

# “The Original Landscape” of Niigata City in the Early Meiji Era (1876): from the Viewpoint of a Russian Geographer, A. I. Voeikov.

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## Introduction

This report will show “the original landscape” of Niigata City in the early Meiji Era (1876), which was described by a Russian geographer and meteorologist, *Aleksandr Ivanovich Voeikov*. He came to Yokohama on July 4, 1876 (Meiji 9) and left Nagasaki on November 27. During the period, he has travelled all over Japan from Hakodate (Hokkaido) to Kagoshima (Kyushu) for only five months. After returning to Russia, *Voeikov* contributed six papers to *Izvestiia imperatorskogo russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva* (*the Bulletin of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society*) in 1877-78. In this report I will extract and analyze the *Voeikov*'s descriptions of Niigata City (hereafter, simply Niigata).

## *Voeikov* in Niigata

It was early in the morning on August 16, when *Voeikov* entered Niigata Prefecture and he arrived at Niigata in the evening on August 17 by jinrikisha (rickshaw) and boat. He stayed in Niigata until August 20. He mainly referred to the following three points about Niigata.

### (1) “Dislike for foreigners” (Xenophobia)

When *Voeikov* arrived at Niigata, for the first time after leaving Tokyo, he encountered a “dislike for foreigners”, when he experienced the difficulty of booking an inn. *Voeikov* suggested that dislike for foreigners not only in Niigata, but also in Japan resulted from the impolite attitude of Europeans, especially British. Moreover, *Voeikov* pointed out that Niigata had no concession (kyoryūti).

### (2) Maritime trade in Niigata

In 1876, Niigata had little trade with Europe, although “Niigata was one of the so-called open ports” (in Niigata the port opened to Europeans in January 1869). *Voeikov* indicated several causes of the insignificant trade with Europe in Niigata: a lack of the so-called harbor, severe weather in winter and the arrival of the Japanese mail ships (once a month) from Yokohama.

On the other hand, domestic trade was significant in Niigata. Niigata was mainly engaged in a lot of trade with Osaka. *Voeikov* described that “Niigata looked like a suburb of Osaka”, because both of cities were the typical commercial sites with many rivers, canals (moats) and bridges.

### (3) The weather and temperature in Niigata

During his stay in Niigata, *Voeikov* recorded the weather and the temperature (mainly in the morning and in the evening). In those days, Europeans in Japan thought that Niigata had a cold climate because of much snow in winter. But *Voeikov* objected to their view, referring to the weather data of A. Reisner (a German merchant) and A.-R. Weber (a German consul and merchant) and comparing the vegetation in

Niigata with that of Sendai. On the other hand, from their meteorological observation (in Summer and Winter) it is assumed that Niigata about 150 years ago was 4-5 degree cooler than today.

### **Conclusion**

For 144 years, the landscape of Niigata has changed dramatically. The modernization and westernization of our life have brought us not only convenience and comfort, but also many problems, like global warming. We also have lost many things like “the original landscape” with canals (moats). Now it might be the time that we should rethink our modern life.

Keywords: The Original Landscape, Meiji Era, Niigata, A. I. Voeikov