

## Littoral Literature and Port Cities: Kelly and Walsh's *It Happened in Japan*

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Room 8018

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**Abstract:** In the 1880s, the Anglophone publisher Kelly and Walsh expanded beyond its headquarters in Shanghai to set up branch offices in the ports of Hong Kong, Singapore, and Yokohama. In doing so, Kelly and Walsh helped to establish a regional network of literary production, distribution, and consumption that was founded on the port city's symbiotic relationship with the sea. Because Kelly and Walsh was so dependent on maritime shipping and telecommunications, it is no coincidence that water permeates the narratives it produced, giving rise to a "littoral literature" that connected Anglophone communities in various port cities. This paper focuses on bodies of water that appear in *It Happened in Japan*, a novel published by Kelly and Walsh in Yokohama in 1905. Grace Lavery (2019) has argued that British writings in the late 19th century often portrayed Japan in contradictory terms that reflected the fascination and fear that the British public felt towards the radical challenge that Japanese aesthetics posed to European artistic conventions. While this interpretation holds true in metropolitan centers where people knew Japan mainly through its artworks, these representations of the contradictoriness of Japan take on a distinctively aqueous dimension in the East Asian port city. As an example of the "littoral literature" that Kelly and Walsh and other port-city publishers helped to create, *It Happened in Japan* associates the country with the extreme changeability of its seas, rivers, and lakes: scenic and tranquil in one moment, violent and destructive in the next.



"The Head Office of Kelly and Walsh" (c. 1925) from *Shanghai of To-day: A Souvenir Album of 38 Vandyke Prints of the 'Model Settlement'* (1927). Image from *Virtual Shanghai*.

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