

History of Ōmuta before Industrialization

Ōmuta's importance as the location of Miike Coal Mine and the source of the coal that fueled Japanese industrialization in the 1800s and 1900s has overshadowed much of its previous history. During the Kofun period (ca. 250–552), people built burial mounds on the mountains in Ōmuta that overlook the Ariake Sea. The most prominent of these are the Hagino-o, Kugurizuka, and Kurosaki Kanzeonzuka mounds.

The first mention of Ōmuta is in the *Nihon shoki* (720), the second-oldest chronicle of Japanese history. According to the text, legendary Emperor Keikō (trad. 13 BC–130 AD) visited Ōmuta and gave the area a new name, Miki no Kuni, meaning “Land of the Sacred Tree.”

By the early Heian period (794–1185), the Miike clan had emerged as local rulers in the Ōmuta area. They are credited with the establishment of the Buddhist temple Fukōji in 820. Their influence was so strong that the

Ōmuta area came to be called “Miike.” Towards the end of the Heian period, Ōmuta was known throughout the country for swords made by Miike Tenta Mitsuyo (dates unknown).

The first discovery of coal in the area was recorded in 1469. A local farmer named Denjizaemon and his wife had climbed Mt. Tōka to gather wood and plants. After building their dinner fire, they were astonished when the black stones beneath the fire also started to burn. Yakeishiyama (“burning stones”) Park was built to memorialize this discovery, and it is one of the few places in Ōmuta where coal can still be seen on the Earth’s surface.

In 1621, the Ōmuta area became Miike domain under Tachibana Tanetsugu (1604–1630). Tanetsugu and his descendants lived in the town of Miike, at the foot of the mountains located south of present-day Shin-Ōmuta Station. In the 1630s, a long drought severely affected harvests in the area, so the Tachibana family built an irrigation pond and the Hayagane Meganebashi Bridge aqueduct to ensure a stable water supply. A

predecessor to the Daija Festival is believed to have begun around the same time to appease the water deity and prevent epidemics. The Zendeko Dance and Hyūtan Mawashi Festival held at a nearby mountain shrine are also thought to have begun during the Edo period (1603–1867) to show gratitude for the harvest and pray for rain.

In 1806, the Tachibana family was transferred to present-day Fukushima Prefecture, and the domain was placed under the direct jurisdiction of the Tokugawa shogunate. The shogunate later transferred the northern part of Miike domain to Yanagawa domain. What remained of Miike domain was given back to the Tachibana family in 1851 and governed by Tachibana Taneyuki (1836–1905) until the domain system was abolished in 1871. Coal mining increased under Taneyuki, who laid the foundation for the industrialization of Miike Coal Mine in the Meiji era (1868–1912).