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This evocative collection of more than 150 picture postcards offers a fascinating insight into Japanese society in Singapore in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Used as souvenirs and as vehicles for advertisements and personal correspondence, and even propaganda, postcards have taken on many roles throughout Singapore's history, making them unique and valuable sources of documentation.

Based on the Lim Shao Bin Collection of Japanese historical materials at the National Library Singapore, this important study illuminates new historical perspectives on the Japanese community as well as related subjects like tourism, war and empire in pre-World War II Singapore.

Postcard Impressions of Early 20th-Century Singapore

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Postcard Impressions of Early 20th-Century Singapore

Perspectives from the Japanese Community

*From the Lim Shao Bin Collection,
National Library Singapore*

Regina Hong, Ling Xi Min and Naoko Shimazu

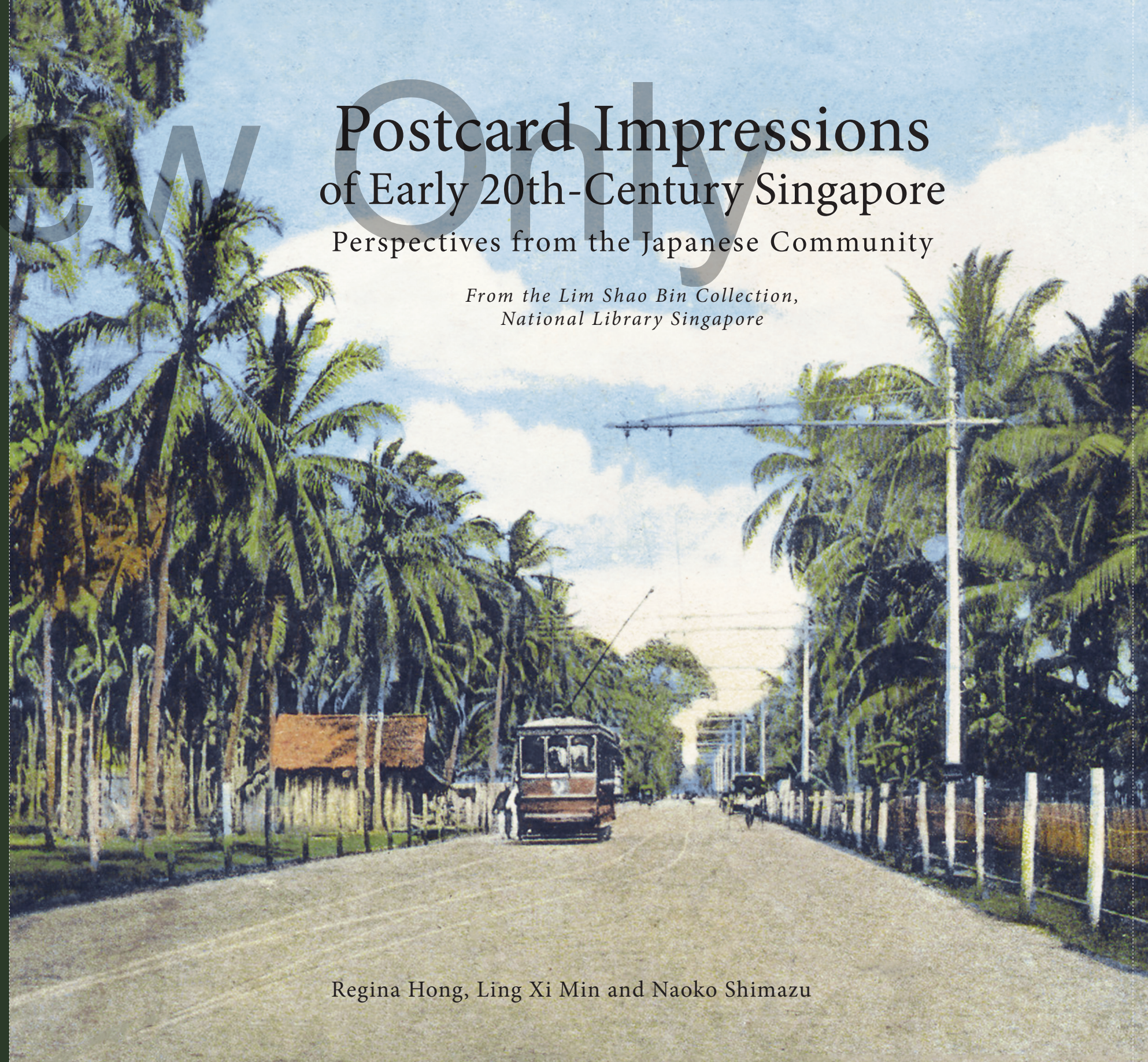
About the Lim Shao Bin Collection

Mr Lim Shao Bin is an independent researcher and a well-known collector of Japanese historical materials on Singapore and Southeast Asia. Between 2016 and 2020, he donated more than 1,500 items, painstakingly amassed over a 30-year period, to the National Library Board. The Lim Shao Bin Collection is a rich resource for the study of the pre-war Japanese community in Singapore and Japan's military expansion into and subsequent occupation of Southeast Asia during World War II. The collection has maps, newspapers, postcards, books, periodicals, posters and ephemera dating back to the 1860s. Notable items in the collection include Japanese intelligence maps of Singapore and cities in Southeast Asia as well as documents on the Nanpō Operation that point to Japan's imperialist plans to colonise this region as far back as the 1910s. The collection also has some of the earliest locally published Japanese guides on Singapore: the "*Harada's Guide*" (1919) and *Shingapōru Gaiyō* (1923).

About the National Library Board

The National Library Board promotes reading, learning and information literacy in Singapore by providing a trusted, accessible and globally connected library and information service through the National Library, a network of 26 public libraries and the National Archives. One of the major functions of the National Library is to acquire, preserve and provide access to materials relating to Singapore's literary and cultural heritage.

Cover image: This postcard of an idyllic Geylang Road is postmarked 17 October 1912. Early spellings of Geylang include Gaylang or Gelang. (See p. 102; Accession no.: B32413805D_0064)



For Review Only

Postcard Impressions
of Early 20th-Century Singapore
Perspectives from the Japanese Community

From the Lim Shao Bin Collection, National Library Singapore

Regina Hong, Ling Xi Min and Naoko Shimazu

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Front endpaper image (see page 65): Scene from a postcard showing a fishing village in the waters off Pulau Brani, a scene that travellers would have encountered as their ships pulled into Singapore’s harbour. *Accession no.: B32413807F_0001*

Back endpaper image (see page 58): This postcard features the Central Police Station on South Bridge Road in Singapore (top left) as well as the vessel S.S. *Sanuki Maru* of the NYK (bottom right). *Accession no.: B32413805D_0093*

For Review Only

Contents

Foreword	07
Introduction: Postcard Views	09
Chapter 1: Mapping the World on Postcards	27
Chapter 2: Early Japanese Tourism in Singapore	55
Chapter 3: Early Japanese Community in Singapore	113
Chapter 4: Circulation of Japanese Postcards in Singapore	147
Acknowledgements	191

For Review Only

Foreword

The picture postcard's heyday was in the late 19th to early 20th centuries. It was a quick and easy way to communicate – whatever one wanted to write was confined to a small blank space – that also doubled as a keepsake of one's travels. Compact in size and convenient to post, old postcards have become collector's items today, valued for the rare images, stamps and postmarks they contain, and oftentimes for the messages and identities of the senders and addressees.

Postcards, such as the ones found in the Lim Shao Bin Collection at the National Library, can also illuminate history, in this instance providing a rare glimpse into the origins, practices and culture of the Japanese community in Singapore during the pre-war period. While much has been written about the Japanese Occupation in Singapore, we know a lot less about the Japanese who resided here prior to the Second World War.

The postcards showcased in this publication feature international shipping routes that point to Singapore's place in the global trade network, as well as landmarks and scenes of a bygone era. The writers – Regina Hong and Ling Xi Min, together with Professor Naoko Shimazu from Yale-NUS College in Singapore – have put together a selection of postcards from the collection that not only help us understand the lives of the early Japanese settlers who sank their roots on this island, but also provide fascinating perspectives of early Japanese travellers passing through Singapore.

This study would not have been possible without the postcards that Mr Lim Shao Bin, an independent researcher who has been collecting Japanese historical materials for the last 30 years, kindly donated to the National Library. Beyond postcards, the collection also contains important Japanese maps and atlases, newspapers, books and documents, mostly relating to the Second World War in Singapore and Southeast Asia. We are grateful to Mr Lim, who shared his vast knowledge and expertise with the writers, often pointing to the significance of specific elements on the postcards.

I hope that *Postcard Impressions of Early 20th-Century Singapore* will encourage further research into our collections and enable people to discover little-known aspects of Singapore's fascinating and multi-faceted history.

Tan Huism

Director, National Library, Singapore

CARTE POSTALE
For Review Only



INTRODUCTION

POSTCARD VIEWS

オサカは便郵

OSAKA SHOSEN KAISHA



商船株式會社

For Review Only

The picture postcards in the Lim Shao Bin Collection at the National Library offer fascinating insights into Singapore society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Many of the postcards in this collection are Japanese in origin, providing interesting historical perspectives on early Japanese connections to the island, as recorded by Japanese travellers and overseas Japanese living in Singapore, as well as Japanese photographers and publishers operating in Singapore before the Second World War.

Used as a vehicle for advertisement, personal correspondence, souvenirs and even propaganda, the picture postcard has taken on many roles throughout history. Due to their popularity and accessibility, postcards can be important primary sources of information. Unfortunately, there is precious little English-language scholarship on Japanese postcards outside the contexts of war and empire, and even less research done on the postcards used by the Japanese community in Singapore before 1941.

As a historical document, the picture postcard is an interesting format; it not only provides visual clues (for example, one can draw insights from the scenes that are typically represented on postcards), but also important textual information about its writer and historical context.

Given the size of the postcards, however, the messages they contain tend to be brief and fragmentary, making it a challenge to obtain detailed information about their senders and recipients. Therefore, careful attention should be paid not only to the written messages but also other clues, such as addresses, printed images and

illustrations, publisher details, as well as stamps and postmarks – all these can expand our understanding beyond what is conveyed by the written text alone.

While there has been substantial research on Japan's involvement in Singapore during the Second World War, much less is known about the social history of the Japanese community residing on the island before the war. This book hopes to plug that gap by examining the Japanese postcards in the Lim Shao Bin Collection along three thematic angles: illustrated maps on postcards, tourism, and the lives of Japanese subjects residing in early Singapore. It also hopes to shed light on how Japanese postcards were produced and circulated in Singapore, a topic that has not been the subject of much study.

In this book, the term “postcards” refers to picture postcards, unless otherwise stated. “Japanese postcards” are broadly defined as: postcards featuring Japanese subject matter; postcards produced in Japan or by Japanese photographic studios, printers and stationers in Singapore and Malaya; and/or postcards bearing Japanese-language messages. Apart from these, a number of postcards from the Lim Shao Bin Collection that do not fit these categories have been included to illustrate certain points. As a first step, we shall explore briefly the use and production of postcards in Singapore during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

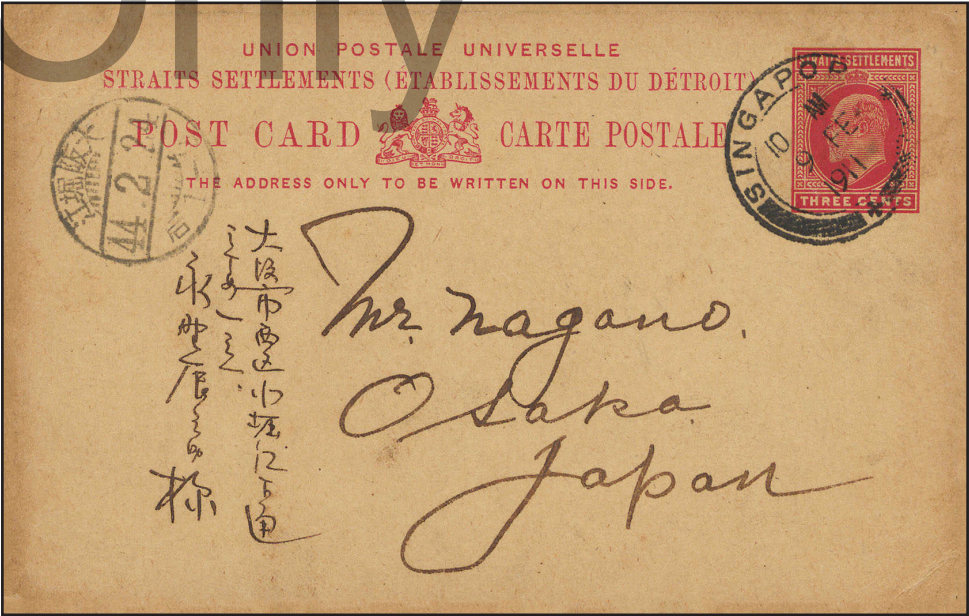
Postcards in Pre-World War II Singapore

The postcard was developed as a result of innovations in the global postal system during the mid-19th century. The first official postcards in Singapore, which came printed with the stamp, were issued by the Straits Settlements government (see PC1) in 1879 (see table overleaf for postal rates).¹ Privately issued postcards were not as popular as they were charged at the same rate as a normal letter, meaning they could cost twice as much as official postcards to send.² This changed 15 years later in 1894, when British postal authorities amended their policies to allow private postcards to be posted at the same rate as official ones.³

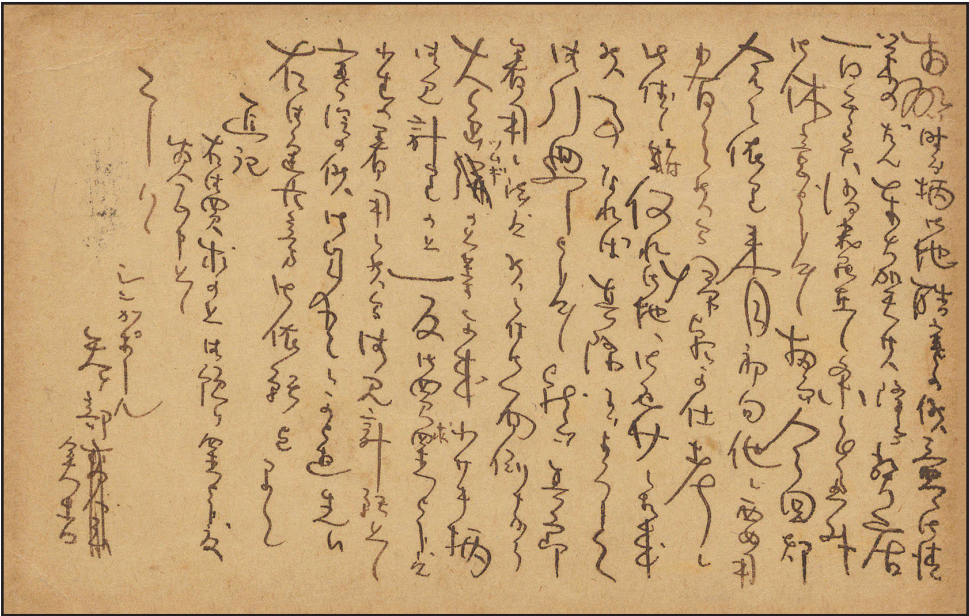
By the 1900s, the sale of private picture postcards had become a profitable business, prompting many international and local publishing firms to enter the market.⁴ In his 1905 report, the Postmaster-General in Singapore, Noel Trotter, noted that the large increase in the number of postcards handled were due to the rise in popularity of picture postcards, attesting to the rapid growth of the postcard industry.⁵

PRICES OF GOVERNMENT-ISSUED POSTCARDS IN 1879		
Stamp value	Route	Price
3 cents	Via Brindisi (when not forwarded through Great Britain) or for transmission via Marseille, Southampton, or any other route to countries belonging to the Postal Union	35 cents per packet of 10 postcards
4 cents	Via Brindisi to the United Kingdom and to countries belonging to the Postal Union beyond Great Britain	45 cents per packet of 10 postcards
These postcards could be purchased at the General Post Office in Singapore or at the post offices of Penang and Melaka. Stamp vendors were also allowed to sell these cards individually and could charge “for each a cent more than the value of the stamp indicated on the [c]ard”.		
Source: Government notification No. 360. [Microfilm: NL 1009]. (1879, September 26). <i>Straits Settlements Government Gazette</i> . Singapore: Government Printing Office, p. 871. (Call no.: RRARE 959.57 SGG)		

PRICES OF COMMERCIAL POSTCARDS IN 1906		
Seller	Details	Price
Jitts & Co.	Singapore souvenir postcards featuring five different views of decorations put up on the occasion of H.R.H. Prince Arthur of Connaught’s visit	25 cents per packet
Kim & Co.	Local cards in 100 varieties (coloured and uncoloured) Note: The source states that coloured cards were priced at 3 cents and uncoloured ones at 5 cents. This might have been a typographical error as coloured cards were likely to have cost more.	3 cents (uncoloured) 5 cents (coloured)
C.A. Ribeiro & Co.	Photographic postcards featuring landscapes and types of Singapore (24 different kinds)	15 cents each or \$1.50 per dozen
Sources: Jitts & Co.: Advertisements Column 3. [Microfilm: NL 2977]. (1906, September 6). <i>Eastern Daily Mail and Straits Morning Advertiser</i> , p. 1.; Kim & Co.: Advertisements Column 1. [Microfilm: NL 2977]. (1906, September 20). <i>Eastern Daily Mail and Straits Morning Advertiser</i> , p. 2.; C.A. Ribeiro & Co.: Advertisements Column 1. [Microfilm: NL 2977]. (1906, September 20). <i>Eastern Daily Mail and Straits Morning Advertiser</i> , p. 2.		



PC1
This postcard is an example of the official postcards first issued by the Straits Settlements government. This postcard was sent to a Mr Nagano in Osaka, Japan, in 1911. Produced by the Straits Settlements. Postmarked 9 February 1911. Accession no: B32413805D_0006



Other factors that contributed to this growth included the affordability of privately printed picture postcards and the relatively inexpensive postal rates for mailing postcards. In addition, the increase in the number of international travellers due to the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 – with Singapore being a key port of call along many major shipping routes – also fuelled a corresponding demand for picture postcards as souvenirs.

Competitions organised for collectors to showcase their pieces reflected the growth of the postcard industry. In 1908, Koh & Co., one of the biggest sellers of postcards in Singapore at the time, announced a “competitive exhibition” of picture postcards to encourage collectors to present their best pieces. Each collector could submit up to 500 postcards, with 14 prizes up for grabs.⁶ The competition drew eight participants from Singapore and Malaysia and was held at Raffles Hotel from 4 to 6 February 1909.⁷ Koh &

KOH & CO.’S COMPETITIVE EXHIBITION OF POSTCARDS

One of the rules of this competitive exhibition required each postcard submitted to have passed through the General Post Office in Singapore. H.T. Jensen of G.R. Lambert & Co. (a local photography studio) and Lee Keng Yan (also spelt Lee Kiag Yan), a local Chinese photographer from Chop Koon Sun (possibly the studio or company he worked at), presided as judges and awarded the prizes to:

- 1st

Lee Kim San (Singapore) who received a silver medal and an album “for a collection which, while being excellent, embraced the widest variety”
- 2nd

Daphne Richards (Singapore) who received a medal and an album “for a remarkably fine selection, that however, lacked wide variety”
- 3rd

Chia Tiong Kim (Singapore) who received a medal “for a very good collection”
- 4th

Cyril Kwa (Kuala Lumpur) who received a medal

Source: Novel postcard exhibition. [Microfilm: NL 316]. (1908, September 22). *The Straits Times*, p. 8.; Postcard exhibition. [Microfilm: NL 318]. (1909, February 4). *The Straits Times*, p. 7.

Co. also published a monthly journal, thought to have begun in 1907, called the *Postcard Exchange Register*.⁸

Some of the postcards for sale in Singapore at the time were imported from countries such as Britain and Japan. Those produced in Japan not only featured scenes of Japan but also Singapore scenes and landmarks – such as Victoria Memorial Hall (see PC51 and PC52 in Chapter 2) and Raffles Hotel (see PC68 in Chapter 2) – as well as industries such as rubber cultivation (see PC36j and PC41 in Chapter 2).

During the First World War, postcards were sold in Singapore to raise funds in support of the British Empire’s war effort. The London firm Raphael Tuck and Sons Ltd. was commissioned to produce two series of postcards, *Our Navy and Army* and *Defenders of the Empire*, in aid of the Prince of Wales’ National Relief Fund. These postcards were in turn consigned to Koh & Co. for distribution and sale in Singapore, as shown in Figure 1.⁹



Figure 1
Advertisement by Koh & Co. promoting the postcard series, *Our Navy and Army* and *Defenders of the Empire*.

Source: Untitled. [Microfilm: NL 2094]. (1915, June 2). *Malaya Tribune*, p. 4.

Apart from imported postcards, there were also those issued by private local photography studios. Established in 1867, G.R. Lambert & Co. was possibly one of the most well-known photography studios at the time.¹⁰ The studio was appointed as photographers to the King of Siam (Thailand) and Sultan of Johor, and was renowned for its high-quality photographs that were “of an excellence difficult to surpass”.¹¹

Wilson & Co. was another major picture postcard publisher. The company was appointed to produce postcards for Hotel de l’Europe (located where the National Gallery Singapore now stands), which were distributed as advertising collateral or tourist mementos. Some commonly featured scenes on Wilson and Co.’s postcards include traditional houses, *sampans* and fishing villages in Singapore (PC2, as well as PC37 and PC38 in Chapter 2).

Rural scenes such as those in PC2 were typically depicted on postcards produced in Singapore at the time. Many of the postcards sold at the turn of the 20th century presented aspects of native life in a bid to appeal to European consumers and their acquaintances back home.¹² These scenes of everyday life in Singapore may have seemed quite ordinary to local residents, but for overseas consumers they represented a slice of the exotic and mysterious Orient.

However, Europeans were not the only ones who purchased these cards. Japanese consumers bought and used these cards as *nengajō*, or New Year’s greeting cards, as seen in PC2 (see PC117–120 in Chapter 4, which also includes a discussion of the *nengajō* circulated by the Japanese community in Singapore).

Postcards in Japanese Culture

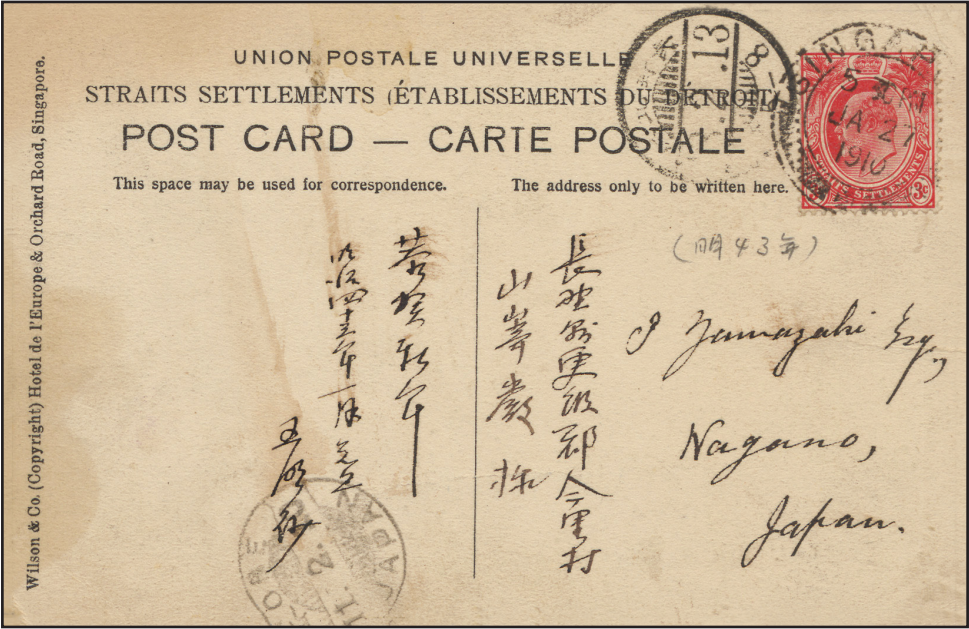
As the Japanese community in Singapore grew, they brought with them a rich postcard culture. In order to understand the place of Japanese postcards in pre-WWII Singapore, we must first look at the ways in which postcards have been traditionally viewed and used in Japan.

In 1875, the first official Japanese postcards were issued by the Meiji government (1868–1912); it took another 25 years, in 1900, before commercial postcards by private publishers were officially accepted for use.¹³

In the early 20th century, picture postcards in Japan became highly coveted collector’s items, spurred by the fervour over commemorative postcards of the



PC2
Posting a *nengajō*, or New Year’s card, was a tradition in Japan. This postcard, featuring a Malay village in Singapore, was addressed to a Mr Yamazaki in Nagano, Japan. Postmarked 1910 (Meiji 43rd year). Published by Wilson & Co. for Hotel de l’Europe & Orchard Road, Singapore. Accession no.: B32413805D_0059



Russo-Japanese War (1904–5). Some of the finest postcards from this period can be distinguished by their highly artistic and ornate features (such as gold stamping and embossing). They were produced to commemorate war victories (see PC3), and were avidly collected by enthusiasts both at home and on the battlefields. Soldiers writing home frequently used postcards and their friends in turn would send picture postcards of beautiful women (*bijin*) to motivate them while they were at the frontlines.¹⁴ On the peripheries of the war zone, a trade on postcards of “Japanese beauties” boomed, including some featuring pornographic content, usually of Japanese Red Cross nurses.¹⁵

By 1904–5, picture postcards arguably supplanted the demand for Japanese brocade prints, known as *nishikie*, which were popular collectables during the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–5). In some ways, picture postcards represented a new approachability to art – a fresh form of consumable, affordable art that was accessible to everyone. This rising popularity of picture postcards as art may have been linked to the Japanese pastime of ink-brush painting known as *fude-e*, an art form still practised in Japan today, on blank postcards.

Themes Presented on Japanese Postcards

The shift from the Meiji (1868–1912) to Taisho era (1912–25) saw an increase in the variety of themes and subject matter presented on picture postcards. Apart from modern concepts such as new culture homes (*bunka jūtaku*)¹⁶ and themes such as the empowerment of women, the picture postcards also featured scenes from Japan’s overseas territories like Taiwan and Saipan.¹⁷

Picture postcards of these colonies rarely featured the Japanese communities living there. Rather, they bore images of local buildings, people and food to satisfy the curious gaze of the Japanese.¹⁸ For the Japanese in Japan, these postcards chronicled their nation’s expanding empire, while for the Japanese traveller or migrant living abroad, these postcards served as a means of sharing scenes from a foreign land with friends and family back home (see PC4).

Although postcards imported from Japan were widely available in Singapore, postcards containing objectionable subject matter, namely pornographic content, that were permissible in Japan were restricted for sale or display in Singapore. This was a



PC3
Postcards were often used to commemorate Japan’s war victories, and in this instance, the Battle of Port Arthur during the Russo-Japanese War. Captioned “The Seventy Seven Heroes Who Resolved to Fight until Death Bravery [sic] Attempted to Block Port Arthur”, this postcard was sent from Singapore to Paris, France. This postcard is also an official Universal Postal Union (UPU) postcard, published by the Japan Post Office.
Postmarked 8 May 1905.
Publisher: Japan Post Office. Accession no.: B32413805D_0029



For Review Only



PC4
This postcard features a group of villagers in traditional Malay dress. Japanese travellers would send postcards featuring scenes such as this back home as a way of sharing their experiences abroad. In this card, the writer conveys his general greetings and notes that he is fine in Singapore.
Date and publisher unknown.
Accession no.: B29626253B_0047

crucial difference in commercial regulations that some Japanese postcard sellers and producers claimed they were unaware of. As a result, some of these postcards featuring “Japanese beauties” made their way to Singapore, with some even produced locally for sale. The British colonial authorities in Singapore, however, took offence to these lewd postcards and slapped their purveyors with heavy fines and, in some instances, even destroyed the offending postcards.¹⁹

Overview of the Chapters

This book explores Japanese impressions, perspectives, experiences and representations of Singapore through postcards. What themes can we find in these postcards? How were they used? What can they tell us about the people who used them?²⁰

Chapter 1 examines picture postcards that depict maps, with a particular focus on those that feature Singapore. These postcards were important not only for conveying information to potential customers about the major shipping routes and the arrival and departure times of vessels, but also allowed families of migrants to trace their loved ones’ journeys to faraway new lands. When Singapore fell in 1942 during the Second World War, however, these postcards took on a darker, more ominous meaning when maps began to feature Singapore as a conquered territory.

Chapter 2 explores how Singapore was perceived by Japanese travellers stopping over on their way to Europe. What did these tourists do here? Which places did they visit? The postcards that these travellers mailed out and the messages they wrote not only give us insight into Singapore as a tourist destination, but also valuable information about its budding tourism industry.

In Chapter 3, we look at the pre-war Japanese community.²¹ Who were the Japanese living in Singapore? How did they feel about living in an unfamiliar place? How were they perceived by other ethnic communities in Singapore? This chapter attempts to provide a brief account of the pre-war Japanese presence in Singapore as a lead-up to the final chapter, which explores how postcards were produced and used by the local Japanese community.

The final chapter moves away from postcards as historical sources to the social history of these postcards. What was the history behind the production of these postcards? How were they used? Beyond personal correspondence, picture postcards

were also used as souvenirs, commemoratives and mementos. Today, postcards are not merely collector’s items but also valuable records of history. Sometimes, postcards may even be the only historical record of a time that has largely faded from memory.

Appended at the end of each chapter are supplementary postcards from the Lim Shao Bin Collection. These postcards provide a sense of the breadth and variety of postcards that are available in the collection.

POSTCARD STYLISTICS

Generally, there are two ways to determine a Japanese postcard’s date of publication:

- 1 Postcard design
 - Undivided-back (1900–07)
 - Divided-back: one third of postcard’s reverse side allocated for correspondence (1907–19)
 - Divided-back: half of postcard’s reverse side allocated for correspondence (1919 onwards)
- 2 Characters printed on the reverse side of the postcard
 - はかき郵便 *hakaki yūbin* (before 1933)
 - はがき郵便 *hagaki yūbin* (1933 onwards)

Source: 学習院大学資料館 [Gakushūin daigaku shiryōkan]. (2012). 絵葉書で読み解く大正時代 [Ehagaki de yomitoku Taishō jidai]. Tokyo, Japan: Sairyūsha, p. 8. (Not available in NLB holdings)

About the Collection

The Lim Shao Bin Collection features materials donated to the National Library Board, Singapore by Mr Lim Shao Bin. Mr Lim, an independent history researcher, started collecting Japanese historical materials on Singapore and Southeast Asia in the 1980s when he was working and studying in Japan. Although Mr Lim returned to Singapore to work later, he managed to amass over 1,500 items, including more than 600 picture

postcards, over a 30-year period.²² Most of the materials are in Japanese and date from the mid-Meiji to early Showa eras.

The postcards featured in this publication were purchased by Mr Lim while he was in Japan; some were formerly in the possession of Japanese families, and were still in their original packaging when he acquired them. While most of these picture postcards feature familiar landmarks in Singapore, such as St Andrew’s Cathedral and the Church of the Good Shepherd (elevated to the status of a Cathedral in 1888), there are also postcards of less recognisable places, like the Japanese hotel Koyokan, that have since been lost to time, making this collection an important visual record of vanishing landscapes in Singapore.

Besides picture postcards, the Lim Shao Bin Collection also holds Japanese maps and atlases of Southeast Asia from the 1860s to 2000s; letters and other correspondence that offer insights into the social networks and lives of Japanese residents in Singapore; as well as books, newspapers, ephemera and periodicals relating to the Second World War. Mr Lim donated these rare materials to the National Library Board between 2016 and 2020 in order to encourage research and scholarship into an important period of Singapore’s multifaceted history.²³

For Review Only



CHAPTER 1

MAPPING THE WORLD
ON POSTCARDS



For Review Only

In the early 20th century, ships were a key mode of transportation for people and goods between Japan and the rest of the world. Shipping routes spanned impressive distances from Tokyo to Europe via Singapore and the Suez Canal. This is why early Japanese postcards often featured illustrations of maps as well as shipping routes. Apart from their aesthetic value, these postcards also served other practical purposes: as advertisements for shipping companies; as useful sources of information on travelling routes for the families of economic migrants; and as a means for public engagement by the Imperial Japanese Navy and propaganda for the Imperial Japanese Army during the Second World War.

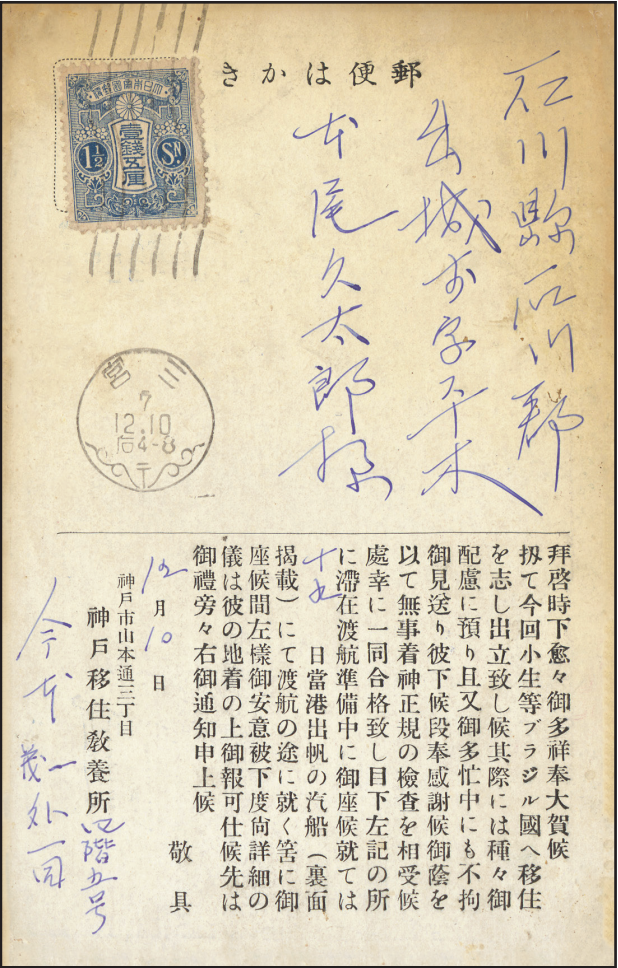
Postcards with illustrations of maps and shipping routes enabled the Japanese public to visualise and imagine a world beyond their homeland. A study of these postcards also reveals how deeply connected Singapore was with the global transport networks of the late 19th to 20th centuries.

Shipping Routes

Maps and shipping routes were highly popular subjects for postcards issued by shipping companies, whose vessels often carried both passengers and cargo. Nippon Yūsen Kaisha (Japan Mail Steamship Company) and Osaka Commercial Corporation were two such firms. Their postcards often depicted detailed drawings of shipping routes, with the names of ports and expected dates of arrival (PC5 and PC6). These postcards indicate that Singapore was an important port lying on major international shipping



PC5
This postcard features the *Buenos Aires-maru*, a steamer in the O.S.K. Lines (Osaka Shōsen Kaisha) shipping fleet. Singapore (written in *katakana*, pronounced as “Shingapōru”) is listed as the third port of call and expected to arrive on the “12th day after departure”. The pre-printed message notes that the sender of the postcard has completed all the necessary procedures for emigration to Brazil and is staying temporarily at the Kobe Emigrant Education Centre. It also says that the sender will be departing on 19 December on the ship pictured on the postcard. Postmarked 10 December, year unknown. Publisher: Kobe Emigrant Education Centre. Accession no.: B32413808G_0008



routes that spanned vast distances (PC7), reaching beyond the immediate region to faraway destinations such as London and Rio de Janeiro.

On PC8, the international and domestic routes that Nippon Yūsen operated are listed along with the names of major ports of call, such as Colombo and Cape Town. This postcard, postmarked 1906, reflects the demand for travel to these places.

These illustrations of shipping routes were intended not only for Japanese passengers, but for other international travellers as well. Postcards such as PC9 were published in English for Nippon Yūsen’s English-speaking passengers.

Postcards were often used by ship passengers to communicate and reassure their loved ones back home that all was well on their travels. Interestingly, some postcards included pre-printed messages with blanks for passengers to fill in with their names and details of their voyage. Such postcards were a boon for semi-literate passengers, who could send word home as they sailed across the seas. On PC8, the pre-printed message on the front of the postcard reads:

Mr/Ms [blank for passenger’s name] conveys his/her regards and wishes to inform you that they have boarded this company’s ship, the [blank for ship’s name], which set sail on [blank for date] for [blank of destination]. Meiji [blank for year], [blank for month], [blank for date].

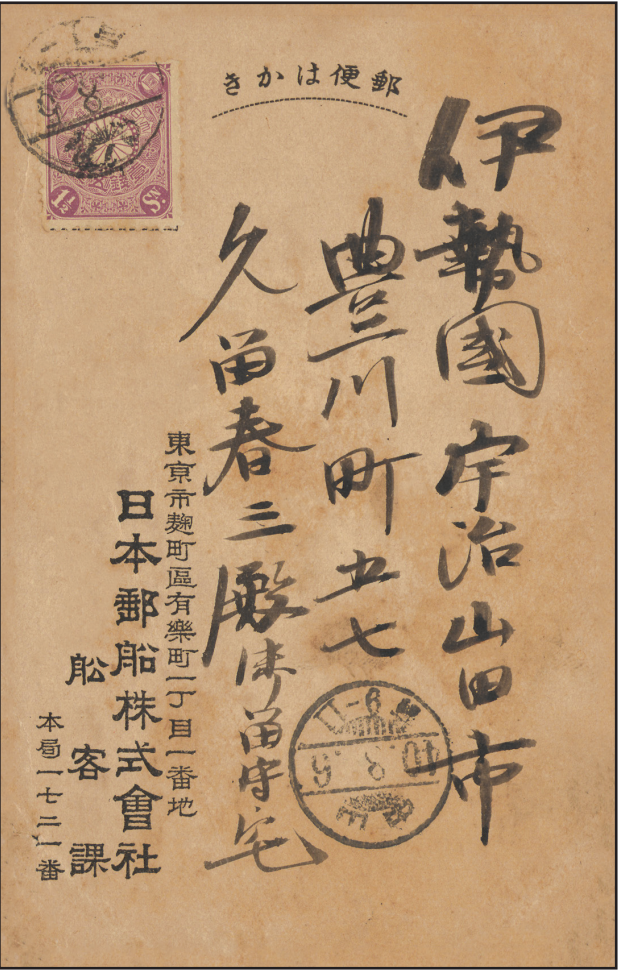
The sender of PC8 was headed for Colombo, a journey estimated to take about 18 days (according to the schedules presented on PC5 and PC6). Upon receiving the postcard, the family back home would have been able to trace the ship’s route and track roughly where it was in the world.

Migration from Japan

Apart from passengers travelling for business or leisure, there was another group of travellers – Japanese economic migrants. The Japanese government regarded migration as a means of managing its growing population and alleviating the pressures that the Japanese economy was facing. These migrants made their way across the seas to destinations such as the United States, Canada, Europe and Brazil, which, for instance, had attracted Japanese emigrants since 1907 due to demand for cheap labour to work on its coffee plantations.



PC8
This postcard maps out the domestic and international routes of the Nippon Yūsen Kaisha (NYK), with its European and Australian routes including a stopover in Singapore. The various ports are indicated on the right side of the postcard, with a pre-set message at the bottom for passengers to fill in. The reverse of the postcard bears the address of the recipient, who lived in Ujiamada City and was headed for Colombo.
Postmarked 5 August 1906.
Publisher: Nippon Yūsen Kaisha, Passengers Division.
Accession no.: B32413808G_0004



Notes

- 1
- National Diet Library, Japan. 国立神戸移民収容所（神戸移住センター） [Kokuritsu Kobe Imin Shūyōjo (Kōbe Ijyū Sentā-)]. ブラジル移民の100年 [Burajiru Imin no 100 Nen]. Retrieved from National Diet Library.
- 2
- PC5 reads similarly, with slight differences in phrasing.
- 3
- Schencking, J.C. (1999). “The Imperial Japanese Navy and the constructed consciousness of a South Seas destiny, 1872-1921”, in *Modern Asian Studies*, 33(4). London: Cambridge University Press, pp. 772–73. (Not available in NLB holdings)
- 4
- Nish, I. H. (1972). *Alliance in Decline: A Study in Anglo-Japanese Relations 1908–23*. London: The Athlone Press. (Call no.: R 327.42052 NIS).
- 5
- Yao, T.S. (2007). ““Images of Taiwan” as visual symbols in official propaganda media during the Japanese colonial period”, in デザイン学研究 [Dezaingakukenkyū (Journal of the Science of Design)]. 54(1), pp. 59–68. Japanese Society for the Science of Design, p. 63. (Not available in NLB holdings)
- 6
- 学習院大学資料館 [Gakushūin daigaku shiryōkan]. (2012). 絵葉書で読み解く大正時代 [Ehagaki de yomitoku Taishō jidai]. Tokyo: Sairyūsha, p. 87. (Not available in NLB holdings)
- 7
- Gakushūin daigaku shiryōkan, 2012, p. 87.

SUPPLEMENTARY POSTCARDS



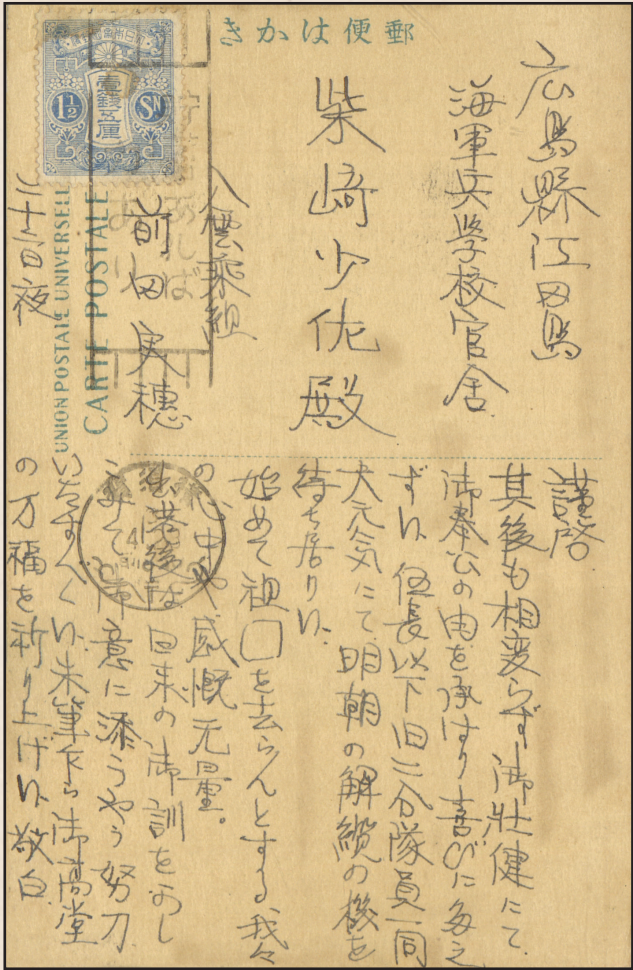
PC17
Featured on this postcard is the vessel *Fushimi Maru* belonging to Nippon Yusen Kaisha. *Date unknown. Publisher: Kobe Mitsumura Insatsu Bushiki Kaisha. Accession no.: B32413808G_0005*

For Review Only

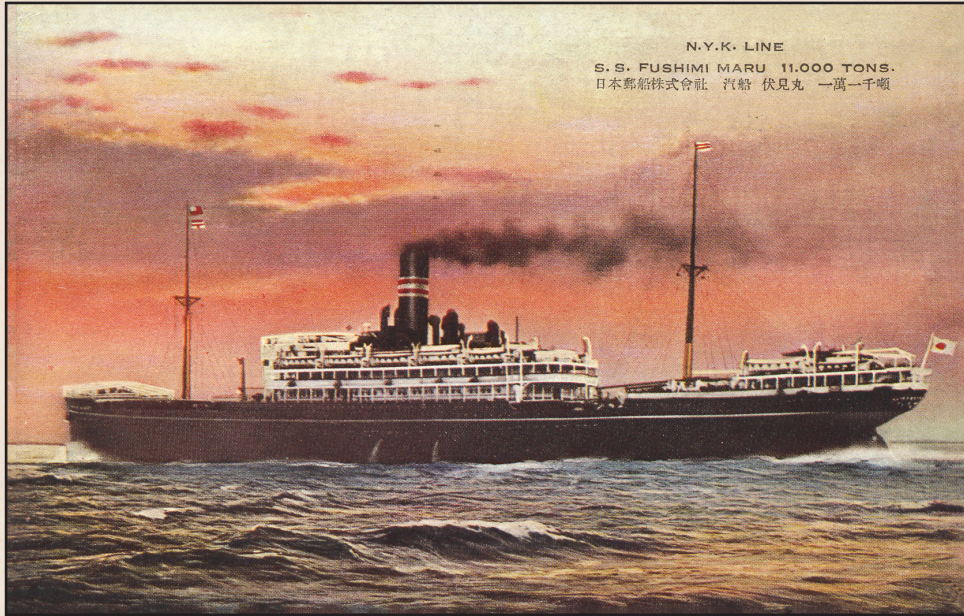
PC18
This postcard was produced in commemoration of Crown Prince Hirohito's voyage from Yokohama to Europe, onboard the flagship *Katori* (also shown on the 3-cent stamp). The red stamp on the postcard's reverse side is a commemorative postmark marking the prince's completion of the journey and return to Tokyo Palace on 3 September 1921. The image on the top right of the postcard was the Crown Prince's residence in Akasaka, Tokyo. Dated 1921. Printed by Choyokai (under Japan's National Printing Bureau). Accession no.: B32413808G_0012



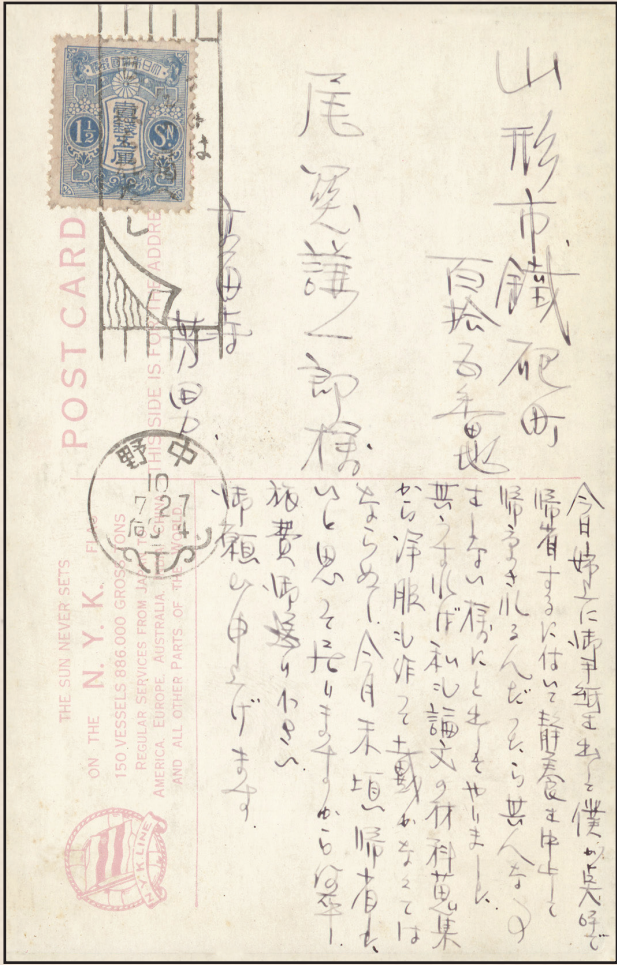
PC19
Dated on the night of 22 April 1928, this postcard was sent by Maeda Mitsuo, a crew member on board the cruiser *Yakumo*, to Lieutenant Commander Shibazaki at the official residence of the Imperial Japanese Naval Academy located on Edajima Island, Hiroshima Prefecture. Maeda wrote that the crew, while overwhelmed at the thought of leaving Japan, were in high spirits and looking forward to sailing off the next morning. The schedule on the front of the card indicates that the ship was to arrive in Singapore on 28 May. The postcard was postmarked at Yokosuka. Dated 22 April 1928. Publisher unknown. Accession no.: B32440324K_0051



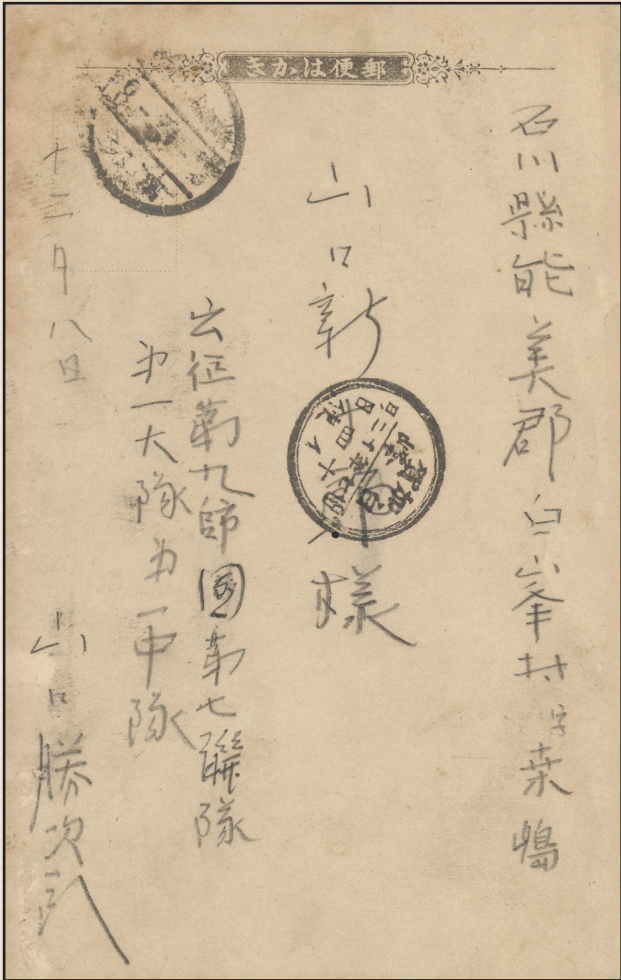
For Review Only



PC20
This postcard features the S.S. *Fushimi Maru*, which had a carrying capacity of 11,000 tonnes. Addressed to an individual living in Yamagata City, the writer updates his family of his plans when he returns home. Postmarked 27 July 1921. Publisher unknown. Accession no.: B32413805D_0086



PC21
This postcard of a world map also features Singapore. This postcard was sent by Yamaguchi Katsujirō, from Ishikawa Prefecture, who had been recruited to serve the Ninth Division (headquartered at Kanazawa). In his message on the front of the postcard, he informs the postcard's recipient(s) of his safe arrival. Dated December 1918. Publisher unknown. Accession no.: B32413808G_0007



For Review Only

CARTE POSTALE
Postkarte - Cartolina Postale - Post Card
ОТКРЫТОЕ ПИСЬМО



CHAPTER 2

EARLY JAPANESE TOURISM
IN SINGAPORE

MADE IN JAPAN

きかは便郵

For Review Only

To help Japanese tourists find their way around, Japanese-language guidebooks have been produced in Singapore, mostly since the early 1920s. One of the earliest known is *Harada’s Guide* published in 1919 by Johdai Printing Works, located at Bras Basah Road. In response to growing requests for more information on Singapore, the Japanese Club (Nihonjin Kurabu) produced the Japanese-language guidebook, *Sekidō wo aruku* (Walking the Equator) in 1939. This guidebook offered useful travel tips, including ways to get around the island (see table below).⁶

As Singapore was an important port along major international shipping routes, a significant number of Japanese visitors made stopovers in Singapore en route to other destinations on passenger services run by Japanese shipping companies. One such company was Nippon Yūsen Kaisha (mentioned in the previous chapter), which ran a fortnightly service (between May 1898 and November 1939), as well as a monthly one to Europe (between March 1896 and April 1898).¹

Early Japanese tourists only had a few reliable sources to turn to for travel information: through word-of-mouth from family and friends, published writings by other travellers (such as guidebooks) and, of course, postcards sent by acquaintances who had gone on similar journeys. The postcards in this chapter reveal the impressions that early Japanese travellers had of Singapore, impressions that were in turn relayed to friends and family in Japan, thus shaping the imaginings of the island for those back home.

The information conveyed in the text and pictures of these postcards is very similar to what modern travellers would be interested in today, such as places to visit, sights to see and foods to savour. These postcards offer a glimpse of what Japanese tourists considered quintessential to the experience of visiting Singapore.

Visitors in the early 1900s had only two main transport options available to them – horse-drawn carriages or rickshaws (seen on PC30).² Reservations-only private taxi services were only introduced in 1910, so the earliest visitors to Singapore generally relied on *fune heiei* (“ship guards” – Japanese-speaking Malays hired by hotels and inns to distribute flyers and provide tourist information)³ to flag down transport for them.⁴

GETTING AROUND SINGAPORE

In their advice to Japanese tourists visiting Singapore, the editors of *Sekidō wo aruku* (Walking the Equator) recommended hiring a taxi to get to the heart of the city. From the ship, visitors could place a call for a taxi with any of the taxi companies. The three main Japanese taxi companies operating at the time were Hanaya Cars, Beppu Cars and Nakahara Cars. The editors recommended hiring taxis from Japanese-run companies over non-Japanese ones, not only for ease of communication, but also because of the cheaper rates (prices indicated below in Straits dollars) offered by the former.

	Japanese taxi companies (est.)	Non-Japanese taxi companies (est.)
1st <i>ri</i> (3.93 km)	20 cents	50 cents
Per <i>ri</i> after 1st <i>ri</i>	20 cents	25 cents
1st hour	2 dollars	3 dollars
After 1st hour	Subject to negotiation	75 cents for every 15 minutes

Extracted from Shingapōru Nihonjin Kurabu. (1939). *Sekidō wo aruku* [Walking the Equator]. Tokyo: Dainihon Insatsu Busshi Kaisha, p. 172. (Not available in NLB holdings)

Hotels Where Japanese Stayed

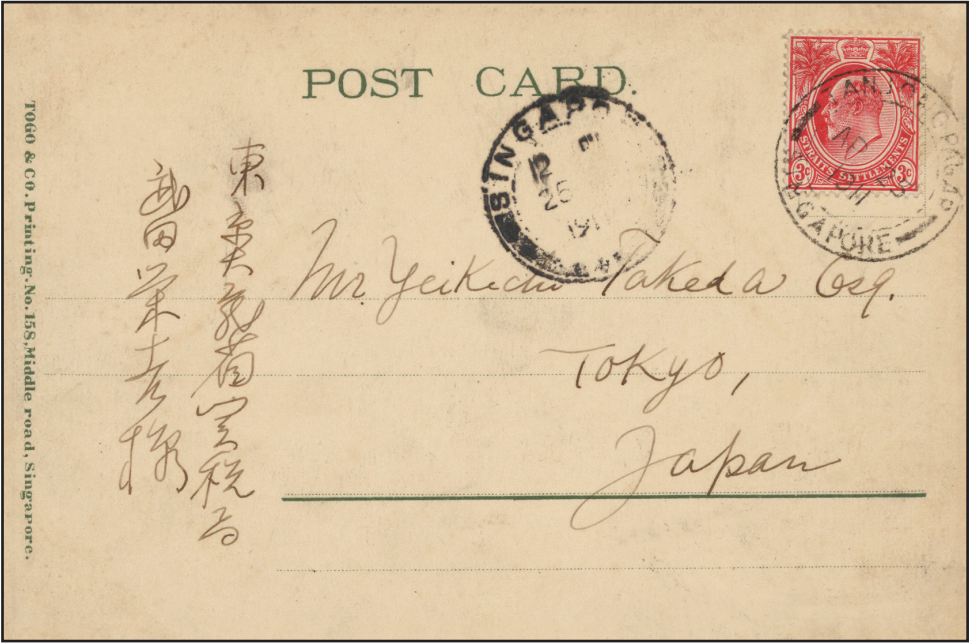
The postcards in this collection offer rare glimpses of the hotels run by Japanese proprietors, which are no longer in existence today and have since faded from

For Review Only

PC30
Scenes such as this gave recipients an idea of what Singapore was like. Addressed to Mr J. Takeda in Tokyo, this postcard features the Central Police Station on South Bridge Road in Singapore (top left) as well as the vessel S.S. *Sanuki Maru* of the NYK (bottom right). The writer says that he has arrived in Singapore and is awaiting his ship to Java. He also notes the temperature on board the ship (86–88°F) and in Singapore (86°F).
Postmarked 22 October 1907. Publisher: Nippon Yūsen Kaisha. Accession no.: B32413805D_0093



PC31
This postcard features (clockwise from top left) the beach along Connaught Drive, Sekidenkan Hotel at Beach Road, and the Botanic Gardens. It was sent to Tokyo from Tanjong Pagar in Singapore. This postcard was sent by an official from the Ministry of Agriculture to Yeikichi Takeda at the Ministry of Finance, noting that he would arrive in Singapore on 17 April.
Postmarked 25 April 1911. Publisher: Togo & Co., Singapore. Accession no.: B32413805D_0065



popular memory. One of these was Sekidenkan Hotel (seen on PC31), at Beach Road.⁷ The establishment began operations in 1901 and was one of the earliest Japanese hotels in Singapore.⁸ Koyokan in Tanjong Katong (PC32) was another such hotel.⁹

Other hotels that were operating in 1939 include Planter's Hotel (PC33) at No. 233 Bencoolen Street, Miyako Hotel (PC34) at No. 15 Beach Road, Toyo Hotel at No. 208 Queen Street, Showa Hotel at No. 25 Bencoolen Street and Sakura Hotel at No. 45 Sophia Road, which offered accommodation packages with daily breakfast from two Straits dollars a night.¹⁰

Japanese-run hotels and inns were not the only places where Japanese tourists stayed. Japanese travellers seemed to favour Hotel de l'Europe over Raffles Hotel (PC68), which began operations in 1887, as Raffles Hotel was deemed as the luxurious "stronghold of Europeans".¹¹ Hotel de l'Europe operated from 1857 to 1932 and counted Mori Rintarō (better known as Mori Ōgai, one of the foremost authors of the Meiji period together with Natsume Sōseki), among its notable guests.¹² The hotel also provided postcards to its guests (see PC2 in the Introduction), which cleverly doubled up as advertisements to prospective travellers to Singapore. Toyokan (Toyo Hotel) similarly produced a set of 19 postcards that it distributed to its guests (see page 63).



PC32
Koyokan was a Japanese hotel which was at one time located at the seaside in Tanjong Katong.
Date and publisher unknown. Accession no.: B32413807F_0096



PC33
Planter's Hotel was located at 233 Bencoolen Street. This postcard was sent as a *nengajō*, or New Year's card, in December 1920. It was sent from Singapore on 31 December 1920 to Taiping (4 January 1921) and returned undelivered to Kuala Lumpur on 5 January 1921.
Postmarked 31 December 1920. Publisher unknown. Accession no.: B32413805D_0089



For Review Only

SET OF POSTCARDS DISTRIBUTED
BY TOYOKAN TO HOTEL GUESTS

The proprietor of Toyokan (Toyo Hotel), Ryū Naozaburō, came from Fukuoka to Singapore in 1910 and started the business in 1914. Toyokan distributed postcards to the guests staying with them. Presented here are 10 of the 19 postcards, which can be viewed in larger format from pages 75–80.

Source: Nanyō oyobi nihonjin sha (ed). (1938). *Shingapōru o chūshin ni dōhō katsuyaku* – Nanyō no 50 nen. Singapore: Nanyō oyobi nihonjin sha, p. 684.

PC34
Beach Road was once home to a string of Japanese hotels such as Miyako Hotel, Sekidenkan Hotel, Harima Hotel, Nippon Hotel and Navy Hotel.
Date and publisher unknown. Accession no.: B32413806E_0020



PC35
Tokiwa Garden was a Japanese *sukiyaki* establishment located at 17-2 East Coast Road, Katong. In the 7 March 1933 edition of *The Straits Times*, it was advertised as serving “all kinds of refreshments ... in beautiful surroundings facing [the] sea”.
Date and publisher unknown. Accession no.: B29626253B_0048

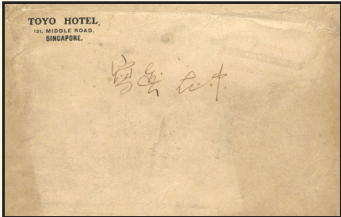
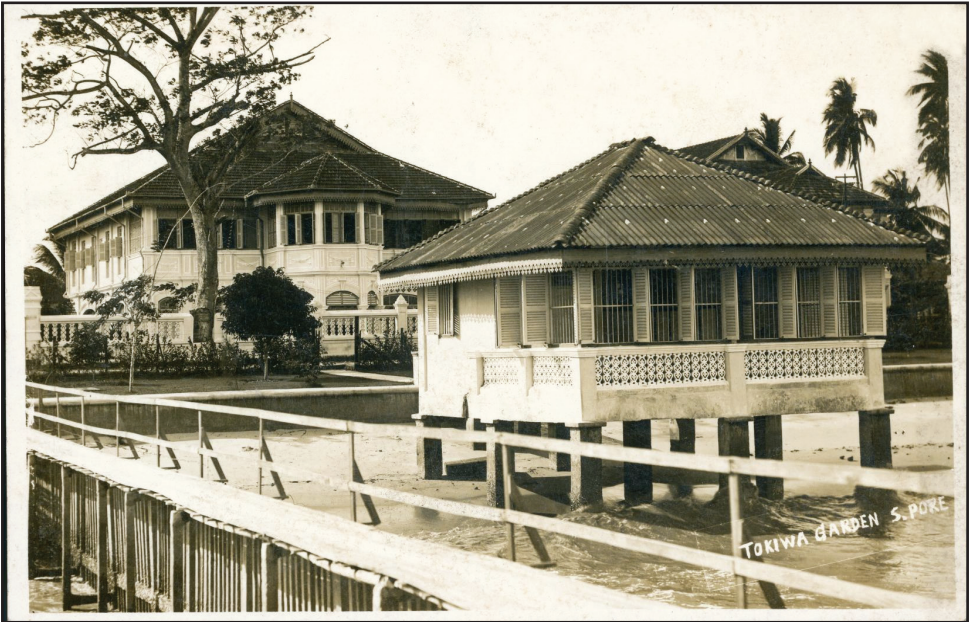


Figure 1



PC36a



PC36b



PC36c



PC36d



PC36e



PC36f



PC36g



PC36j



PC36h



PC36i

For Review Only

SUPPLEMENTARY POSTCARDS

MADE IN JAPAN

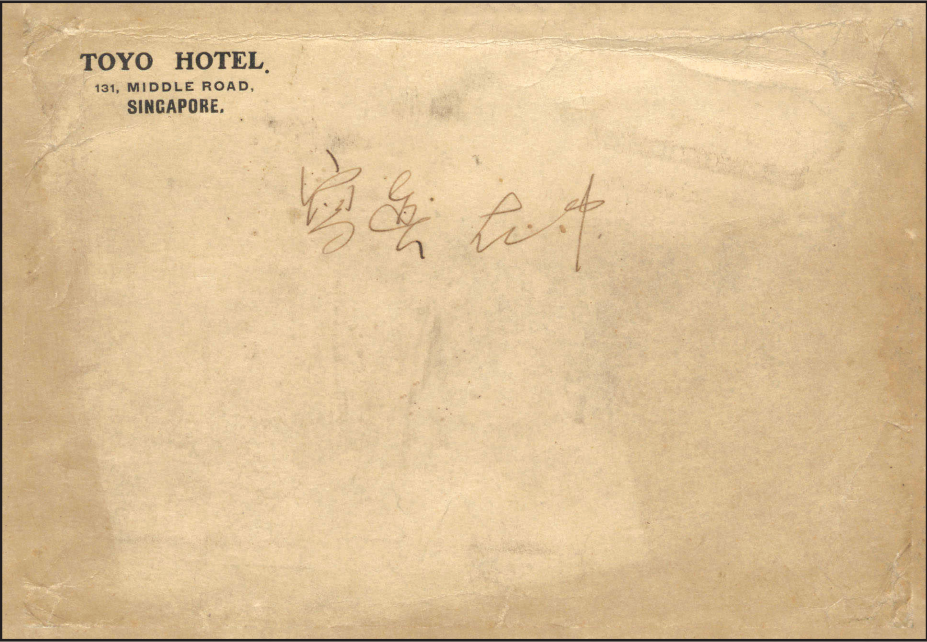


Figure 1
The envelope for a set of 19 postcards distributed by Toyokan to its guests. Ten of them (PC36a–36j) are presented in the following pages.
Date and publisher unknown. Accession no.: B32413805D_0172

For Review Only

PC36a

The Singapore waterfront was once lined by the (from left to right) Ocean Building, Alkaff Arcade, Union Building, Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank (HSBC) and the Fullerton Building.

Date and publisher unknown. Accession no.: B32413805D_0172

**PC36b**

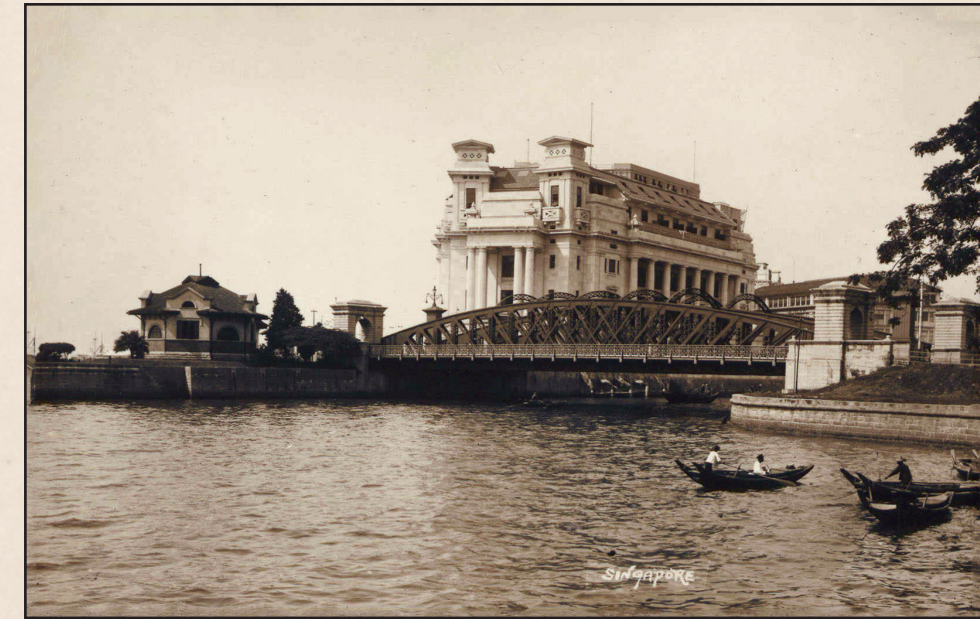
Originally located at the Padang, the statue of Sir Stamford Raffles was moved to a site in front of the Victoria Memorial Hall at Empress Place in 1919. There, the statue was framed by a semi-circular colonnade of the Italian Doric order with a marble-lined pool with fountain jets before it.

Date and publisher unknown. Accession no.: B32413805D_0172

**PC36c**

The Fullerton Building, which was officially opened in 1928, was home to the General Post Office. It was gazetted as a national monument on 7 December 2015.

Date and publisher unknown. Accession no.: B32413805D_0172

**PC36d**

This postcard features Anderson Bridge with the General Post Office in the background.

Date and publisher unknown. Accession no.: B32413805D_0172

PC36e

This postcard features an aerial view of the Singapore waterfront. Visible are the Ocean Building (foreground, right), the tidal basin and the eastern part of Sentosa island in the background.

Date and publisher unknown. Accession no.: B32413805D_0172

**PC36f**

Presented here are, from left to right, Union House, Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank (HSBC) and the Fullerton Building. Union House and HSBC were designed by renowned architectural firm Swan and Maclaren. Fullerton Building was designed by Major Percy Hubert Keys and his assistant Frank Dowdeswell.

Date and publisher unknown. Accession no.: B32413805D_0172

**PC36g**

A view of Raffles Quay with Ocean Building on the right. There were four Ocean Buildings constructed over the years, the first in 1866 and the present one known as the Ocean Financial Centre completed in 2011.

Date and publisher unknown. Accession no.: B32413805D_0172

**PC36h**

This postcard features a rare view of Singapore and was likely taken atop of the Bank of Taiwan, which could probably only be accessed by the Japanese. The building on the right is the former General Post Office, prior to its moving to Fullerton Building. The shoreline in the background is Tanjong Rhu and Katong.

Date and publisher unknown. Accession no.: B32413805D_0172

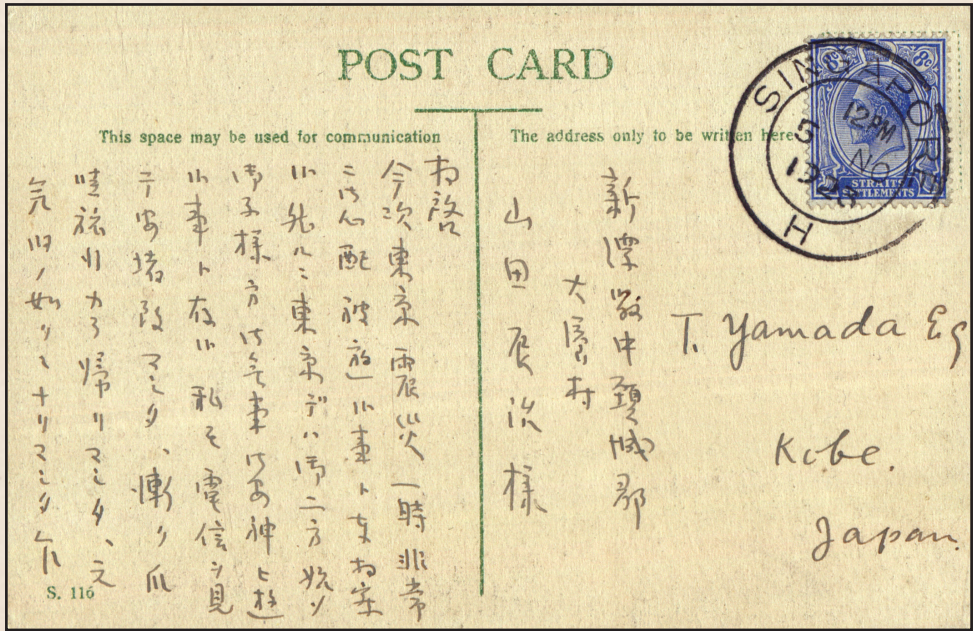


For Review Only

PC61
In this postcard featuring the Botanic Gardens in Singapore, the sender writes to his acquaintance, Mr Yamada T. residing in Kobe, to express his concern about the “Tokyo earthquake disaster”. This likely refers to the 1923 Great Kantō Earthquake, which occurred on 1 September 1923. Dated 5 November 1923. Publisher unknown. Accession no.: B32440324K_0140



PC62
Also featuring the Botanic Gardens in Singapore, the sender of this postcard writes to a Mrs Takeda in Tokyo, informing her of the writer's arrival in Singapore. The writer also notes that he is staying at Hotel de l'Europe. Publisher unknown. Accession no.: B32413805D_0055



UNION POSTALE UNIVERSELLE
Straits Settlements (Établissements du Détroit)
Post Card - Carte Postale
THE ADDRESS ONLY TO BE WRITTEN ON THIS SIDE.

CHAPTER 3

EARLY JAPANESE
COMMUNITY
IN SINGAPORE

For Review Only

Some three decades later, the 1910 population census by the Japanese government recorded that the number of Japanese living in Singapore had risen to 1,215 residents, comprising professionals such as dentists and doctors, entrepreneurs like innkeepers and restaurant proprietors as well as photographers (PC82), hairdressers, plantation workers and those engaged in the sex trade (see table below).

CENSUS OF LOCAL JAPANESE BY PROFESSION IN 1910

Industry type	Number of businesses	Males	Females	Total no. of individuals
Sex work			353	353
Rubber industry	35	250	15	265
Brothels	80		73	73
Employed by foreigners			52	52
Food	12	23	11	34
Hairdressing	8	24	9	33
Board and lodging	9	15	14	29
Doctors	4	20	8	28
Pharmacy	6	23	2	25
Lodging	4	16	9	25
Dentistry	5	14	8	22
Food supplies and provision shops	5	16	5	21
Intermediaries	2	14	7	21
Laundry	4	14	4	18
Drapery	6	12	3	15
Official business (incl. servants)	3	10	4	14
Photography	3	7	6	13
Newspaper	2	10	3	13
Other business		111	50	161
Total	188	579	636	1215

Original data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ Archives. Translated from: The Japanese Association. (2016). シンガポール日本人社会百年史：星月夜の耀 [100 Year History of Japanese Community in Singapore (1915–2015)]. Singapore: The Japanese Association. (Call no.: RSING 305.895605957 ONE)

During the 16th and 17th centuries, Japanese traders paved the way for the influx of Japanese migrants to parts of Southeast Asia, such as Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, Myanmar and Singapore.¹ In 1932, Nishimura Takeshirō,² an important figure in the early Japanese community in Singapore and one of the island’s first Japanese doctors, noted in his diary that early emigrants such as himself were like the “foundation stones used in the construction of harbours”: they enabled the advancement of Japanese interests overseas but were not recognised for their instrumental roles. Lamenting the lack of acknowledgement of the efforts put in by these pioneers, Nishimura added that if there “came along an individual who might shed [...] tears for these foundation stones, they [the foundation stones] might begin shaking out of their excessive happiness.”³

In this chapter, we look at the lives of early Japanese settlers in Singapore through picture postcards that were addressed to or sent by them.

Although Singapore’s first Japanese resident, Yamamoto Otokichi (also known as John M. Ottoson), is known to have sunk his roots here in 1862, the island’s nascent Japanese community only took shape after Japan lifted its ban on overseas travel following the Meiji Restoration of 1868.⁴

By the time the Straits Settlements population census of 1881 was carried out, there were 22 Japanese (8 male, 14 female) living in Singapore.⁵ With the commencement of shipping routes from Japan to Bombay (present-day Mumbai) in 1893 and to various cities in Europe in 1896, the number of Japanese residents in Singapore began to grow, with people engaged in a variety of trades and occupations.

For Review Only



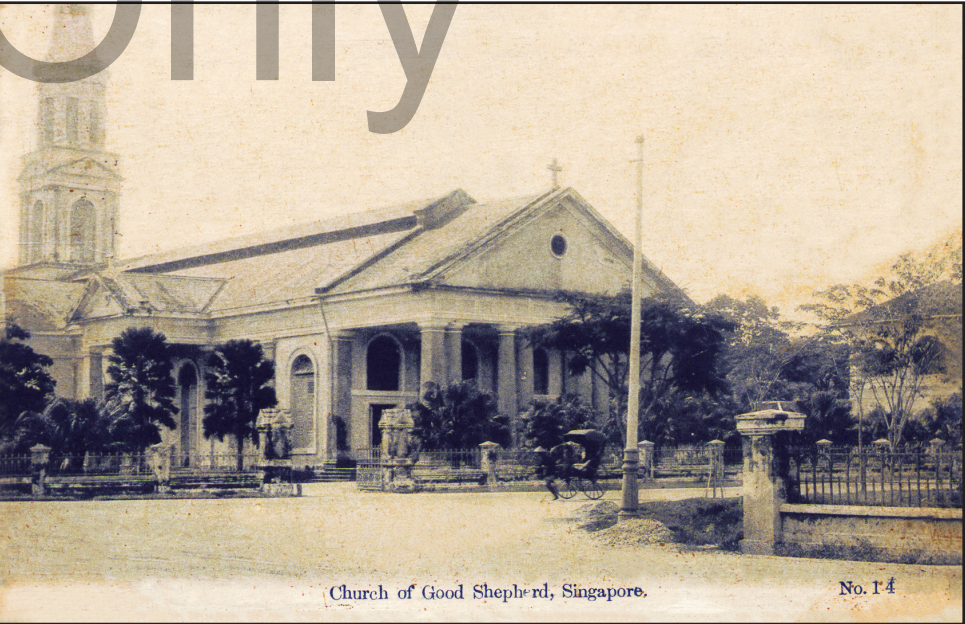
PC82
This postcard features Hylam Street in Singapore. On the right of the image is a Japanese photography studio called S.T. Yamato. Date and publisher unknown. Accession no.: B32440324K_0103

At a time when economic migration tended to be the preserve of men, it is interesting to note that slightly more than half of Japanese residents in Singapore were women (636 women to 579 men). Of these female Japanese residents in Singapore, more than half were involved in sex work, who were known as *karayuki-san* (“women who have gone overseas”). Those not engaged in the sex trade worked in other sectors, such as food (e.g. restaurants), laundry, photography and newspaper publishing industries.⁶

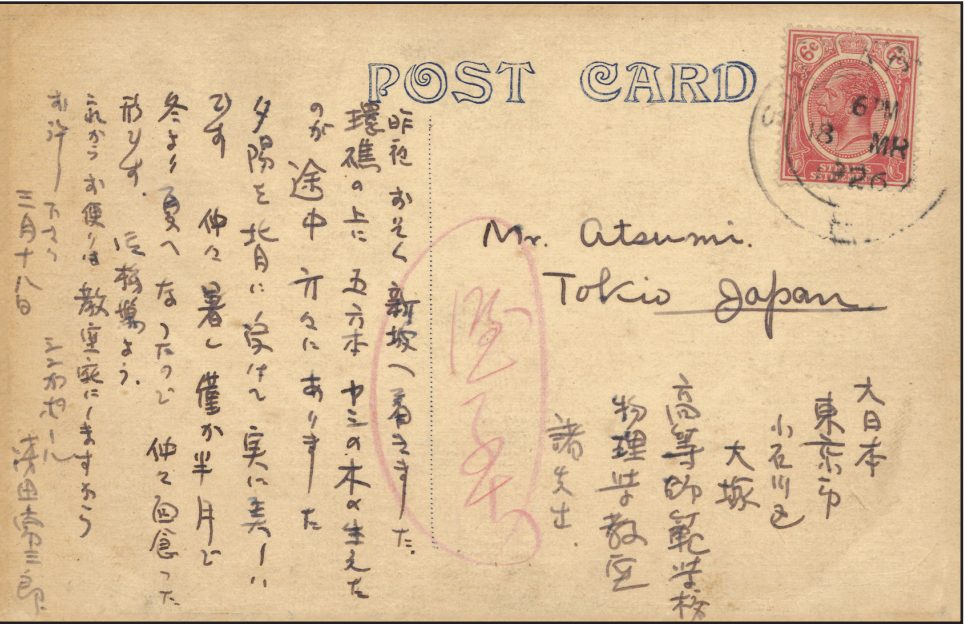
First Impressions

What did these Japanese migrants see, feel and experience in this new land? PC83 provides a glimpse of a new arrival's first impressions of Singapore:

We arrived [in] Singapore late last night. The five or six shadowy trees we saw above the reef were ones we had seen again and again on our journey here. Lit up against the setting sun, they were truly beautiful. It's pretty hot, and I am bewildered as to how it has changed from winter to summer in the span of half a month [...]



PC83
This postcard, featuring the Church of Good Shepherd in Singapore, is addressed to the Physics class at the Teachers' Training School in Tokyo. Besides recording his impressions of Singapore, the sender also notes that he will send more correspondence to the class. Postmarked 18 March 1926. Publisher unknown. Accession no.: B32413805D_0102



The confusion of PC83’s writer would have been shared by his fellow travellers – they had just left Japan in March, when winter was ending, to a tropical climate with intense heat and humidity. Although some Japanese had already been living in Singapore since the 1860s, there was little, if any, existing travel literature in the early 20th century⁷ to inform prospective visitors of Singapore’s weather, culture or topography.

As such, wild stories were circulated about Singapore’s searing heat, with tales of burnt and blackened corpses lying on the streets and natives wrapping their heads in white cloth to protect themselves from the sun.⁸ Such impressions were eventually debunked after the new arrivals acclimatised to the tropical weather, and realised that the island’s temperatures were actually similar to Japan’s in the summer months.⁹

Prospective Japanese residents may have been surprised to discover how urbanised Singapore was. As their ships pulled into the harbour, tall buildings would have come into view, possibly overturning any preconceived notions of Singapore as a small fishing village. Presented with a thriving port city of the British empire, travellers might have wondered with “a sense of unease” as to what they had gotten themselves into.¹⁰

Setting Up Shop

The first Japanese provision shop, K. Nakagawa & Co., was set up in 1885, and sold Japanese goods and items at wholesale prices.¹¹ Such privately owned shops were a rarity during this period. In its first four years, K. Nakagawa & Co. (PC84) was the only Japanese provision shop in town until another opened in 1889.¹² During this time, the local Japanese community consisted largely of *karayuki-san* and brothel owners, hence, business proprietors chose to hire their new staff directly from Japan.¹³

In 1891, Mitsui & Co., a major Japanese trading company, established a branch in Singapore, marking a major turning point in the history of the local Japanese community and heralding the arrival of a new wave of Japanese professionals such as pharmacists and doctors.¹⁴

The opening of the first Japanese bank in Singapore, the Bank of Taiwan (under the auspices of the Japanese colonial administration in Taiwan), in 1912 (see PC46 and PC47 in Chapter 2) and shipping company Ōsaka Shōsen’s introduction of a Singapore-based regional service that same year similarly ushered in the winds of change that swept over the local Japanese community.¹⁵



Figure 1
Echigoya was a Japanese draper’s shop opened by Chubei Takahashi (seated) in 1907. Chubei was the proprietor in 1907 and is pictured here with his young Japanese staff. *The Japanese Association Singapore Collection, courtesy of National Archives of Singapore. Accession no.: 202384*



Figure 2
Endo Takao, owner of the Tanjong Katong Rubber Estate perched on a tree in his plantation. Hoping to make their fortunes in booming industries such as rubber, many Japanese businessmen came to the region in search of business opportunities.

Source: 佃光治 [Tsukuda Mitsuharu]. (1917). *Marai ni okeru hōjin katsudō no genkyō* [Current Status of the Activities of Japanese in Malaya]. Singapore: Nanyō oyobi Nihonjinsha, p. 28. (Call no.: RRARE 305.89560595 TSU-[LSB]). Also available on BookSG.

These professionals not only provided services and supplies to the Japanese community residing in Singapore (such as textiles, see Figure 1) but also hosted friends visiting from Japan (PC89). Japanese business proprietors who were already comfortably settled in Singapore also set up new industries (such as rubber, see Figure 2), on the island. For instance, Ōkawa Kiyotachi was responsible for bringing over the first group of fishermen from Chiba Prefecture to begin a new fishing business in Singapore. This subsequently led to the arrival of more Japanese fishermen between 1892 and 1895, including some 61 men from regions such as Wakayama Prefecture.¹⁶

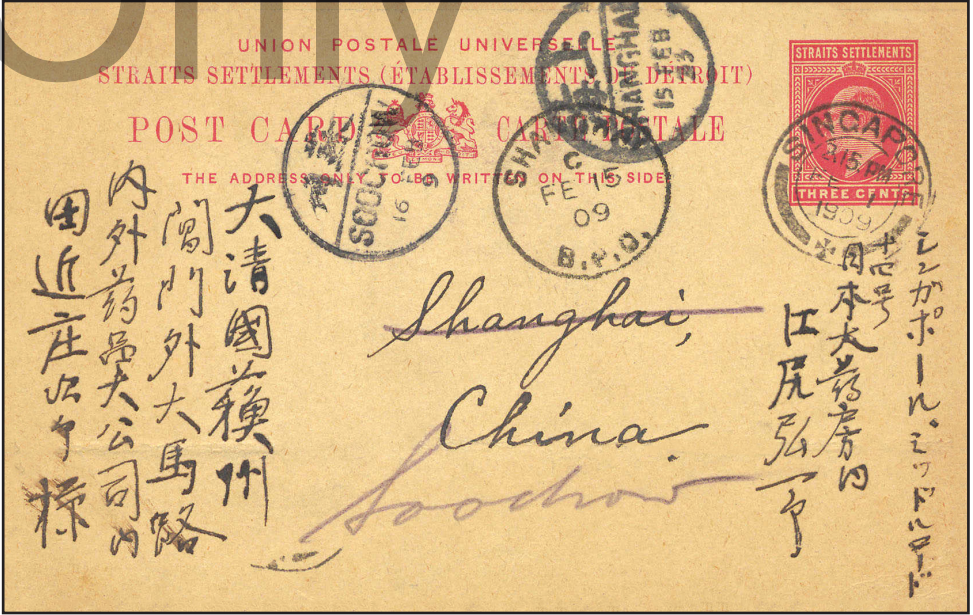
For Review Only



PC84
Visible on the left of the postcard is the first Japanese provision shop in Singapore, K. Nakagawa, which was located at 328 High Street. Date unknown. Publisher: M.S.N. Co. Accession no.: B32413806E_0104

The Lim Shao Bin Collection contains another interesting set of postcards and letters containing business correspondence (PC85–88) – these were sent by Ejiri Koichirō, the owner of K. Ejiri, a Japanese pharmacy located at 414 North Bridge Road in Singapore. He had corresponded with his acquaintance, Tajika Shōjiro, who was also from the pharmaceutical industry, between 1909 and 1925. Their correspondence recorded the various places where Tajika lived and worked over this 16-year period: from Suzhou, China in 1909 (PC85) to Toyama City, Japan in 1912 (PC86) to Seremban, Malaysia in 1918 (PC87); and finally back to Toyama City in 1925 (PC88).

Ejiri's postcards are useful for understanding how a new Japanese migrant may have settled into life in Singapore. PC85 stands out from the other correspondence sent by Ejiri, as it is the only one that does not bear the company stamp “K. Ejiri”. Moreover, the address indicated on the postcard is 14 Middle Road (written in both *katakana* and *kanji* characters), and not 414 North Bridge Road, which was the address used on both the company's stamp and letterhead between 1912 and 1925. Being the earliest postcard in the lot, it suggests that Ejiri had moved to Singapore by 1909 and had not set up his business yet.¹⁷



PC85
This postcard was from Ejiri Koichirō in Singapore to Tajika Shōjiro in Suzhou, China. This government-issued postcard reached Shanghai on 15 February 1909 and Suzhou on 16 February 1909. Postmarked 1 February 1909 (Singapore). Publisher unknown. Accession no.: B32413805D_0005

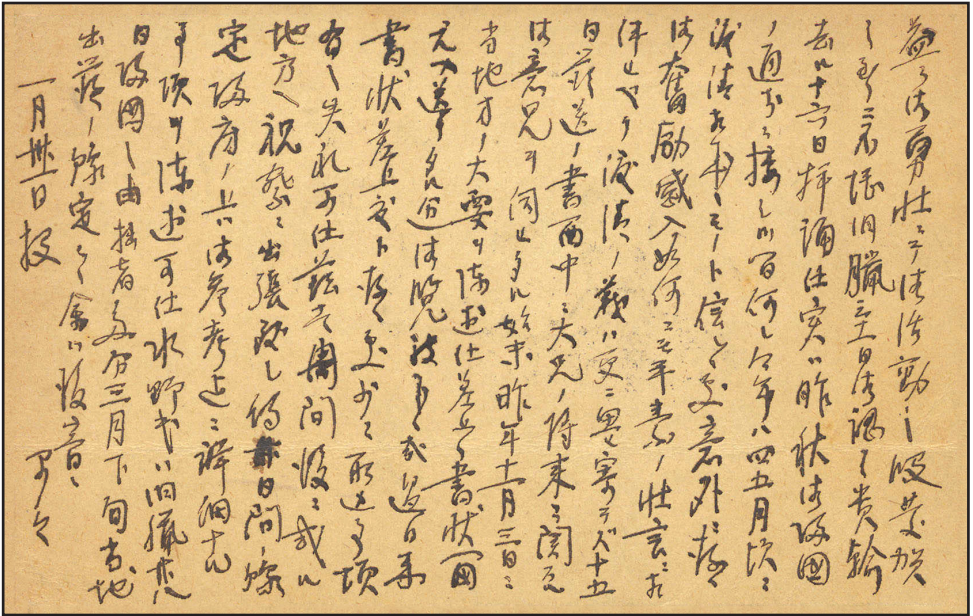
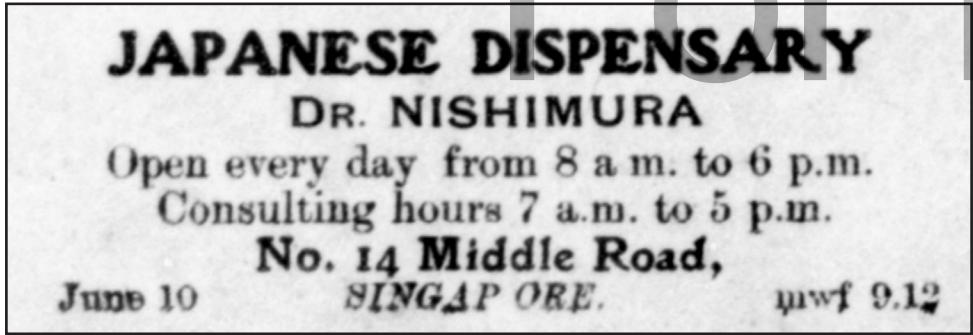


Figure 3
Advertisement for
Dr Nishimura's dispensary

Source: Advertisements
Column 2 [Microfilm:
NL5309]. (1904, July 4). *The
Singapore Free Press and
Mercantile Advertiser*, p. 3.



The property at Middle Road, “a cozy and fine three-story house with cheap rent”, is a particularly interesting location, as the aforementioned Japanese resident Dr Nishimura Takeshirō had first set up his dispensary there (see Figure 3) before moving to new premises in 1906.¹⁸ After Dr Nishimura moved out, the property was leased by Endō Takao, the proprietor of Navy Hotel located at 5-17 Beach Road.¹⁹

It appears that 14 Middle Road was not only a popular location for newcomers due to its affordable rent and proximity to the Japanese merchant district, but also its potential for networking within the local Japanese community. While it is unclear if Ejiri took over the lease from Endo or was only temporarily residing with him, 14 Middle Road was likely a useful location in helping Ejiri to establish his network and contacts in Singapore. The North Bridge Road and Middle Road areas, including adjacent streets such as Malay and Malabar streets, were commonly known as Little Japan.²⁰

The rubber boom from 1906 also brought in workers and investors eager to reap profits (see Chapter 2).²¹ However, when the global demand for rubber fell and prices plunged in the years following the First World War, the effects rippled through Singapore's Japanese community: the population fell from 3,591 individuals in 1920 to 1,731 in 1924.²² Although rubber prices rebounded in 1925, they plummeted again in 1930 at the onset of the Great Depression, falling by almost 40 percent within a year.²³

Even so, the steep decline in the number of Japanese residents between 1920 and 1925 was not solely due to the crash in the rubber market and weak global economy. In 1920, an abolition edict issued by Japan's Acting-Consul in Singapore came into effect, resulting in the expulsion of *karayuki-san* from the island.²⁴ To understand the lead-up to this, it is useful to examine the circumstances that brought these women to Singapore.

ISHIHARA AND CO.

Ishihara and Co., located at 14 and 15 Winchester House and 16 Collyer Quay, was a trading company engaged in the export of tropical produce such as rubber, tin, sago powder, gambier, rattan, pepper and tapioca, and the import of industrial products such as steel wire ropes, machinery, hardware, automobiles, tires, galvanised pipes, shovels, copper boat nails, paints, red leads and carbides.⁺

PC90 was sent by Ishihara G. of Ishihara and Co. to Uno Kazuo of Kyodo Commercial Co. Ltd in Java, noting that Singapore had experienced a lot of rainfall. Ishihara and Co. was also one of several businesses that participated in the fundraising efforts for the commissioning of Sir Arthur Young's portrait, then-governor of the Straits Settlements, in 1919 (Figure 4), and a wedding gift for Princess Mary of the British royal family on the occasion of her marriage to Viscount Lascelles in 1922 (Figure 5).*



Figure 4

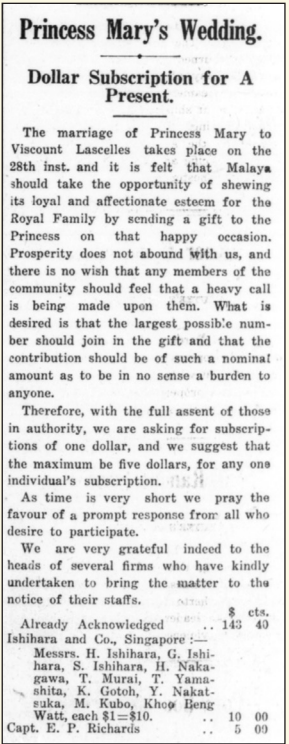


Figure 5

⁺ Sources: Untitled [Microfilm: NL 1657]. (1921, June 21). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, p. 4; Notice [Microfilm: NL 00519]. (1924, June 6). *The Straits Times*, p. 7.; New Stock Just Arrived [Microfilm: NL 00450]. (1918, December 7). *The Straits Times*, p. 5.; Toyko Seiko Kaisha [Microfilm: NL 00453]. (1919, March 28). *The Straits Times*, p. 7; 南洋協会(Japan). 新嘉坡商品陳列館 [Nanyō Kyōkai (Japan). Shingapōru shōhin chinretsukan]. (1920). 南洋之産業. 壹之巻 [Nanyō no sangyō. Ichi no ken]. Singapore: Shingapōru Shōhin Chinretsukan, p. 234. (Call no.: RRARE 338.0959 NAN) Digitised book available from BookSG.

*Sources: Sir Arthur Young's portrait [Microfilm: NL 2121]. (1919, December 8). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, p. 7.; Princess Mary's wedding [Microfilm: NL 491]. (1922, February 11). *The Straits Times*, p. 8.

For Review Only

SUPPLEMENTARY POSTCARDS

PC99
Shopfronts along High Street
in Singapore – many Japanese
businesses were clustered
around this area.
*Date unknown and publisher
unknown. Accession no.:
B32413806E_0102*



PC104
Addressed to Brighton,
England, to "dearest
Kathleen from Freddie", this
postcard features a woman
in traditional Japanese
dress serving rice.
Dated 2 June 1905
(postmarked Singapore).
Publisher unknown.
Accession no.:
B32413805D_0040



PC105
This postcard doubling as
a Christmas card features
morning glory flowers and
a girl wearing traditional
Japanese dress and a headscarf.
Postmarked December
1902 (Singapore). Publisher
unknown. Accession no.:
B32413805D_0032



For Review Only

CARTE POSTALE
Postkarte - Cartolina Postale - Post Card
ОТКРЫТОЕ ПИСЬМО.



CHAPTER 4

CIRCULATION OF
JAPANESE POSTCARDS
IN SINGAPORE

For Review Only

In this final chapter, we move from postcards as historical objects to the social history behind postcards, specifically the study of how postcards were produced and used by the Japanese community in Singapore.

Producing and Circulating Postcards in Singapore

One of the earliest Japanese photography studios to produce picture postcards in Singapore was Togo & Co., which began producing and selling postcards in the early 1900s. Figure 1 shows its premises as well as a portrait likely to be of its studio manager, Mitsui Toshimasa.¹ Postcards from this studio typically depicted local buildings such as Hindu temples (PC106), local flora and fauna (PC107 and PC108), local industries such as rubber tapping, as well as hotels and places of interest (see PC31 in Chapter 2), suggesting that such subjects might have been popular with consumers.

Togo & Co. also photographed and produced commemorative picture postcards marking important community events. One example was the founding of Saiyūji Temple² at Yio Chu Kang in Singapore in 1911 by Hioki Mokusen. Hioki was a renowned Zen monk who later became the 66th chief abbot of Eihei-ji, one of Japan's main Zen temples.³

Singapore's much-acclaimed photography studio G.R. Lambert & Co., which was established in 1867, was also a pioneer – it had been selling a series of postcards bearing images of Japanese women.⁴



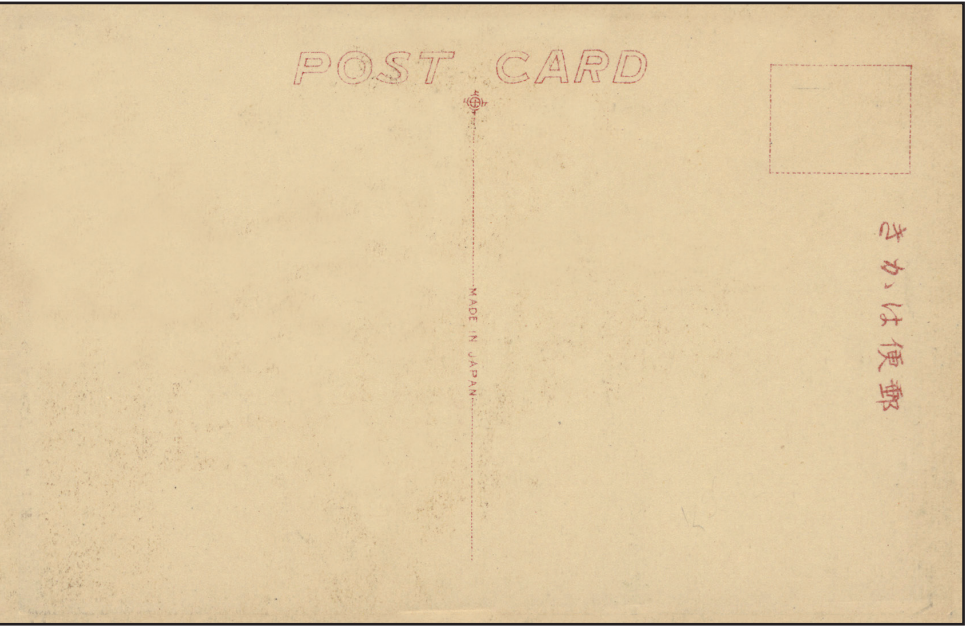
Figure 1
The premises of Togo & Co., or Togo Photographers (Togo Shashinkan). The text on the left of the postcard notes “Mitsui Toshimasa was not only involved in the photography, but also with the cultivation of rubber.”

Source: Tomojiro Itō. (1914). *Nanyō Guntō Shashin Gachō: Fu Nanyō Jijō* [Picture book of the South Sea Islands]. Eiryō Penan Shi: Nanyō chōsakai, p. 21. (Call no.: RRARE 959 ITO)

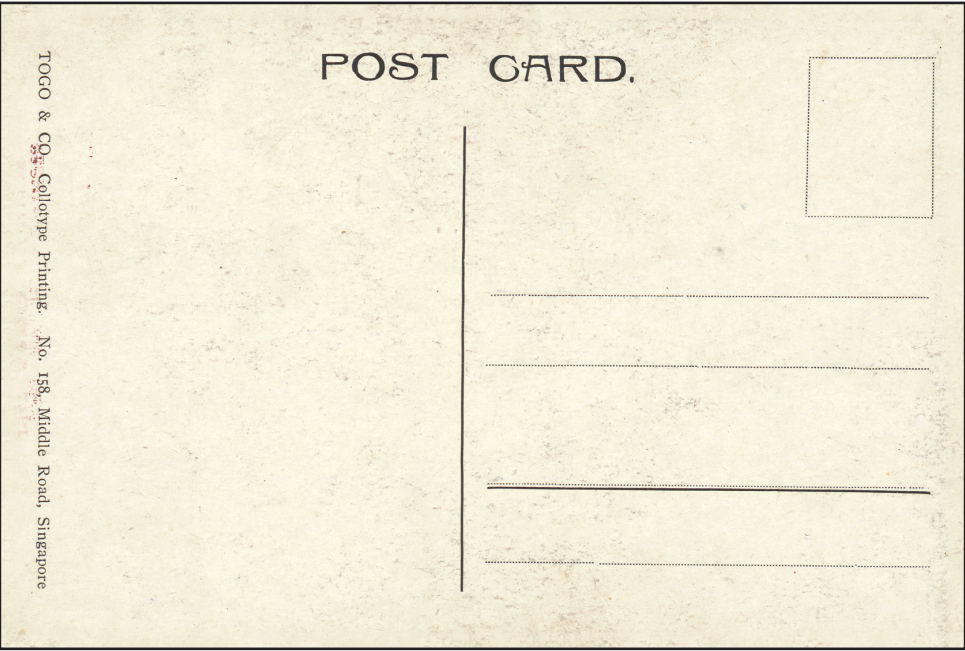
In 1902, an unnamed company circulated PC105 (Chapter 3), which featured a woman in Japanese dress and a decorated border, which does not appear to have been produced in Singapore. PC97, PC98 and PC104 (Chapter 3) similarly share the same border, suggesting that they were produced by the same company. The consumers of such postcards were not only tourists but also local Japanese residents, Sugino Reisuku being one example. Sugino, an employee with the branch office of Mitsui & Co. (a trading company) in Singapore, had used such a postcard when writing to a Japanese acquaintance.⁵

Gradually, photographers began to take an interest in subjects beyond local buildings, events and people. Takahashi Shōhei, who took over Togo & Co. in 1917⁶ and renamed it Daiwa Photography Studio, was most interested in photographing the activities of the local Japanese community in Singapore. Many of Takahashi's photographs appear in the book *Marai ni okeru hōjin katsudō no genkyō* (Current Status of the Activities of the Japanese in Malaya), which was published by Nanyō Oyobi Nipponjin Sha (South Seas and the Japanese Press).⁷

For Review Only

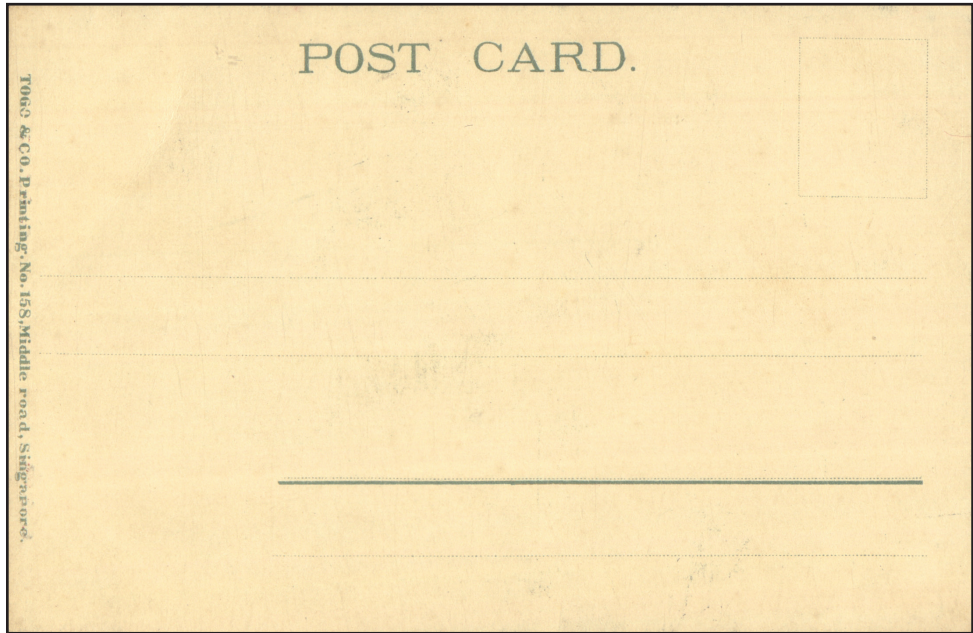


PC106
This made-in-Japan postcard features the Sri Mariamman Temple at South Bridge Road. *Date unknown. Publisher: Togo & Co. Printing. Accession no.: B32413805D_0145*



PC107
This postcard featuring ripened coconuts was produced by Togo & Co. Postcards like this gave its recipients an idea of tropical produce found in Singapore. *Date unknown. Publisher: Togo & Co. Printing. Accession no.: B32413807F_0160*

For Review Only

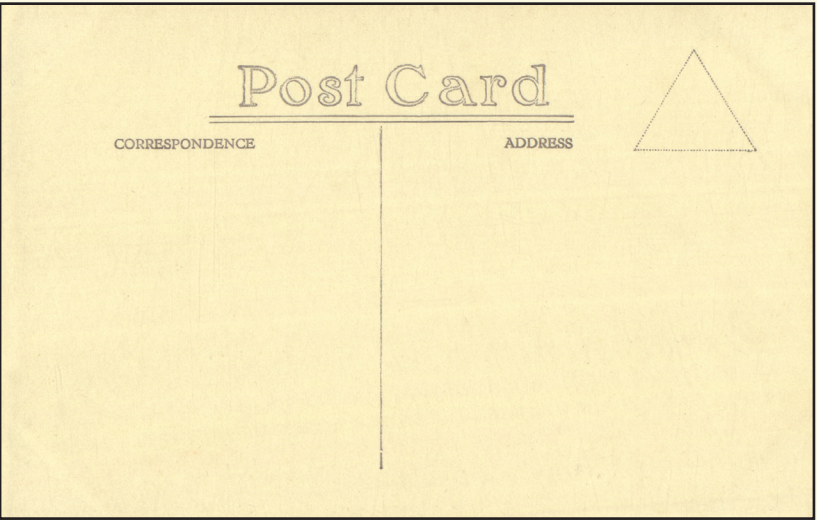


PC108
Produced by Togo & Co., postcards such as this one presenting a close-up of a monkey reinforced ideas of Singapore as an exotic destination.
Date unknown. Publisher: Togo & Co. Printing. Accession no.: B32440324K_0012

An interesting inclusion in Takahashi’s book is the photograph of a large snake (PC109), together with the description “23 metres in length (and) the swollen belly suggests that it had swollen [*sic*] a deer”.⁸ The image is part of a series of photographs, titled *A Big Snake Swallowing a Deer*, that was made into picture postcards. The photograph on PC109 captures the snake hissing in fury at the camera; PC110 presents the snake tied to a pole; PC111 shows the dead snake surrounded by a group of beaming men who were presumably part of the hunt; and the picture on PC112 shows the deer that was pried out of the snake’s stomach. Obviously, there was a market for postcards depicting such exotica in Singapore.

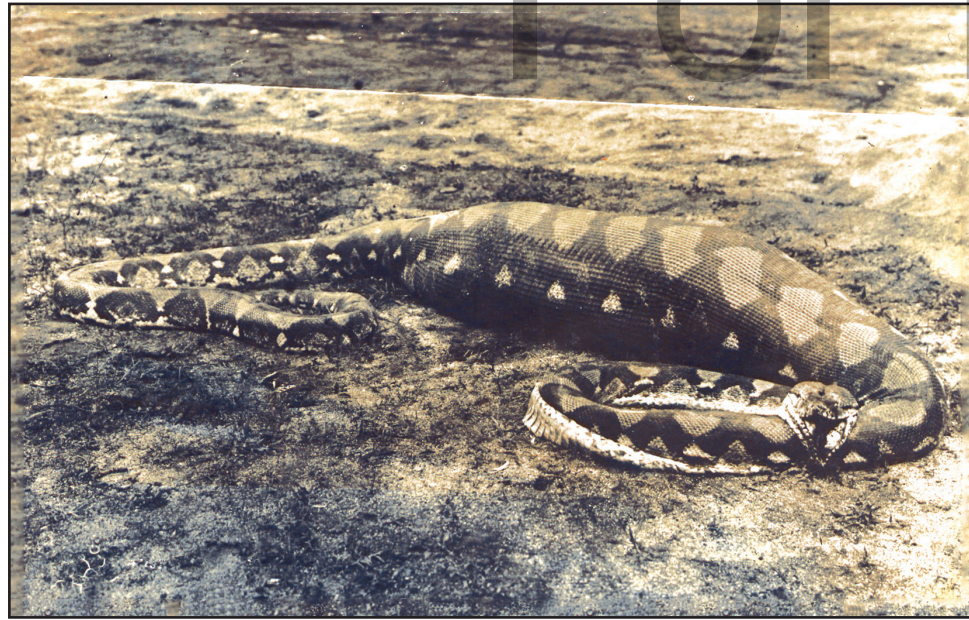
TRIANGLE SPACES FOR STAMPS

According to Chai Foh Chin’s *Early Picture Postcards of North Borneo and Labuan*, the unusual triangular space marked out for stamps on the back of some early postcards were thought to be a distinctive feature used by a group of some 50 Japanese photographers and artists in the 1920s. Postcards PC110, PC111 and PC112 were likely to have been produced by Takahashi Shōhei, and suggests that he was part of this group. See pages 179–190 for more postcards with such triangle spaces for stamps.



Source: Chai, F. C. (2007). *Early Picture Postcards of North Borneo and Labuan*. Kota Kinabalu: Opus Publications, p. 2. (Call no.: RSING 959.53 CHA)

PC109
This set of four images (PC109–112), later turned into postcards, were from a series called *A Big Snake Swallowing a Deer*. They were published in *Marai ni okeru hōjin katsudō no genkyō* (Current Status of the Activities of the Japanese in Malaya). This postcard features the python with its belly swollen with its prey (a deer). The image was taken at the Fujita Kumi Plantation. *Date and publisher unknown. Accession no.: B32413807F_0149*



PC110
A group of men, presumably the hunting party, pose for a picture with the python, which had been strapped onto a pole after being caught. *Date and publisher unknown. Accession no.: B32413807F_0146*



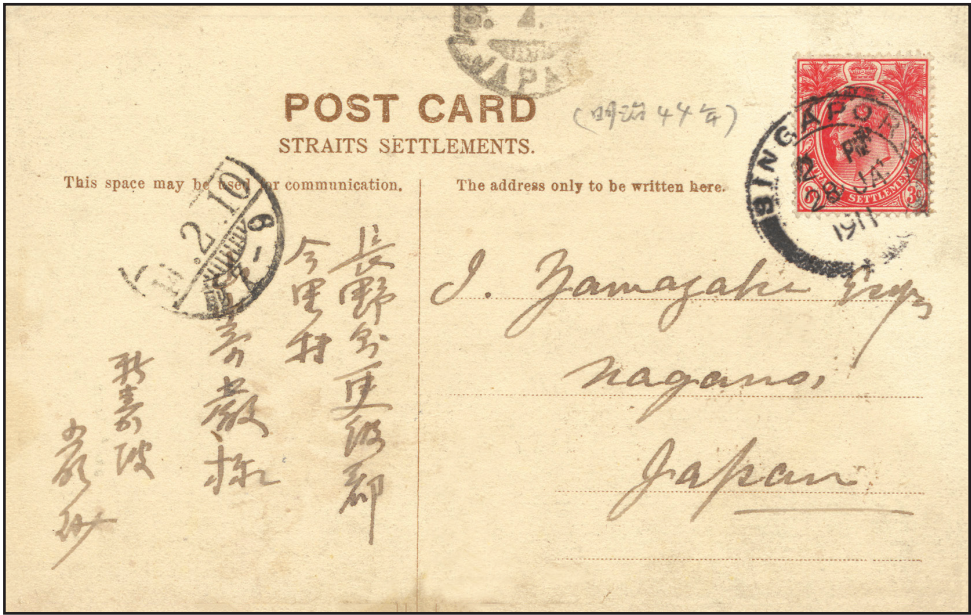
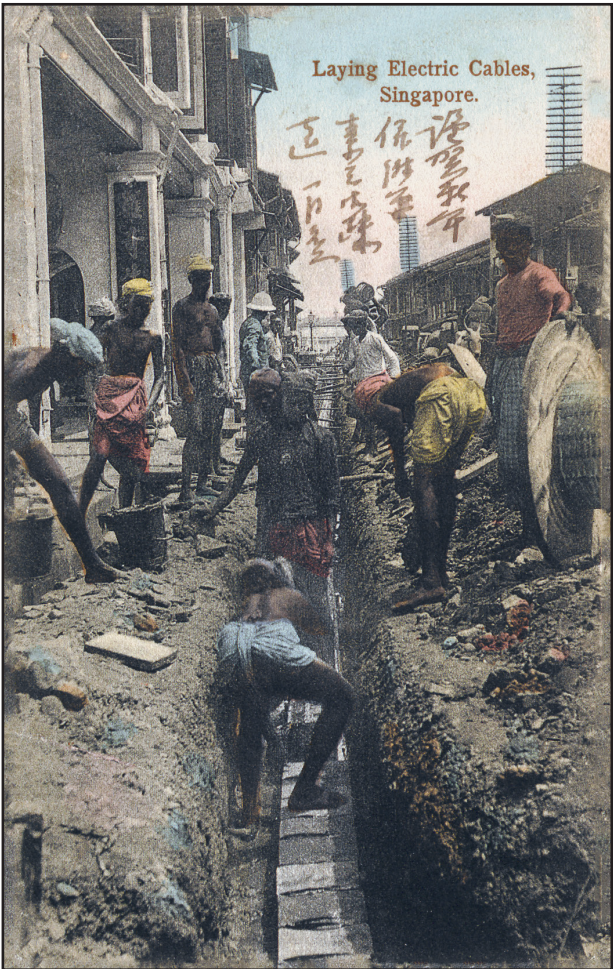
PC111
The dead python, with its extended belly, is laid on the ground prior to being cut open. *Undated and publisher unknown. Accession no.: B32413807F_0147*



PC112
This postcard features the deer after it was extracted from the stomach of the python. *Date and publisher unknown. Accession no.: B32413807F_0150*

Celebrating Japanese Traditions

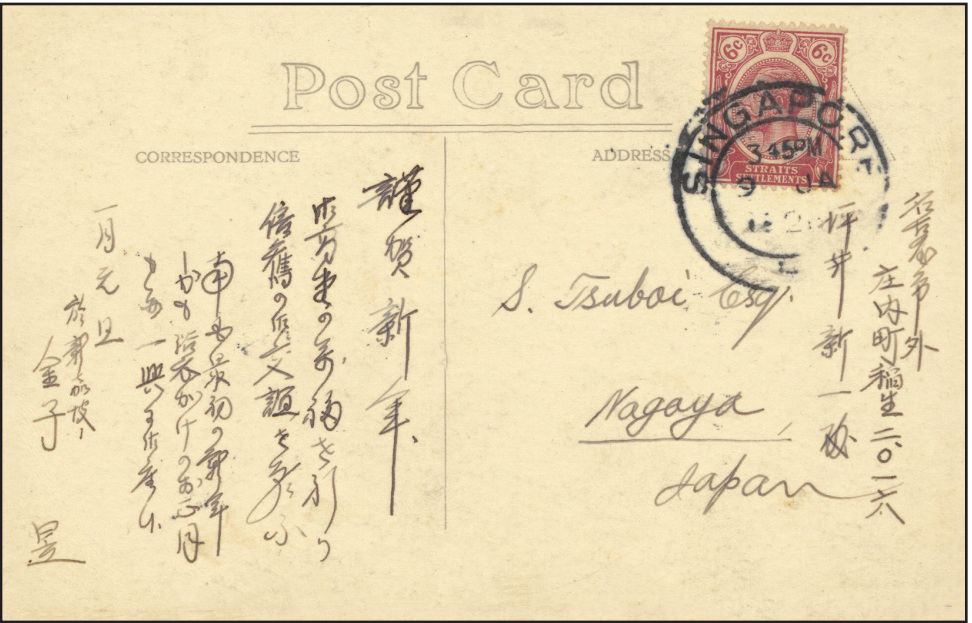
Aside from commemorating special visits, postcards were also used by the local Japanese community for another unique reason – the Japanese tradition of sending *nengajō*, or New Year greeting cards, to friends and acquaintances (PC117). Used to express gratitude as well as to keep in touch with friends and relatives overseas, these postcards doubtless took on a special meaning for Japanese living in Singapore. In PC118, the writer, Kaneko (first name illegible), conveys his well wishes on 1 January (year unknown) to an acquaintance living in Nagoya, stressing that it was his first New Year away from Japan.



PC117
A New Year card addressed to Mr Yamagaki from Nagano, Japan. This postcard features Indian workmen laying electric cables in Singapore. Written on the front of the postcard is “謹賀新年”, which means “Happy New Year” in Japanese. Postmarked 28 January 1911. Publisher unknown. Accession no.: B32413805D_0061



PC118
A New Year Card addressed to S. Tsuboi in Nagoya, this postcard features Kling boys. The term “kling” was derived from the word “Kalinga”, the name of an ancient empire in southern India. While acceptable during 19th century Singapore, over time the term “kling” took on a derogatory meaning. Date and publisher unknown. Accession no.: B32413805D_0109



The New Year greeting cards also enabled Japanese communities across Southeast Asia to keep in touch with one another. PC119 was addressed to a Mr Shimaya in Singapore, from a friend living in Melaka. Unlike Kaneko’s postcard, this postcard features individuals posing with their pets in front of what appears to be a house. The women are dressed in traditional *kimono*; interestingly, the photo also features a non-Japanese child in *kebaya* (traditional dress worn by women in Indonesia and some parts of Southeast Asia). In contrast, the man in the foreground of the picture, presumably Japanese, dons a shirt with a mandarin collar and Western-style trousers and shoes.

Another New Year card (PC120) was sent from someone living in Singapore to relatives living in Klandasan, Balikpapan, a seaport city on the east coast of Borneo.

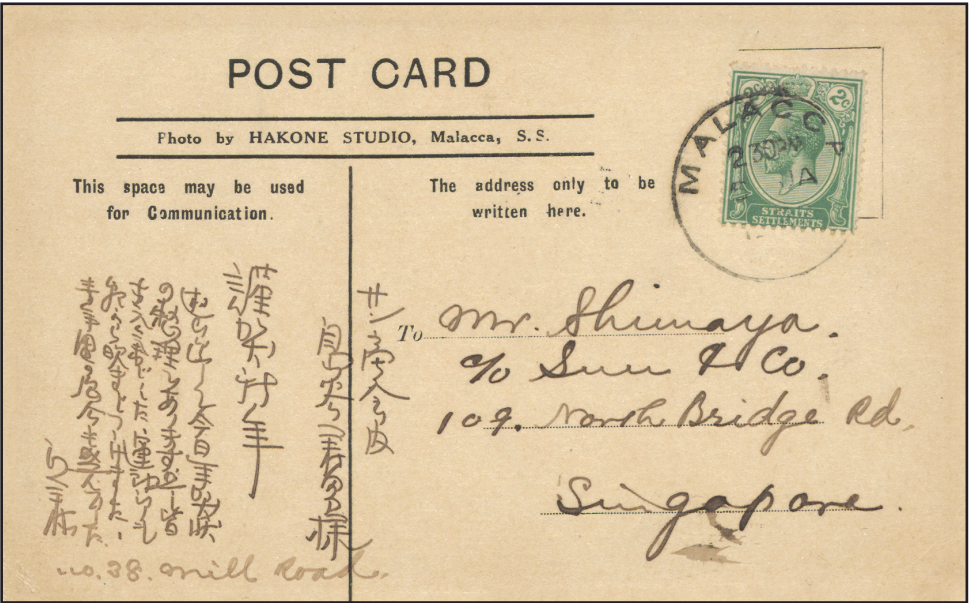
Apart from the practice of sending New Year greeting cards, Singapore’s Japanese community also observed other occasions, such as *hatsumōde*, the first shrine visit of the year (PC121). Observing familiar cultural traditions in a land far away from home must have mattered greatly to the Japanese community as it would have helped them to stay close to their roots and provide a connection to their families in Japan.

THE “WRONG” TYPE OF POSTCARD

While postcards certainly enabled local Japanese residents to keep in contact with friends and family back home, sending the “wrong” type of postcard could land one in hot soup. For instance, in 1935, Ishihara S., a Japanese electrical salesman, was fined 60 Straits dollars, or three months’ imprisonment, for sending “obscene articles” to Japan.

The articles in question were obscene postcards that Ishihara had sent in a parcel to a friend in Nagoya. Unfortunately for Ishihara, they were discovered by postal authorities in Japan and sent back to Singapore, leading to the charges. Whether Ishihara had known about the rules against sending such risqué material overseas is unclear, but what is interesting is that the Japanese postal authorities did not send the rejected parcel back to Ishihara, but instead directed it to the Post Office in Singapore. This suggests that the postal authorities of some countries – or at least that of Japan and Singapore – worked together to prevent the sending and receiving of contraband items.

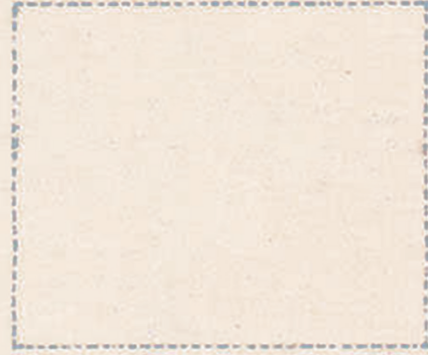
Source: Obscene postcards – smart fine on Japanese salesman [Microfilm: NL 4049]. (1935, November 20). *Malaya Tribune*, p. 19.



PC119
This *nengajō* (New Year’s greeting card), showing individuals dressed in various traditional and modern dress, was addressed to Mr Shimaya at Sun & Co., North Bridge Road in Singapore. The sender’s address was 38 Mill Road in Melaka.
Date unclear. Publisher: Hakone Studio, Malacca. Accession no.: B32413805D_0091

For Review Only

CARTE POSTALE
Postkarte - Cartolina Postale - Post Card
ОТКРЫТОЕ ПИСЬМО.



SUPPLEMENTARY POSTCARDS

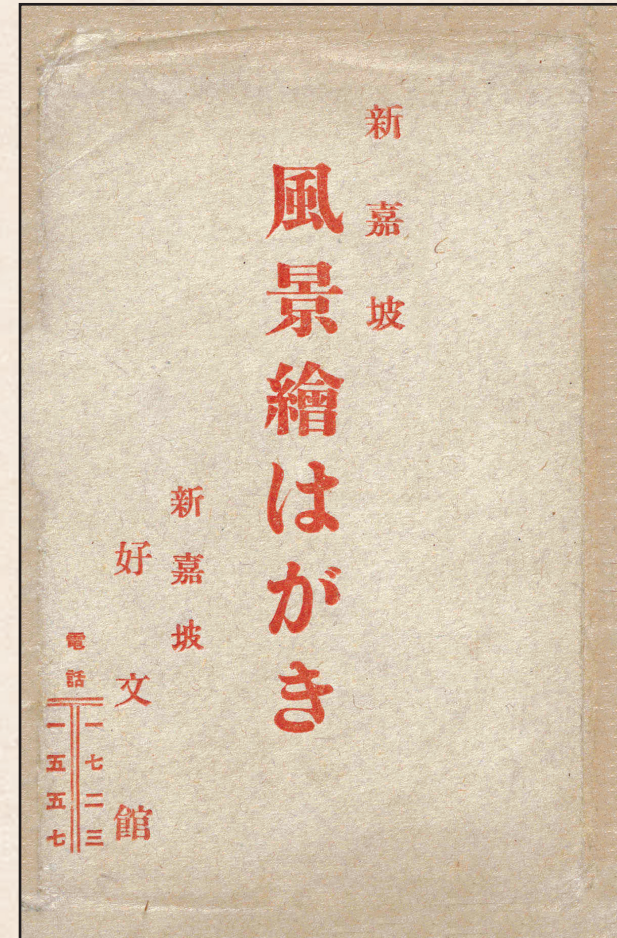


Figure 2
The envelope for *Shingapōru*
Fukei Ehagaki (Singapore
Landscapes on Postcards), a set
of postcards produced
by Kōbunkan.
Date and publisher unknown.
Accession no.: B32413805D_0171

For Review Only

SELECTED POSTCARDS WITH TRIANGLE SPACES

This selection of postcards (PC135–158) all feature a distinctive triangle stamp space (see page 153) on their reverse sides. It is thought that the unusual triangular space for stamps were the distinctive feature of photo cards used by a group of some 50 Japanese photographers and artists in the 1920s.

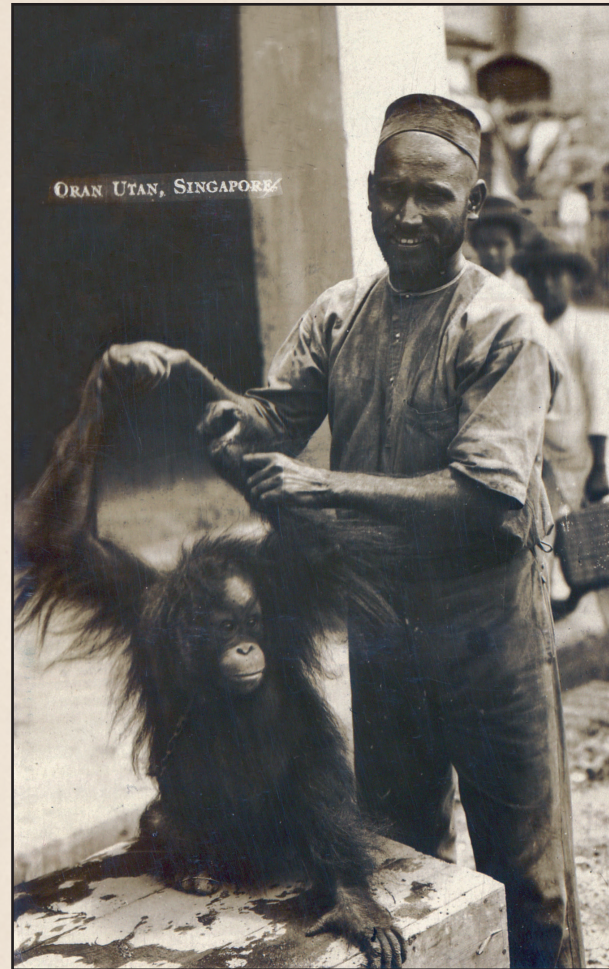
Figure 3
Besides envelopes (see page 173), postcards were also packaged in small booklets for sale. This set of 12 picture postcards features photographs by M.S. Nakajima and sold as a booklet called *Views of Singapore*. Postcards could be torn out and used.
Date unknown.
Publisher: M.S.N. Co.
Accession no.: B344882111



PC135
A young boy holds up a flying fox, with two others pinned onto a tree trunk.
Date and publisher unknown.
Accession no.: B32440324K_0023



PC136
Written in *kanji* characters at the bottom of the postcard is the description “Bird of Paradise”.
Date and publisher unknown.
Accession no.: B32440324K_0024

**PC137**

A man poses with an orangutan, which are native to the islands of Borneo and Sumatra.

Date and publisher unknown.

Accession no.: B32440324K_0026

**PC138**

Crocodiles have had a long history in Singapore. One of the earliest accounts of crocodiles on the island can be found in the autobiographical work, *Hikayat Abdullah* (Stories of Abdullah) (1849).

Date and publisher unknown.

Accession no.: B32440324K_0025

**PC139**

A pineapple farm in Singapore.

Pineapples were sometimes grown

as a cash crop alongside rubber.

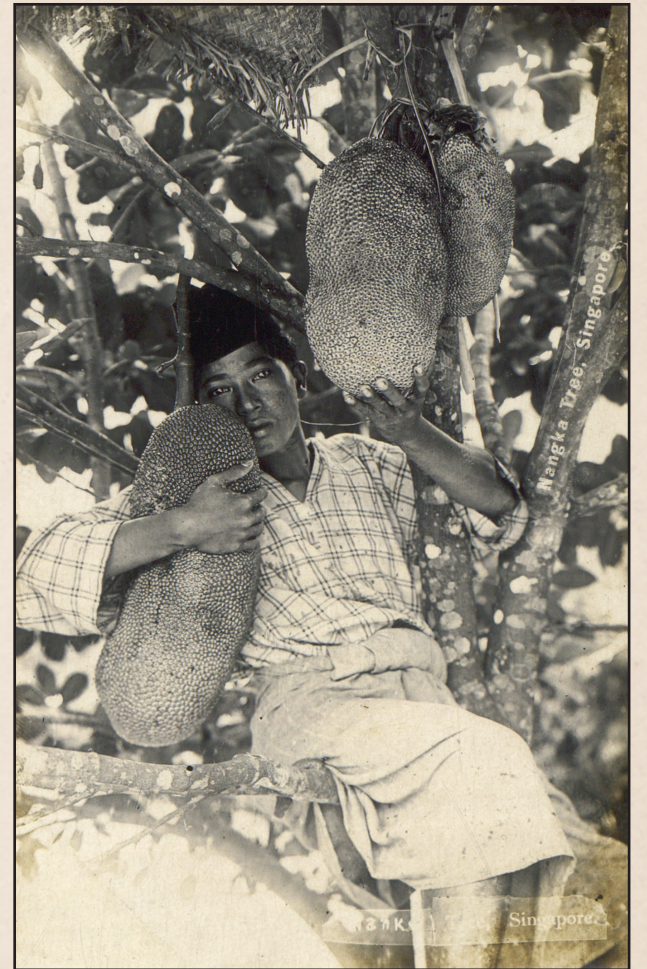
Singapore was a top world producer

of canned pineapples during the early

20th century.

Date and publisher unknown.

Accession no.: B32440324K_0029

**PC140**

A Malay man poses with fruits of a *nangka* (jackfruit) tree.

Date and publisher unknown.

Accession no.: B32440324K_0027

For Review Only