

NAGASAKI

The destruction of Nagasaki in August 1945 is an object lesson in the absurdity of war. The city was the most international of any Japanese city, with a history of international connections far older than those of the 19th century treaty ports such as Yokohama or Hakodate. As such it represented precisely that side of Japanese history, that openness to the world, that was most opposed to the narrow nationalist obsessions of the military governments that precipitated Japan into the war.

Nagasaki was a centre of Chinese influence in Japan for most of its history and its China Town, though small by today's standards, predates that of Yokohama, today the most important and impressive China Town in the country, by centuries. Nagasaki was also the centre of Christianity in Japan due to Spanish and more importantly Portuguese influence in the 16th century and received the full force of the anti Christian policies of the early shoguns, who wanted to wipe out this source of alternative allegiances to their own.

After the policy of isolation was instituted by the new shogunate government in the 16th century Nagasaki became the only place in Japan where western merchants could legally trade – these were the Dutch, who were happy to focus on the practicalities of international trade while confined to their artificial island of Dejima for most of the year.

In the nineteenth century the daimyo (feudal lords) of Kyushu were among the first Japanese leaders to start to modernise the Japanese economy and Nagasaki became an important site of Japan's early industrialisation through its shipbuilding and mining interests. The Scottish industrialist Thomas Blake Glover played an important role in these developments and supported the local samurai leaders who were determined to overthrow the shogunate as part of Japan's modernisation. His House, the Glover Garden, is today one of the city's main tourist sites. There is even a legend linking Glover to the story of Madame Butterfly – there is a statue of Puccini in the garden of the house.

The Glover Garden is perched on a hill to the south of the city centre with a fine view over Nagasaki Bay – on the opposite hills to the north are the Dutch Slopes, an area of western style houses that retain their 19th century look and that reflect the easing of restrictions on western traders and industrialists as Japan began to modernise.