A Re-examination of the Course of the Namerigawa River in Kamakura

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It is known from local oral traditions dating from long ago that prior to the latter part of the Early Modern Period the position of the mouth of the Namerigawa River in Kamakura was located at a site further east than its present site. In addition to this, recent research has resulted in clearer information on the topography in the area surrounding the former river mouth. In a previous paper titled ‘Changes in the Course of the Namerigawa River in Early Modern Kamakura’ (2000) the author speculated as to the location of the former river mouth and the former course of the river that meandered on the inward side of the sand dunes using data that included old documents, travel diaries and various types of pictures dating from the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, cadastral maps from the 1870s and 1880s, present-day 1:500 topographical maps, aerial photographs, boring data and data obtained from the excavation of medieval sites. In this paper, the author reinforces his theory by interspersing information from eighteenth century drawings, travel diaries and the like that has subsequently been confirmed, together with the examination of the possible existence of other former course of the river.

The following conclusions have been drawn by combining the findings of this paper and the previous paper. (1) The former river course that had been called ‘Enmagawa River’ lies 350-400 meters east of the present river mouth and emptied into the sea after winding around the eastern side of Arai Emmado, which was destroyed in the earthquake of 1703. We find that the former river course more or less corresponds to the area of marshland that is classified as rice paddies in the cadastral maps from the 1870s and 1880s, and it is also possible that in some places it swelled to form the shape of a lagoon. The existence of this river course can be traced back to the Middle Ages, though it is possible that at certain times it shifted by several tens of meters. However, it seems unlikely that two river courses simultaneously traversed the Yuigahama sand dunes for a long period of time. (2) The former river mouth was narrowed by sand dunes as swamps and marshlands were formed whose water levels were between 1.5 meters and 2.4 meters higher than the level of the sea. There is a strong possibility that points up to current heights of 3.4 meters above sea level were temporarily submerged by water. Furthermore, there were times when the river mouth was blocked as a result of blown sand and drift sand and on very rare occasions when abnormally high tides accompanied typhoons land was submerged up to heights of 4-5 meters. (3) There is a strong possibility that the shift from the former river course to the current river course took place between 1829.
and 1841. Although we cannot discount a shift prior to 1829, there is virtually no possibility that it happened after 1841. (4) The normal water depth of this river course was shallow, making it unsuitable for water transportation. Though passage in some parts would have been possible for flat-bottomed boats (punts), it is assumed that it would have been difficult to navigate the area near the river mouth.