

Looming crisis in China



The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (center) and Nagasaki Hotel
(Collection of Nagasaki University Library)



Submarine cable landing depot built by the
Great Northern Telegraph Company
(Kogakura, Nagasaki City)
Front: Telegraph used when the submarine
cable was landed in 1871

■ Background of Shanghai

Shanghai, which was only a trading port in China, did not appear in world history until the Treaty of Nanking signed in 1842 by Great Britain and Qing China after the Opium War. After this, concessions by Britain, France, and other countries were established in Shanghai and the city seemed to be prospering with Western trading houses lining the streets. Shanghai, however, became a city in China that did not belong to the Chinese. Takasugi Shinsaku and others from the Choshu domain (present-day Yamaguchi Prefecture), who sailed to Shanghai in 1862 on the Senzai-maru sent by the shogunate from Nagasaki, returned to Japan with a strong sense of crisis about the situation.

■ Shanghai and Nagasaki

Shanghai and Nagasaki have very similar origins as ports opened for overseas trade and are closely connected. In 1871, the Great Northern Telegraph Company of Denmark laid communication cables between Shanghai and Nagasaki and between Nagasaki and Vladivostok. The building of the former Nagasaki Branch of the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (nationally designated Important Cultural Property), which still stands today in Matsugae, Nagasaki, was completed in 1904. Among all, the closest link between Nagasaki and Shanghai was the Shanghai sea route from Yokohama via Kobe and Nagasaki. Initially operated by the Pacific Mail Company of the United States, it was replaced in 1875 by the Mitsubishi Mail Steamship Company led by Iwasaki Yataro.

■ Liberation of Asia from the Western powers

The Industrial Revolution began in the late 18th century, and the Western powers colonized African and Asian countries with their overwhelming technological and military power, including steam engines. Some of those angered by the humiliating domination left their home countries and studied abroad to become highly educated and sophisticated, and worked to save their people with their own hands. Under these circumstances, Japan, the only country in Asia that had developed modern industry and was catching up with the West, was expected to cooperate in the movement for ethnic independence.