

Deshima Re-Emerges: Plans for the Restoration of a Lost Island

The site of the former Dutch trading post, or “factory,” on Deshima was designated an important historic site by the Japanese government in the year 1922, but the pressure of urban modernization schemes over the decades has resulted not only in the destruction of original buildings but also in the loss of the island’s distinctive fan shape. In October 1978, Nagasaki City launched the “Nagasaki City Council for the Refurbishment of the Historic Site Deshima,” which returned its recommendations to the city in 1982. In November 1994, the city established the second council to discuss how these recommendations could be set in motion, and the council recommendations were returned in 1996. These call for short to mid-term plans expected to reach completion by 2010 and long-term plans that will result in the construction of a true-to-life replica of Deshima as it looked in the early nineteenth century. With its eye on the year 2000, which will mark the 400th anniversary of the grounding of the *Liefde* on Japanese shores in 1600 and the beginning of relations between Japan and the Netherlands, Nagasaki City has already begun to implement the plans.

The following is a brief history of the island and a description of the restoration plans.

Historical Deshima

After the arrival of the first Portuguese in Japan and the introduction of guns in 1543, the daimyo (feudal lords) in various parts of the country began to welcome the Portuguese ships into their ports in order to promote trade and in some cases Christianity. The Portuguese meanwhile asked Omura Sumitada, lord of the domain including present-day Nagasaki, to allow them to use the excellent natural harbor of Nagasaki. In 1570, Sumitada built six town blocks on the “long cape” (the literal meaning of “Nagasaki”) and the Portuguese began to call here the following year.

For seven years from 1580, Nagasaki came under the jurisdiction of the Society of Jesus, and during this period it flourished as a Christian center and port for foreign trade. But national ruler Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who disliked Christianity, ordered the expulsion of all priests from Japan and brought Nagasaki under his own direct jurisdiction in 1587.

In 1635, the bakufu government banned travel by Japanese nationals overseas and ordered 25 wealthy Nagasaki merchants to build an island (Deshima) to intern Portuguese residents. The Shimabara Rebellion, a Christian uprising near Nagasaki in 1637, only increased government fears about the religion and the influence of the Portuguese. The bakufu finally expelled all Portuguese from Japan in 1639, thus enforcing a policy of national isolation and leaving Deshima empty.

In the year 1600, thirty-nine years before this event, a lone foreign ship foundered on the coast of Bungo (present-day Oita Prefecture). This was the *Liefde*, and its arrival marked the beginning of a long history of exchange between the Netherlands and Japan. In 1609, the Dutch sent two ships to Japan and received permission from Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu to establish a factory (trading post) at Hirado. In 1641, the Dutch moved this trading post to Deshima and for 218 years thereafter they joined China in monopolizing trade with Japan.

The approximate dimensions of the island were as follows:

Area 15,395 square meters

Circumference 564 meters

South side 233 meters

North side 190 meters

East/west sides 70 meters

The buildings on Deshima underwent numerous changes over the years due to rebuilding and fires, etc. Among the principal structures were the residences of the director and vice-director, quarters for other Dutch employees, and warehouses for merchandise. There were also buildings for use by Japanese officials and interpreters. A bridge joined the island to the adjacent neighborhood. Placards set up on the neighborhood side stated that Dutch residents were not allowed off the island and that no women except courtesans were allowed in. There was also a guard stationed at the gate to check passers by.

Only male employees of the Dutch East India Company were allowed on Deshima. The positions of the employees included the director, vice-director, cook, warehouse keeper, physician, scribe and craftsmen such as a carpenter and blacksmith.

After the departure of the Dutch ships for Indonesia every autumn, the director and his ten employees were left on Deshima to tie up all transactions and to make preparations for the visit the following summer. On holidays, the Dutchmen slaughtered cattle brought from abroad or purchased from Nagasaki farmers and enjoyed a feast with Japanese guests.

The beginning of the nineteenth century saw turbulent changes around the world. The Netherlands was annexed by France in 1810, and its colony in Indonesia was captured by the British the following year, making Deshima the only place in the world flying the Dutch flag and suspending the voyage of Dutch ships to Japan for a period of three years. The incumbent director, Hendrik Doeff steadfastly refused all attempts by Britain to take over the trading post during this period, maintaining its independence until the next ship arrived.

The Netherlands was finally restored in 1815 and the Indonesian colony returned by Britain the following year. Doeff was later decorated by his country for his loyalty and courage.

Another famous former resident of the island is Philipp F. von Siebold (1796-1866), who arrived in Nagasaki in 1823 to serve as resident physician on Deshima. During his stay he conducted research with the cooperation of the Dutch interpreters, Nagasaki artist Kawahara Keiga and the Japanese students who gathered in Nagasaki from around Japan to draw from the well of Western science. Later, he published the results of these extensive studies in Europe, including information on the natural environment, geography, history, customs and arts of Nagasaki. In particular, his work "Nippon" published from 1832 gave Europe its first clear look at Japan and remains a classic to this day. Siebold introduced Western medicine to Japan and contributed enormously to the modernization of the country. He was in fact one of the first Europeans to study Japan in depth and to promote knowledge about the country overseas.

The last director of Deshima, Donker Curtius, arrived in Nagasaki in 1852, the year before American Commodore Matthew Perry visited Uraga near Edo to demand the opening of Japan's doors for trade. At that time Curtius submitted to the Nagasaki Magistrate (national government representative in Nagasaki) an official letter from the governor of the Dutch East Indies. The letter predicted the arrival of the Americans and requested that Japan sign a trade pact with Holland before that

event. The bakufu government, however, ignored the letter.

The following year, Japan was thrown into a state of confusion by the arrival of the American squadron in Uraga and the visit by a Russian delegation led by Rear Admiral Putiatin to Nagasaki.

In 1854, the Japanese government signed a trade pact with the United States, and this was followed soon after by trade pacts with Russia, Great Britain and France. Donker Curtius also signed a trade pact for his country in 1855, thus ending the confinement of his compatriots on Deshima and allowing Japanese citizens free access to the island. In 1858, the trading post was converted to a consulate, and in 1860 it started as part of the larger Nagasaki foreign settlement.

Although it had enjoyed a monopoly on foreign trade during the Edo Period, Nagasaki found itself at a disadvantage to Kobe and Yokohama after the opening of Japan's ports in 1859. As a result, the city forged plans for the construction of a new trade port. In an eight-year-long construction project from 1883, silt was removed from Nagasaki Harbor and Nakashima River was rerouted to flow between Deshima and Edo-machi. As a result, an 18-meter-wide strip of land was sliced off the concave side of the island.

Then in a second large scale harbor reconstruction project from 1897 to 1904, the waterfront on both sides of the harbor was filled in and equipped with facilities appropriate for an international port.

Unfortunately, however, the historic island of Deshima was lost because the surrounding harbor was filled in during the course of this project.

Restoration Plans

Excavations conducted over the past decade by the Nagasaki City Board of Education have revealed portions of the original foundations and also unearthed a large number of artifacts, animal bones and other materials that shed light on the lifestyle of the former Dutch inhabitants. The former front gate was reconstructed in 1995, and although not at the original location a replica of the Deshima flagpole has also been erected. The ongoing short to mid-term plans call for the restoration of other buildings and gardens starting from the west side of the former island as well as the reconstruction of the stone bridge that once connected the island to the Edo-machi neighborhood. Efforts will also be made to preserve and utilize the four late nineteenth/early twentieth-century buildings presently standing on Deshima, that is the former Deshima Protestant Seminary (built in 1879), the former Nagasaki International Club (built in 1904) and two stone warehouses.

Before the celebration of the 400th anniversary of Japanese-Dutch relations in the year 2000, Nagasaki City hopes to finish work on the following six former structures: the head clerk's quarters, kitchen, first ship captain's quarters, No.1 and 2 warehouses, and sea gate. Not as much as a trace remains of these structures, and the only existing photographs are those taken (mostly from the harbor) after the opening of Japan's doors in 1859 (for example, see p.6 and 15). Thus the only reliable source of information about the size, style and location of former buildings is the hand-painted bird's-eye views of the island as it looked in the early part of the nineteenth century.

The long-term restoration plans pose still greater problems because they call for the surrounding of Deshima by water on all four sides and the complete reproduction of the fan-shaped island and trading post. Since it will involve the rerouting of Nakashima River and redesign of city streets,

this part of the project is expected to take several decades and to cost enormous sums of money.

An objective observer might ask why these plans did not emerge sooner, and indeed why the island was so completely neglected in the first place. The answer is that, once the Dutch East India Company factory closed down, Deshima became more of an impediment than a “gateway” to modernization, especially in a city so chronically short of flat land. It was not until after the rush to modernization and urbanization slowed down and Nagasaki had managed to pick up the pieces after the atomic bombing that city officials found the leisure to think seriously about historical and cultural assets. But now, however late, Nagasaki is searching for a new position as a city of culture and peace, and the importance of Deshima as a historic site and tourism resource is more than enough to justify the restoration plans.

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