The published diary of Baroness d’Anethan, the English wife of Baron Albert d’Anethan, Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of the King of the Belgians, presents to us the experiences of the wife of a diplomat in Japan over an unprecedentedly long period of fourteen years. From her arrival in Japan on 2 October 1893, to her departure for Europe in March 1906 which marked the end of her published diary entries, Baroness d’Anethan recorded her impressions and descriptions of the social, cultural and political events in the late-Meiji period, over a span of years unrivalled in the published writing of women travellers to Japan.

Background

Baroness d’Anethan was born in 1860, one of nine children of William Haggard, a Norfolk barrister from the rural gentry, and Ella Doventon Haggard, who had been raised in British India. Five of the nine Haggard siblings achieved fame as writers, the most well-known being her brother, H. Rider Haggard who wrote over fifty novels, of which *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885) was possibly his most successful adventure story.

Baroness d’Anethan chronicles few details about her life prior to her marriage to the Baron, a member of an illustrious Belgian family. Personal details about Baron Albert d’Anethan (but not the Baroness) are found in her diary’s Introduction, which was written by Takaako Kato, from the Japanese Embassy in London in 1911. It is interesting that Kato introduces Baroness d’Anethan’s writing through the prism of his esteem for the Baron; her literary worth is measured, not as an independent individual, but only in relation to her husband’s achievements. As the wife of a career diplomat, Baroness d’Anethan’s inclusion of these
accolades to her husband would have been received as most appropriate. Of the Baroness, Takaako Kato wrote that:

Being an English lady by birth and endowed with all the superior qualities of her race, she is quite a woman of the world, eminently fitted to be a diplomatist’s wife. Her natural charm, grace, broad-mindedness and sympathetic nature, in addition to her tact and discretion, must have been of invaluable help to her husband.5

As the wife of the most senior Minister in the diplomatic corps for most of the time she lived in Japan, Baroness d’Anethan held the pre-eminent diplomatic social position as doyenne. This placed her at the centre of social events, both European and Japanese, and allowed her privileged access to the Imperial family and Japanese nobility. When the British Ministry was up-graded to the status of an Embassy in late-1905,6 this role of doyenne passed to Lady Macdonald. On 1 January 1906, Baroness d’Anethan wrote: ‘Today was the New Year’s reception at the Palace ... The British Ambassador and Lady Macdonald naturally preceded A. and myself. A. has been doyen for seven years, and I doyenne for nine years.’7 The reason for the seeming discrepancy in the number of years served by the d’Anethans as doyen and doyenne is explained by the fact that Sir Ernest Satow – the British Minister from 1895 to 1900 – was a bachelor,8 and on two occasions asked the Baroness to be his hostess. She wrote in 1896: ‘Sir Ernest Satow came round to ask me to act as hostess at his official dinner.’9

The narrative

Fourteen Years of Diplomatic Life in Japan10 is valuable as a primary source of contemporary events in Meiji Japan, seen through the eyes of an observer/participant, over a period of time which was marked by important political coming-of-age changes within Japan and changes in the perception of Japan by the Western powers. In the Introduction, Takaako Kato acknowledged this by stating that her diary was ‘in fact a history, social and otherwise, of my country during its most interesting period’.11 In 1912, her publisher – Stanley Paul and Co. – recommended to their readers, the:

Stray leaves from the Diary of the Baroness d’Anethan ... widow of the late Baron Albert d’Anethan, Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of His Majesty the King of the Belgians at the Court of Japan. For fifteen or sixteen years Baron d’Anethan held this position, and during the whole of that period the Baroness described day by day events, historical, social and official, in which she was taking part. The Diary commences with her first day in the Far East, and deals with the