sundry items. Though no names or occupations were provided for women, the gender imbalance pointed to the fact that most were *karayuki-san* – or prostitutes.⁴¹

KIMURA Shūzō (木村修三) was one of about a hundred Japanese residing in Hong Kong in the early 1880s.⁴² He recalled that there was a lot of petty crime, which an inadequate police force failed to tackle, and that the authorities required him to show a night pass if he wanted to move from Central to Wan Chai after dark. From as early as 1842, the colonial government had sought to restrict the night-time movements of the colony's Chinese population 'to provide for the better security' of its residents. In 1870, it was unlawful for any Chinese 'to be at large in the city of Victoria, between the hour of 9 in the evening and sunrise without a pass'. Clearly, this legislation was applied selectively to Japanese residents as well, despite the relevant ordinance making no mention of other ethnicities.⁴³

The consulate recorded occupations for women in its count for 1886, with fifty out of ninety-six female residents described as managing or working in 'cafés' and *kashizashiki* (貸座敷; rental rooms), a euphemism for prostitution, and thirteen as concubines of Western men.⁴⁴ Their average age of twenty-four, single status, and geographical provenance were further indications of their occupation.⁴⁵ Indeed, over two-thirds of the women hailed from Nagasaki prefecture, which was the point of origin for a significant proportion of trafficked prostitutes during the early years of the Meiji era.⁴⁶

Conclusion

In the afternoon, we visited the famous cemeteries belonging to people from various countries. . . . Westerners call the place [Happy Valley]. The cemeteries are neatly separated according to religious affiliation: Protestants, Roman Catholics, Parsees, Jews, Muslims, etc. all have their own sections. The Protestant ground is the best laid out with a fountain at its centre. Trees create natural arches with their prolific branches and foliage. Flowers bloom all year round. The Chinese cemetery, though, is located elsewhere. . . . Generally speaking, Westerners take better care of their graves than the Japanese. This attention to their dead is an admirable social and cultural quality.¹

[Section from the journal of Hongwanji priest Asakura Meisen (朝倉明宣), who accompanied Ōtani Kōzui on an 1899 stopover in Hong Kong.]

This late nineteenth-century Japanese visitor's account fails to mention whether he and his party located their compatriots' tombstones within the 'Protestant ground'. His comments suggest, however, that, even then, the Meiji-era (1868–1912) Japanese graves in the Hong Kong Cemetery were overlooked.

Yet the examination of these burial sites and their occupants provides valuable insight into the make-up of this significant pre-First World War community, about which little has been written in English. It sheds light not only on its internal workings, but also on how its members lived and were perceived within the colony's highly segregated society as a whole.

The advent of the Meiji era marked a major turning point in Japan's relationship to the rest of the world. The country began to measure itself against the foreign nations determined to infiltrate its borders. Whereas clan and domain affiliations prevailed during the Tokugawa period, Meiji political leaders were keen to develop a modern sense of what it meant to be Japanese, with the emperor serving as a unifying symbol. The lifting of the travel ban in 1866 and the realisation that the country needed to adapt and learn from the European and American powers accessing its resources made it possible for thousands of Japanese to venture abroad. Hong Kong was both a necessary transit point for those on their way to Europe and a destination for individuals and, later, commercial concerns looking to make a living or turn a profit. Some stayed for just a few years, while others made the colony their home until their death.

From just a handful in the 1870s, the number of Japanese residing in the city totalled over a thousand by the second decade of the twentieth century. In 1912, the Japanese formed the fourth largest group of non-Chinese residents in Hong Kong, after the British, Portuguese, and Indians. By 1921, they were the third largest and had their own column in the Hong Kong government census. Indeed, in his report to the Legislative Council, the census officer writes:

Japanese have increased from 958 to 1,585 [since the 1911 census], and are now to be found in nearly every kind of trade, in the professions, crafts and domestic service. Numbers of them have now brought their families to the Colony, and the number of married women and children is largely increased. Ten years ago the number of married women was very small, but there are now 293 married women. Japanese have largely displaced Europeans in the last ten years in the middle levels between Kennedy and May Roads, while most of the artisans and small shopkeepers are to be found along the Praya in Wanchai between Arsenal Street and Morrison Hill.²

A Divided Community

Hong Kong's Japanese community in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was one of two halves, as evidenced by the occupations of those interred in the cemetery. The male deceased had found employment in service professions such as hairdresser, photographer, tattoo artist, and boarding house operator, as well as clerical or managerial roles in major commercial concerns. Most of the women buried in Happy Valley during the Meiji era, meanwhile, had worked in just one industry, the sex industry. The monument to prostitute, or *karayuki-san*, KIYA Saki (木谷佐喜) was the first of more than ninety belonging to women connected to the brothel business added between 1884 and 1912. This represents almost a quarter of the approximately 380 identifiable Japanese graves erected during that period.³

As the region's pre-eminent transportation hub, Hong Kong played a central role in the transnational traffic of Japanese sex workers to other parts of the British Empire until Singapore became the preferred transit point in the late 1880s. Prostitutes like Saki, from impoverished rural areas near the newly opened treaty port of Nagasaki, travelled clandestinely aboard ships transporting coal to Hong Kong, where they were sold to brothels in the colony or transferred to destinations across South East Asia and as far afield as Australia. Some, if not all, of Hong Kong's Japanese male boarding house owners were significantly involved in this traffic, providing accommodation and other necessities to the women on arrival in the city and liaising between brothels and procurers in Japan. This was their most lucrative source of revenue, with the offering of beds and meals to independent Japanese travellers like HONDA Seiroku (本多静六), NATSUME Sōseki (夏目漱石), and INOUE Teijirō (井上貞治郎) more of a sideline. Boarding house owners were key members of the Japanese Benevolent Society, which was established in 1890 mainly for the purpose of raising funds for the burial of the destitute. The society paid for a minimum of forty-eight graves between 1892 and 1910, chiefly from the proceeds of its booth at the annual Derby Day horse races in Happy Valley.⁴

Small store owners selling sundry goods and items such as kimonos initially derived much of their income from the Japanese brothels. However, they gradually

acquired customers from beyond their own community. Indeed, a large percentage of Hong Kong's Japanese nineteenth-century residents, including the *karayuki-san*, relied on a foreign clientele to make money. Japanese brothels catered predominantly to European, American, Indian, and Malay men, while Japanese hairdressers plied their trade at Hong Kong's foremost hotel for European guests. Professionals such as tattoo artists and photographers, who set up their businesses in the 1890s, advertised extensively in the English-language press and depended to a great extent on non-Japanese customers to make a living.

The Meiji era's most prominent multinational companies are also represented in the Hong Kong Cemetery. As Japan pressed on with reforms aimed at modernising its institutions and engaged further with the outside world, the Meiji government desired a more formal presence in the colony. Hong Kong's Japanese Consulate opened in April 1873, and large commercial concerns soon followed, among them the semi-governmental agency of Kōgyō Shōkai, which specialised in dried seafood products from Hokkaido, and the trading firm of Kusakabe & Co. Mitsui Bussan Kaisha was the first major Japanese company to establish an office in the city in 1878. In October 1879, the Mitsubishi Mail Steamship Company launched Japan's first commercial shipping line between Yokohama and Hong Kong. Both Mitsui and Mitsubishi played a central role in supplying what would become Japan's most lucrative export to Hong Kong in the late nineteenth century: coal. The colony was a major market for coal, and Mitsubishi's Takashima and Mitsui's Miike mines provided the fuel needed to power the Pacific's expanding commercial and military fleets.

Together with the Yokohama Specie Bank (YSB), which came slightly later, in 1896, Mitsui Bussan and Mitsubishi were at the forefront of Japan's push to project a modern vision of the country in the British colony of Hong Kong. The early managers of smaller concerns, such as Kusakabe & Co., came from Osaka or Nagasaki and did not have a university education. Mitsui, Nippon Yusen Kaisha (NYK) – the successor to the Mitsubishi Mail Shipping Company – and YSB, meanwhile, recruited their senior staff from Kobe and Yokohama and turned to graduates from prestigious universities to manage their offices. Some had spent time learning the ropes in Shanghai before coming to Hong Kong, while others had experience travelling or studying overseas. These were worldly, adaptable individuals who had the skills necessary to operate in a multicultural environment like Hong Kong's. Several spoke a good standard of English or else improved their language abilities during their stay. For many, the colony proved a stepping stone to even greater things. Mitsui's SHUGYŌ Hiromichi (執行弘道) and FUKUHARA Eitarō (福原榮太郎) moved on to international postings, one to New York and the other to London. Shugyō and NYK's MIHARA Andrew Shigekichi (三原繁吉) both became leading figures in the curation or collection of Japanese woodblocks – *ukiyo-e* (浮世絵) – and socialised in New York's artistic circles.⁵

However, the number of graves belonging to *karayuki-san* in the cemetery indicates that Hong Kong's early Japanese community was a fragmented one. The extent of the Japanese sex industry's operations in the city, with Japanese prostitutes and concubines second in number only to the Chinese, undermined the efforts of senior consular officials and company representatives to promote the desired image of Japan as a commercial and cultural equal to the region's colonial powers.

These internal divisions influenced who was and was not invited to prestigious Japanese occasions, such as the Meiji Emperor's birthday celebrations. They played

out spatially as well, with brothels concentrated in the lower, less respectable reaches of Central and Wan Chai, while Japanese company executives lived higher up the hill in the more affluent vicinity of the consulate in Caine Road and MacDonnell Road. Despite several attempts by consular officials to limit the number of Japanese brothels, they remained a thorn in the side of the city's Japanese elite throughout the Meiji era and beyond. The 1921 Hong Kong government census recorded 139 Japanese prostitutes in the territory, the only 'non-Chinese population' with an entry in this category of employment.⁶

Occupying an Ambiguous Space

The Japanese graves are located on the steeper fringes of the Hong Kong Cemetery. The burial ground's more accessible areas were generally reserved for the Christian dead. This configuration is indicative of how the fragmented make-up of Hong Kong's Japanese community further complicated its already ambiguous situation. Neither Chinese nor European, Japanese residents occupied a shifting position in the colony's social structure and the British administration struggled with where to place them within it.

Early Meiji travellers passing through the colony, including the Iwakura Embassy in 1873, contrasted Hong Kong's impressive, Western-style harbourfront buildings with the squalid streets of the predominantly Chinese areas of the city. They blamed opium addiction and a weak Qing government unable to resist foreign encroachment for China's decline and sought to distance themselves from the country's plight. Eventually, the Meiji government's modernisation of its army and navy along French and British lines allowed it to pursue its own territorial ambitions in China and Korea more effectively. Ongoing tensions between China and Japan following the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895 found expression in Hong Kong as well. Matters came to a head in 1908 when Chinese merchants, upset at Japan's negotiating tactics during the *Tatsu Maru II* affair in neighbouring Guangzhou, initiated a months-long Japanese boycott.

The Meiji era's second major conflict, the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905, along with the first Anglo-Japanese Alliance signed two years prior to its start, had a particularly significant impact on British attitudes towards Hong Kong's Japanese community. Japan emerged from the war with an enhanced status in the eyes of the world's imperialist powers and this boosted the prominence of its elite in the colony. Whereas only slightly over half of those invited to the Mitsubishi Mail Steamship Company's tiffin in 1879 showed up, the Mikado Ball held in November 1905, a couple of months after the end of the war, was an unmissable highlight of the colony's social calendar that year. English-language newspapers praised Japan's increased standing on the global stage, yet the tone remained condescending – while the country had made great strides forward, it could, of course, never hope to match the greatness of the British Empire.

Senior consular officials and company representatives appeared on the guest lists of prestigious European social occasions – the Hongkong Club even admitted its first Japanese member in 1906. Despite this, the colonial government did not consider the Japanese on a par with the city's American and European communities. Examples of differences in treatment include the issuance of liquor licences. The government