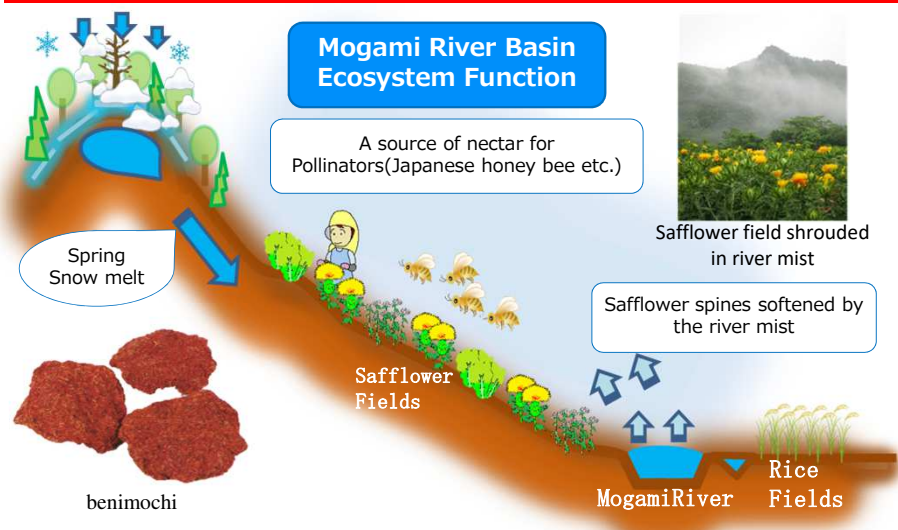




— Japanese-NIAHS —

Mogami Safflower Connecting History and Tradition

(Mogami River Basin Region, Yamagata)



Safflower Blooming in Snow Country

The region's unique landscape has been shaped by the close relationship between human endeavor and the natural environment in this agricultural system. Safflower is a native of the hot, arid lands of the Middle East, but as it traveled eastward on the Silk Road to Japan, it adapted to colder climates and became established in this part of Japan's snow country.



Traditional Techniques for Processing Benimochi

Safflower farmers cultivate the flowers, harvest the petals, and also manufacture the primary processed product benimochi on an individual household basis. Benimochi is made using the Mogami method, a traditional manual method that is depicted in folding screen paintings of the 19th century and has been passed down through the generations almost unchanged. Safflower is no longer produced for dyeing purposes in countries along the Silk Road, making this site the last bastion of knowledge regarding the production of this high-quality red dye.

- 1** **«Washing»**
Wash with clean water
- 2** **«Watering»**
Moisten the petals
- 3** **«Leaving»**
Spread out on a straw mat and let them rest
- 4** **«Pounding»**
Pound with a mortar to paste
- 5** **«Shaping»**
Create balls, arrange them, and flatten
- 6** **«Drying»**
Turn over from time to time and let dry to finish

Cultures with Roots in Safflower Production

Shipped to Kyoto, long regarded as the center of Japanese culture, and many other parts of Japan, benimochi from this site became indispensable as a red dye used in rituals and the creation of traditional Japanese costumes. The merchant ships that carried the benimochi would return loaded with hina dolls, furniture, and other products of the Kamigata culture of Kyoto that continue to enrich the everyday lives of local inhabitants to this day.



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