

Nagasaki, an international city



Oura foreign settlement and Nagasaki Port (1872)

Photo by Ueno Hikoma, Nagasaki native and Japan's first professional photographer (Collection of Nagasaki University Library)

■ Port open for overseas exchanges

The port of Nagasaki was opened in 1570 to trade with foreign countries and became prosperous through the Nanban trade (trade with Spain and Portugal that started in the mid-16th century). Later, the Edo shogunate (established in 1603) adopted a policy of national isolation, which limited trade with the West to the Netherlands solely at Dejima Island. Trade with China was conducted by establishing a Chinese settlement in Nagasaki called Tojin Yashiki. Nagasaki played the role of a window through which various cultures and information from overseas were conveyed to the rest of Japan.

■ History of Japan-China exchange

The construction of Tang temples such as Kofuku-ji Temple, Fukusai-ji Temple, and Sofuku-ji Temple in Nagasaki and the arrival of Tang monks such as Ingen, Mokuan, and Sokuhi to Japan led to full-fledged cultural exchange between Japan and China. In addition, among the traders and boatmen who lived in Tojin Yashiki, there were many artists and intellectuals. Through their interactions with the literati and citizens of Nagasaki, they exerted a profound influence on Nagasaki and Japan that continues to this day, ranging from the fields of culture and arts such as painting, calligraphy, and poetry, to medicine, civil engineering, festivals, annual events, foods, and lifestyles.



Camera used by Ueno Hikoma (Collection of Nagasaki Museum of History and Culture)

■ Pioneer of Japan's modernization

In 1855, the Edo shogunate established a naval training school at the Nagasaki Magistrate's Office to counter the naval capabilities of the Western powers, which were pressing for the opening of Japan to the outside world. With the additional establishment of a medical school in 1857 and an English language school in 1858, the latest Western science and technology were rapidly disseminated from Nagasaki.

■ Nagasaki as seen by Umeya as a boy

As part of the naval training program, construction of the Nagasaki Iron Works began in 1857. After its completion, the Meiji Restoration took place in 1868 and it became government-owned for a time. It later became Mitsubishi Nagasaki Shipyard and Machinery Works, supporting Japan's shipbuilding industry. Meanwhile, with the opening of the port in 1859, a foreign settlement was established in Nagasaki. Along with Western traders, many Chinese traders also came to live in the area. At that time, Nagasaki was quick to introduce the latest technology in the fields of photography, printing, coal mining, and communications. In the early Meiji era, Nagasaki was an international city in both name and reality in Asia.