

## ESSAY ON THE REGIONAL SPATIAL COMPOSITION OF THE MUKO PLAIN

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### Introduction

The Muko Plain is located in the lower basin of the Muko and Ina Rivers. Its western part is the result of sediment deposition by the Muko River. The plain is predominately flat and, during these 150 years, its urbanization has drastically increased as Fig.1 shows, making it more and more difficult to determine the direction of its regional spatial composition in the crowded residential areas. Since olden times, this has been an advanced area that linked the ancient capital of Kyoto and economic center of Osaka to western countries. In this paper, I attempt to illustrate some characteristic elements of this region's spatial composition from the perspective of historical roads, irrigation channels, and area divisions.



Fig.1 Map in 1880's (left) and present map (right) of Muko Plain around Amagasaki and Nishinomiya area

### Muko Plain and Yomo River as a county boundary

The Muko Plain extends over both of the ancient Muko and Kawabe Counties to form the urban area of today's Nishinomiya and Amagasaki Cities. The Muko River flows down between Nishinomiya and Amagasaki City, establishing a clear administrative boundary. Old maps, however, illustrating the ancient field division system or "Jori-sei," show that Muko County previously occupied the left bank of the Muko River and that the Yomo River served, until the World War Second, as the boundary between Muko and Kawabe Counties. Amagasaki City, established in 1916 as the third city in Hyogo Prefecture, has expanded its municipal area and, in 1942, merged three villages—the Ohsho, Tachibana, and Muko Villages—that were located on the alluvion of the Muko River and belonged to Muko County.

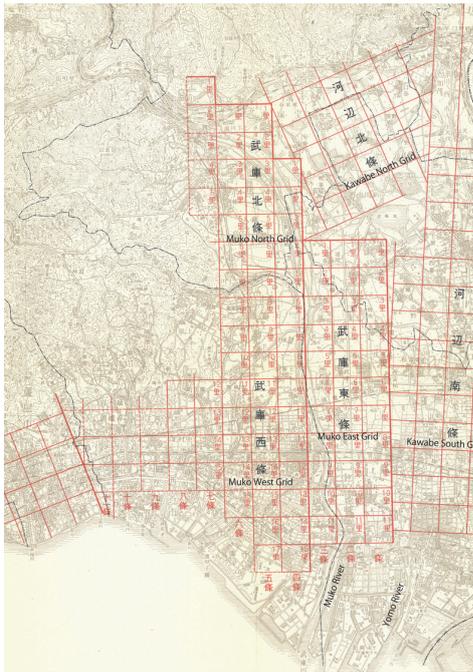


Fig.2 Old map of “Jori-sei” in Muko County (quoted from “Nishinomiya City chronicle” vol.1 and partially revised by author)

The direction of “Jori” of Muko County was different from that of Kawabe County proving the existence of the boundary between these counties. Nevertheless it is so difficult to find out this direction, particularly in Muko East Grid area, because flood disasters had often demolished the topographical features. The Yomo River has since become buried underground partially, causing it to lose its role as boundary. Some tributaries originating from the Rokko Mountains have brought masses of sand that cause frequent flood damage to both sides of the Muko River. The course of the Muko River has never been fixed, generating chaotic wetlands with innumerable narrow streams in case of floods. The Yomo River, like the Shoge River flowing by the ancient Amagasaki Castle, is believed to be one of the old courses of the Muko River. Therefore, the boundary between Muko and Kawabe Counties was not a clear independent course, but an amorphous zone with many channels running through the Muko and Ohsho Villages. These two villages on the left bank of the Muko River have a special bond with the Naruo and Kawaragi Villages on its right bank. There was a plan to unite these four villages to create the new Mukogawa City, whose location is illustrated in Fig.4/right shown later, in 1940 and this fact reflects such boundary characteristics.

### Saigoku Kaido and other straight historical roads as topographical axis

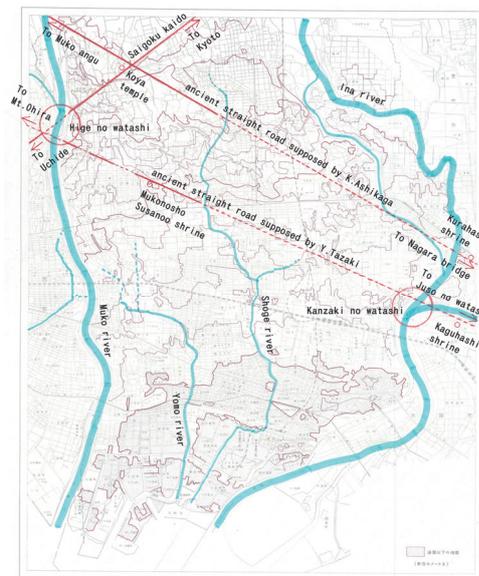


Fig.3 Ancient main roads in Muko Plain<sup>2</sup> and photos of their landmarks(above : Mt. Kabuto for Saigoku Kaido, below : Mt. Ohira for straight road found by Y.Tazaki)

Saigoku Kaido, an ancient main road from Kyoto to Dazaifu in Kyushu, passes in a diagonal line through the Muko Plain even now as national road No.171. Saigoku Kaido is located along some faults at the southern foot of the Hokusetsu Mountains between Takatsuki and Arima. Through this area, it passes almost straight from “Ina no Watashi” of the Ina River in the northeast to “Hige no Watashi” of the Muko River in the southwest, and then continues directly to Uchide Beach, fronting the Inland Sea in ancient times<sup>1</sup>. It could be theorized that travelers walked westward on Saigoku Kaido toward Mount Kabuto, which is

seen close at hand on the opposite bank from “Hige no Watashi” as the above photo of Fig.3 shows, along the Itami Fault. According to K. Ashikaga, ancient Japanese main roads were built in a straight line. He points out the existence of the straight road, that is assumed to be the olden “Arima Kaido”, from the Nagara Bridge of Osaka to “Muko Angu” or the emperor’s temporary adobe on the right bank of the Muko River as an example<sup>3</sup>. I found similar ancient road in this area from “Kanzaki no Watashi” of the Kanzaki River to the above-mentioned “Hige no Watashi.” I believe that this main road, which is mostly nowadays buried under the crowded buildings, linked two important traffic locations, leads to the top of Mount Ohira as a landmark over the Nigawa Valley, and might be ancient Arima Kaido. Along this road, some shrines remain, such as the Kaguhashi Shrine on the left bank of the Kanzaki River, Tsuneyoshi Susano Shrine by the Muko River, and Mukonosho Susano Shrine, which notably faces southeast and parallel to this road. A microtopographical map shows that this straight road runs along the bottomlands lower than its surroundings, suggesting that it was built intentionally as the shortest course. Such roads, which have landmarks such as mountain tops or tall trees, provided excellent direction for orientation of each region.

**Irrigation channels and subsection divisions**



Photo of irrigation channels developed as promenade for inhabitants

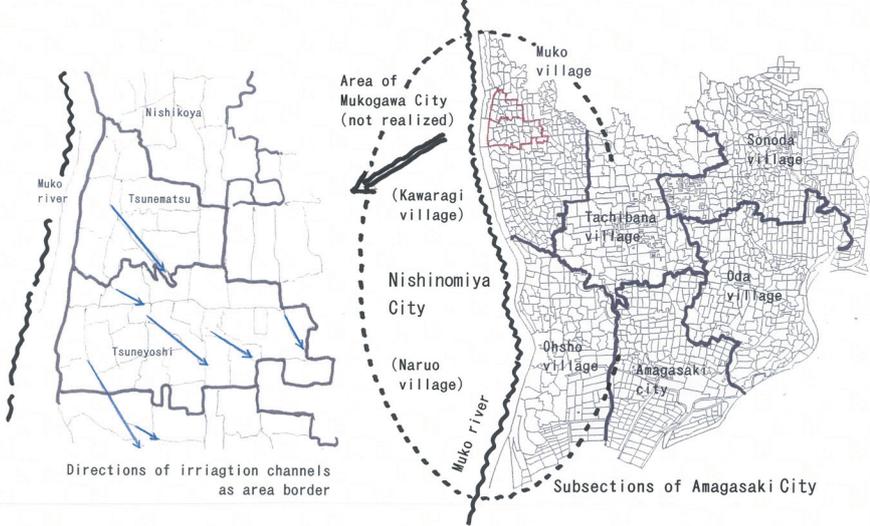


Fig.4 Irrigation channels and division of subsections in Amagasaki City<sup>4</sup> (left : Photo of present landscape of channels in former Muko Villages, center : Directions suggested with some channels in Muko Village, right : Reticulated division of subsections and location of unrealized Mukogawa City)

In some areas of the former Muko Village, many irrigation channels remain but have lost importance for rice farming. Formerly, irrigation maintenance was of the utmost concern to farmers. F. Shono noted that the course of the Shoge River has changed three times and the fork from the Muko River has gradually gone south<sup>5</sup>, and, therefore, these channels may be traces of such old courses. Additionally, in this region, the many irrigation disputes internally and against villages on the opposite bank have resulted in common channels such as “Roku-Hi” or six diversion weirs<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, such channels could not be drawn on general maps; however, on large-scale maps of this village, we can find some traces of these old channels running in a general northwest to southeast direction. There are a large number of subsections that have distinctive names derived from historical “Myoden”<sup>7</sup>. The “Myoden” is a small rice field owned by local officials in ancient private estates of nobles called “Shoen”.

Each “Myoden” was a small unit surrounded by irrigation channels. Even now, such subsections are often amorphous and desultory, composing complicated village scenes. “Jori-sei” as a national system was very geometrical and massive, while the confused allotment of these subsections seems more human and familiar. Walking along the winding channels in these villages, while we do not find landmarks, we do feel an intuitive direction with such a small scale.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I examined the existence of ancient straight roads and the significance of an aggregate of small subsections with irrigation channels in the Muko Plain. Thereby I could find out two directions for this region, although any traces of ancient “Jori” has already disappeared. One is the visual direction of these straight roads which have their landmarks in the distance. Another is the sensuous direction suggested generally by the whole of irrigation channels. These two factors illustrate the orientation of this region individually in order to understand the spatial composition of the Muko Plain. The Muko River is an administrative boundary, but such boundary was historically a linear zone with a certain width, not a line. The boundary distinguishes the two areas and at the same time connects these areas closely. The linear zone around Muko River and Yomo River, which was four villages of unrealized Mukogawa City, is so important for both of Nishinomiya and Amagasaki Cities. In a future study, I would like to examine the transition of the relationship between Nishinomiya and Amagasaki City through their regional spatial compositions.

## Notes

1. The course of Saigoku Kaido changed in early modern times in order to pass through Amagasaki Town developed as a castle town and link to Chugoku Kaido directly from Osaka.
2. This microtopographical map is quoted from the document attached to “Amagasaki City Chronicle” vol.1. Because this area is so flat, it is almost impossible to read little undulations in general topographic map.
3. See; K. Ashikaga, “Study on Ancient Geography in Japan”, 1985, and K. Ashikaga, “History read from Maps”, 2012. He has indicated the significance of such straight roads in ancient times against the common theories of the characteristics of spontaneous roads in Japan.
4. These maps quoted from Amagasaki City, “Place-name in Amagasaki”, 1985. This document lists all subsections in Amagasaki City showing their names on the area maps of every administrative unit and also summarizes on the historical transition of these units.
5. See; F. Shono, ‘Transition of landscape in lower area of the Muko River’, in “Historical Study in Hyogo” vol.2, 1954,
6. T. Ikeda, “Roku-Hi”, 1978, is a commemorative document for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the union of six irrigation groups in former Muko Village and explains the history of their channels minutely.
7. Concerning “Myoden” and irrigation channel in the Muko Plain, there are included many related subjects in Amagasaki Municipal Archives of Regional Study, “Dictionary on Regional History of Amagasaki”, 1996.