Middlemen and Middlewomen: Sex Trafficking Networks in Japanese Open Ports in the Nineteenth Century
Ann Marie L. Davis
UCLA, PhD Candidate in Japanese History
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**Introduction**

Frequently decried as “modern-day slavery,” human trafficking constitutes a global phenomenon that has existed for centuries – indeed millennia – and clearly dates before “modern” times. ¹ Women and children, the most frequent subjects of human trafficking, were not viewed as “victims” in this trade, however, until relatively recently, at the turn of the twentieth century. At this time citizens in “modern” and industrializing countries began to politicize the issue along with related yet more general practices of prostitution as problems of global concern. The 1902 International Agreement for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic, for example, marks a watershed moment when moral, feminist, and human rights advocates began to collaborate internationally to suppress activities involving “the procuration of women and girls for immoral purposes abroad.” Despite this international attention, however, human trafficking not only persisted but garnered more and more global concern; showing unprecedented global solidarity, forty-nine countries ratified a United Nations Convention in 1949 for the

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¹ In this paper I recognize the United Nations definition for “human trafficking,” an activity involving “traffic in persons for the purpose of prostitution.” Based on this definition, I use the terms “human trafficking” and “sex trafficking” interchangeably. More importantly, I use the words “sex trafficking networks” and “sex trafficking patterns” to refer more broadly to institutions and events that shape how men, women and children are recruited, transferred or harbored for purposes of sexual commerce.
Recognizing the increasing frequency of sexual trafficking and advocacy, my research aims to trace historical antecedents of these trends involving women and children in the Pacific Rim in the nineteenth century. In particular I focus on the tide of human trafficking to and from Japanese ports during a period when global concerns were first enunciated in Europe, North America and indeed East Asia. While the historical roots of this ongoing issue merit a variety of analytical perspectives and disciplinary approaches, the present study aims to delineate some of the macro dimensions of sex trafficking as seen through the micro lens of Japanese case studies. To this end, I propose three distinct and related phases of Japanese and World History: i) feudal isolationism (1800-53); ii) heightened political turmoil and change (1853-80); and iii) early colonial expansion (1880-1900). I discuss these stages as political and economic backdrops that directly shaped discrete historical patterns in human trafficking in the Pacific Rim. Although this type of “top-down” analysis runs the risk of oversimplifying or obscuring the “human experience” of sexual trafficking, it aims nevertheless to put forward a framework by which researchers can better discern the evolution of past and present patterns in sex trafficking. By correlating the relevant phases in nineteenth-century Japanese and World History, scholars of human trafficking are better equipped to understand the gamut of micro- and macro- forces that continue to drive global sex economies to this day.

**Japan and the Pacific Rim: Three Stages in Nineteenth-Century History**

Viewed through the lens of trade and diplomacy, nineteenth-century Japanese history can be divided into three distinct periods: i) feudal or “pre-colonial” isolationism
(1800-53); ii) heightened political turmoil and change (1853-80); and iii) early colonial expansion (1880-1900). First, from the turn of the century until 1853, the central islands of the Japanese archipelago continued under Tokugawa Shogunate rule, a feudal military dictatorship established by Tokugawa Ieyasu in 1603. Although arguably incomplete, one of the most salient features of Tokugawa rule was its foreign policy prohibiting all Japanese and foreigners from entering or leaving the main archipelago under penalty of death. Coined in retrospect as “chained” or “closed country” (sakoku), the isolationist policy remained in effect for more than two centuries, until the arrival of US Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry and his notorious gunboat diplomacy (in 1853). As throughout most of the Tokugawa period, Shogunate authorities restricted formal trade and foreign relations to exchanges taking place in Nagasaki, a small port on the southern tip of Kyushu Island. At this time, negotiations were not only isolated within this small, remote enclave, but they were also restricted to contact with agents of the Dutch East Indies Company or operators hailing from Qing China.²

Next, from 1853 to 1880, Japan experienced a period of heightened turmoil and upheaval including the dissolution of the Tokugawa Shogunate, the threat of western colonization, civil war, and the Meiji Restoration (1868). Although Japan was never formally colonized, it was coerced under U.S. and European pressure to open formal treaty ports in which western powers could dock warships, conduct trade, dispatch dignitaries, and establish permanent consular outposts. Established under the Treaty of Commerce and Friendship (a.k.a. the Harris Treaty) in 1858, the terms of Japan’s new relationship with the

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² During most of the Tokugawa period, Japan also maintained indirect contact with China via the Ryukyu vassalage of the Shimazu daimyo of Satsuma. Nevertheless, these ties remained informal, and indeed efforts were made to conceal the relationship in order that the Ryukyu kingdom could continue tribute missions to the court at Peking. (Sakai, 1969)
foreign powers were lopsided and unfair, guaranteeing the western signatories extraterritoriality rights and trade advantages such as low fixed import duties subject to external control. Such one-sided stipulations created a system of “informal imperialism,” which gave Western officials the power to make unfair and even offensive demands on their hosts. (Burns, 4). Earning the unfortunate moniker of the “unequal treaties,” the Harris treaty and those that ensued clearly encroached on Japanese sovereignty and signaled its vulnerability to the West.

Despite these overwhelming challenges however, authorities in the new capital Tokyo focused their energy on “catching up” with the western powers and regaining full national sovereignty. Thus, as the Meiji oligarchy consolidated domestic power, it gradually entered a new phase of early colonial expansionism. While no one discrete event marks the separation between the second period of turmoil and the next period of early empire building, I choose the year 1885 as a tipping point between the chaotic early Meiji years on the one hand, and the increasingly stable and calculated years of nation-building on the other. As early as the first year after the Meiji Restoration, Tokyo had already begun expanding the nation’s borders to include Ezochi, a large, northern territory placed under the control of the ad hoc Meiji Colonization Office (1869) and subsequently renamed Hokkaido. Nevertheless, events such as the Bōshin War (1868-69) and the Satsuma Rebellion (1877) presented significant challenges to the stability of the fledgling government throughout its first decade. While the Japanese national border next advanced southward with Japan’s forceful incorporation of the Ryūkyū Kingdom as

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3 The treaties were objectionable to Japanese not only because they imposed low fixed tariffs on foreign imports and thus handicapped domestic industries, but also because they gave a virtual monopoly on external trade to the Western powers.
Okinawa Prefecture in 1879, the Meiji government could not yet claim political or economic stability until the mid-1880s. Having quelled military insurgents in the previous decade, Meiji authorities next began to implement austere economic policies (known as “Matsukata Deflation”) to subdue a crisis of rampant inflation. Finally, with the suppression of the Chichibu Rebellion (1884), the Meiji oligarchy, armed with a newly modernized imperial army established incontrovertible authority and was now firmly entrenched at home.

Despite solidifying domestic control, however, the Restoration government continued to recognize its vulnerability vis-à-vis the western powers, which in turn motivated its increasing involvement in overseas confrontations during the third period and well into the twentieth century. Among other anxieties, Japan feared Russian expansion into northern Qing China and Korea, and it sought foreign conquests in emulation of colonial policies practiced by its western rivals. Indicating its growing interests abroad, Japan coerced Korea into signing the Treaty of Kanghwa (1876), an equally unequal agreement reminiscent of the Harris Treaty almost twenty years earlier. Meanwhile, invoking the mantra “rich nation, strong military” (fukoku kyōhei), the Meiji government prioritized the creation of a powerful, modern navy and army in anticipation of international aggression. Many leaders, including War Minister Yamagata Aritomo, believed that national security depended not merely on a strong defense but also on expansion. By the mid-80s, the presence of Japanese imperial forces was clearly recognized in northeast Asia. Nearly averting war with China over the growing power vacuum in Korea, the Meiji government signed the Sino-Japanese Convention of Tientsin.

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4 In this treaty, China and Japan agreed to (a) pull their expeditionary forces out of Korea.
in 1885. Despite this forestallment in the mid-80s however, Japan finally encountered China on the battle field ten years later, and experienced its first major victory abroad in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95). In sum, in addition to acquiring the new colony, Taiwan, as a spoil of war, Japan also gained the attention - if not full respect – of the Western powers by the turn of the twentieth century. In 1894, the new Meiji leaders finally won revisions of the reviled unequal treaties, and in 1902, they succeeded in forming an alliance with the world's leading power, Great Britain.

Indeed, at the close of the nineteenth century, Japan looked back on a series of astounding changes and transitions. Japanese diplomatic and trade relations evolved within systems of a) marked isolationism under the Tokugawa bakufu, b) threatened sovereignty and vulnerability during the Meiji Restoration, and finally, c) early empire-building in order to gain parity with the West. While each of these stages was characterized by individual events and power constellations unique to Japanese history, they also each converged with trends and systems that comprise some of the key events of Pacific Rim and world history.

The first phase, isolationism, for example, overlapped with two noteworthy events already shaping trade networks and diplomacy in the Pacific Rim: a) the expansion of transnational commerce by the Dutch East Indies Company and b) the shift of migrant circuits under the Chinese Diaspora, which reached its apex in the nineteenth century. Representatives from both Dutch and Chinese groups had been settling temporarily in the

simultaneously; (b) refrain from dispatching military instructors to train of the Korean army; and (c) notify the other side in advance should either country decide to send troops to Korea.
Tokugawa-designated port of Nagasaki – a type of settlement that Jones et al. label as a “colony of sojourn” – to engage in trade with isolationist Japan.5

As with the first phase of isolationism, the second phase in nineteenth-century Japan, instability and informal imperialism, coincided with a broader, more global phenomenon: the peak of Western expansionism in East and Southeast Asia. Indeed as Zhou points out, the Dutch took over Indonesia at the turn of the eighteenth century (1799); the Great Britain “occupied and ruled territories on the Malaya Peninsula, including Singapore” (1819); and Great Britain also wrestled control of Hong Kong from China after two opium wars. (Zhou, 5) Thus, foreshadowing/auguring the period of informal imperialism in Japan, China became a “semi-colonial state” in the 1840s, suffering the indignity of its own series of unequal treaties, most notably the Treaty of Nanking (1842). Following the Dutch and British examples, the French proceeded to invade Cochinchina (the southernmost part of present-day Vietnam) (1864) and then annexed the whole of Vietnam by 1885. (5)

Finally, as Japan emerged from seclusion and civil war, and began to pursue industrialization and modernization more aggressively, its decision to emulate Western-style expansionism not only marked its entry into a third Japanese stage of trade and diplomacy, but also indicated an era of imperialism in East Asia that shaped power constellations in the Pacific Rim well into the twentieth century. Thus, this third stage of

5 In contrast to “colonies of settlement” characterized by direct overseas intrusion, societies in East Asia, most notably Tokugawa Japan, managed to ward off political intrusion by foreign agents. (Jones et al, 1993, 44-45)
incipient Japanese imperialism no longer simply *overlapped* with broader trends in global history but rather began to *merge with* and even *define* a new system of imperial expansionism for greater East Asia. Demonstrating this convergence in Japanese and Pacific Rim history, Imperial Japan extended its borders beyond Japan proper (*naichi*), as defined in the early Meiji period, to include the lands of Ezochi (as the colony of Hokkaido), the Ryukyus (as Okinawa Prefecture), the Republic of Formosa (Taiwan), and Joseon Korea. Indeed, presaging this merger of Japanese interests with those of “Greater East Asia,” the famous educator Fukuzawa Yukichi extolled the idea of Japanese imperialism in laying out his thesis “Japan’s Mission in Asia” as early as 1882.⁶

Whether viewed as strictly unique to Japanese history or more applicable to broader, more significant trends in world history, the overlappings and mergers of the stages outlined above are directly relevant to understanding the development of sex trafficking patterns emanating to and from Japanese ports in the nineteenth century. Moreover, it is precisely the amalgamations of these stages and events that ultimately dictated the possibilities, experiences and destinies of women and children trafficked/ensnared through these networks.

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⁶ As suggested here, many scholars trace the roots of twentieth-century Japanese imperial institutions including the Ministry of Greater East Asia (known originally as the Ministry for Colonization, organized in 1929) and the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (conceived in 1941) to early Meiji ultra-nationalists works such as Fukuzawa’s in *Jiji Shinpō* (“the Times,” founded 1882) and *Datsu-A Ron* (“Leaving Asia” 1885).
Stage I: Prostitution, Concubinage, and “Temporary Marriage” in Pre-Colonial Nagasaki, (1800-1853)

Constrained by the policies of Tokugawa isolationism, human trafficking during the latter half of the Tokugawa period rarely involved the transportation or transfer of persons overseas. Nevertheless, it was not uncommon during this period for women, men, and children throughout the Japanese archipelago to be recruited, transferred or harbored between borders of feudal domains known as “countries” (kuni). Academic studies of the sex industry in Tokugawa Japan – particularly in Japan’s most notorious pleasure quarters Yoshiwara in the capital Edo – are plentiful. However few of these consider the topic in terms of human trafficking. Designed not only for local Japanese customers, but also for foreigners in the restricted Nagasaki settlements, the Maruyama pleasure district lends itself well to the investigation of historical precedents in sex trafficking to and from Japanese ports. Due to its location in Nagasaki, a “geopolitical” or “cultural borderland” vis-à-vis the outside world, the Maruyama pleasure quarters offer a unique opportunity to see how transnational systems such as Chinese and Dutch trading networks converged with isolationism to shape sex trafficking during the last decades of Tokugawa rule.

In fact precedents for transnational trafficking in the nineteenth century ports were established as early as the sixteenth century, during a “pre-colonial” period when the first Europeans began traveling to Japan and cohabiting with native women. The circumstances of these arrangements overlapped two spheres of conventionally opposing relationships: those between prostitute and client, and those between husband and wife. Many of these early, long-term “mixed marriages” evolved originally from short-term associations between foreign visitors and local prostitutes. Of course the nature of such
relations varied dramatically depending on the individuals involved. Nevertheless, systems of concubinage and prostitution in Nagasaki were also largely defined according to the existence of government regulations concerning permissible contact between local women and foreign visitors.

The Japanese government permitted Japanese merchants to interact and conduct business with overseas people until the early seventeenth century. Traders from the London East India Company, representatives of the Dutch East Indies Company (VOC), and individual agents from China, Southeast Asia, Portugal, and Spain comprised the majority of foreigners in Japan. In the early 1620s, however, interactions between Japanese and foreigners were soon radically altered. In 1622, for instance, the English decided on their own accord to pull out of Japan due to low profits. Next, in 1623 the bakufu placed the Portuguese under careful restriction and surveillance, and then, in 1624 it completely banished the Spanish from the islands and prohibited Japanese Christians from traveling abroad. Because the Tokugawa empire depended entirely on the loyalties of individual daimyo, the shogunate had become skittish over the growing number of Catholic converts in the country. By some estimates, Japan had as many as 2,000,000 converts at that time. Fearing the defection of converted daimyo to outside religious authorities in Rome, the third Shogun Iemitsu began to view the proselytizing activities of Latin missionaries as detrimental to the stability of his regime (Goodman, 11).

Consequently, the shogunate enacted increasingly stringent policies in attempt to control and curtail the activities of foreigners. By 1635, Iemitsu issued an edict forbidding “on pain of death” the repatriation of all Japanese residents living abroad. From this point
forward, no Japanese were allowed to leave the country.\footnote{According to different sources, different dates are given for the edict forbidding the repatriation of Japanese and restricting their travel abroad. As noted in the text, this edict was issued in 1635 according to Murakami. Goodman, however, writes that it was issued on June 23, 1636.} (Murakami, 355) The following year, in 1636, the bakufu banished all Japanese women married to Portuguese and persons of “mixed blood” including the grandchildren of Portuguese and Spanish visitors. According to this ordinance, “two Portuguese galliots took to Macao two hundred eighty-seven persons with their property amounting to 6,697,500 florins” in the fall of 1636.\footnote{Again, depending on the source, the number of boats and the number of people banished to Macao are different. In contrast to Goodman, Vos writes that “four galliots conveyed 387 persons with their property...” (614)} (Goodman, 11) The Shogun also consigned all remaining Europeans to Dejima, a man-made islet in the harbor of Nagasaki, and restricted their contact with native Japanese to officially licensed merchants in specially designated areas.

By July and August 1639, the “seclusion policy” was fully implemented with the ruling that thereafter only Chinese and Dutch were allowed to conduct trade in Japan. (Vos, 614) Although representatives from China and Holland were allowed to remain in Japan, their activities, like those of the Portuguese before them, had become strictly regulated. In that same year, Shogun Iemitsu also decided to send away all Dutch residents married with Japanese women and to banish children of European descent and their mothers in Nagasaki and Hirado. The Dutch ship Breda leaving Hirado in October 1639 took on board 4 Dutch families, 7 children of Dutch men, 1 daughter of an Englishman and 2 of an Italian, and 6 Japanese mothers, and arrived at Batavia on the 1st of January, 1640. (Murakami, 26)

Consequently, a general missive from Batavia (Java), dated January 8, 1640 looked forward to the ensuing arrival of over four hundred banished men from Japan to be accompanied by their wives. (26)
In terms of sex trafficking, one of the most significant results of the expulsion edicts was that from that point forward, permanent ‘mixed’ marriages between Dutch men and native women were absolutely prohibited. Although François Carron, the Chief of the Dutch factory at Hirado, was married to a Japanese and had five children at this time, he obtained special permission to stay with his family until February 1641. After Carron, however, foreigners could no longer expect to marry native women, particularly after their consignment to Dejima on July 24, 1641. In fact, regardless of race or nationality, virtually no women were allowed to have contact with the remaining Europeans in Dejima. Rules determined soon after the Dutch incarceration on Dejima not only forbade the foreigners from leaving the island without permission (“kotowari nakushite Oranda-jin Dejima yori soto e izuru koto”), but also prohibited women – with the exception of prostitutes – from visiting them there (“Keisei no hoka onna iru koto”). These regulations were among the first and fifth posted at the entrance of Dejima in 1666. Apparently before they were posted, however, they were already in effect as unspoken rules by 1641. (Vos, 615-6)

Thus confined to the island and restricted in their contact with women, lifetime relations with Japanese natives were indeed virtually impossible. Despite these limitations, however, the establishment of a brothel district and regulations concerning prostitutes worked together to encourage the development of long-term relations and cohabitation on the island of Dejima. According to the “Confidential Records of Nagasaki” (Kiyō hiroku), the first visits of prostitutes to Dejima coincided with the establishment of the Nagasaki pleasure quarters, Maruyama-cho, in 1642 (Vos, 616). Interestingly, the name

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9 I assume that marriages between Chinese merchants and Japanese women were also prohibited around this time. Currently, I am still looking for specific details regarding Tokugawa laws on Chinese-Japanese “mixed marriages.”
“Maruyama” in Nagasaki seems to have originated from a hill in Hirado where special houses were built for the entertainment of English sailors earlier in the century. Because the sailors were so rowdy when they docked in Hirado, the English captain Richard Cocks had felt compelled to restrict them to this hill above the port. In 1641, when the Dutch moved to Nagasaki, the name of the hill was transferred with them and was applied to the corresponding quarters in Nagasaki (Paske-Smith, 45). By 1649, visits of licensed prostitutes from Maruyama to Dejima became established custom. Subsequently, throughout the period of Japanese seclusion, “the prosperity of Maruyama went up and down in proportion to the trade with China and Holland”. (616)

After the protocol of regular visits was established, Dutch residents needed simply to appeal to one of the seventeen resident “Commissioners for Victualing” (Kaimono Tsukai), Japanese staff members who resided with their families on Dejima, to have a prostitute brought to him. As part of the extensive retinue of Japanese officials dispatched to oversee foreign activities, these Commissioners were responsible for “provid[ing] the island with food, household goods, and prostitutes” (Goodman, 22). Extensive books and memoirs left by Karl Thunberg (1743-1828), a Swedish botanist who lived in Japan from 1775-1776, provide a vague understanding of the general circumstances between the Dutch and Maruyama prostitutes during this period. According to Thunberg, the town of Nagasaki was just like any other Japanese town because it afford[ed] opportunities to the Dutch and Chinese of spending their money in no very reputable manner. If any one desire[d] a companion in his retirement, he ma[de] it known to a certain man, who [went] to the every day for this purpose. This fellow before the evening procure[d] a girl, that [was] attended by a little servant-maid, generally under the denomination of a Kalbro… (Thunberg, 74-5).
In contrast to the restrictive nature of pleasure quarters in Edo or Kyoto, the unique conditions in Nagasaki permitted prostitutes and their servants to leave Maruyama in order to visit their clients. They were broadly divided into three categories: those going to the Dutch (*oranda yuki*), those going to the Chinese (*kara yuki*) and those going to the Japanese (*nihon yuki*). Later during the Meiji period (1868-1912), the term *kara yuki* became a title for children and women going to all foreigners in general or those recruited for trafficking abroad. During the period of *sakoku*, however, a variety of other appellations were used synonymously to refer to one of the three broad categories; other ways to say *kara yuki*, for example, included *tōjin yashiki yuki*, *tōkan yuki*, *jūzenji yuki*, and *kan’nai yuki* (those going to the Chinese factory, Chinese building, Juzenji Temple, and “inside the Chinese factory” respectively). The term *tōkan* was another expression for “Chinese factory,” as was *kan’nai* in the local vernacular. *Jūzenji* was the name of a temple located near the Chinese factory. Other expressions for *oranda yuki* included *oranda yashiki yuki*, *rankan yuki*, and *dejima yuki* (those going to the Dutch factory, the Dutch building, and Dejima respectively). Again, the term *rankan* was a second way to refer to the Dutch Factory, while *dejima*, of course, referred simply to the island where the Dutch were confined (Koga, 230-1).

Hinting that the rules at Dejima encouraged long-term relationships, Thunberg testifies that:

One of these female companions [could] not be kept less than three days, but she [could] be kept as long as one please[d], a year, or even several years together. After a shorter or longer time too, one [was] at liberty to change, but in that case the lady [had to] appear every day at the town gate, and inform the banjoses whether she means to continue or not. For every day eight mas [was] paid … and to herself, exclusive of her maintenance, presents [were] sometimes made of silk night-gowns, girdles, head ornaments, &c. (Thunberg, 75)
Compensating their prostitutes with gifts and money, the foreigners seemed to appreciate these women for romantic and familial reasons as well as sexual. Lacking the amenities of night-time servants, one Dutch visitor, Mr. G.F. Meylan, wrote plaintively: without these women “‘how, then…could the Dutch residents otherwise manage to procure any domestic comfort in the long nights of winter, - their tea-water, for instance, - were it not for these females?’” Passing high praise on “their strict fidelity and affectionate activity,” Meylan also suggested that the combination of these services and attributes formed the virtues of a good housewife. Recognizing a parallel between Meylan’s attitude and later, nineteenth-century arrangements of concubinage or “mixed marriage” between foreigners and Japanese natives, Hildreth points out perceptively: “indeed the connection appear[ed] to be regarded by them not so much in the light in which we see it, as in that of a temporary marriage” (Hildreth, 487).

Stage II: What Western Colonialism and Capitalism Bring to Japanese Sex Trafficking (1853-1885)

In contrast to the above-described “pre-colonial” patterns of concubinage or “temporary marriage,” Japan’s ensuing period of instability and turmoil ushered in two new distinct patterns of human trafficking from the newly opened ports. The first of these, linked most directly to the unequal treaties, involved the introduction and imposition of “modern” European regulatory methods on Japanese prostitutes who serviced foreign customers. The second of these, the trafficking of Japanese women and children (karayuki-san) overseas, commenced a few decades later, as soon as the Meiji government
lifted all restrictions on overseas travel. Although both of these patterns underscored the development of unprecedented power inequalities in the Pacific Rim, the former manifested Japan’s diplomatic and legal vulnerability to the Western powers, while the latter emphasized the birth of a new chasm between urban and rural economies within Japan’s increasingly capitalist society.

I. Modern Mandatory Venereal Disease Testing

The “Posadnik Incident”

The first demands for “modern” venereal disease testing in Japan were made by a Russian naval official commanding the Posadnik, a warship docking in Nagasaki for repairs and fuel during the summer months of 1860. Within days of the ship’s arrival, Nagasaki residents began complaining that the foreign sailors were harassing local women and girls. When the Nagasaki Bakufu magistrate, Okabe Nagatsune, complained to the Russian commander about the sailors’ behavior, the commander responded in turn by asking permission for his men to visit the Nagasaki yūkaku (pleasure quarters), an area where officially authorized brothels were separated from the rest of the city. The magistrate granted him permission, but “a new problem emerged when the Russian commander insisted that the women in the quarter be subjected to genital examinations” for syphilis (Burns, 4). Worried about the health and vitality of his crew, the commander aimed to ensure that his men did not have sexual relations with prostitutes who were infected with venereal disease. Not surprising however, the commander’s demands “were met with dismay on the part of Okabe and outrage on the part of those within the yūkaku”
(Burns, 4). Attesting to the unprecedented nature of the foreigner’s demands, Okabe responded that vaginal testing was “‘something which has never occurred in our country’” (13).

Frustrated by the Russian’s request, Okabe turned to local “Dutch Studies” experts J. L. C. Pompe van Meedervoort (1829-1908) and Matsumoto Ryōjun for advice. Consequently, “the medical issue involved in the Posadnik incident – namely, the status of syphilis as an infectious disease – came to involve …[a] body of experts who looked to forms of knowledge derived from very different cultural systems” (6). Because Okabe desired to appease the Russian crew but was unwilling to force a decision on the managers of the pleasure quarters of Nagasaki, he turned to Matsumoto Ryōjun, one of the few students proficient in Dutch, for advice and help. As a compromise to the Japanese and Russian parties, Matsumoto devised the notion of a special brothel for Russian sailors whereby, in exchange for “twice the usual payment,” a number of Japanese prostitutes (yūjo) would be chosen at random, moved to a makeshift brothel, and subjected to regular syphilis inspections. (14)

According to his memoirs, Matsumoto thus established the first brothel with facilities for venereal disease testing in the history of Japan. The new syphilis examinations came to be known in Nagasaki as “‘viewing the whores’ private parts,’” while the inspected yūjo were referred to as “Russian whores.” Although Okabe and the brothel owners were ultimately satisfied by the extra profits that the new system exacted from “the foreigners,” Matsumoto and his colleagues found the examination procedure “extremely distasteful.” Matsumoto himself found the tests so repulsive that after two examinations he turned the responsibility over to his junior assistants. Similarly repulsed, the inexperienced
examiners developed a special elevated chair that was high enough off the ground that the woman had to climb a set of stairs to mount it. With her genitals at eye-level and her face out of sight, the young practitioners could objectify the woman’s body and make the inspections seem a little less personal. (14-5)

Matsumoto did not write about how the new procedure influenced his views of public hygiene. Nevertheless, his memoirs suggest that somewhere in the process, he “began to perceive the examination not merely as a way of appeasing foreigners in the treaty ports but as a necessary and vital technique that had implications for Japan as a whole” (15) When he moved to Edo during the final years of the Bakufu, he became an arch advocate of regulating venereal disease in order to protect the future of Japan. His memoirs identify the spread of syphilis as “the most serious of all diseases” due to its ability to proliferate “‘without limits’” and thus “‘destroy the strength of the nation’” (15).

So convinced of the utility of “modern” European regulatory system, Matsumoto eventually drew up plans for the creation of Japan’s first, ‘syphilis-free’ pleasure zone. Once they were authorized, he created a new district of twenty-one brothels near Edo. On the entrance gate to his complex, he posted a large sign designating the area a “Syphilis Hospital District of the Bakufu Medical School.” Despite Matsumoto’s intentions and struggles, however, he had to abandon his plans after the fall of the Tokugawa Shogunate. His new district survived the Restoration, but his plans to conduct regular venereal disease testing in the district did not. As he notes in his memoirs, “‘Suddenly the Bakufu fell, so we couldn’t perform the examinations, and all I succeeded in doing was creating another brothel district’” (15-16).
Although systematic venereal disease testing was greeted with resistance and opposition by the declining Tokugawa shogunate, it was a widespread component of public health projects in virtually all of nineteenth century Europe at this time. As Burns confirms in her investigation of the Posadnik incident, “[t]he notion of regulation prostitution by licensing either prostitutes themselves or brothels would have been a familiar one to the Russian crew of the Posadnik, for the nineteenth century was marked by a wave of regulation in almost every European country” (6). As historian Fujime attests, the “modern licensed prostitution system, a combination of compulsory venereal disease examinations and a registration system for prostitutes, began in the West during the Napoleonic era.” Hoping to “preserve the battle potential of military troops,” European officials geared their regulation systems toward prostitutes who were held responsible for the spread of venereal disease. (Fujime, 135)

By the nineteenth century, a system of mandatory regulations in so-called “Lock Hospitals” emerged in England with the passage of the Contagious Disease Acts (CDA, 1864, 1866, 1869). According to these Acts, British women suspected of prostitution could be subjected to compulsory medical examinations on eighteen military and naval bases throughout the country. (Taithe, 184) If diagnosed with venereal disease, the women were detained and treated within specially designated Lock Hospitals; if deemed “syphilis-free,” the women were released to ply their trade. Emulating licensing systems in France and Russia, the Contagious Disease Acts aimed to curb the spread of venereal disease particularly within the nation’s military. Once again, these inspections were based on the notion that prostitutes were solely responsible for the spread of venereal disease. As with the French and
Russian systems, the imposition of the new laws in Britain reflected a growing interest for state intervention in public life. Furthermore, and more relevant to the story of trafficking in the Pacific Rim, the newly defined licensing system became an integral component of maintaining British Empire abroad.

Government enthusiasm and support for the Lock Hospital system was eventually manifested by British efforts to reproduce such hospitals in its foreign colonies and settlements abroad. In contrast to the Posadnik commander’s spontaneous demands for makeshift syphilis testing, British implementation of the licensed prostitution system was calculated and systematic throughout the empire. Considering British power “contingent upon maintaining … troop strength at high levels and in good health” (Kaminsky, 78), imperial officials recommended the implementation of the Contagious Disease Acts in British colonies including India, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Shanghai (Fujime, 126). Operative not only within the confines of Great Britain, the Lock Hospital system imposed the standards of public hygiene, prostitute management, and compulsory testing on a number of cultures worldwide.

**Bringing the Lock Hospital System to Japanese Ports**

While Japan never formally constituted a part of the British empire, the British Legation was able to bring the Contagious Disease Acts to the foreign settlements due to their unfair advantages in governing Japan’s treaty ports. Beginning with the Harris Treaty, the unequal treaties demanded the opening of trading ports in Kanagawa (Yokohama), Hyōgo (Kobe), and Niigata to foreign trade and settlement by the fall of that year. Based on the treaties’ clauses of extraterritoriality, these ports, along with the cities of Edo (Tokyo) and
Osaka, were soon subject to the demands and caprices of Western visitors. Echoing the Harris Treaty, Article IV of the Anglo-Japanese Treaty, for instance, stated that “‘All questions in regard to rights, whether of property or person, arising between British subjects … Japan, [were to] be subject to the jurisdiction of British authorities.’” Likewise, under Article V, all “Offences against Japanese were to be ‘tried and punished by the consul … according to the laws of Great Britain” (Cortazzi, xii). Such one-sided stipulations gave Western officials the power to make unfair and even offensive demands on their hosts. Aiming to avoid scenes of molestation and harassment such as those committed by the Posadnik crew, Bakufu and Meiji officials soon recognized that it behooved them to cooperate with European programs to regulate all prostitutes working in treaty port pleasure quarters. (Burns, 4)

Consequently, contemporary observer J.E. de Becker notes, a “hospital for the treatment of venereal diseases of prostitutes was established in Yokohama for the first time in the history of Japan” in September 1867. “[S]ubsequently,” he continues, “similar institutions were established at Kōbe and Nagasaki,” and then at Senju in 1871. Calling the new institutions “the Hospital[s] for Venereal Complaints” rather than Lock Hospitals, De Becker explains they were adopted by the bakufu government “owing to the representations made by an Englishman – Dr. Newton, R. N.” He adds that despite “much opposition from prejudice and ignorance,” Newton eventually “succeeded in converting the authorities to his views after a long struggle” (De Becker, 163). Again, as Burns confirms, Newton could thank the “‘imperialist’ relations of power,” for giving him and other British officials the authority to demand for syphilis testing and inspection offices in the first place (Burns, 16).
II. Extending Japanese Networks Overseas: the “Karayuki-san”

While the top-down imposition of “modern” venereal disease testing practices involved the trafficking of new knowledge systems on public health, the nation, and the body, the bottom-up evolution of overseas trading networks likewise conveyed radical transformations to human trafficking patterns in the Pacific Rim. In addition to expansion of contacts with overseas merchants, the sudden appearance of economic inequalities between Japan’s new urban rich and struggling peasant population further exacerbated the growing number of bodies now available for sexual servitude. Characterized by domestic economic instability, the growth of overseas sex trafficking networks falls categorically within the second period of turmoil and Restoration outlined above. Nevertheless, the Meiji phenomenon of shipping women and children (karayuki-san) overseas developed several decades after the Restoration and continued to flourish well into the twentieth century.

As mentioned above, the term “karayuki” was originally used in Nagasaki during the Tokugawa period to denote prostitutes destined for customers working in the Chinese factory in Nagasaki. During the Meiji period however, the term “karayuki,” gradually came to signify the practice of sex trafficking via Japanese ports to destinations throughout the Pacific Rim. Interestingly, the word karayuki (literally meaning “going to China”) contained the very notion of migration – if not trafficking – within it. When adding the honorable suffix “san” to the end, the appellation “karayuki-san” simply denoted a person – usually a woman or child, typically from Amakusa Island or the Shimabara Peninsula in Northern Kyushu – who made the voyage in search of livelihood abroad as a prostitute.
According to Morisake Kazue, other terms for such a person included karayukidon and karankuniyuki. (Morisake, 17-18)

The Japanese Context: Rural Poverty and the Meiji Restoration

Again, as suggested above, the Meiji Restoration placed an unbearable strain on much of the peasantry, which, according to Sone, comprised roughly eighty percent of the Japanese population. (Sone, 104) To be fair, a number of peasants, particularly the gōnō class (wealthy peasants), arguably benefited from the Restoration – especially during its earlier, more chaotic years. Having grown prosperous by the end of the Tokugawa period, this entrepreneurial class had gained many of the privileges of the aristocratic samurai class, operated as village leaders, and looked forward to the liberalization of laws on their status and commerce. Indeed, as agrarian protests continued into the early Meiji years, starving peasants tended to target the gōnō as the source of their problems, rather than Meiji representatives or policy makers.

Putting the gōnō aside, however, most Japanese peasants were barely surviving. Many of their struggles continued unabated from the Tokugawa period – as did many of their measures for dealing with such hardship, including practices of infanticide and human trafficking. To make matters worse, Restoration policies aimed at “modernizing,” “industrializing,” and “militarizing” the nation now brought heightened adversity to lower agrarian classes. Meiji land tax reform (1873), for instance, brought about the redistribution of ownership and income rights, which, in turn, ultimately increased the number of landless farmers. While agricultural recession forced families to find employment outside of the agrarian sector, constant natural catastrophes forced tenant farmers to the point of starvation.
In an effort to survive, destitute families often sold female members into bondage as nursemaids (komori), female factory workers (jokō), geisha, and, of course, prostitutes (shōfu).

Another source of hardship characteristic of the transformations of the Meiji period was a steep rise in the national population. According to Shimizu et al., “the Japanese population continued to grow steeply from 35,200,000 in 1873 to 46,100,000 in 1903, [and] 56,000,000 in 1920…” In spite of this expansion,

much of the rapidly growing population was not sufficiently absorbed by the economy in which agriculture and small and medium-sized manufacturing industries continued to account for a large proportion of gainful employment. (Shimizu et al., 17)

To be sure, Japan’s struggling economy certainly exacerbated problems of joblessness and high tenancy rates. What’s more, for the first time, it encouraged large numbers of impoverished Japanese to consider seeking opportunity abroad. When the Japanese government finally lifted all bans on overseas travel by the early eighties, the number of Japanese emigrants exploded. At this time

large numbers of Japanese began to emigrate to North America, Latin America, Southeast Asia, Oceania and other parts of the world. The annual average number of Japanese who went abroad with valid passports was 2,045 in 1881-90, 11,672 in 1890-1900, 14,729 in 1901-10 [and 16,727 in 1911-20…” (17)

According to Sone, among these emigrants, the number of karayuki ultimately exceeded 100,000 over a period of roughly five decades.” (Sone,104)

Of these emigrants, Sone writes, the number of karayuki ultimately exceeded 100,000 over a period of roughly five decades.” (Sone,104) Of course not all destitute women went abroad. Large numbers of girls from northern Japan, for example, ended up
in cities like Tokyo to work as maids, prostitutes, barmaids, factory workers and geisha. Nevertheless, those in the south migrated more frequently overseas via the port of Nagasaki, “the primary place of export for women and coal to China and Southeast Asia. (105) In fact, in the islands of northern Kyushu there was already a local tradition of migration to Kumamoto and Nagasaki to find work. According to Mihalopoulos, these islanders’ “consequent familiarity with the possibilities and practices of leaving the island to seek opportunities … led to the formation of the … karayuki-san.” (Mihalopoulos, 46)

In addition to demographic pressures and traditions, Meiji efforts to “modernize” and “catch up” with the Western powers brought about changes in the legal sphere that also contributed indirectly to the formation of overseas trafficking networks. After the Maria Luz Incident (1872), for instance, Meiji policy makers succumbed to international pressure to abolish slavery and prostitution and thus enacted legislation prohibiting the sale of persons for any type of service in Japan. Consequently many sex trade establishments were inadvertently forced to shut down. Many women bound for jobs in pleasure quarters in Japan now found themselves “stranded… without a means to survive.” (Colligan-Taylor, xvii) Merchants with overseas connections began offering such women transport to destinations in the Pacific Rim. According to Colligan-Taylor, by 1877 a new “system emerged to systematically gather them up and send them abroad.” (xviii)

By the mid-Meiji period, the origins of karayuki were not confined to northern Kyushu. Employment agencies (kuchi-ireya), which sought young women to fill overseas positions including domestic servants, waitresses, and nannies, sprouted up in all of the open ports of Japan. In addition to these more respected jobs, the kuchi-ireya also supplied “a great number of young women to overseas brothels.” While in some cases the agencies
managed to attract young women legitimately, often due to publicity about the money to be made abroad, on other occasions they reportedly obtained women by “tricking” them and “lulling them into a false sense of security only to smuggle them overseas and sell them into brothels.” (Mihalopoulos, 49) In any event, the business of sex trafficking was no secret. Returnees, traffickers, and brothel owners were often the subjects of regular popular newspaper reports and official ministry memoranda on the phenomena of trafficking.

The Global Context: Chinese Diaspora, Migrant Culture, and Resulting Sex Imbalances

Of course Japan was not the only nation to experience heavy emigration at the end of the nineteenth century. Large numbers of bachelor-migrants around the world were moving to urban centers to work in fledgling industrial and commercial enterprises at home and abroad. The most prominent wave of migrant labor at this time was the “huagong” component of the Chinese Diaspora. With the First Opium War in China (1840-42), the prior “Chinese century” of stability and prosperity reached its demise, and the foundations of the Q’ing Empire began to erode. As turmoil, chaos, and extreme poverty characterized turn-of-the-century Q’ing China, a new and distinct stream of “huagong-dominated” or contract labor migration began heading overseas – especially to Southeast Asia (the Malay Peninsula, East Indies, and Philippines), Hawaii, continental US, Canada, Siberia, South Africa, Australia, Cuba and Peru. Also referred to as “the coolie trade,” the number of huagong émigrés reached the million mark by the end of the century. In search of better lives, the “labourers were prepared to risk imperial wrath and emigrate, for instance, to
mine tin in Perak and gold in Bendigo, to open up the tobacco plantations of North Sumatra, to pioneer railroad construction in the American West, to prop up the declining sugar industry of Cuba, to develop the fertilizer industry of Peru, and to become rickshaw pullers in Singapore.” (Warren, 10).

No matter where they immigrated, one of the most salient features of migrant laborers was that they traveled in groups and often settled together in crowded working-class tenements or makeshift settlements. Destination labor markets were capable of absorbing them, but their sudden influx often brought serious social problems to their host communities, often referred to as “borrowed places.” (9) As practically all of the coolie laborers were bachelors, they created unprecedented and soaring demands for the services of prostitutes and pleasure districts. Making the situation even more complex, times of prosperity attracted increases in the male population and exacerbated the general lack of women. As Warren attests, in this type of setting, the labor market itself “created a situation fraught with possibilities and problems.” (10)

Chinese migrant laborers were not the only customers exacerbating demands on sexual markets. Indian, European and American men also migrated to port cities throughout the Pacific Rim to pursue burgeoning business opportunities in shipping, mining, trade, and construction. According to Shimizu et al., Asian immigrants tended to find employment in infrastructure construction, commerce, and other industries where hard labor was involved. Meanwhile “[c]aucasians were mainly engaged in administration, the armed forces, foreign trade and other non-menial works.” In addition, the populations of migrants from western colonizing countries also frequently included more transitory visitors including seamen, tourists and transit-visitors. (Shimizu et al, 22-23) In any event, regardless of their type of occupation or length of sojourn, each of these foreign populations
manifested strikingly large gender imbalances.

Keeping in mind the close relationship between karayuki trafficking and the high number of male migrants in the nineteenth century, many scholars focus their research on the port city of Singapore as a major center and case study where sex trafficking in the Pacific Rim thrived. While hardship and poverty drove Japanese and other foreign nationals to emigrate there, unparalleled opportunity in Singapore (known retrospectively as the “Singapore economic miracle”) lured migrant laborers away from their homelands. Describing its seemingly boundless opportunity, Warren writes, “Singapore was booming,” and in contrast to China and Japan, “the region was opened up to economic development.” (10) In addition to its economic pull and unique demographics, colonial gender hierarchies further encouraged the trafficking of karayuki and other Asian women. Throughout British Malaya, colonial authorities banned the activities of British prostitutes “because in their view, such women would tarnish the British prestige.” (Lockhart, 122-23) Consistent with such supremacist views, colonial administrators also avoided publicizing the existence of other European (non-British) brothels. (Shimizu et al., 24)

Stage III: Imperial Regimes of Regulation: Early Japanese Imperialism (1885-1900)

In this section I will address the development of top-down Japanese efforts to appropriate and impose “modern” European regulatory schemes throughout the Japanese Empire. I will focus special attention on how these schemes abetted Japanese authorities in their early efforts to expand territorial control in the northwestern quadrant of the Pacific
Rim. In addition, I will write about how such regulatory schemes were implemented in
the colonies as they were acquired by the Japanese government.

I will submit this part of the paper to conference organizers by Wednesday October 25.
Works Cited


