

HIST 110

Prof. Ropers

Something in the Water: Hazards of Travel and Pilgrimage on the *Gokaido* in Tokugawa Japan

By Phillip Spain.

The Tokugawa period is widely regarded as a period of unprecedented peace and prosperity for pre-modern Japan. In the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, the economy was stable and growing due to the increased trade and traffic of goods and people.<sup>1</sup> Amidst all of this, Japan experienced a new phenomenon – the emergence of widespread recreational travel.<sup>2</sup> Both recreational travel and widespread religious pilgrimage amongst the laity became major components of Japanese culture during the Tokugawa period. Despite significant risks, the people of Tokugawa Japan

From *Something in the Water: Hazards of Travel and Pilgrimage on the Gokaido in Tokugawa Japan* by Phillip Spain

as it happened on the road. Whether this is due to a lack of interest or simply because the details of travel were taken for granted remains to be seen

consequence of the relatively peaceful and prosperous conditions created by the Tokugawa

~~Shogunate~~ This was due in part to the *Edo* highway system that was developed and

Pythagorean sanctuaries.<sup>7</sup> Emersons might also make pilgrimages to the same places and indeed

Despite the well-cared-for nature of the *Gokaido* road system, travelers and pilgrims still had to be prepared to deal with all manner of dangers and risks. In fact, many writers of the period produced travel dairies with anecdotes of misadventures that served as warnings, or that provided

travel dairy of Matsuo Basho, *Oku No Hosomichi*, and Yasumi Roan's *Ryoko Yojinshu*, which is specifically dedicated to providing expert travel advice.<sup>12</sup> In general, the information on the dangers of travel and pilgrimage provided by these two gentlemen falls into three categories – 1) Natural forces; 2) physical conditions or illnesses; and 3) Other travelers or persons encountered in the course of travel

*you do this, then things will turn out for the best no matter what the conditions  
are."*<sup>14</sup>

Swollen rivers were also a concern for boat travel which was required in some cases in

specific warnings about drinking from unknown water sources while on the road, especially if the water is not perfectly clear. He provides some suggestions for remedies such as *goreisan*, which may be some type of drug or herb although this is not made clear, as well as hot peppers.<sup>20</sup> This is particularly sage advice, as water is something that every traveler and even modern-day

dehydration. Adding bacteria or toxic chemicals to the mix makes Yasumi's warning rather sensible indeed.<sup>21</sup> Food management is an equally important task, and Yasumi offers some

stay of. The influence was great and deep, that he is honest and trustworthy. Going so far as to

and that he is a man of high "Daddy Casanova" on account of his integrity. Deak is

bed.<sup>27</sup> Another warning appears against taking medicine from random inn guests or travelers. Yasumi sensibly advises that “If you are really in need of medicine, go to an established medicinal shop.”<sup>28</sup>

Between Basho and Yasumi we are presented with a broad array of potential hazards to

foot traffic along the *Gokaido*. Ranging from the wrath of nature to personal carelessness, and the ever-present dangers of other humans, these journeys, whether for spiritual enlightenment or simply going from point ‘A’ to point ‘B’, were not to be taken lightly. Yet, despite all of these



Bibliography

Blacker, Carmen. "The Religious Traveller in the Edo Period." *Modern Asian Studies* 18, no. 4 (1984): 593-608. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/312337>.

Uehara, Eiko. *Jan Reader and 俳歌 (Iwano shō)*. "Diligence and Derogating: Contestualizing

the Saikoku Junrei and the Shikoku Henro." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 24, no. 3/4 (Fall 1997): 271-299. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30233587>.

~~Uehara, Eiko. *Saishū no Saishū: Saishū no Saishū*. 1994. E. J. Thomas, trans.~~