

Japan Avenue in the Yokohama Foreign Quarter in the Meiji Period:

— Revealing the True Picture and Role of the Street

as an Administrative District Based on Nonwritten Material —

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Upon the opening of Japan to the world, the country was required to establish foreign quarters. In founding the first foreign settlement in Yokohama in the vicinity of Edo, a unique approach was adopted to keep foreign residents under surveillance and avoid conflict between such residents and Japanese. To be exact, the plan included developing a settlement that was to be isolated from other parts of Japan like Dejima Island in Nagasaki, and building separate areas for foreigners and Japanese so that the parties would be able to do business together in the settlement. This isolation was a unique feature of the Yokohama foreign quarter. In terms of city planning, the settlement is highly valued as a model case for which a Western method was quickly adopted like that in Kobe.

These distinctive characteristics are reflected in Yokohama Park and the adjacent Japan Avenue. The street served as a border between the Japanese and foreign areas, and separation between walkway and roadway and street trees convey the essence of the Western-style city planning method. Along the avenue, government offices mushroomed, and the area is still known as an administrative district. Even though the street played an important role in the development of the foreign quarter, there is not enough historical reference material explaining the formation of the administrative district in detail. This paper examines how Japan Avenue was built in reference to non-written material on the Yokohama foreign quarter after the Tokugawa shogunate such as old maps, photographs and woodblock prints to find out about the establishment of the administrative district.

The research yielded the following four results: 1. Old maps indicate that Japan Avenue already existed in 1871. 2. Government offices started to be built along the street around 1874. 3. After Yokohama Customs was built in front of Yokohama Park in 1885, the district felt closed and unwelcoming with the prefectural government office, a post office and a police station on the Japanese side and British, Swiss and American consular offices on the foreign side. 4. The administrative district that was centered on the customs office was destroyed in the Great Kanto Earthquake. As part of the country's reconstruction efforts, the office was rebuilt in a different location, and consequently an open and well-balanced atmosphere was created in the renewed administrative district.