

## Transport on the Hozu River

The Hozu River, flowing 13 kilometers south out of the wooded mountains west of Kyoto, has been a vital waterway in the region for more than 1,200 years. Initially used to transport timber, the river played a vital role in bringing goods to Kyoto and, eventually, to Osaka. The water transport system was used until the end of the nineteenth century, when it was supplanted by rail transport.

The earliest recorded use of the river dates to 784, when skilled raftsmen called *ikadashi* used the river to transport lumber to the new capital of Nagaokakyo, in what is now southwestern Kyoto Prefecture. It was not until in 1606, when the riverbed was dredged, that passage by boat became possible. The dredging was spearheaded by the merchant Suminokura Ryōi (1554–1614), who had amassed a great deal of wealth through trade with neighboring countries, including what is now Vietnam. By financing the five-month project, Ryōi facilitated the emergence of a domestic transport business that benefited farmers, merchants, and the local rulers. The boats that plied the Hozu River carried timber, goods, and rice from Tamba (now Kameoka) to the city of Kyoto. Today, those boats carry passengers rather than cargo, but the transportation business continues unbroken.

Even after the Hozu River was opened for passage by boat in the seventeenth century, the local *ikadashi* could not be persuaded to abandon the use of their rafts. Instead, Ryōi brought in boatbuilders and *sendō* (boatmen) to Arashiyama to teach the local farmers. To navigate the river, the boatmen developed a specialized boating method with three positions that has remained unchanged since its conception 400 years ago.