CHAPTER FIVE

ECONOMIC EXPANSION

On 14 April 1884, Holme, Ringer & Co. received official appointment as Lloyd’s agent at Nagasaki, a designation that cemented the company’s status as Nagasaki’s business leader and local link in the global network of trade and communication.¹ A further boost came in the summer of the same year when the Mitsubishi Mail Steamship Co. took charge of the government shipyard at Akunoura on the Inasa side of Nagasaki Harbour. The editor of The Rising Sun and Nagasaki Express applauded the decision and predicted that Mitsubishi would be much more successful than the Imperial Japanese Navy or any government body in introducing new technology, dealing with competition and earning profits. His long article on the subject reflects the elation of the foreign community, which saw the Mitsubishi takeover as a light at the end of the dark economic tunnel of the 1870s and an opportunity for foreign as well as Japanese businesses. He confidently assures readers that:

The port of Nagasaki is well situated geographically; the land-locked deep-water harbour is easily accessible, safe, and admirably adapted for these purposes; it is a coaling port; the surrounding country abounds with all descriptions of timber, from oak to cedar; skilled labour is cheap; provisions and necessaries in general are as plentiful and far cheaper than in any other part of the East; and in fact everything is strongly in favour of the Nagasaki Dockyard being made a great success in the hands of an energetic and influential firm with almost unlimited resources like the Mitsubishi Co.²

One of the first vessels to visit the newly-founded ‘Mitsubishi Nagasaki Shipyard’ was the French naval frigate Triomphante, which arrived on 8 July 1885 and underwent repairs at the dock for a period of about one month.³ The 4,176-tonne frigate was by far the largest ship in the harbour: the runners-up were the 2,380-tonne British corvette Champion and the

¹ The Rising Sun and Nagasaki Express, 26 April 1884.
² The Rising Sun and Nagasaki Express, 5 July 1884. This comment is preceded by a detailed description of the dockyard, factories and other facilities. Mitsubishi purchased the rights to the shipyard in 1887.
³ The Rising Sun and Nagasaki Express, 8 July 1885. The newspaper carried an announcement of the arrival of the warship this day.
2,300-tonne American frigate *Trenton*, the latter still decked out in bann-
ers from its celebration of Independence Day four days earlier. At the side of the larger steamships, chains of basket-bearing labourers, some of them women with infants strapped to their backs, stood on ladders and passed coal up to the bunker ports with ant-like diligence. Other groups of Japanese sat in boats or clambered up onto the ship decks to hawk a dazz-
ling array of crafts and curiosities, everything from bamboo ear cleaners to bird cages, silk kimono, Noh drama masks, scarlet lacquerware trays with mountain scenes painted in gold, and bottles of medicinal liquor containing poisonous snakes.

The city of Nagasaki stretched back from the waterfront: to the south the foreign settlement; to the north orderly rows of low wooden buildings with ceramic-tile roofs and white paper windows. A grid of flagstone-paved streets led up to a string of Buddhist temples skirting the hillsides and, behind them, graveyards looking out over the old town as if to remind the populace of the impermanence of life. Shinchi, the former site of ware-
houses, was now a congested Chinese Quarter. The island of Dejima was intact, devoid of its status as Japan’s only point of contact with the Western world but still untouched by the harbour reclamation projects that would engulf it by the turn of the century. Although the chonmage topknots and samurai swords of old were gone, most of the Japanese people walking in the streets wore traditional dress, lived in houses that dated back to the days before the opening of the port, cooked food with firewood in earthen kitchen *kamado* stoves, illuminated rooms with oil lamps, and enjoyed the same familiar Nagasaki diet of Japanese cuisine spiced with Chinese, Portuguese and Dutch influences. There were no telephone poles, no modern vehicles (other than rickshaws with spoked bicycle wheels), no significant military presence, and still very few artifacts of glass or steel to mar the historic townscape. In short, aside from the foreign settlement and the Mitsubishi factories, the lifestyles of the citizens of Nagasaki and the physical appearance of their city remained remarkably unchanged since the sunset years of the Edo Period.

Lieutenant Julien Marie Viaud, one of the officers gazing from the quar-
terdeck of the *Triomphante*, was better known in his homeland as ‘Pierre Loti’, the author of quixotic travelogues enjoying acclaim for his keen pow-
ers of observation, his gift for poetic turn of phrase, and his talent for smuggling himself into the bosom of faraway lands. During the month-
long stopover in Nagasaki, Loti engaged a teenage prostitute in a kind of play-marriage and wove his impressions of the city into in a book entitled *Madame Chrysanthème* that promptly shot to the top of bestseller lists