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# The Mogi Road in Old Photographs and Picture Postcards

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## Introduction

The subject of my presentation is not research on the history of photography in Japan or the activities of pioneer photographers, but rather a specific subject of interest among the early photographers that is expressed today in a wealth of old photographs and picture postcards. The Mogi Road, which connected Nagasaki with the nearby port of Mogi, was similar in almost every respect to other regional byroads in Meiji-period Japan. However, Nagasaki's role as the cradle of photography in Japan, a busy international port, and the site of a foreign settlement – not to mention the use of the road as a route to the popular hot-spring resort of Unzen – brought the Mogi Road to the attention of early photographers and resulted in a rich photographic record rivaling that of major thoroughfares such as the Tokaidō and Nakasendō. The subject of the Mogi Road also shows how the early photographs of Japan evolved into picture postcards and reached a much wider audience through the latter medium. In this paper I will look at the history of the Mogi Road with reference to the photographs that have come down to the present-day, show how picture postcards evolved from the professional photographs of old, and consider the potential of this remarkable photographic heritage as a source of information for future research.

## Nagasaki and Picture Postcards

Generally speaking, the photographs of Ueno Hikoma, Felix Beato and other early photographers are sophisticated works of art, just as they were expensive luxuries at the time of publication. By contrast, picture postcards were and continue to be much cheaper than the professional photographs of old and to enjoy a much lower rung on the ladder of historic, academic and cultural interest. They were usually mass-produced, and in most cases the photographer, date of photography and even publisher remain unknown. Compared to the professional photographs of old, moreover, the coloring of the early picture postcards was sometimes haphazard and garishly exaggerated. It is important to note, however, that the professional photographs of Japan produced in the late-Edo and early Meiji periods set the stage for the picture postcards produced by private companies from the beginning of the 20th century and that considerable correspondence exists between the two media.

The years 1899 and 1900 were important milestones in the evolution of picture postcards from the prototypical professional photographs of old. In 1899, the effectuation of Japan's new treaties with Western powers resulted in the abolition of this country's foreign settlements and an end to extraterritoriality and other unequal privileges enjoyed by foreigners. Only a few weeks later, the Japanese government enacted the Strategic Zone Law (*yōsai chitai hō*) and designated Nagasaki as the center of a high-security area because of its close proximity to the Chinese continent.<sup>1</sup> One of the clauses in the law was a strict ban on measurement and photography of the city, harbor and environs. After 1899, all photographs of Nagasaki had to be altered so as to hide the line of mountains, and the production of expensive photograph albums for sale to foreign visitors rapidly declined.

The restrictions imposed on panoramic photography ironically coincided with an unprecedented boom in Nagasaki's fortunes as an international port and a receptacle for foreign visitors. On any one day during the summer months, several thousand people might disembark from ships and pour out into Nagasaki, most of them stopping at souvenir shops in Umegasaki, Kago-machi and other downtown neighborhoods to purchase local products such as silver cutlery, tortoiseshell ware and Arita porcelain. These people also began to seek the picture postcards available in Europe and other destinations linked by the growing network of global transportation.

In 1900, bowing to this demand, the Japanese government lifted its ban on the publication of picture postcards by private companies and, a few years later, even allowed these companies to use the entire rear side of the postcard for the visual image and to allocate part of the front (the side with the stamp) for a message.<sup>2</sup> These governmental decisions resulted in a remarkable flowering of picture postcards in the early 20th century. Black and white photographs were printed on postcards by the collotype process<sup>3</sup> and then hand-colored by teams of artists using brushes, stencils and woodblocks. Images gleaned from old photographs were used at first, but, as postcard production turned into a thriving cottage industry, the postcard producers adopted snapshots of a wide variety of scenes throughout the city and neighboring areas, everything from government buildings to markets, bridges and streetcars. This snapshot quality is evidenced by the

fact that, unlike their modern-day successors, the postcards published in the late Meiji and Taisho Periods usually captured people unawares in everyday situations.

Nagasaki was also gaining fame as the starting point for the journey to Unzen, one of the most popular tourist destinations in East Asia, especially in summer when the cool mountain air provided a refuge from the steamy ports of China and French Indochina. Foreign travelers hired rickshaws in the Nagasaki Foreign Settlement and departed for the port of Mogi on the other side of the Nagasaki Peninsula, a distance of about five kilometers, usually stopping for a rest at one of the teahouses in Tagami, then continuing down the winding road to Mogi where they checked into the Mogi Hotel, a hybrid Western-Japanese facility standing amid pine trees on the coast of Tachibana Bay. The following day, they caught a steamer to Obama and checked into one of the hotels waiting for them on the waterfront with hot-spring baths, European furniture, and dining rooms serving French cuisine made from local products. Then they hired “chair palanquins” (veranda chairs tied to poles, hoisted onto the shoulders of runners and carried in the fashion of the palanquins of old) to convey them up the mountain path to Unzen where they would stay for weeks on end, all of this made possible by the high value of European currencies in Japan. By the turn of the century, the trip by rickshaw from Nagasaki to Mogi had become one of the most famous tourist destinations in East Asia.<sup>4</sup>

### The Mogi Road in Photographs and Picture Postcards

A well-traveled path connected Nagasaki and Mogi from the late 16th century when the two towns were part of the area governed by the Society of Jesus.<sup>5</sup> The original road started in front of Shokakuji Temple (near the terminus of the modern-day streetcar line) and stretched up the steep hillside to the pass at Tagami and down through forests and bamboo groves to the port of Mogi. Foreign visitors began to use the road soon after the opening of Nagasaki in 1859, usually en route to the hot springs of Obama and Unzen. By the 1880’s, the Nagasaki Prefecture government was receiving ever louder demands from both foreign visitors and local residents for a new road that would be easier to negotiate and less vulnerable to the weather. As a result, Nagasaki Prefecture started the construction of a new road to connect Nagasaki with Mogi in 1885, and the “New Mogi Road” (*shin mogi kaidō*) reached completion in June 1887.<sup>6</sup>

The new road began in front of Yasaka Shinto Shrine on the other side of the valley from Shokakuji, and stretched up the less steep hillside through the neighborhood of Koyabira, skirting the foot of Mt. Atago. To further facilitate transportation, Nagasaki Prefecture cut a pass, or *kiritoshi*, through the top of the hill at Tagami. The new road soon garnered the nickname *jinrikishadō* or “rickshaw road” because, unlike its predecessor, it could accommodate rickshaws and carts pulled by oxen. Rose Mansbridge, the daughter of an Irish employee of the



Figure 1

Hand-colored picture postcard entitled: “Road to Mogi, Tagami Nagasaki.” Although produced between 1905 and 1916,<sup>7</sup> the postcard seems to portray the Mogi Road before it reached completion in 1887 and so was undoubtedly printed from an old negative. The tinting is so subtle and exact that it gives the impression of a faded color photograph. The postcard also provides a rare insight into the methods used in building the road and one of the traditional ways in which people were transported at the time. Both the photographer and postcard producer are unknown. (Author’s collection)

Mitsubishi Nagasaki Shipyard, traveled to Mogi frequently during her childhood in Nagasaki in the early 20th century and left the following comment in a memoir:

In the early days, as I remember it, the only means of transportation from Nagasaki to Mogi was by rickshaw – two men to each rickshaw – one pulling, the other pushing from the rear, all the way up the hill, over unpaved roads to Tagami, the summit, and halfway to Mogi – a grueling, strenuous job in the heat of summer.<sup>8</sup>

However hard on rickshaw drivers, the availability of this form of transportation on the new Mogi Road made it significantly more pleasant for foreign visitors and brought the road and its scenery to the attention of photographers and the producers of picture postcards. Another amenity was the appearance of a cluster of teahouses and souvenir shops at the pass in Tagami, where travelers disembarked from their rickshaws and enjoyed a snack of tea and *inarizushi*. Again, scenes of these facilities and their rustic surroundings were immortalized in a large number of picture postcards that found their way overseas as mail or collector’s items.

A search of Nagasaki University’s “Metadata Database of Old Japanese Photographs of Bakumatsu-Meiji Period”<sup>9</sup> under the keyword “Mogi Road” summons up a list of nineteen items. Among these, only five are actually so-called *koshashin* or old photographs; the other fourteen are all picture postcards produced around and after the year 1910. This shows how picture postcards took over for



Figure 2  
Hand-colored picture postcard depicting the Koyabira neighborhood. The place name is rendered incorrectly in English, indicating that the postcard was produced in Tokyo or some other location outside Nagasaki. The New Mogi Road stretched along the hillside from Yasaka Shinto Shrine to the far left. The photographer, publisher and exact date are unknown. (Author's collection)



Figure 3  
This is part of the “New Mogi Road” in modern-day Atago-machi, looking toward Tagami about 300 meters from Yasaka Shinto Shrine. Although paved with asphalt, the road has not been significantly widened, and portions of the original stone curbing (left foreground) remain intact. (Recent photograph by the author)

professional photographs after the turn of the century and provide an even richer variety of insights into the historical reality of the Mogi Road and other specific subjects in the later time frame. Moreover, the images of the Mogi Road created by collotype printing and hand-coloring tend to capture spontaneous, workaday scenes rather than artistically calculated poses, and in that way they convey the atmosphere of the period more directly with their simple beauty.



Figure 4  
Photograph showing the New Mogi Road near Tagami, with Mt. Atago in the background. A rickshaw driver is posing for the shot. Vegetable patches stretch up the terraced hillside almost to the summit. The photographer and date are unknown, but the unaltered image of the mountain indicates that it was produced no later than 1898. (Nagasaki University collection)



Figure 5  
Picture postcard depicting the artificial pass (*kiritōshi*) at Tagami. Electric poles are visible along the side of the road. This is an example of an image printed by the collotype process and left uncolored. The photographer, publisher and exact date are unknown. (Author's collection)

As mentioned above, the Mogi Road was the route of choice to Unzen, the hilltop resort on the Shimabara Peninsula that enjoyed great popularity as a summer refuge among foreign travelers and well-heeled residents of Shanghai, Hong Kong and other ports of East Asia. In 1903, responding to the remarkable growth in traffic between Nagasaki and Unzen, a Japanese woman named Michinaga Ei opened the Western-style “Mogi Hotel” on the site of a former head townsman’s residence facing



Figure 6  
Hand-colored picture postcard depicting the Mogi Road at Tagami, where a large number of teahouses and souvenir shops vied for the attention of travelers. The photographer, publisher and exact date are unknown. (Author's collection)



Figure 7  
Hand-colored picture postcard depicting a flat portion of the Mogi Road between the summit at Tagami and the port of Mogi. Electric poles are visible in the rice paddies to the left. The other side of the postcard bears the following message handwritten in English and dated November 17, 1916: "There are plenty of bamboo roads here. They are very pretty to look at. The Japanese forests in general are very clean, and seem to be stringently preserved. This is the road on the other side of the mountain that is after reaching the summit of the first range from Nagasaki. You go down the valley via the road shown here." The photographer, publisher and exact date are unknown. (Author's collection)

Tachibana Bay. A former geisha and fluent Russian speaker, Michinaga had run a Western-style hotel in Nagasaki and served as a host for Nicholas II when the Russian prince visited the port in 1891.<sup>10</sup> Like the Mogi Road, the Mogi Hotel was featured in a large number of picture postcards with photographs taken from various angles and at various points in time. One of the travelers on the road and visitors to the hotel was the British jurist, historian and politician James Bryce (1st Viscount Bryce,



Figure 8  
Hand-colored picture postcard depicting a rather dilapidated farmhouse and watermill near the Mogi Road. The coloring is garish, and the line of the mountain in the distance has been altered according to the Strategic Zone Law. This scene was undoubtedly chosen as a postcard subject in response to interest among foreigners in the charm of the Japanese countryside. The photographer, publisher and exact date are unknown. (Author's collection)

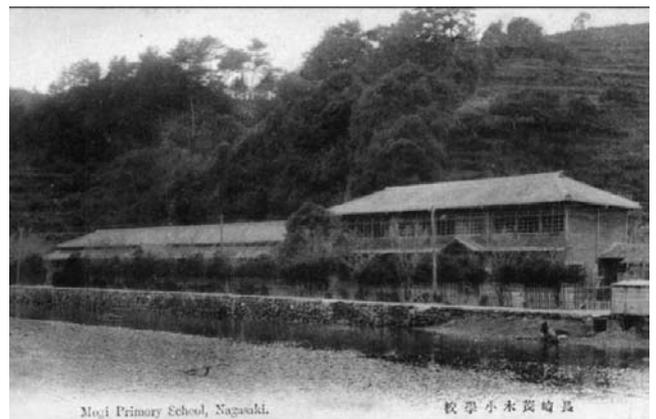


Figure 9  
Hand-colored picture postcard depicting Mogi Primary School in the port of Mogi. It is safe to assume that this nondescript building was immortalized in a picture postcard simply because it was visible from the Mogi Road and thus etched in the memory of foreign travelers who purchased postcards after their trip. The photographer, publisher and exact date are unknown. (Author's collection)

1838-1922), who visited Nagasaki at the end of a political errand to Japan in 1913. The English-language newspaper reported the visit as follows: "The Rt. Hon. James and Mrs Bryce passed through Nagasaki yesterday on the P.M. *ss Mongolia*. The distinguished visitors landed in the morning, visited the British Consulate, and afterwards made the famous trip to Mogi by *jinrikisha*."<sup>11</sup>

Two important factors – namely the appearance of cars and the resulting change of pace on the old road and



Figure 10

Panoramic view of the port of Mogi, with the village in the foreground and a hilly outcrop in the center. The unaltered appearance of the mountains and the absence of Mogi Pier in the center indicate that the photograph was taken before 1899. Many of the visitors arriving in the town via the Mogi Road proceeded to the Mogi Hotel, built in 1903 on the skirt of the hilly outcrop. The pier built later on the coast accommodated the regular steamers connecting Mogi with Obama on the other side of Tachibana Bay. The photographer and date are unknown. (Nagasaki University collection)

the completion of a train connection from Nagasaki to Obama – played a role in the closing of the Mogi Hotel in 1924 and the decline in visitors using the old road. In 1921, the Kiyō Automobile Co. started a regular service between Tokiwa-machi (formerly Oura-machi, part of the former Nagasaki Foreign Settlement) and Mogi using four imported Ford vehicles.<sup>12</sup> This service dramatically reduced the amount of time needed to reach Mogi from Nagasaki and made the rickshaws and teahouses of old all but obsolete. The completion of the Shimabara Railroad line from Isahaya to Obama in 1927 meanwhile provided a convenient and comfortable alternative to the old route.

### Conclusion

The Mogi Hotel remained open despite the dwindling foreign population of Nagasaki prior to World War II. After the war, it enjoyed a spurt of prosperity as the only Western-style hotel and restaurant in the Nagasaki area and a favorite haunt for American Occupation personnel and other foreign visitors. However, it closed in 1966 under the new wave of modernization washing across Japan. The buildings were summarily demolished, and subsequent public works changed the neighborhood so dramatically that even the site of the hotel is hard to find today. Similarly, the construction of National Route 324 between Nagasaki and Mogi and other road-building projects have erased the former Mogi Road and marred the pristine rural scenery that once mesmerized travelers. While providing valuable insights into the landscape and architecture of a



Figure 11

Hand-colored picture postcard showing the Mogi Hotel on the coast of Tachibana Bay. The hotel was comprised of a Western-style building (right foreground) and a traditional Japanese building. The photographer, publisher and exact date are unknown. The postcard was sent from Manila, the Philippines to the United States in 1915. The message on the back reads as follows: “Jan 4 we spent partly in Nagasaki, but lunched at Mogi house, about 1 1/4 hours by rickshaw. We had a fish dinner there and I did full justice to it. The drive there and back was beautiful, up and down terraced hills and through bamboo groves. The road only nine feet wide, the only conveyance being a narrow cart pulled by oxen and rickshaws. Love for you all from Lynn.” (Courtesy of Lane Earns)



Figure 12

This hand-colored picture postcard shows the Mogi Hotel (incorrectly referred to here as the “Nagasaki Hotel”), with the Japanese building and two rickshaws in the foreground and the Western-style building in the rear. The image was printed on a thin sheet of wood, using a traditional Japanese technique that added a further attraction for foreign customers. The photographer, publisher and exact date are unknown. (Author’s collection)

bygone era and into a unique chapter of local history, the photographs and picture postcards depicting the former Mogi Road may also serve as a guide for people of the



Figure 13  
 Michinaga Ei closed the Mogi Hotel in 1924 and passed away in Nagasaki three years later. The property was purchased by Sunada Sanjiro and reopened as the Mogi Beach Hotel in 1928. The car parked in front of the Japanese building symbolizes the changing times. The black-and-white image on this postcard also reflects the end of an era in that it was produced using an offset printing machine rather than the collotype printing and hand-coloring method of old. The photographer, publisher and exact date are unknown. (Author's collection)



Figure 15  
 The pier at Mogi served the regular steamer departing the port for Obama and Amakusa until cars, trucks and buses became the main means of transportation in Nagasaki Prefecture. After World War II, the town of Mogi was also transformed by the reclamation of the shore from the sea, and widening of roads and the destruction of old buildings. The photographer, publisher and exact date are unknown. (Author's collection)

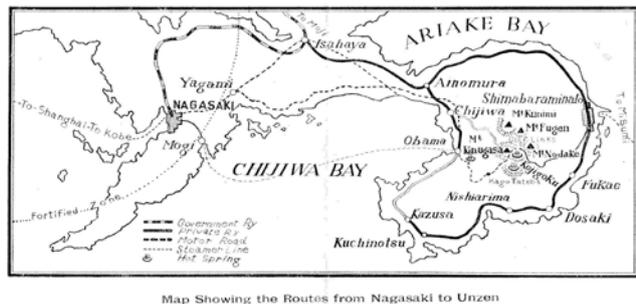


Figure 14  
 This map shows the Mogi Road and the steamship route from Mogi to Obama across Tachibana Bay (Chijiwa Bay). Travelers by train disembarked at Isahaya and took the Shimabara Railroad to Obama. The mountains and hot springs of Unzen, the driving force for the development of the Mogi Road and later transportation facilities, are marked with symbols in the center of Shimabara Peninsula. The "fortified zone" alludes to the political changes that exerted a profound effect on the photography of Nagasaki. (From a pamphlet entitled "China-Japan Rapid Expresses: Unzen and Inland Sea" published by Nippon Yusen Kaisha [NYK] in 1934) (Author's collection)

future trying to restore the natural environment and to remember Nagasaki before automobiles changed the pace of life there.

## Notes

- 1 *Nagasaki shishi nenpyō* (Nagasaki City Chronology) (Nagasaki City ed., 1981), p 133.
- 2 For information on the historical background of Nagasaki picture postcards see Brian Burke-Gaffney, *Nagasaki: A History in Picture Postcards* (華の長崎：秘蔵絵葉書コレクション) Nagasaki: Nagasaki Bunkensha, 2005, pp 8-13.
- 3 In the collotype process, a glass plate is coated with sensitized gelatin and exposed under a negative. The light passed through the negative hardens the gelatin on the glass plate, while the unexposed areas remains soft and can be washed off. The ink applied to the glass plate adheres to the exposed gelatin and can be printed onto paper. The collotype printing and hand-coloring of postcard images was gradually replaced by offset printing and all but disappeared by the early 1920's.
- 4 For example see *Murray's Handbook to the Japanese Empire* (1903 edition), p 459.
- 5 C.R. Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan 1549-1650* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), pp 101-102.
- 6 *The Nagasaki Press* (Nagasaki Museum of History and Culture) June 29, 1887.
- 7 The entire rear side is used for the photograph, indicating that the postcard was produced after 1905, while only one-third of the front is reserved for a message, meaning that it was produced before 1917 (when private postcard producers were granted permission to use one-half of the front for the message, as is the case today).
- 8 Unpublished memoir written by Rose Mansbridge, who was born in Nagasaki in 1892 and lived here with her family until leaving Japan in 1916.
- 9 <http://oldphoto.lb.nagasaki-u.ac.jp/en/keyword.html>
- 10 For a biography of Michinaga Ei see Brian Burke-Gaffney, "The Tattoos of Michinaga Ei and Nicholas II," *Crossroads: A Journal of Nagasaki History and Culture*, No.1, Summer 1993, pp 91-105.
- 11 *The Nagasaki Press*, May 28, 1913.
- 12 *Nagasaki nenpyō* (Nagasaki Chronology) website (<http://www4.ncmc.ne.jp/~makuramoto/01.nenpyo/1916-1921.t02.html>)