What Pre-Modern Japanese Travel Writing Tells Us
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What I call pre-modern Japanese travel writing includes travel diaries, travel records, guides, and travel fiction written for private, public, and mixed purposes. I must warn the reader, however, that the division of private/public requires elaboration and explanation, because, in many cases, public and private appear in a mixture that reflects complex writing motivations. When we juxtapose the motivation to travel and write, we must often tackle the question of to what degree such motivations are linked, independent, and/or fictionalized. I prefer to use the term “travel writing” rather than “travel literature” in order to avoid discussing the perhaps unsolvable problem of what does and does not constitute literature, not only for us, but for the various periods of pre-modern Japanese literature as well. Let me point out, however, that the traditional rules determining what is and is not literature began breaking down in the Edo period (1600-1868).

By the eighth century—when Japan just started to write—travel had already assumed an important position in the canon of Japanese literature. One fourth of the approximately 4400 songs included in Japan’s first anthology, the Collection of a Myriad Leaves (Manyōshū, c. mid-eighth century), are travel songs, not including the travel-related songs that express love for wives, traveling husbands, and homesickness. This attests to the importance of producing travel songs during roughly the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries that are covered by the Collection of a Myriad Leaves, in which a number of Japanese experts, including this author, see the response to a religious need. Together with many Edo-period nostalgics, we appreciate the spontaneity of the travel songs in Collection of a Myriad Leaves produced by actual travel and painful human separation, because this spontaneity was mostly lost in subsequent periods, which produced more fictional travel poetry and writing than was conceivable in the centuries covered by the Collection of a Myriad Leaves.
Whether the need for travel and for the production of travel songs decreased in the subsequent Heian period (794-1185) is a debatable subject. We know there was travel, especially official travel and travel for errands, but even though official travelers produced travel poetry, not much of it found its way into the imperial anthologies of poetry. The travel songs official travelers may have composed along their journeys and during their voyages was utterly overshadowed by the overwhelming number of poems composed about fictionalized “as-if” travel. Until the end of this period and the compilation of The New Collection of Poems Ancient and Modern (Shinkokinshū, compiled in 1205), most travel poetry was composed inside the capital Kyoto by non-travelers, hence the staggering number of such fictionalized travel poetry included in the seven Heian-period imperial anthologies of poetry starting with The Collection of Poems Ancient and Modern (Kokinshū, compiled in 905) and ending with a collection titled Collection of a Thousand Years (Senzaishū, 1183). We non-Japanese may well ask ourselves the question: How did the Japanese manage to create such a poetic culture? What cultural and social factors made poetry possible?

What made this poetic culture possible was the development, if not establishment, of a rhetoric of stereotyped travel poetry that allowed poets to compose poems about select places all around the Japanese archipelago that he or she had never visited, or even heard about directly from actual travelers. All poetry was composed as if drawn from dictionary entries, including what feelings the landscapes were likely to produce upon the poet had he visited the site in person. One of the stereotypes Heian-period poets liked to use—a handy thing considering the fact that the poet never traveled outside Kyoto—was to use some of the semantic properties of a place name to convey an image, if not a feeling, about the place, hence, the use of Sodenoura (Sleeve Bay) in many travel poems as a place name that provided an occasion for the poet to express the hardships of travel and maybe his homesickness. This was because sleeves connoted the sadness and tears they were supposed to hide or dry. Heian-period poets often availed themselves of such rhetorical devices. The irony of the place name Sodenoura, however, is that its exact location remains unknown to this day.

Such place names as appeared commonly in Heian-period imperial poetry came to be known under the strange name of “utamakura,” meaning “poem pillow,” a pillow on which the poem rests, in other words, on which the poem depends. Strange, also, if one considers that the term implies the composition of travel poems in the comfort of one’s home. Indeed, utamakura became a rhetorical feature that came to dominate Heian-period and much subsequent travel poetry and writing. It amazes us to realize how stubbornly Japanese travelers, poets, and authors adhered to this tradition, through the Meiji period (1868-1912) and beyond. It amazes us even more when we realize how attractive actual visitors found this traditional rhetoric, preferring to see a place not as it presented itself before their eyes, but rather in compliance with its time-honored image.
The study of Japanese travel poetry is perhaps the best way to learn how much travel writing depended on the visions that accompanied the stereotypical rhetoric, imagery, and set associations that came with the kind of poetry the poet decided to use. That is, there was what could be described as “a waka way” of looking at scenery and places. *Waka* is a five-lined poem of five-seven-five-seven-seven syllables. Equally, there was a “*kanshi* (Chinese verse) way,” much influenced by Chinese poetic tradition of describing places. In the way the poet refers humorously to place names and to the mishaps and misunderstandings he allegedly encounters here and there, *kyōka* (humorous *waka*), as well as the unorthodox *waka* called *haikai*, also entailed their own “vision.” One also finds of course the eclectic mixtures of *kanbun* (Chinese prose) with *waka*, *wabun* (*waka*-like Japanese prose) with *kanshi* verses, and linked *waka* or chain verses called *renge* that use both *waka* and *kanshi*. *Renga* are usually composed by more than one poet in a group. Poetic rhetoric was so strong that a traveler’s vision changed according to the poetry he or she decided to include in the diary.

As part of traditional imperial culture, *waka* was considered orthodox poetry, whereas the humorous *kyōka* and *haikai* deviated from the norms of orthodoxy. We discover social and perhaps even political impulses behind such deviations and combinations. We should look at the orthodox *waka* as originating from and dependent on the court, but even at this seemingly stable political level of Japanese civilization, we observe over the course of time important changes in tone and diction. *Utamakura*, however, was so basic that most poets honored this poetic tradition until if not beyond the Edo period. This meant that when an Edo-period *daimyō* wrote a travelogue on one of his *sankin kōtai* (forced periodic service in Edo) journeys and wanted to show off not only his knowledge of poetry, but also display his loyalty to imperial culture and its heritage both vis-à-vis the emperor and his representative, the shogun, he kept his diary in the *waka* tradition, which dictated that the *daimyō* should not leave any *utamakura* place unmentioned and unsung along his journey. Orthodox attention to *utamakura* also entailed composing poetry in reference to the ancient songs that made a place famous.

Many a political leader preferred to keep himself within the confines of cultural orthodoxy. The many *daimyō* who kept their travelogues in *kanbun* escaped the rigors and limitations of Japanese literary tradition, preferring a much less compromised style of writing. Some, like Matsura Seizan (1760-1841) of Hirado (a feudal domain in northwestern Kyūshū) even wrote in the vernacular as if to indicate an alliance with commoners, rather than with the imperial court. From the bottom up, we discover in the Edo period ambitious commoners who kept their diaries in the imperial tradition, or who wrote their diaries in *kanbun*, despite their social status that dictated that they use common language. Edo-period Japanese increasingly usurped the confines of class-specific culture and style as we already see in Ki no Tsurayuki (c. 868-945), the compiler of *The Collection of Poems Ancient and Modern*, who, in his *Tosa Diary* (Tosa nikki, 934) infringed upon the world of women’s writing. *Tosa Diary* is a diary Ki no Tsurayuki
wrote in the feminine style as a record of his return voyage to Kyoto from the Tosa Province (roughly present-day Kōchi Prefecture), where he had served as governor and where he had lost his daughter. Similarly, Sei Shōnagon (dates unknown, mid-Heian period), the celebrated authoress of The Pillow Book (Makura no sōshi, date unknown), did the same when she boasted of her knowledge of kanbun Chinese, the style reserved at that time for government officials, that is, for men.

The perimeters for poetry became less and less vigorously defined during the Edo period. The culprit was not disloyalty to time-honored tradition, but the greater and freer choices in writing styles, based on the more complex social structure of the times.

Imperial culture also bent to change and Fujiwara no Teika (1162-1241), who compiled The New Collection of Poems Ancient and Modern for Emperor Gotoba, decided to collect poems of actual travel that included, for example, the many travel poems left by the itinerant poet-priest Saigyō (1118-90); although, here again, we are unsure as to whether Saigyō visited all the places he composed poetry about. But let us not again forget the social changes that brought about social instability and forced people to take to the roads in the Kamakura era, the first shogunal period (1185-1334). It was the political need to link the imperial government in Kyoto with the shogunal government in Kamakura that engendered a large number of travel diaries kept by officials who secured this vital link.

Socio-political changes were also responsible for the increase in priestly travel, but the question as to why a priest who had renounced all worldly ambition continued to write travel diaries that included waka is still largely unanswered. A well-known example of this is Kamo no Chômei’s (1155-1216?) An Account of My Hut (Höjöki, 1212), written in a superbly organized style despite the author’s pledge to abandon the world, to which he undoubtedly addresses his celebrated booklet. Readership consciousness is simply too strong for the account to be read as nothing more than the private record of a recluse. The above-mentioned Saigyō offers us another example of socially forced dislocation and its literature. Some, like Priest Dōhan’s (1184-1252) Wanderings in the Southern Circuit (Nankai rurō ki, 1243), were written as poetic diaries while traveling to political exile. Of course, China with its rich exile literature may have served as an example and impetus to the Japanese. This kind of literature was perhaps for many a Chinese and Japanese literati a way to overcome the vicissitudes of their times, that is, their writing served as a subtle form of political protest. This may be why so much of the literature of this period remains firmly attached to the mundane world.

It was in this period, around the thirteenth century, that women appear—or, reappear if one considers the female travel songs of the Collection of a Myriad Leaves as authors of travel writing. The problem I see in such prominent female travelogues as the Diary of the Sixteenth Night (Izayoi nikki, 1279) produced by the nun Abutsu (1222-83) and the travel section of Lady Nijo’s The Unrequested Tale (Towazugatari, c. 1316), however, is that these diaries may not be based on actual travel and are potentially
fictitious. I say “potentially fictitious” because they include scant reference to the inconveniences and hardships of actual travel, and we find that they provide no information as to how the authors traveled, where they ate, how food was procured, how they were treated at checkpoints, and other bits of information the reader would expect from a woman traveling at a time in which there was no monetary economy that allowed a traveler to buy food and pay for lodging en route. Whether these authors wrote their diaries about actual journeys or simply wrote at home remains for me an open question. The *Diary of the Sixteenth Night* is a travel diary that we know Abutsu intended to bequeath to her children in order to teach them the art of composing travel poetry. Let us not forget that similar to the inclusion of fictitious travel poems in imperial anthologies, the simple pretension of travel may have been enough to move the shogunal officials in Kamakura to hear Abutsu’s inheritance case. Abutsu fought for her sons’ portion in the inheritance of Fujiwara no Tameie’s estate, which he had inherited from his father Fujiwara no Teika. The same applies to Lady Nijō’s travel writings, which are far too reminiscent of Saigyō. There is simply too much literary precedence in both diaries to fully convince me that they were produced based on actual travel. On the other hand, one may apply the same doubts to Bashō’s (1644-94) *Narrow Road to the Deep North* (Oku no hosomichi, 1694) given its reliance on utamakura and its fictional portions. For example, in Bashō’s diary he writes that he arrives unexpectedly at a place called Ishinomaki (presently, northeastern Miyagi Prefecture) after losing his way, whereas we know from the diary kept by his traveling companion that Ishinomaki had been on the itinerary from the start. Yet, at the same time, there is enough personal experience in the narrative to make the journey believable.

A more realistic type of travel writing appeared during the Edo period in response to socio-economic and intellectual pressures. Contemporary Japanese scholars believe that the development of more realistic travel writing in the Edo period stems not from *Rangaku* (School of Western Studies), but from Chinese pharmacology. In China, the natural sciences, such as the study of plants and minerals and efforts to classify natural phenomena began as early as the Song dynasty (960-1279), when Neo-Confucianism shifted its emphasis from abstract morality to the study of nature. The study of nature was considered a socially beneficial, pragmatic endeavor, and a sufficient means to cultivating the self. Since all things (*ki*) were understood as participating in the ultimate truth (*ri*), study of the natural sciences was thought to serve as an intermediary in man’s search for the truth. The importance and influence in this shift in Chinese intellectual orientation cannot be overestimated. It engendered numerous encyclopedia more than half a millennium before enlightened Europe and inspired the study of nature in Japan. The accumulation of knowledge in China was not inimical to religion as it was in the West, but was a vehicle for understanding the truth.

It may be difficult for some of us to fully appreciate the link between pharmacology and realistic travel that many recent Japanese experts on Edo-period intellectual history
have proposed. That there are direct links, however, is undeniable. The Japanese began studying plants seriously after Li Shizhen’s (1518-93) *Pharmacopoeia* (Bencao gangmu; in Japn., Honzõ kõmoku) had been imported into Japan and Kaibara Ekiken (1630-1714), the first prominent travel author of the Edo period, wrote his *Plants of Japan* (Yamato honzõ, 16 volumes) in 1709. In Ekiken we discover at once a Neo-Confucianist, pharmacologist, and avid traveler whose travel writings belie someone who was driven by a thirst for information and a passion for conveying this information to his readers. The information that he compiled was, for the most part, free of intellectual commitments; what Ekiken tried to convey to his readers was an unprejudiced observation of reality.

We also observe a relation between pharmacology and travel during the rule of eighth shogun Tokugawa Yoshimune (1684-1751), who ordered his herbalist Uemura Masakatsu (1695-1777) to travel the country to survey its natural resources. This effort was the first national survey of its kind. After more than twenty years on the road, Masakatsu came home with a wealth of new information. More interested in the exotic, the next shogun, Tokugawa Ieshige (1711-61), asked Masakatsu to report on the strange things and customs he had observed in the countryside. The result was a folkloric survey superimposed on the pharmacological and mineral survey that Masakatsu had submitted to the previous shogun. Interesting examples of the survey include his observations about sexual culture in the countryside, such as the seclusion of menstruating women in separate buildings and the sexual free-for-all of those who built them. We discover again and again the same combination of folklore and plants in the travel writings of, for example, Tachibana Nankei, Sugae Masumi, and Hirao Rosen (1808-80) from Tsugaru (which roughly corresponds to present-day Aomori Prefecture). Such efforts are to be understood as being undertaken not from a Western perspective, but as the result of the study of natural sciences and the classification of nature that stemmed from Chinese Neo-Confucianism.

Western science made its inroad into Edo-period Japanese intellectual history thanks at least in part to the Chinese Neo-Confucian reorientation from abstract moral philosophy to the natural sciences. Under Protestantism, Europe effected a similar shift toward anatomical medicine and classificatory pharmacology, a shift that was duly transmitted to Japan by such physicians as Engelbert Kaempfer (1651-1716), Per Thunberg (1743-1828), who studied under the Swedish botanist Linneus, and later by the Bavarian Philipp Franz von Siebold (1796-1866), all of whom taught and practiced in Nagasaki under the Dutch. The high level of Japanese botanical surveys and Japanese knowledge of the medicinal quality of many plants surprised von Siebold on many occasions.

It may seem ironic, given its emphasis on returning to the sources of Confucianism, that Neo-Confucianism inspired the combined study of history and geography. For such physicians as Ekiken and Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801), returning to the source of things meant the study of Japan’s past. Therefore, during their journeys both sought to
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examine places they encountered and their histories, combining geography and history whenever possible. They both saw in the present the traces of past history; for them, geography was inseparable from history and a journey was a movement in reality as well as into the past. Their endeavor to make their experiences and insights known to readers make them both Neo-Confucian gentlemen who were willing to dedicate themselves to informing the public, that is, scholars who worked for the public good. Considered one of the fathers of Japanese textual analysis, Norinaga constantly sought geographic evidence for what he considered unalterable textual absolutes. In doing so, Norinaga differed little from those Chinese Neo-Confucianists who discovered in the textual sources of Confucian philosophy absolute and unalterable truths. Sugae Masumi’s interest in local folklore of the Tōhoku (Northeast) and Ezo (present-day Hokkaidō) is also to be understood as a journey back into an unspoiled past, which he found in the spontaneous poetry of the Collection of a Myriad Leaves. For him, folklore was a living past that deserved to be studied and recorded.

Ekiken, Ueda Akinari (1734-1809), and especially Furukawa Koshōken (1726-1807) pushed Neo-Confucianism beyond textual infallibility toward a kind of textual criticism that was already reminiscent at this time of Western enlightenment and modernity. In his travel writings, Koshōken constantly reminds his readers that reality precedes the text and that texts are more unstable than observable reality. Koshōken went as far as to reject all religious mystery and ridiculed the worship of volcanoes and the “unfounded and misleading” stories and foundation myths of shrines and temples that he encountered here and there along his journeys. He claimed that they were “pure nonsense” and that “one glimpse is worth more than one hundred hearsays” and likened them to: “when a dog barks, all others follow.” We find in the travel writings of these authors an acceptance of the “as is,” which reminds us of the Neo-Confucian classificatory premise that all observable reality deserves a place in the taxonomy of things. “As is” slowly replaced the “as if.”

It was this kind of realistic travel writing that allowed Edo-period readers to discover their country. Urbanization and the urban dwellers’ thirst for information increased the readership of writings by travelers. The country they discovered for their readers was realistically, culturally, and linguistically diverse, far removed from the ideological notion of “one-nation-under-the-emperor” that Meiji-period politicians and intellectuals tried portray.

Some of us may expect to find strong intellectual commitments among those Edo-period travelers known to have been adherents of specific schools of thought. However, although we discover much Kokugaku, or native studies, thought in Kamo no Mabuchi’s (1697-1769) Consolation from Travel (Tabi no nagusa, 1736) and Motoori Norinaga’s Sugagasa Diary (Sugagasa no nikki, 1772), and Rangaku (lit. Dutch Studies, more often referred to as School of Western Studies) in Tachibana Nankei (1753-1805) and Shiba Kōkan (1747-1818), when it comes to their travel writing we find that it contains much
Figure 1
Sugae Masumi, “Paper Images to Avoid Epidemics,” from *Middle Road of Ina District* (Ina no nakamichi), 1883. Courtesy of Akita Prefectural Museum.
more intellectual eclecticism than we would expect. Rather than portray all Edo-period intellectuals according to their exclusive adherence to specific schools of thought, it is time, I believe, to elevate intellectual eclecticism to the level of a school of thought, at the very least it should be acknowledged as an important intellectual trend. While one may find much Kokugaku in Masumi’s motivation to travel (“I travel in order to visit all of the nation’s shrines”), we find, by contrast, little exclusive intellectual commitment in his observations of local custom, such as, the gathering of data to support an ideology.

Nevertheless, we do find the writings of some travelers to reflect their political commitment, especially when they report on what they have seen during their journeys. The choices travelers make about what to report and what not sometimes betrays their political thought. We find this to be the case in observations about the Tenmei famine (1782-84) in the Northeast, for instance, in the travel writings of Takayama Hikokurō. Lending an eye to people’s misery can be understood as part of the political duty of a Neo-Confucian, but Hikokurō’s dramatic descriptions in his Diary of a Journey to the Northern Provinces (Hokkoku Nikki, 1790) of the famine and extreme human suffering has to be linked with his belief that such natural calamity and the way in which it was handled by the local authorities puts into question the efficacy of the feudal system then in place in Japan. In light of what we know of Hikokurō’s politics and political engagement, he must have felt that a centralized imperial government would be better able to cope with such crises than the decentralized, quasi-feudal shogunal system. Even the much less critical Masumi may have held similar sentiments when he committed his detailed observations about the famine to his travel writings. Koshōken, who had the ears of Matsudaira Sadanobu (1758-1829), one of the highest officials of the Tokugawa military government, did not refrain from mentioning the tragic results of bad daimyō policy. Koshōken almost appears to be a spy of sorts, ordered by Sadanobu to report on local conditions in the Northeast and Ezo. Perhaps this is the reason that his Miscellaneuous Notes of a Journey to the East (Tōyü zakki, 1788), despite the existence of many manuscript versions, was left unpublished during the Edo period, but nevertheless read widely in private.

Something that surprised me in reading Edo-period travel writing is the degree of individualism and self-centeredness one discovers in the records of many travelers. We already notice a degree of self-centeredness in Ekiken’s travel diary titled Notes on a Journey to the South (Nan’yū kiji, 1689), in which he assumes center-stage in the world he observes around himself. Often using the personal pronoun “I,” Ekiken inaugurated an approach to travel writing that subsequently became increasingly self-centered. Koshōken’s writing style, for instance, was so egocentric that Masumi complained, stating that one should not put too much personal feelings into public writing: “Because writing lasts a thousand years, one should not write in a personal vein.” One would think that Norinaga would write his Sugagasa Diary in a more traditional style given his penchant toward the pure undefiled Japanese culture that he discovered in ancient texts.
But contrary to one’s expectations, Norinaga wrote his diary in a personal mode, almost as if it were a detailed record of his archeological investigations. His travel was not only a trip into ancient history, like much of the travel writing during the Edo-period, but a record of his archeological investigations and his attempts to find correspondences between ancient texts such as the Code of the Engi Era (Engi shiki, a book on court rituals compiled in 927 and published in 967) and the Annals of Japan (Nihon shoki, a history of the emperors compiled in 720) with the archeological evidence or lack thereof that he encountered during his journey into the Yamato basin (Nara plain). One may perhaps argue that the type of observation that went into Masumi’s account would have been impossible were it not for his consciousness of self, of “being there personally.”

What allowed Masumi to spend so much time observing and recording? Masumi sometimes spent weeks if not months in one place to follow the sequence of folkloric events, seasonal customs, and agricultural and fishing labor. We can hardly expect such dedication from the average traveler, who traveled during the day and spent the night at an inn or a like facility, on a fixed itinerary. Masumi’s long stays at Noshiro (Akita Prefecture) and at Tanabe (Mutsu City) made his extended observation of local culture possible, something one cannot expect from official travelers such as Nagakubo Sekisui (1717-1801), a noted geographer from the Mito clan, who accompanied foreign shipwrecks to Nagasaki, and Koshōken during his participation in a shogunal inspection journey to the Northeast and Ezo, which he describes in his Miscellaneous Notes of a Journey to the East. These extended stays at a single place is what makes Masumi’s writing so unique, ethnologically valuable, and, to a certain extent, intellectually modern.

We should not overlook the other factors that made realistic personal travel narratives possible. Among them was the interest villagers had in obtaining the latest information about important events, developments, and technology in other regions, especially the central parts of Japan. When a traveler stayed at a local inn and or the house of the village chief (shōya), villagers often gathered around the traveler, trying to obtain this kind of information from him. Information traveled at great speed into the remotest parts of Japan in this way. Edo-period Japan was linked by a network of information, something that enabled local villagers to overcome the feudal seclusion that only officials and merchants were likely to break. When a poet and intellectual like Masumi would stay in a village, the villagers sometimes kept him there for days and weeks so that he could teach the locals the art of poetry and calligraphy, as well as reading and writing to children. We learn from Norinaga’s diary that even in the more densely populated central parts of Japan there were illiterate Buddhist priests from whom the locals had no means of extracting reading and writing skills as was being offered by literate priests in terakoya, or temple schools. Hence the reliance on travelers like Masumi, men of leisure, in remote places where there were no such terakoya.

Perhaps we should give the name “salon” to this type of activity, “salon” in the sense that villagers interested in poetry, painting, and intellectual issues would not have
Figure 2
Shiba Kōkan, “Whaling at Ikutsuki Island,” from *Diary of a Journey to the West* (Seiyū nikki), 1788; published separately under the title “Sketches from a Journey to the West” (Gazu Seiyū ryodan). Courtesy of Naikaku Bunko.
Figure 3
Furukawa Koshōken, “Pantoon Bridge at Morioka,” from Miscellaneous Notes of a Journey to the East (Tōyū zakki), 1788. Courtesy of Naikaku Bunko.
missed the chance to converse with notable travelers who happened to stay in their village overnight. We learn from Shiba Kōkan and Watanabe Kazan (1793-1841) how much their painting skills were in demand along their journeys. Ono Keizan, a haikai and haiku (three-line verse of seven-five-seven syllables) poet, availed himself of the salon network of his school of poetry during his journey from Edo to Zenkōji temple (in present-day Nagano). His diary is a record of the many visits he paid to other local poets along his way. Similarly, Kazan traveled with a letter of introduction he had received from his haikai teacher in Edo, from which he expected access to local poets and, of course, their help in finding accommodation and companionship during his stays.

Once there was a monetary economy in place that enabled travelers to buy food, lodging, straw shoes, and other services along the postroads, as was the case in the Edo period, one can imagine how much travel depended on the traveler’s own resources. Ekiken probably paid for his journeys from the royalty he received from his travel books. Some travelers like Masumi lived off the pay he received from his village hosts, including pay for his teachings. Perhaps we can call Masumi the first professional traveler, a kind of eighteenth-century Paul Theroux. The same can be said about Shiba Kōkan who made a considerable amount of money by painting on demand along his journey. Norinaga was a physician by profession and made his living from the medical fees he received from his patients. The journeys of those who traveled on official errands like Nagakubo Sekisui and Kazan were paid for from their domains. Hishiya Heishichi (dates unknown) who traveled between Nagoya and Nagasaki in 1802, was a rich, retired merchant. His travel record shows how one could spend money on expensive women and food along the roads to and in Nagasaki.

Among all of the travelers of the nineteenth century the poorest was an itinerant artist named Tomimoto Shigetayū. He made his living by performing jōruri (stories recited with a drum) along his journeys to Sendai, Morioka, Sakata, and Niigata, moving on when his clientele decreased, or when trouble forced him to leave. He starts his diary At the Mercy of My Brush (Fudemakase, 1828), writing that he has been unable to recuperate a debt from a Kamakura merchant. His need for money then drives him to the north and into the unstable and volatile livelihood of an itinerant performer. The record he leaves us about his travels is an amazing, well written document about his activities and human relations, which includes his observations about local customs, eccentric characters, his encounters with women, life in the inns where he performed, his audiences, etc. He also kept what has become a historically valuable record of his income and expenses.

A characteristic feature one finds in much of Edo-period travel writing is the sketches that accompany the text. Masumi’s sketches contain so much important cultural data that they were recently published as a separate volume. Koshōken’s writings contain sketches, maps, and drawings of local plants and tools. Bakin, too, sketched
his *Complete Record of a Journey* (*Kiryo manroku*, 1802) a diary about his journey to Osaka. Kôkan’s travel sketches are high-level artistic works and Kazan’s sketches of his pilgrimage to the temple called Meguro Fudô (in present-day Meguro-ku, Tokyo), have been designated a national treasure. Kazan’s *Diary of a Journey to Sagami* (*Yûsô nikki*, 1831), an account of a journey that brought him to the former concubine of his daimyô, an amazing record of Kazan’s humanity, also contains valuable sketches. Some like Masumi, Kôkan, and Kazan, drew their own sketches, while others, like Hishiya Heishichi, had theirs drawn by professional artists. Travel sketches have not yet received much attention from art historians, despite the fact that some travelers were accomplished artists. Ike no Taiga (1723-76) and Tani Bunchô (1763-1840) also drew travel sketches during journeys they actually undertook. What needs to be fully acknowledged here is that much Edo-period travel writing combined text and illustration. We must not forget that illustration was an important means of geographic documentation and painters (eshi) often accompanied surveying expeditions.

Travel by women during the Edo period deserves special attention. The reason why there is much less travel writing by women than men can be found in the Edo-period socio-political structure. Seeking to control the movement of people, the shogunal government set up (and in some cases revived) a system of check-points (seki), often referred to in English as “barriers.” Travelers needed traveling documentation, a kind of passport, which allowed them to clear the checkpoints. But even a passport did not guarantee free access to a feudal territory; we know from Koshôken’s *Miscellaneous Notes of a Journey to the West* (*Saïyû zakki*, 1783) that he had to disguise himself as an itinerant priest to clear the barrier into Satsuma territory and Masumi and Hikokurô inform us of the difficulties of passing the barrier into Tsugaru. It is conceivable that, suspecting that he was a spy, barrier officials confiscated some of Masumi’s writings, finding in them too much incriminating information were they to be read, say, by a shogunal official in Edo. For women, passing barriers was equally unpleasant. Having imposed the *sankin kôtai* system that subjected all daimyô to periods of forced attendance in Edo, the government also enforced a kind of hostage system whereby the wives and children of the daimyô had to stay on in Edo during the periods daimyô were allowed to return to their home territories. Barrier officials were therefore under strict orders to make sure that no daimyô wife would clandestinely try and join her husband at home. The death penalty stifled all such attempts.

This law made it hard on female travelers to pass the barriers. Checking female travelers caused considerable backups as we learn from Takejo, the authoress of the *Record of a Journey Along the Road to Koshi* (Koshi michi no ki, 1720), and Inoue Tsûjo’s (1660-1738) *Homegoing Diary* (Kika nikki, 1689), and from Minokawa’s (family name uncertain) *Personal Notes on a Journey to Izu* (*Izu no kuni futokoro kikô*, 1838). Female travelers complained about bodily searches and many were sent back because of slight discrepancies a barrier official would find between the
passport description and the real person. In order to avoid such cumbersome and unpleasant investigations, women who went on popular pilgrimages to Zenkōji Temple or Ise Shrine toward the end of the Edo Period, hired special guides who took them around the barriers at night. Barrier-breaking by women became a common and perhaps tolerated practice, considering that little effort was made to curb it.

How much valuable historical documentation can we find in Edo-period travel accounts? Let me mention a few points that are of particular historical interest. We learn, for example, that the carrier services available to travelers were strictly local. That is, the traveler had to hire a luggage carrier along the road, but this kind of service was territorially limited and therefore important for the local economy. Carriers, who were usually under the jurisdiction of the ton'ya (a kind of wholesale cooperative) would never go beyond its territorial limits. The jurisdiction of ton'ya usually varied from ton'ya to ton'ya, which carriers were not allowed to bypass. Many travelers complained that their luggage had to be carried by a different carrier in each territory, increasing the cost of transportation. The same applied to river-crossing services, which were also supplied exclusively by locals.

Few travelers experienced their journeys as leisurely pleasure trips. As we learn from Kōkan, inns were often dirty and Masumi tells us of sleepless nights in lice-infected quarters. Many inns were in need of repair and while pleasant enough during the hot summer months, they left one sleepless during cold winter nights, especially during snow storms. Some travelers complained about the noise from neighboring rooms where locals partied until late at night, not to mention the lack of privacy and commotion caused by fellow travelers crammed into a single room. Imagine a situation in which some fellow travelers tried to sleep, while others engaged local prostitutes, all in the same room! We learn from Edo-period travelers that a restful night was far from guaranteed and perhaps the exception rather than the rule.

Other inconveniences included extended stays when floods washed away the roads and bridges. Read Bakin and Masumi about floods and how they affected a traveler’s safety, schedule, and itinerary! Bakin offers us a vivid description of the floods that ravaged all the way from Lake Biwa to Osaka in 1802. Also read Masumi about the frozen roads that slowed him down many times while traveling in the wintry Northeast. In 1793, when he was traveling on Shimokita Peninsula (presently Aomori Prefecture), he witnessed a cow that had slipped and fallen on the frozen road. Only after much effort was the keeper able to get the cow on its feet again. One must add to this the dangerous ferry services, say, between Honshū and Kyūshū in stormy weather, as experienced by Kōkan, and Masumi’s dangerous crossing of the Tsugaru Strait to Ezo. In addition, uncomfortable palanquins were a problem for the Dutchmen who went to see the shogun in Edo, despite special construction that allowed them to stretch their legs. Edo-period travelers complained about palanquins that were either too hot in the summertime, or leaked in rain, and about passages over dangerous, slippery roads.
In conclusion, I wish to draw the reader’s attention to the similarities that exist between the Edo period, especially the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and European enlightenment. Yes, most Japanese were prohibited from venturing abroad and engaging in the kind of exploratory journeys and voyages on record in Europe and the United States, but there were notable exceptions. One should not overlook Mamiya Rinzō (1755-1844), who explored Sakhalin and eastern Siberia, and for whom von Siebold (1796-1866; in Japan, 1823-29 and 1859-62) had the greatest respect. There is also Inō Tadataka (Chūkei, 1745-1818) who, following Sekisui’s first map of Japan based on latitudes and longitudes, produced an amazingly accurate map—the one that proved so fateful to von Siebold when he tried to smuggle it out of the country. Masumi’s travels in the Northeast and Ezo were explorations into the unknown, considering the fact that he encountered unfamiliar cultures, customs, languages, and the Ainu race. This also applies to Kōkan, who left us an amazing pictorial record of Japanese whaling off the coast of Kyūshū.

The most amazing achievements of Edo-period travelers like the ones I have discussed above are to be found in the efforts to map Japan’s geography and culture. Driven by a universal interest in all that they found, these travelers respected and recorded the exotic cultures they encountered. We find lists of local dialects and descriptions of other cultural idiosyncrasies in a number of Edo-period travel diaries. Racial and cultural discrimination is practically non-existent in Edo-period travel writing. Rather, we find in these records the effort to understand and bridge cultural variety. I would even go so far as to claim that some Edo-period travelers exceeded their enlightened European counterparts in several important aspects. Foremost examples include Sugae Masumi, whose detailed mapping of the diverse culture of the Northeast and Ezo was not achieved, say, for the Alps, until later. Masumi recorded local legends in the regions that produced them, as an ethnologist would do today. How does this compare with the Grimm Brothers, who had storytellers visit their comfortable city apartment and made no effort to visit the sources from which their stories and legends were drawn? Also, I have not yet been able to find in European enlightenment an agnostic like Furukawa Koshōken: Enlightenment intellectuals criticized the authority of the church, but did they go so far as to deny the existence of God?

List of Travel Diaries and Authors (in alphabetical order)

Furukawa Koshōken (1726-1807) Miscellaneous Notes of a Journey to the West (Saigyū zakki, 1783) and Miscellaneous Notes of a Journey to the East (Tōyū zakki, 1787)
Kaibara Ekiken (1630-1714) Notes on a Journey to the South (Nan'yō kiji, 1689)
Matsura Seizan (1760-1841) Diary of a Journey in the Kansei Period (Kansei kōki, 1800)
Matsura Takeshirō (1818-1888) Diary of a Geographic Exploration into the Ishikari Region (Ishikari nisshi, 1857) and Diary of a Geographic Exploration into the Tokachi Region (Tokachi nisshi, 1860), among others.
Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801) Sugagasa Diary (Sugagasa no nikki, 1772)
Nagakubo Sekisui (1717-1801) Diary of an Official Journey to Nagasaki (Nagasaki kōki nikki, 1767)
Ono Keizan ((1786-1864?) Miscellaneous Notes of a Pilgrimage (Tosō zakki, 1833)
Herbert Plutschow

Shiba Kökan (1747-1818) *Diary of a Journey to the West* (Seiyū nikki, 1788)
Sugae Masumi (1754-1829) *Sightseeing Record* (Yūraki, 1783-c.1803)
Tachibana Nankei (1753-1805) *Record of a Journey to the West* (Saiyūki, 1782) and *Record of a Journey to the East* (Tōyūki, 1786)
Takayama Hikokuro (1747-93) *Diary of a Journey to the Northern Provinces* (Hokkoku nikki, 1790)
Tomimoto Shigetayū (dates unknown) *At the Mercy of My Brush* (Fudemakase, 1828)
Ueda Akinari (1734-1809) *Record of a Journey to Akiyama* (Akiyama no ki, 1779)
Watanabe Kazan (1793-1841) *Diary of a Journey to Sagami* (Yūsō nikki, 1831)

For more detailed information about these and other Edo-period travel accounts, see Herbert Plutschow, *A Reader in Edo Period Travel* (Kent: Global Oriental, 2006) and *Edo no Tabi Nikki—Tokugawa Keimōki no Hakubutsugakushatchi* (Edo-Period Travel Diaries—Documents of an Edo-Period Enlightenment and Universality) (Tokyo: Shūeisha Shinsho, 2005).