

The Year in Nagasaki

Siebold Secret

Philipp F. von Siebold (1796-1866), the German doctor and naturalist who served as physician at the Dejima Dutch Trading Post from 1823 to 1829, is known today as one of Japan's greatest early benefactors in the field of science and medicine. A recent discovery shows that his activities went well beyond the merely academic. Researchers at Nagasaki's Siebold Memorial Museum (Narutaki-machi) announced the discovery of documents linking Siebold to the establishment of the Russian-Japanese border in 1855.

The documents show that Siebold, who had been appointed as an advisor to the Russian czar because of his great knowledge of Japan, recommended that the borderline be drawn between Etorofu and Urup islands northeast of Hokkaido. The handwritten documents include a letter addressed to a high-ranking official of the Tokugawa Shogunate in 1853 making the same recommendation. As it turned out the two countries agreed to the Etorofu-Urup border in the Russo-Japanese Treaty of Amity in 1855.

But, in a twist of history 90 year later, the Soviet Union seized the four northern islands including Etorofu in the wake of World War II. Now the development of Japanese-Russian relations is hampered by Japan's claim to the islands and Russia's refusal to give them up. It seems that, on this side of the Sea of Okhotsk at least, Siebold's recommendation continues to bear weight even after 140 years.

A Request Touches a Sensitive Nerve

Dr. Martin Harwit, director of the U.S. National Air and Space Museum at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., visited Nagasaki on April 7, 1993 to request the loan of atomic bomb exhibits for a special exhibition to mark the 50th anniversary of the atomic bombings.

Atomic bomb survivors immediately expressed concern that the exhibition would be a means to 'show off' American nuclear might and to support the country's ongoing adherence to the theory of nuclear deterrence.

Clearly, one reason for the concern is the museum's plan to restore and display the Enola Gay, the B29 bomber used to deliver the Hiroshima atomic bomb. Said survivor representative Yamaguchi Senji: 'Although donated to Nagasaki City, the atomic bomb museum exhibits are the relics of more than 70,000 victims who suffered gruesome deaths. Among the bereaved families are many who would say "Why should we lend exhibits to a country that insists on justifying the atomic bombings and on refusing to apologize?"'

However, Dr. Ito Tatsuya, director of the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum, pointed out that 'it is important at this time in history to change public opinion in the United States by showing the effects of the atomic bombings directly to the people, and the proposed exhibition will provide an ideal opportunity to do this if properly handled.'

City officials were reticent at first in deference to the feelings of the atomic bomb survivors, but museum officials assured the two atomic-bombed cities that the exhibition will provide a balanced and accurate view of the events leading up to the bombings, their effects, and their meaning for the future of humanity

In his letter to the museum, which by coincidence fell on the anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack, Mayor Hitoshi Motoshima promised Nagasaki's cooperation on the basis of the following three conditions: 1) that the exhibits be designed to instill in visitors an understanding of the fact that 'nuclear weapons must be abolished if humanity is to survive;' 2) that the exhibits must not be used to boast about the power of the atomic bombs or to justify their use; and 3) that the relics to be loaned, which are articles of immense value to mankind, be handled carefully and returned intact.

As it turned out, both Nagasaki and Hiroshima promised their cooperation and are now reviewing the exhibition plans.

Atomic Bomb Museum Piece

The Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum (official name: Nagasaki International Culture Hall) is meanwhile temporarily out of a home. The reconstruction of the institution is currently underway and is slated to reach completion in April 1996. The new museum will be a unique low-lying structure with a spacious underground floor on which all the atomic bomb exhibits can be displayed and also a video room, peace research hall, library, meeting rooms and storage space. The plans also call for the relocation of relics from nearby Hypocenter Park to an open lobby stairwell illuminated by skylights.

City officials announced recently that a portion of the former Urakami Cathedral will be restored inside the museum in its original size. The restored wall be approximately 10 meters high and 14 meters wide and will include bricks that were part of the original building. In order to impress visitors with the devastation caused by the bomb, other relics such as the twisted frame of a water tower will be displayed nearby.

The original Urakami Cathedral was completed in 1925 after some 30 years of work, a romanesque-style building of brick and stone and the largest church in the Orient at the time. Located only 500 meters from the hypocenter, the church was almost completely demolished by the atomic bomb. The remains were cleared and replaced with the present reinforced concrete building in 1959.

Reunion

One of the most shocking exhibits in the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum is a color photograph of a 16 year-old boy lying face down in hospital with bright red open burns all over his back. The boy, whose name is Taniguchi Sumiteru, had been exposed to the atomic bomb explosion 1.8 kilometers from the hypocenter while delivering mail in the Sumiyoshi district of Nagasaki.

Despite the fame of the photograph, the person who actually took it was unknown, unknown that is until Mr. Joe O'Donnell, an American visiting the Atomic Bomb Museum this past November, identified himself as the photographer.

It seems that Mr. O'Donnell came to Japan in September 1945 as a U.S. marine cameraman and stayed here for seven months to record the war damages in approximately 50 cities around the country.

Mr. O'Donnell (71), who came to Nagasaki for the first time in 48 years, was stunned to hear that the boy, Mr. Taniguchi Sumiteru, is now 64 years old and one of Nagasaki's most prominent atomic bomb survivors and anti-nuclear activists. Said the former photographer: 'It was such a ghastly wound that I thought the boy had no more than a few days to live.'

A reunion was immediately arranged, and Mr. Taniguchi agreed to Mr. O'Donnell's request to photograph his healed wounds. 'It is a miracle that I survived,' said Mr. Taniguchi. 'There are still many other survivors who are suffering from the effects of the bombing.'

Mr. O'Donnell meanwhile has requested the cooperation of Nagasaki City is holding an exhibition of his photographs on the 50th anniversary of the atomic bombings in 1995. In parting, the photographer and his former subject shook hands vigorously and promised to work together to rid the world of nuclear weapons.

Bad Times for the Tourism Industry

Tourism joins shipbuilding and fisheries as one of the three traditional pillars of the Nagasaki economy, and in recent years it has become the rising star in the city's future outlook. Last year, however, the industry took a hard blow from Japan's current economic slump and other factors such as the cold summer and the growing trend among Japanese tourists to choose foreign over domestic destinations.

The Nagasaki City Tourism Section uses the number of visitors to Glover Garden as an index of the overall influx of tourists to Nagasaki. Data released recently by the section shows that a total of 1,923,873 people visited Glover Garden during 1993, or 2.4% less than in 1992. The drop was particularly prominent among dantai or group visitors, with a decrease of 4.6% overall and a staggering 27.6% and 23.2% in the key months of July and August.

Section officials state that the economic situation and Nagasaki's tourism prospects are no better for 1994, and so the city has been making new efforts this year such as the restoration in February of the old Maso Gyoretsu (the procession held by Chinese residents during the Edo Period to celebrate the safe arrival of Chinese ships), the shifting of Nagasaki Festival events to the end of July, and aggressive promotion campaigns in the Kanto and Kansai areas.

Korea Takes the Lead

Nagasaki's time-honored tourism industry saw another interesting change last year. Americans, who have traditionally accounted for the majority of foreign tourists to Nagasaki, were stripped of their lead by visitors from South Korea during 1992.

Figures compiled by the Nagasaki City Tourism Section show that 7,099 Koreans (22.6% of the total) visited Nagasaki as tourists as compared to 5,873 Americans (18.7%).

The section attributes this change to the relaxation of limitations on overseas travel by the Korean government and the establishment of regular air service between Nagasaki and Pusan as of January 1991. Most of the Korean visitors come in groups on package tours and stay at Unzen or Obama after visiting Nagasaki and the Dutch-style theme park Huis Ten Bosch.

Considering this new trend, the Nagasaki prefectural and municipal governments will undoubtedly begin to put more emphasis on services and information in the Korean language.

Disappearing Traditional Architecture

One thing that the planners should think about is just what tourists are looking for when they go to all the trouble to come to Nagasaki. The fact that they invariably gather at historic sites such

as Glover Garden, Sofukuji and Megane-bashi is evidence enough that the ‘old face’ of Nagasaki attracts more attention among visitors than the new one.

What the tourism and city planners alike have apparently overlooked or deliberately ignored is the importance of historic buildings other than those with some ‘foreign connection.’

A recent study by Murata Akihisa of the department of architecture at the Nagasaki Institute of Applied Science revealed that the traditional Japanese neighborhoods of central Nagasaki are rapidly disappearing in the face of urban development.

In a similar study in 1977, Prof. Murata counted 378 classic wooden Japanese houses in the neighborhoods of central Nagasaki that participate traditionally in the Kunchi Festival. In his recent study, Prof. Murata found that 107 or 31% of these houses have been replaced by condominiums or other modern buildings. Moreover, only a small proportion of the houses that have escaped the wrecker’s hammer retain their original appearance.

Said Professor Murata: ‘These houses are invaluable historic assets and display architectural features unique to Nagasaki, such as the narrow second-story balconies and balustrades installed to allow inhabitants to view the Kunchi performances. Without preservation measures and efforts to harmonize old and new buildings, they will all disappear very soon.

If the authorities do not take note of this advice, they may find that the tourists disappear as well.

Films Are Returned to Nagasaki

The National Air and Space Museum at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., which is presently preparing for an exhibition on the atomic bombs to mark the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, recently donated a valuable motion picture to the city of Nagasaki.

Comprised of 19 reels (nine on Hiroshima and 10 on Nagasaki), the film was made soon after the bombings but was confiscated by the American armed forces. It was later returned to Japan, but the Japanese government deleted the parts showing human injuries before public release.

Entitled ‘The Effects of the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki,’ the film was produced from September 1945 to January 1946 by Nippon Eigasha Co. in close concert with scientific investigations organized by the Japanese Ministry of Education.

The production staff of about 30 persons broke into four teams in charge of physics, medicine, biology and civil engineering, respectively. One of the cameramen recounted his experience as follows:

“Although two months had already passed since the atomic bombing, the northern part of the city remained a vast field of rubble and more rubble, an uninhabited wasteland where, except for the provisional road running north and south, there was no one to ask for information and nothing of any particular shape or form to photograph.

I finally set up my tripod near present-day Peace Park and took a 360 degree pan shot of the area, then filmed similar footage at 500-meter intervals using my map as a guide.

Wandering about the scorched rubble in this way for more than a month, I began to understand the colossal power generated by the atomic bomb. The ravaged state of buildings was particularly

astonishing. And when I filmed children with atomic bomb burns, I would usually return two or three days later to find that they had died.”

Nagasaki Speaks, p.121, Nagasaki, 1993

A preview held in Nagasaki on February 24 elicited a powerful response from the audience and requests that the film be shown publicly in its entirety.

Said Iwamatsu Shigetoshi, a university professor and leading anti-nuclear activist: ‘The absence in the Japanese version of parts showing the effects on the human body has led to an under-estimation of the damages caused by the bombings. A film on the atomic bombing is meaningless without pictures of the victims.’

U.N. Disarmament Conference

The Nagasaki prefectural and municipal governments had been appealing for several months for the holding of the U.N. Disarmament Conference in Nagasaki in 1995 the 50th anniversary of the atomic bombings. Prvoslav Davinic, director of the U.N. Office for Disarmament Affairs, announced during the 1994 conference being held in Hiroshima in late May that the parties had agreed to the Nagasaki request.

A project advocated by the Japanese government, the U.N. Disarmament Conference has been held in Japan every year since 1989. The municipal authorities view the Nagasaki conference, which will be held here next June, as one of the highlights in the schedule of events to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the atomic bombing

Nagasaki-Shanghai Link Restored

The Japan-China Marine Transport Council announced on May 25, 1994 its agreement on the launching of a regular passenger/cargo service between Nagasaki and Shanghai, and the service started on June 22.

The Chinese ship Haihua (‘Sea Flower,’ 15,350 tons), which can carry 165 passengers and 26 containers, is now making a weekly trip between the two ports, leaving Yanagi Wharf in Nagasaki at 5:00 p.m. Thursday, arriving in Shanghai at 9:00 a.m. Saturday, leaving Shanghai on Monday 5:00 p.m. and arriving in Nagasaki at 9:00 a.m. Wednesday.

The ship offers accommodations from economy (¥19,000 one way) to special class A (¥41,000 one way). Discounts are available for round-trip passengers, children, disabled persons and groups. Among the facilities are a reading room, game room, bar, restaurant and outdoor pool.

The project means the resumption of ocean transportation between the two ports after a silent interlude of half a century. Nagasaki and Shanghai were linked from the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century as ports-of-call for trade vessels, navy squadrons and opulent foreign ocean liners like the Empress of India, and from 1923 to 1943 the much-loved Nagasaki Maru and Shanghai Maru shuttled between the two ports twice a week as part of a Japanese-Chinese joint venture. But both ships were sunk during World War II and the service was discontinued.

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