

Kawakami Sadayakko

Geisha, Actress, Entrepreneur, Mistress, Monk

Momosuke's private life was nothing if not complicated. Although he was married to Fukuzawa Fusa, the daughter of the influential scholar, poet, translator and educator Fukuzawa Yukichi, Momosuke openly lived in this villa with his mistress Kawakami Sadayakko (1871–1946).

The two originally met as teenagers, when Momosuke drove off a pack of dogs that had attacked Sadayakko when she was out horse riding. Sadayakko went on to become a geisha whose patrons came from the topmost echelon of Japanese society: her virginity was bought by Ito Hirobumi, the prime minister, and she eventually married Kawakami Otojiro, a celebrated actor, in 1894.

Sadayakko became famous as an actress in the United States and Europe while touring with Kawakami's troupe. She was known in Japan as *joyu daiichi-go*, "the first-ever actress," since men had traditionally played all roles, including female roles, in the theater. After her actor-husband's death in 1911, Sadayakko abandoned the stage and set up a textile company in Nagoya.

Her relationship with Momosuke gave her a second lease on life. The two of them lived together in this house from 1919 to 1924, with Sadayakko advising Momosuke on his business and helping him win over influential politicians and potential business partners. She was a highly recognizable figure, driving at high speed around the town on her American motorcycle, with the local children shrieking *mekake* ("kept woman") as she roared by.

As Sadayakko got older, she used her fortune to build Teishoji Temple, in Unuma, Gifu Prefecture, which was completed in 1933. She died in 1946. Her colorful life is the subject of a 2003 English-language biography, *Madame Sadayakko: The Geisha who Seduced the West*, by British journalist and author Lesley Downer.