

Modern Tourism as it Developed in Japan since the Late 17th Century

By Kanzaki Noritake

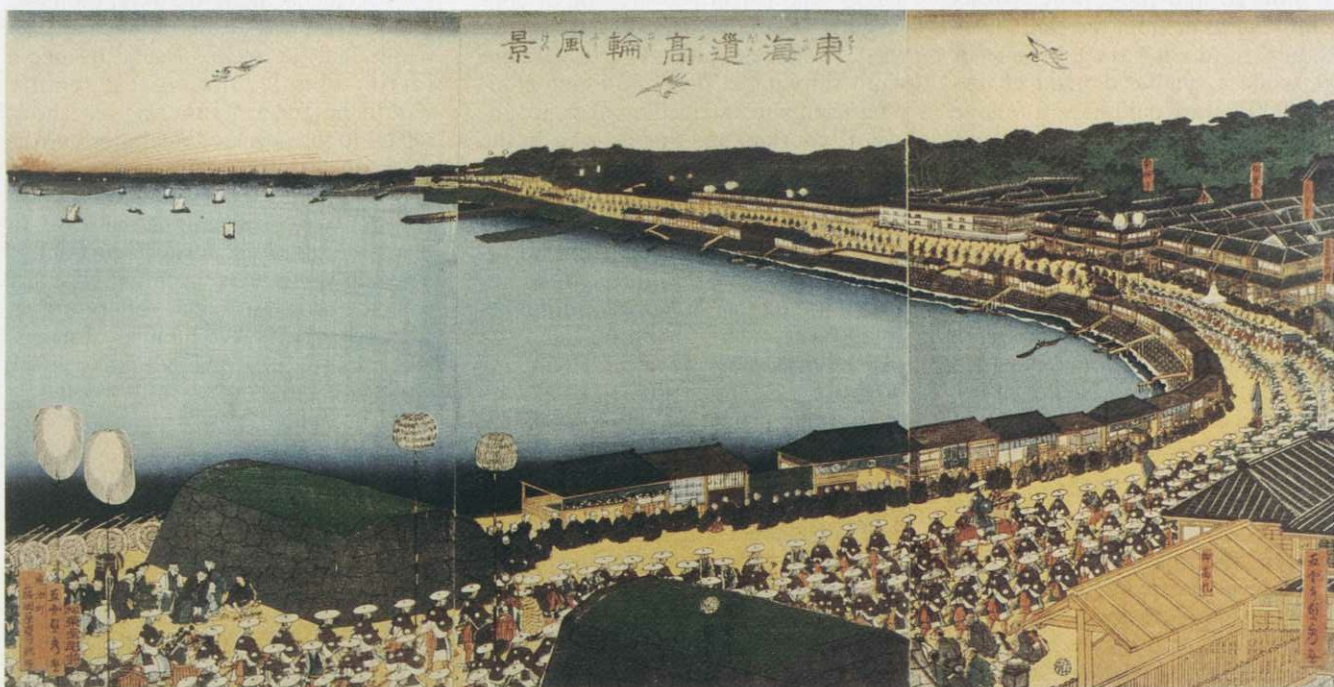


Photo : Shinagawa Historical Museum

More than 260 feudal lords were required to make periodic trips to Edo with a huge number of retainers to be in attendance on the Tokugawa shogun. These trips encouraged the development of infrastructure for nationwide tourism involving a million commoner travellers.

Functions and Organization Fostering Travel

The desire to set forth on a journey seems almost instinctive across the world in all generations. Not only humans but also in some cases monkeys are known to separate from their bands and wander, so such a desire can be taken as a characteristic common to primates in general.

Yet there may be a general flourishing or, in reverse, an overall sluggishness depending on the political situation of the times. For instance, travel by the masses was suppressed in the Edo period, due to the fact that in most feudal domains, traveling without authorization was forbidden.

Under the shogunate and domain (*bakuhau*) system, travel especially by farmers and women was strictly prohib-

ited. It was held that it was the duty of the farmers to protect the land and the duty of women to protect the household.

In actuality, however, the common people were quite active travelers. We know this because of the many records of famous sites (*meishoki*) and travelers' journals (*dochuki*) of that period. In addition, large numbers of travel guides (*dochu annai*) and itineraries (*ryoteihyo*) were published.

We can safely say that during the Edo period, Japan may have been the world capital of tourism. For example, Engelbert Kaempfer (1651-1716) who was attached to the Dutch Factory, the trading post at Nagasaki, traveled with the head of the post on the annual Dutch tribute mission to the Edo *Bakufu* (shogunate) in the years 1691 and 1692, and he was astounded by the

following.

"The number of people who daily travel on the roads of this country is scarcely credible. In two or three seasons the roads are as crowded as the public streets in any of the most populous towns in Europe....One reason for this is that in contrast with other peoples, the Japanese travel quite frequently." [*Edo Sanpu Ryoko Nikki, (Record of the Tribute Mission to Edo)*]

In the middle of the Edo period, particularly between the late 17th century (the Genroku period) and the early 19th century (the Bunka-bunsei period), travel flourished to a considerable degree.

One reason for this was that due to the system of *sankin kotai* (alternate residence), traveling became several degrees safer because the maintenance of roads and inns became virtually a

national enterprise.

Under the system of alternate residence, the various *daimyo* (feudal lords) were required to spend alternate years in Edo (now Tokyo), meaning that virtually every year the 300 or more *daimyo* and their processions were moving to or from the capital. A large domain might have a retinue of 4,500, while a smaller domain of less than 10,000 *koku* would have a retinue of approximately 60 followers. Even if we assume a low estimate of 250 persons per procession, the number of travelers on the major highways such as the Tokaido (a road from Edo to Kyoto) would have been considerable.

Of first importance among the roads they traveled were the so-called "Five Highways (*Go-kaido*)," which included the Tokaido, Nakasendo, Nikko Kaido, Koshu Kaido and Oshu Kaido, and these roads were carefully maintained and marked with posts every *ri* (a traditional unit of distance). These five highways began in Edo, and had mile-posts every 4 km where pine and cypress trees were planted. Not only was it possible to measure distances throughout the country by means of these *ri* markers, the markers and trees provided a series of rest stops for travelers. In addition to these five main highways, subsidiary roads (*waki-kaido*) were maintained, including the Mito, Mino, Ise and Chugoku roads.

To enable these roads to fulfill their function completely, post stations had to be built and maintained. Known as "post towns," they were established, for example, every 9 km or so along the Tokaido, with a total of 53. Along the Nakasendo and Oshu Kaido, they were established approximately every 8 km.

As to the functions of these post towns, there were established for lodging of the *daimyo* an officially approved inn, *honjin*, and a secondary inn, *waki honjin*. These were to establish status among the facilities in the villages along the highways. Ordinary travelers were forbidden to stay at either of these two types of inns, but there were no restrictions at all on who could stay where among the other facilities such as tavern inns (*hatago*) and

teahouses.

These post towns were provided with a system of post horses (*ekiden*), a supplementary system of men and horses from the surrounding area, and couriers. *Ekiden* refers to the forwarding agents who performed the role of conveying people and goods along the road. For these pivotal services there were shipping offices, at which shipping agents maintained a constant supply of couriers and horses, and in the case of freight, they determined charges by weight. When the agents lacked a sufficient supply, they could requisition men or horses from designated villages nearby, through the so-called *sukego* system. These agents acted as freight transporters and the requisition system served in a supportive role. Because this system was established, people and goods could be transported safely without delay.

Separate from this official system and apparatus, there originated in these post towns private intermediary brokers and freight agents with men and horses, and we ought not to overlook their role in supporting travel by commoners. The same is true for the development of cheap lodging houses where travelers could stay at prices considerably lower than those of the inns.

In addition, by the middle of the Edo period, a system of family or parish temples and parishioners had been established throughout virtually the entire country, and this too had a considerable effect on the flourishing of travel among the common people. This is because of the *orai tegata*, official travel permits, issued by the family temples.

In general, it is thought that *orai tegata* were issued by magistrates or local governors. Consequently, one tends to think that for a commoner to set out on a journey would require going through troublesome procedures and assume therefore that travel was markedly restricted. And there are cases in which this was certainly true, but from the mid-Edo period onward, the official travel permits, in a large number of cases, were issued by the temples to which the family belonged.

Here we have rationalization in the interest of convenience. Although the highways and their facilities were maintained, travel was still on foot and that meant little difference in terms of hardship. Among the potential unforeseen accidents along the way, the most problematic was death. In such a case, if one had the *tegata* issued by one's family temple, the closest temple would perform a funeral – without regard to the deceased's religious affiliation. Surely being in possession of that *tegata* must have provided a sense of security to people along the way. In plainer terms, without such a guarantee, it would surely have been unlikely that so many people would have set forth on such a journey. The number of nameless tombstones remaining today at the various temples along the highways attests to this.

The unique development of the Ise Pilgrimage

Thus, travel by the masses expanded rapidly.

However, having said that, for a commoner to set out on the road required a reason acceptable to his or her lord. The most convincing excuse was to make a pilgrimage to a temple or shrine to pray for peace throughout the land and an abundant harvest. No feudal lord could help but give tacit consent to such an act of faith, especially if the departure was during the farmers' slack season. Ostensibly travel was restricted, but regulations were relaxed under the justification that the journey was to be undertaken in order to visit a temple or shrine.

Still it was not permitted for an entire village or an entire family to set forth on a journey. Furthermore, the financial resources of the common people could not allow it. That is why the pilgrimage would take place on behalf of the village community or a young people's association. Or it could take place through participation in developing religious associations called *ko*.

In passing, these *ko* were groups organized for the purpose of mutual aid and friendship among interested per-



Photo: Jingu Museum of History and Agriculture

Many commoners enjoyed group tours on the pretext of making pilgrimages. Their number totalled as many as one million a year in the 18th century.

sons based in the local villages and towns. The members of these religious or fraternal associations paid for their group's expenses through contributions from each member. In the case of the *Ise-ko*, the money went for travel expenses. And this money was used by the representative who served as the group's proxy. The proxy was chosen each year on a rotational basis, so that every few years or every ten or twenty years, it would become a member's turn to make the pilgrimage – a fair system of selection. This certainly shows the beneficial wisdom of the common people.

This form of group travel based on the organization of the *ko* associations is almost identical to the modern-day group tours which are funded by regularly setting aside funds specifically for that purpose. Although compared with ancient times the religious aspect of such journeys has faded somewhat, there continue to be large numbers of package tours based on regional affiliations whose purpose is to visit temples or shrines or to travel around various ancient sites. In terms of those based on the workplace, there are large numbers of "study tours" (*kenshu ryoko*) which are the modern-day equivalent of "proxy pilgrimages." And there are a

considerable number of examples in which representatives from workplaces and schools over a wide area organize trips together. Not all are of this type, but the source of today's thriving package tour phenomenon can be traced back to the travels of these associations during the Edo period.

Among the common people such visits to temples and shrines flourished, but the most effective justification for such travel was to the pilgrimage to Ise Shrine, held to be where the founding deities of the country were worshipped. The common sayings that "everyone should make a pilgrimage to Ise at least once in his life" and that one should make a "thanksgiving pilgrimage" (*okage-mairi*) indicate just how popular a phenomenon this became. During this period, it became common for younger people from farming and mountain villages to make an "absconding pilgrimage" (*nuke-sangu*), by just picking up and leaving without benefit of required formalities as a kind of rite of passage.

Concrete evidence of the numbers of pilgrims can be found in the April 1718 report by the magistrate of Ise-Yamada to the Bakufu. According to this document, in that year from January first to April 15, the number of pilgrims

totalled 427,500. If we assume in this instance that those making a pilgrimage to Ise were primarily farmers and that their travels were during the off-season between the start of the new year and the beginning of spring, we can safely estimate that 50% more made the trip during the other months of the year. That means we can assume that in the mid-Edo period between 600,000 and 700,000 pilgrims paid their respects at Ise every year. Further, if we add the unofficial *nuke-sangu* pilgrims, it is reasonable to assume that approximately 1,000,000 people travelled annually to Ise. That is to say, with an estimated population of 20,000,000 in the whole country, close to 1 in 20 made the walk to Ise each year. While that figure may not compare favorably with present-day travellers abroad (the figure for 1995 was about 12%) against contemporary population, when one considers the degree of hardship involved in walking the highways of that day, it is an extremely high concentration.

Needless to say, in those days the journey to Ise was arduous. From Edo it was approximately 20 days, so it took 40 days roundtrip. However, the return almost always included going on to Kyoto or Osaka. Among records of travels there are examples of such trips

taking 60 or 70 days from Edo, but such journeys would have been quite leisurely and a lot of time would have been given over to pleasure-seeking. The average pilgrimage to Ise was more likely to have been about 50 days.

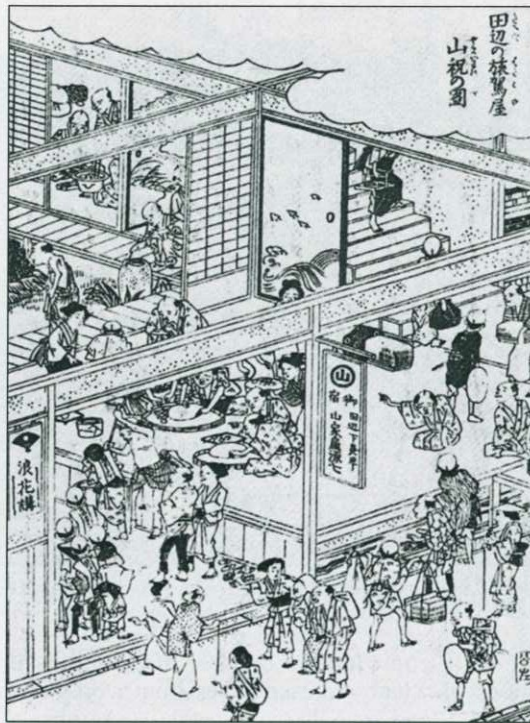
In 1705 and again in 1830, a type of spontaneous, mass pilgrimage took place known as *okage-mairi*, literally “thanksgiving pilgrimage”, especially at the beginning of the 19th century. Rumors flew that in a certain district of Ise amulets had fallen from the sky and that illnesses had been miraculously cured, and it is said that during those years between 2,000,000 and 3,000,000 people made their way to Ise. It is difficult to make comparisons between figures of the past and the present, but there is no doubting the fact that the numbers of pilgrims reaching Ise during the mid-Edo period equalled the number of travelers per year in the contemporary period of booming overseas travel.

Onshi, the original travel agents

As we have seen, the people were resolute, but we should not overlook in the background in which the Ise pilgrimage developed this far the bold enterprisers known as *onshi*.

During the medieval period, the *onshi* were Shinto clerics who propagated belief in Ise. One part of this group continued to modern times, but at about the same time that the people began making pilgrimages to temples and shrines in great numbers, they lost their clerical nature and took on a more mercantile character. For instance, those at Ise severed organizational ties with the Grand Shrine, each becoming an independent intermediary Shinto priest.

According to the *Shishokucho*, a registry of Ise *onshi*, in 1594 there were 145 such households in Yamada. Later, in the *Yamada Soshi Shokuninzu Oboecho* of 1684 there were 440, and according to the *Shishokumeicho* of 1755 there were 573. Adding to this a small number of *onshi* at *Naiku*, the Inner Shrine, and we can estimate that in the mid-Edo period there must have



Inns flourished along highways to accommodate the increasing number of travellers

Photo : National Institute of Japanese Literature

prayed for peace throughout the country, safety within the home, and general prosperity. It was an ingenious way of tying together the Ise Shrine and the masses.

The actual traveling around to parishioners was generally done by representatives of the *onshi*, and they were received cordially at their various destinations. The *onshi* were called “*Oise-san*” by these parishioners, but by this time their activities had absolutely no connection with Ise Shrine proper. Among the people of the provinces, however, there was absolutely no questioning at all, and it is understandable that they believed that they were receiving the divine merits of the Ise Shrine.

In addition to the amulets, the second product offered by the *onshi* were “*inmotsu*”, local products of the Ise area. The main products were lightweight and easy to carry and they included *Sugibara* paper (a special product of present Hyogo prefecture), *Torinoko* paper (a special product of present Ishikawa prefecture), charcoal, *obi*, combs, seaweed, tea, face powder, and Ise calendars. Originally these were not sold as goods, but were given as “return courtesy” to those who made large contributions for prayers, i.e., they were gifts in return for prayer fees. But gradually these goods were offered for sale.

Another major source of income for the *onshi* was providing lodging to those who made the pilgrimage to Ise.

The houses of the *onshi* were worthy of being called halls, for they were impressive and magnificent, with authentic tiles on hip-gabled roofs, fabulous dolphin-like fish tiles gracing the entrance gate roofs, elegant pines decorating the entranceways, and gardens with plum and cherry trees. There

been between 600 and 700 such households.

In the mid-Edo period, each *onshi* already had its own *kasumi*, or territory. The registered households within each *kasumi* were known as *danka* or *danna*. In the *Shigito Dankacho* of 1777, the number of believers in each province are listed, and according to these statistics, there were approximately 4,190,000 households. These figures were compiled by the *onshi* themselves, so there was probably a certain amount of exaggeration, but still this is an astounding figure. It amounts to 70 to 80% of the entire population of Japan.

The foremost mercantile activity of the *onshi* was to once a year distribute a paper amulet of the Ise Shrine, with the characters for “*Daijingu*” written on it, to each parishioner household. By doing this, they could cultivate new parishioners. These amulets were evidence that the *onshi* had already visited the respective shrines at Ise and in place of the parishioner had as a proxy

would naturally be an elegant reception hall, extending widely as far as the kitchen. In the innermost part of the hall would invariably be a stage for *kagura*, ritual music and dance.

It was customary for the parishioners who stayed in the residence of the onshi to pay an offertory fee, sacred music fee and sacred horse fee. Each of these became income for the onshi as prayer fees, and these too were completely unrelated to the Ise Shrine. In other words, these various prayers took place entirely within the residence of the onshi. Of course, fees such as the sacred horse fee were originally supposed to be offered to the Ise Shrine, but they were done so nominally, and actually became the income of the onshi.

The onshi were truly shrewd. Even the superb polite hospitality which they extended to their parishioners was part and parcel of their enterprise.

When a group of parishioners arrived at the onshi's gate, either the head of the household or a representative would greet them and immediately offer them an invitation to take a bath. After they had had a chance to shave, rearrange their hair, change clothes and relax in the reception hall, the master of the household would come to greet them, and formally extend hospitality during their stay.

Following this would come a meal. The feast offered would be sumptuous. The menu would include such delicacies as a bottle of well-known sake, an entire grilled sea bream, and steamed abalone – a grand feast fit for a feudal lord. In a word, the feast was intended to have advertising value. When the guests returned to their villages, if they let others know how extravagant everything was, the next group would definitely want to stay there. Unless they returned and announced how wonderful Ise was, their business would not prosper. For that reason, they provided their guests with silk bedding, and distributed amulets and souvenirs.

The next day they would dedicate prayers and sacred music at the onshi's ritual music hall. And, finally, they would make the formal visit to the Ise

Shrine. First, the onshi would guide them to *Geku*, the Outer Shrine, and on behalf of the group recite Shinto prayers and worship before the gods. Following that, the group would throw offerings into the offertory box the onshi carried and worship the gods. Going from there to smaller affiliated shrines and *Amanoiwato*, they would continue on to Naiku, the Inner Shrine. In some cases they would also visit Futami, Asama and Toba. Regardless of where they went, the onshi never separated from his offertory box.

At any rate, the activities of the onshi included the functions of today's travel agency, inn and souvenir shop. One could call the onshi all-inclusive travel coordinating agencies. In this sense, the onshi are the ancestors of our contemporary travel agents. The journeys by associations of commoners (Ise-ko) which they solicited, in that their services included everything from lodging to prayers to visiting the shrines, could be called Ise pilgrimage group package tours.

Following the example of the Ise-ko devised by the onshi, similar ko were organized around temples and shrines throughout the country. These included the *Dewa Sanzan-ko*, *Fuji-ko*, *Ontake-ko*, *Hakusan-ko* and *Kompira-ko*, and many of the *sendatsu* and *yamabushi* who commenced these travel services performed the same functions as the onshi at Ise.

Of course these were of major benefit to the people, and that was why they developed. In other words, because in principle leaving the villages was strictly controlled and because they would be travelling for such a long time, the fact that they were making a pilgrimage to a shrine or temple was an expedient that was desirable to justify this. Therefore, having the group name of the ko and the name of the onshi as a nominal escort was at the very least better than nothing at all.

Even more advantageous was being able to entrust the onshi with the management of the traveling expenses. The



Nikko Kaido, one of the Five Highways managed by the Edo Bakufu (shogunate) as a national project

Photo : Tokyo Trade and Tourist Office of Tochigi Prefecture

members of the ko in communities in each region were able to send a certain number of their membership every year by laying aside small amounts of money a little at a time. There are even examples of the onshi diligently managing and investing these funds. The members of these associations could leave everything to the onshi, so when it came to their turn, they could make their pilgrimage unburdened. In this sense, the onshi can be said to have carried out financial services as well.

To take a world-class example, Thomas Cook became famous in 19th-century Great Britain for founding a travel agency. However, in Japan, a full century or more earlier, we find the activities of the onshi centered on Ise already gaining strength.

From that time onward, Japan has been a tourist nation of global proportions.

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