

# **The Mogami River in the Making of the History**

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(This English version is translated by Masanobu Hayakawa)

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## 1. Introduction

I would like to talk under the title of “the Mogami River in the making of the history”. I believe this river has been played important roles to look back the history of Yamagata Prefecture. The river has been inevitable to our lives for both industries and cultures. Of course, each age had its own relation to others, especially how to make our history promote. Japan is geographically mountainous and many rivers are counted—long or short rivers. Small rivers flow down, gathering tiny ones and finally it becomes a long river. It is a surprise to be able to see so many small rivers in small lands like our country. The reason for it depends on the aspects of the land. For example, they don't have rivers like those in the Okinawa Islands. In the main land of Japan, various parts are surrounded by the mountains and formed as a fan-shaped basin, and the areas are fostered as significant areas along the rivers. Geographically, for the first time, the rivers were not so wide, but gradually it grows wider. Finally some governmental unit was formed along the rivers. The Mogami River flows through the prefecture and it makes up some mental colour of the people who inhabit there— cultures. Before the rail road was constructed in this prefecture, the river played the roles to make up some economic and cultural exchanges. Not to mention that the river flows down to the sea, economic and cultural exchanges were inevitably existed. In the developing ages, Sakata was the only extrance in and out of tradings. This meant that the Mogami River had an important factor to make a fundamental prosperity for a long time.

And if one word may be added, the ages depended on this River and characteristic factors led a fundamental trading prosperity. If another viewpoint may be allowed, the ages depended on rice prices which made the economic basis through the periods. Not to mention only in the Edo period, this had been true till nearly modern days. This price may be called “Sakata market”. There were five spots' markets, in those days, like Shinjo (新庄), Higashine (東根), Yamagata (山形) and Aterazawa (左沢). Traders settled the prices as an authorized market price of the inland areas. This fact meant that the area along the river was a total economic and social unit. Also historically, the society has been formed all along the river. This is the theme that I would like talk from the primitive to the modern ages.



Aterazawa (左沢) : Around the area of the Aterazawa Ship Cargo Office of the Yonezawa Clan.

## 2. From Primitive to Medieval Ages

I already talked about “the lives along the riverside.” Talking of the lives of the primitive people, many new discoveries have been done by the recent archeological researches. Among the relics, those of Jomon age (縄文時代) are numerous. The history of this country has a little over one thousand years before the historic records were written down. But, on the other hand, the Jomon age lasted several times longer without records only to find the lingering relics. Under these situations, gathering and hunting life based on the foundation in the mountainous basins and along the riversides before agricultural society was formed. The daily activities for their lives were done at the edge of the waters or mainly at the mountain foot faced to the south. Especially, people in those days made use of the river terrace. In the Yamagata Basin, this is proved in that most of habitants there occupied around the northern areas of San-nansho (三難所). Among these areas, from the upstream

of the river to the town stream, Goten (基点), Mikanose (三ヶ瀬) and Hayabusa (早房) were counted under the same aspects. And a little down the river we can find Oishida (大石田) at the center of the Oishida Basin. This is the spot where many small rivers meet at the one place, gathering the rivers to make a river terrace—along the Isazawa River (伊左沢川), the Oboroge River (朧気川), the Nyu River (丹生川) and the Nokurosawa River (野黒沢川). For their lives, many salmon and trout were caught, not to say, with many fruits in the mountains. To preserve them, they could spend the rather long life at the one place. Along the Mogami River and its terraces people's life was settled as the most favourable one in the primitive ages.

When an ancient age began, in the geographical situation like Yamagata Prefecture, the rivers were well used for transportation not only for fishing and hunting. Of course, transportation was done by land. In the ancient stations many horses were usually prepared. The ancient officials made use of the horses and they moved from capital to capital. The important thing was the safety of the transportation.



San-nansho : The area of Hayabusa (早房) of the Mogami River.  
The road depended on these stations, and in this prefecture the “water stations”

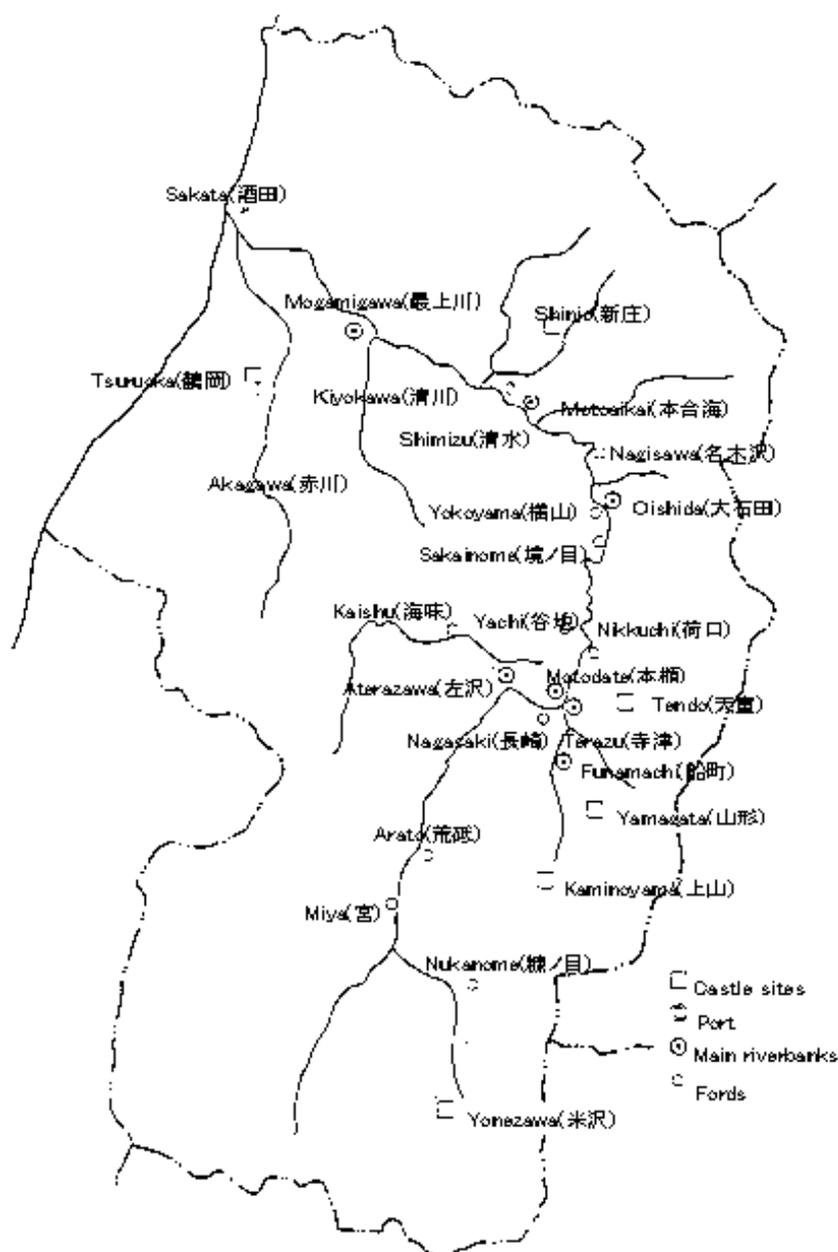
were also built. These stations were constructed at the middle of the Mogami River to downstream—to the north. People and officials flew down the river where the stream ran through the easy mountains. They steered the ships via Nojiri (野後), Sabane (猿羽根) and Sake (佐芸) to the Shonai (庄内) plain. In the ancient ages, these type of stations were very rare, but the fact was written down in the record of the Engishiki (延喜式). Gradually, the age turned to the medieval age. As you know, this age was not governed by one regime, and several noblemen or temples of the central government made manors in the far districts from the capital.



**Motoaikai : The stream of the Mogami River in front of the Yamuki Shrine**  
(矢向明神).

So the road systems which were seen in an ancient age, but the formal documents are not existed. Perhaps the areas which the routes governed became smaller. Along the Mogami River, some of the manors could be counted like Naryu (成生), Shonai (庄内) and Yuza (遊佐). And at the upriver areas, Yashiro (屋代) and Nagai (長井) were also newly built. Of course, all of the areas along the River did not depend on the river, but these manors dedicated the development of the areas, combining their profit with the central government. In these

medieval ages, the combination of the upstream and the downstream could not be counted together. At the upstream, downstream and the middle of the stream, each was existed respectively. Maybe, at the water stations , many small boats went up and down the River. These small wooden boats belonged not only to an ancient and a medieval age but also even to the Edo and the Meiji period. Soon the age finally came when the aspects of the river transportation totally were changed.



Main riverbanks and fords along the Mogami River

### 3. Modern Ages

#### (1) Yoshiaki Mogami and the Mogami River

From the Tensho (天正) to the Keicho (慶長) period in the name of Japanese era, the way of exploitation of the River was greatly developed. Yoshiaki Mogami conquered the Yamagata Basin and the Mogami areas. Finally at the time of 1577 to 78, he occupied the Shonai areas. But not only the Mogami, the Uesugi Family was watching for a chance who already governed the Echigo (越後) areas. Originally, the Muto Family governed there, living in the Oyama (大山) area. But he was lack of capacity to rule the area well. He took the balance of power policy between the Mogami and the Uesugi, and the battle against the two powers broke out at the Jugorigahara (十五里ヶ原). The Muto Family was defeated and split into destruction. At the last stage, the Uesugi Family won the battle the Mogami Family retired into his home area to the Mogami Basin. But even after the defeat, the Mogami seeked after getting Shonai areas and stationed its troops to Shimizu (清水) in the corner of the Shinjo Basin. He also aimed at getting into Sakata and taking its initiative to rule the Mogami River. For Yoshiaki thought the ruling of Shonai areas was inseparable relation with that of the River. Later the chance for Yoshiaki unexpectedly came when the Sekigahara Battle (関ヶ原) was broke out.

In Tohoku areas, the Battle of Hasedo (長谷堂) was occurred and the Mogami got a lucky victory. Not to mention about the situation, the Uesugi was suffered to be a loser after the Battle. As is known the Uesugi fought together with the Toyotomi Family (豊臣方), then the power situation was upside down between the Mogami and the Uesugi. The Mogami Family got 750 thousands kokus (石) or materially one million kokus (石). On the contrary, the Uesugi was reduced one million and 2 thousands kokus (石) to 300 thousands kokus (石). The Shonai areas was now all governed by the Mogami and further more even the Yuri (由利) area, (now in Akita Prefecture) belonged to the Mogami Family. The Mogami Family built a great state over two present prefectures except the Okitama (置賜) area, the southern part of Yamagata Prefecture. Yoshiaki made the River the important transportation route during this period.

When did Yoshiaki cultivate the Mogami River? There has been several opinions about this cultivation. One was the time during the Tensho period. The

Senshoji-Temple (専称寺) was founded at Takadama (高掬) once, but it was moved to Yamagata (山形), which has the document by Gangyoji-Temple (願行寺) to show the achievements of Yoshiaki. In this document, the relation of Yoshiaki and the Mogami River was minutely described. Though its time was uncertain, Yoshiaki cultivated San-nansho (三難所) after he defeated the Tendo Family (天童). The fords of Oishida and Funamachi (船町) had been said to be constructed at that time. And he built the roads to Oishida via the Ushu Route (羽州街道). The cultivation lasted for three or four years in summer. In summer season, the rivers suffered water shortage, which also meant the best season to cut the rock of the bottom of the river. As the Tensho period lasted for no less than 18 years, this cultivation was thought at latest at the middle of the period. I think these cultivation was done at the beginning of the Keicho (慶長) period, when the Mogami Family was given 570 thousands kokus and the Family began to be governed by Ieyasu Tokugawa (徳川家康). And a certain records are not preserved to show when the river bank of Oishida was constructed. But this construction did not depend on natural power but just on artificial construction. But the Torii Family (鳥居家) who governed the area successively left the notable Genna-kenchicho (元和検地帳). To give a minute research to this document, it was done clearly under planning. This proves both of constructions above to have been built at the beginning of the Keicho period.

The case in Sakata (酒田) and Kamo (加茂) is thought at the same period. Kamo was the second largest port in the time then, the street and town making was done during the Keicho period. The town planning and making of the conformable with making of the port along the River. These facts also meant it was a big enterprise to govern the larger areas. To focus the role of the Mogami River, many historical relations—roads, transportation and town planning had the relative connections together. This is the relation of Yoshiaki Mogami and the Mogami River.



**San-nansho : The down stream of the Mogami River at the area of Oyodo (大淀).**

## **(2) The West-route Sea Transportation and Sakata**

The later developing of Sakata had the important moment when Zuiken Kawamura (河村瑞賢), who was a famous merchant of Edo, re-adjusted the west-route sea transportation. Talking of this merchant, he was adopted as a great man in the school text books of junior and senior high schools. He was born in Ise (伊勢) and became a lumber merchant in Kii (紀伊), but he suffered a conflagration in Edo. He was ordered by the Shogunate to adjust the sea route transportation, not to mention of planning of town and house-making. He already dedicated to make the east-sea route, but the west-sea route was longer and its size was bigger. The east-sea route was founded along the Abukuma River (阿武隈川) whose riverside belonged to the Shogunate. It was aimed at conveying tax rice down the river and at transporting it to Edo at the ford of Arahama (荒浜). Another aim of his was to make the conveyance system along the Mogami River, where the Shogunate possessed more than 150 thousands kokus area. At the age of Genroku (元禄) the belonging was increased

to 190 thousands kokus.



**The Sketch of Koya-no-hama (小屋之濱) of Sode-no-Ura (袖之浦) in Sakata.**  
(the Sakata Ancient Sketch) (財団法人 本間美術館所蔵)

These areas were called Tenryo (天領). As is known, the riverside of the Mogami River has been rich productive area as well as Akita and Shinano (信濃) area. At that age, how to convey rice to Edo was a big problem. Zuiken, then, tried to solve this difficult problem.

The west-route transportation was carried out from 1671 to 72 and soon his dream came true. The Shogunate wanted to convey rice directly to Edo. But previously most of the packages of rice were loaded down at Tsuruga (敦賀) or Obama (小浜) and conveyed to Kyoto via Otsu (大津) by land, passing along the Lake Biwa (琵琶湖). The packages were finally transported to Osaka. At that age, the transportation by land was very expensive and, to make the matter worse, they were loaded up ships again. Instead of these, the regular cargos called Higaki-kaisen (菱垣廻船) sailed directly to Edo after sailing round Shimonoseki (下関) via the Seto Inland Sea (瀬戸内海). This route was called “West-sea Route” for which Zuiken gave a better innovation. These cargos were called “Kansen” (官船) which were designated by the Shogunate and the big cargos were sailing in the sea. These were used in big cargos sailing in the sea above. These were used in old times as pirate boats and sometimes called Shiwakusen (塩飽船). The existence of such types of cargos also meant that some big merchants traded across the Seto Inland Sea. In the Edo period, the cargos were no longer used for transportation as pirate ships. But these ships came into the ports of Japan Sea. The transportation system of rice including the Mogami River also was

innovated. The cargos conveyed the Shogunate rice as well as each Daimyo's matters. How the other matters were shipped is the problem occurred. All the method of transportation was not the same, but it depended on the situation which the rivers already characterized.

### (3) The Distinction of the Mogami River Cargo Conveyance

Here, we have to consider the speciality of the River. What divided the transportation from others? This problem must be discussed from various standpoints, but, first of all, it is the ruling relations. Of course, I mean here the Edo period. The development of cargo conveyance was seen in the medieval times, the Edo period and modern times, but the most drastic one was seen in the Edo period. The reason for it depended on the rice trading by waterway. Lumbers were also the main freight. Rice, at that age, was cultivated all over this country and was delivered as a tax. It was a regular way to pay a tax as rice itself. Then, the land lords hand to deliver it to the rice market. The center of the market was Osaka or Edo. In this country, the conveyance by land cost much as I mentioned before, because the heavy delivery was hard to convey in this mountainous country. This was the reason why the land transportation was not developed like in Europe. Before the rail roads were not prevalent through this land, the main means for it was a horse or a cart. A long distance conveyance was difficult: no tunnels, no bridges, many rivers. Many barriers blocked its smooth transportation.

This way of transportation gradually declined when the Meiji era began. At the middle of the Meiji era, the rail road came up to Sendai, but it was the latter time of the Meiji era the train reached Yamagata City. The Ou (奥羽) main line was completed in 1907. Then the words — “Ura-nihon” (裏日本) and “Omote-nihon” (表日本) — appeared. The words were led on the times of opening of railway traffic. Before this modern traffic was opened, the ship traffic in Japan Sea side was more prosperous than that of other side. Further more, the speed of the development of the Meiji era was so rapid that the difference between railway society and non-railway one made the standard so large. What I want to say here is that the water-borne traffic was enormously developed in the Edo period. The variety of the governing systems along the river made its distinction bigger. For example, in Tohoku areas, some of the long rivers are counted, then the role of them dedicated its power to the industries and cultures. Comparing with

other areas, the role of the rivers was more significant. The Kitakami River (北上川) had the longest flow, and its riverside was governed by both the Nanbu Family (盛岡藩) and the Date Family (仙台藩). But the riverside of the Mogami River was governed by some Families the areas were governed. After the decline of the Mogami Family, the Torii Family in Yamagata and several Families were transferred in short periods and the Sakai Family in Shonai (庄内藩) the Tozawa Family in Shinjo (新庄藩), Matsudaira Family in Kaminoyama (上山藩) governed the River. At the upstream of the River, the Uesugi Family (米沢藩) governed the Okitama (置賜) areas. That meant the River did not belong only to the rulers' but to everyone who were leading lives along it. So, naturally it was needed to make a common rule to make use for. The rule of system of cargo transportaiton needed to be settled.

In the Kitakami River (北上川) and the Omono River (雄物川) the most of the cargos sailing belonged to the Families, governing the areas. The cargos were called "Otesen" (御手船) or "Onkokuhirata" (御穀船) in Sendai. In other words they were called "Hansen" (藩船). On the other hand, the most of sailing cargos were "Machibune" (町船).



The sketch of the Oishida river bank. (大石田東町地区所蔵)

The style of these was the same one at Kitakami River and Omono River. But they belonged to the merchants. This fact made the transportation characteristic. A number of the cargos, if mentioned their belongings, were from Sakata. And the next numbers of cargos came from Oishida. They loaded the packages at Terazu (寺津), Sagae (寒河江), Funamachi, Oishida and Shimizu. The riversides were more prosperous, if the load was bigger. These fords continued their prosperity through the Edo period. At this time, the riverside and the anchorage were quite separate. And the loads were categorized into three types. The first was the rice which served to the Shogunate as a tax. The second was the rice which belonged to Daimyos'. The last was the packages which belonged to the merchants. The order of the cargo' was stipulated. All of the cargos should be ordered to load all of the packages above. Too small cargos were forbidden to sail because of their danger in the rivers. The rule to elect the managers to adjust the sailing among merchants was also enforced. These managers stayed in Sakata and the upstream points. Sometimes the managers were enforced by tendering. This tendering, of course, was decided by the amount of money. The representatives of ship owners took part in its control. These facts were the characteristic of the Mogami River's transportation.

Table - 1 Transportation of *Ryoshu-mai* (領主米) (1) and *Shonin-nimotsu* (商人荷物) (2) along the Mogami River.

Items	Amount of Transported Loads (hyo <俵>)	Number of Ships (sou <艘>)	Managing Charges (7) (Kanmon <貫文>)
<i>Jomai</i> (城米) (3)	900,000	360	144
<i>Shiryo-mai</i> (私領米) (4)	40,000	160	64
<i>Shonin-nimotsu</i> (商人荷物) <i>Kudari</i> (下り) (5)		320	128
<i>Shonin-nimotsu</i> (商人荷物) <i>Nobori</i> (上り) (6)	75,000		60
Total		840	396

- Notes :
- (1) Private rice tax of Daimyos, some of which were merchandized in Osaka et al.
  - (2) Cargos of the merchants for merchandizing.
  - (3) Rice tax for the Shogunate, which were transported directly to Edo.
  - (4) See (1) above.
  - (5) (6) See (2) above. "*Kudari*" meant the merchandizing goods, including the special productions in the local areas, sold by the merchants. And "*Nobori*" meant the goods dealt with the merchants."
  - (7) The managing fare was collected by the cargo officials.

**Table - 2 Number of *Shonin-nimotsu* at some fords and *Niwasen* (庭錢)**

Name of Fords	Number of Ships	<i>Niwasen</i>	Remarks
	(Sou)	(Kan) (mon)	Kin-2-bu for a cargo
1. Terazu (寺津)	145	352. 495	(金 2分)
2. Sagae (寒河江)	30	72. 030	
3. Funamachi (船町)	30	72. 030	
4. Oishida (大石田)	65	112. 540	(About 2 kanmon as a cash.
5. Shimizu (清水)	50	65. 450	A little difference were found in places.)
Total	320	672. 450	

Notes : Two tables above depend on the Togashi-ke (富樫家) documents at Oishida, Yamagata.

At each ford in unloading, the cargo officials collected the managing fare-*Niwasen* (庭錢) for merchants.

#### (4) Cargo Conveyance and its Cultures

Here, I would like to talk about the cultures of cargo conveyance. This is one of the very interesting problem. One of the distinctive facts was the shipping of the temple bells. Most of them at that time were imported from Kyoto and Osaka. At the beginning of the Edo period—from 17<sup>th</sup> century to 18<sup>th</sup> —, the bells were mostly imported at Sakata. The forging of temple bells in this area was begun after the Genroku period. The bells were brought in via Japan Sea and was brought up the River. The bells were very heavy, so the waterway was the best means to their transportation. Not to mention it, this phenomenon was an inflow of cultures. Along the Mogami River, dolls and stone lanterns in Yachi (谷地) from Kyoto were found in several places. This is the result of the cultural exchanges. The Konpira (金比羅) belief was also found along the Mogami River.

This belief was brought by way of Seto-Inland Sea to Yamagata. Another exchange of architecture was “Kurazashiki” (蔵座敷) house. This was one of the symbols of rich persons, so all the people did not accept this style of the house. But some architects say nowhere is so abundant as Yamagata to find “Kurazashiki”. This style of architecture mostly belonged to merchants’ and compromised between Edo and Kyoto. For instance, “Kura” (蔵) seen in Yamagata was built by stucco and put a roof on the building like a hat. The roof was mainly covered by slates and in a few cases, by zinc. But in the Edo period, this type of architectures were combined directly with roof and walls. This

method was called “Nurigome” (塗り籠め). When a fire breaks out, the fire is difficult to enter into the roof. But in Yamagata , such a roof as these put on like a hat is kept in a good ventilation. Architects evaluate this unique transformation as well-adaptable one to adapt the climate . I would like you to consider such a unique cultural phenomena through the waterway transportation.