

Walking for Pleasure: Murao Karyō's Day Trips in Edo and Beyond

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Walking has a long history in Japan. Especially during the Edo era (1600–1867), Japanese men and women walked great distances for purposes that included official work, buying and selling goods, religious observance, travel, and pleasure. By the mid-eighteenth century, the outburst of travel to famous places had fueled what the cultural historian Nishiyama Matsunosuke called a “culture of movement.”¹⁾ This culture was supported by a literature of guides, maps and personal accounts, an infrastructure of roads and waterways, and the availability of accommodation, restaurants, and travel goods. And, especially among ordinary people, it was a culture conducted primarily on foot.

Somewhat surprisingly, walking as a leisurely, unstructured activity—strolling, rather than travelling—appears less prominently in historical records of the Edo era “culture of movement.” The Dutch physician Pompe van Meerdervoort, who lived in Nagasaki from 1857 to 1862, famously wrote that he hardly knew any Japanese people who walked without a clear objective, or simply because they enjoyed it.²⁾ Moreover, when Japanese literary figures of the late nineteenth century introduced strolls through nature into their works, they looked to English romantics for inspiration and even for the language to describe their ramblings. The word “*sanpo* 散歩,” most commonly used today for walking, appears in Chinese texts from the Tang era (618–917) but was hardly to be found in Japanese writing before the modern era. It was introduced in Japanese texts from the 1880s to express the supposedly new activity of rambling or unstructured walking.³⁾

However, one has only to look at the numerous images of ordinary people viewing blossoms, watching fireworks, or enjoying picnics to know that walking for pleasure, and not too far from home, occupied a meaningful place in the “culture of movement” created by people in the Edo period. This essay focuses on something less common—a written record left by an Edo period walker, Murao Karyō (1760–1841). Murao, a samurai attached to a Tokugawa branch family based in Edo, described 41 day-excursions that he took from his home in the opening decades of the 19th century. Why did Murao walk? And how did he experience the terrain through which he rambled? By examining the record of Murao's walks, I suggest that mobility—simple, unregulated walking—offered Murao respite from the routines of his everyday urban life while at the same time reinforcing his knowledge of and connections with the physical and cultural environment in which he lived.

Murao Karyō and *Edo kinkō michi shirube*

Not much is known about Murao Karyō.⁴⁾ He was born in 1760 to a samurai family attached to the Shimizu, one of the three branch families (*gosankyō* 御三卿) of the Tokugawa shogun. The Shimizu family was based in Edo, and Edo is the only home of record for Murao. He worked in the *ohiroshiki* 御広敷, the administrative area of the Ōoku, the daimyo's inner chambers and the only area accessible by men. Murao's title of *ohiroshiki yōnin* 御広敷用人 indicates the highest level for managing clerical business connected with the Ōoku, and comments in his walking record suggest that the work was time-consuming. Other comments indicate that he was married, had at least one child, and lived in at least two locations in Edo: in Hamachō (eastern Edo), near one of the secondary residences (*shimoyashiki* 下屋敷) of the Shimizu, and later in Kōjimachi, near Yotsuya.

Most of what we know about Murao comes from the record of his 41 day-excursions, published under the title *Edo kinkō michi shirube* 江戸近郊道しるべ (Signposts to the Environs of Edo).⁵⁾ Figure 1 shows that Murao took the walks between 1807 and 1834, his 48th to 75th years. About half of them are concentrated between 1816 and 1822, the years either side of Murao's 60th birthday. He took as many as six walks in 1819, his 59th year, and five in 1831, his 71st year. This is not to say that *Michi shirube* reflects the total of Murao's walking history. He was clearly an experienced walker; he knew the basic geography of Edo and its surrounds well; and the very first excursion described in the volume was to a destination—present-day Ichikawa City in Chiba Prefecture—that he had visited 19 years earlier. It is possible, however, that Murao began taking longer walks and recording them more fully in his later years, as work and other responsibilities lightened.

Where did Murao walk? In the map, Figure 2, the destination of each walk is marked with a dot. Several place names have been added in order to show the geographic span. While Murao traveled widely, he most often headed west, to what are now the Nakano, Nerima, and Suginami areas of Tokyo. The frequency of these destinations, located some 16 to 20 kilometers from his home, suggest that Murao probably planned his walks to fit into one full day. (A noticeable exception was the overnight trip to Ageo in today's Saitama Prefecture, which Murao took in the autumn of 1819 because he had heard that on a clear day one could see from Ageo right across to the top of Mt. Asama, located on the border of today's Gunma and Nagano prefectures.)

Edo kinkō michi shirube takes the form of an occasional diary, and was probably intended primarily as Murao's personal record rather than as a book for publication. His handwritten text lists the walks chronologically (though the published editions have arranged them by direction—north, east, south, and west of Edo). The seasons of travel suggest that Murao walked primarily for pleasure. More than half of his walks were taken in the autumn; several others were taken in the spring. There were few in the hottest summer months and none in the cold and busy year-end and new-year seasons. Murao walked mostly alone and at an easy pace. He usually left home between 8 to 10 a.m. and returned by about 10 p.m. the same day, sometimes, but not always, pausing for refreshment along the way. He often chose a temple or shrine as the endpoint of his walks, though he expressed as much interest in the

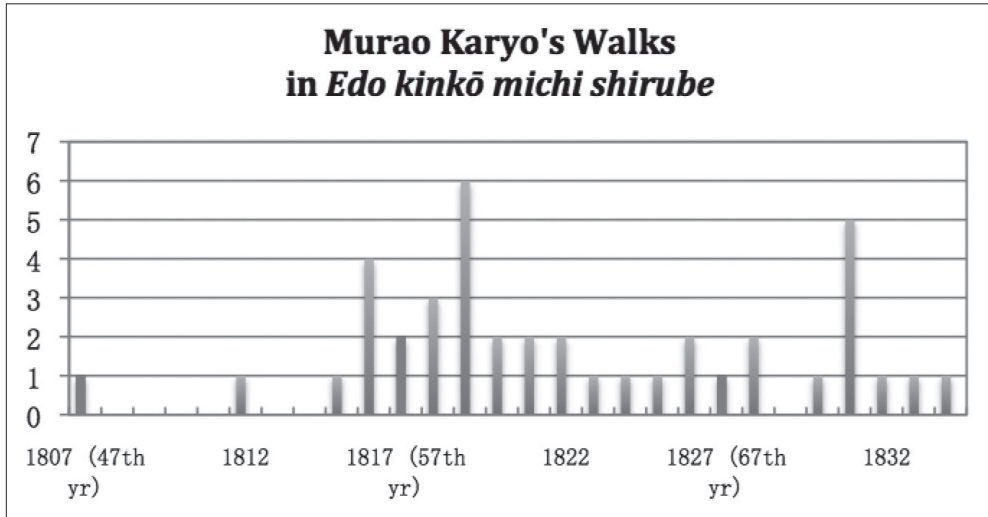


Figure 1: Muraō Karyō's Walks

Source: Muraō Karyō, (ed. with notes by Asakura Haruhiko), *Edo kinkō michi shirube* (Heibonsha 1985), iii–vi; Suzuki Shōsei, “Muraō Karyō no *Edo kinkō michi shirube*,” *Meiji Daigaku Bungaku-Gengogaku kenkyū*, (No. 2, 2006, 1–14), 3.

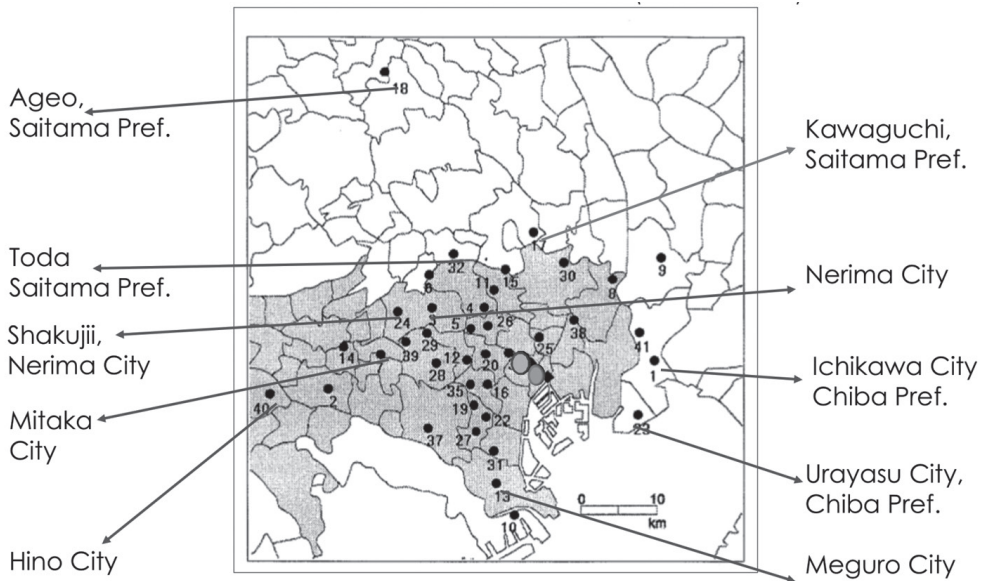


Figure 2: Muraō Karyō's Destinations

Source: Suzuki Shōsei, “Muraō Karyō no *Edo kinkō michi shirube*,” *Meiji Daigaku bungaku-gengogaku kenkyū*, (No. 2, 2006, 1–14), 4.



Figure 3: To Kōnodai and Mama, Shimōsa Province

trees, flowers, and famous landmarks that he passed along the way as in any religious observance.

Murao’s descriptions of each trip are organized around the route: how he got to the various places along the way and the distances between each point leading to the destination. He usually omitted any reference to the trip home. In addition, he recorded the weather, his rest stops, and incidental encounters, and he offered detailed explanations of the history and current condition of points of interest, often with simple sketches or maps. Intermingled with this factual information is Murao’s record of his personal response. Murao clearly enjoyed his walks, and *Michi shirube* abounds in his expressions of pleasure at identifying known landmarks and observing the trees, flowers, and landscape of the Kanto countryside.

Some Examples

1) Historical Sites: Mama and Kōnodai, Shimōsa Province

Murao’s first excursion in *Edo kinkō michi shirube* took him on a fresh spring morning in 1807 (today’s 4/14/1807) to the historic Kōnodai 国府台 and Mama 真間 area of Shimōsa Province (present-day Ichikawa City, Chiba Prefecture).⁶⁾ (See Figure 3.) Mama was a scenic spot beloved by artists and literary figures; Kōnodai was the site of a decisive 16th-century battle. The distance from Murao’s home in Hamachō was about 14 kilometers. Accompanied by a friend, Murao set out before daybreak and headed east, crossing the waterways by boat. The two marveled at the fine weather and the misty landscape; they noted the levees along the rivers and stopped for sake and sweets. At the Kita-Koiwa crossing on the Edo River they passed through an unattended government barrier, and Murao commented on the general peace that made their easy passage into Shimōsa possible. Arriving at Sōneiji Temple in



Figure 4: To Chōmeiji, Musashi Province

Kōnodai, the travelers secured the services of a temple priest to take them on a detailed tour of the temple and the battle site. Murao, already well informed, was anxious to see and learn more: about buildings, gates, pagodas, treasures, and tombs. His eyes fastened on changes from his earlier trip and he looked carefully for changes in thatch and in trees. It was early afternoon before he noticed that the exhausted priest was yawning and needed to be released. Although long aware of their own weary feet, the travellers, nevertheless, continued on to visit Guhōji, a temple in Mama, where Murao’s account of the day’s journey ended.

2) Learning the Roads: Chōmeiji Temple, Musashi Province

After the trip to Ichikawa, Murao’s walks took him mostly to the west of Edo into Musashi Province, with its open fields, historic temples and shrines, and distant mountain views. On 9/8/1815 (today’s 10/10/1815), his destination was Chōmeiji temple. (See Figure 4.) Chōmeiji, a Shingon temple known as the Kōyasan of the East, was (and still is) a large complex surrounded by trees, and located in present-day Nerima City at a distance of some 15 kilometers from Murao’s home.⁷⁾ He left the Shimizu daimyō residence just inside Edo Castle at around 10:00 a.m. and called first at the house of a friend, Ōkubo Sei’emon, who was to act as guide for the day’s walk. Ōkubo treated him to a lunch of potatoes dug fresh from the garden. Then, as the noon bell sounded, Murao, Ōkubo, and three other companions set off for Chōmeiji. Their route was along the Kiyotomichi, the road used to bring agricultural produce into Edo from the west, through Zōshigaya, Gorōkubo (today’s Minami Nagasaki), Ekoda, and Nerima. Unlike the trip to Kōnodai and Mama,



Figure 5: To Inokashira, Musashi Province

where Murao had been absorbed in the details of his destination, the interest of this trip appears to have focused on the road networks along the way. Perhaps because he was being guided, Murao paid particular attention at intersections, noting road markers, names, and destinations. He included a drawing of the *shirube* or road marker leading to Chōmeiji; the same stone marker remains today to help followers of Murao’s route. And, as usual, Murao observed the changing landscape carefully. At Chōmeiji he recorded no details of the buildings but noted the vegetation: he reported the thinning of the trees inside the temple grounds and the *hatsutake* mushrooms in the woods beyond. Murao returned to this road network in several subsequent solo walks, including an 1816 walk to Kamitakada Hikawa Shrine in today’s Nakano City, an 1818 walk to Jōganji, also in Nakano City, and an 1822 trip to the Bente Shrine at Shakujii in today’s Nerima City.

3) A Shrine and Spring Water: Inokashira, Musashi Province

On 9/15/1816 (today’s 11/4/1816), Murao walked west again, this time to Inokashira in present-day Mitaka City. (See Figure 5.) Located about 20 kilometers from Murao’s home in Hamachō, Inokashira was the location of the Benzaiten Shrine, a major pilgrimage site in the Edo period and Murao’s primary destination. Known for its clear spring water, Inokashira was also Edo’s first major water source, and the area formed part of the Tokugawa family hunting grounds. Murao set off alone, after 10:00 a.m., and walked west, past the Ichigaya Gate of Edo Castle and through Shinjuku and Nakano.⁸⁾ By the time he reached Myōhōji, a Nichiren temple and pilgrimage site located in today’s Suginami City, it was past 1 p.m. Turning south, he found a landscape of fields, houses, and beautiful vistas. One house had a water mill. At Ōmiya Hachiman shrine, still in today’s Suginami area, there were huge pine and cypress trees. Continuing through Takaido and Kugayama, Murao found dry fields, farmhouses, and cypress trees. A stone road marker led him through narrow roads to Mure and, finally, Inokashira. As in Kōnodai and Mama,



Figure 6: To Shiba, Shinagawa, and Ikegami Honmonji

Murao’s account shows him to be well informed, interested in learning more, and seemingly indefatigable. He describes the *torii* leading to the Benzaiten shrine, the official notices, the crumbling stone bridges, and the seven springs of Inokashira. The pond, he observes, was quite small—about half the size of Shinobazu Pond in Ueno. Murao recounts the history of the area, including the visits of the first and third Tokugawa shogun, noting that Tokugawa Iemitsu had given Inokashira its name by carving it into a tree. His account ends with a description of the water channels leading to Edo.

4) Viewing Spring Blossoms: Shiba, Shinagawa, and Ikegami

Thanks to the immense variety and number of cherry trees, Japanese people in the late Edo era enjoyed a long and resplendent blossom-viewing season. One of Murao’s most memorable walks was his excursion on 3/25/1819 (today’s 1819/4/19) to enjoy spring blossoms in Shiba, Shinagawa, and Ikegami (in present-day Minato and Shinagawa cities). (See Figure 6.) The distance from his home, if walked directly, would have been about 16 kilometers.⁹⁾ Setting out around 8:00 a.m. on a warm spring day, Murao headed south. He made his way to Atago, climbed to the hilltop shrine to survey the view, and then walked—through what even today is a belt of almost uninterrupted green—to Zōjōji temple, then through the Hijirizaka thoroughfare in Mita to Sengakuji (temple of the 47 Rōnin) in Takanawa, to Gotenyama, and to the Tōkaiji and Raifukuji temples in Shinagawa. At every place Murao marveled at the cherry trees. He identified the famous ones, knew the history of plantings,

and could distinguish the varieties. Around Zōjōji, cherry and willow trees had been planted after a fire in 1805 destroyed much of the area from Akasaka to Akabane. Pale-colored *yaezakura* were also in full bloom, and even trees in their decline had produced beautiful flowers. At Sengakuji, too, several hundred cherries trees had been planted since the fire. Through the trees, Murao caught a view of a calm ocean and wondered whether such a glorious day would ever come again. Mellowed by his surroundings, he struck up an acquaintance with a fellow walker, listened to his stories, and shared with him some of the lunch he had brought from home. (The two strolled as far as Shinagawa together.) At Gotenyama, Murao reminisced on his previous visit with an uncle—30 years earlier—and, ever conscious of trees, noticed that almost all of the old cherry trees had been replaced. Raifukuji was full of cherries, almost 100, he thought, including a magnificent double-flowered *shiogama* cherry planted by a high-ranking samurai lady in the early seventeenth century. Murao thought of poems, gazed at the view, and declared himself lost for words.

From Raifukuji, Murao's companion returned to his home in Mita, but Murao decided he had time to walk on to Ikegami Honmonji, the head temple of the Nichiren school, located in present-day Ota City. Walking alone, he observed a more agricultural landscape, framed at times with magnificent ocean views. He heard the paddle of a boat, watched ducks in flight, and saw wild cherry trees that seemed even more beautiful than the cultivated ones. Here and there plum blossoms lingered. At Ikegami Honmonji he looked at the trees and examined the graves. When the temple bell sounded at 4 p.m., Murao set off for home. Using familiar roads, he was there within three hours.

Murao Karyō's Walks as Environmental History

Although environmental history is usually considered to be “the history of the relationship, broadly defined, between human society and the natural environment,”¹⁰ it is unsurprising and reasonable that much of the research in environmental history focuses on the mostly negative impacts generated by the human side of this relationship. The record of Murao Karyō's walks, however, reminds us of the effects, mostly positive, that interaction with the natural environment exerts on humans.

Murao was an urban, educated, and professionally engaged person, who developed the habit, at least in his later years, of taking long walks to places of interest beyond the confines of Edo. Walking brought Murao into contact with human society (fields, farmhouses, local shops, and water mills) and with a physical world (trees, mountains, and vistas) that he could not experience in the city. On getting to its peripheries, he often wrote of looking both ways, seemingly to compare inside and out. Like other travelers, including the peripatetic map-maker Inō Tadataka and the globe-trotting Kume Kunitake, Murao used his excursions into new surroundings to separate himself temporarily from his everyday life and reflect upon it from outside.

But unlike those two, Murao's excursions were not journeys into the unknown. His destinations—almost always well-known temples and shrines—were places that he already knew about, through his study of history or by hearing from other people. And Murao didn't travel far: he started from home in the morning and returned to

sleep there at night. Much of his walking was necessarily within the boundaries of Edo, and all was in territory familiar enough that he could comfortably communicate with people he met along the way. In other words, it may be said that, for Murao, knowing by going was less about discovering new worlds and more about deepening an understanding of his existing world. He studied its geography: roads, villages, distances, and directions. He studied the vegetation: particularly the varieties, numbers, and health of trees. And his keen powers of observation and sharp memory allowed him to notice and record change.

Is this environmental history? In 1989 Donald Worster wrote in an appendix to *The Ends of the Earth* about the need “to go still deeper yet, down to the earth itself as an agent and presence in history. Here we will discover even more fundamental forces at work over time. And to appreciate those forces we must now and then get out of parliamentary chambers, out of birthing rooms and factories, get out of doors altogether, and ramble into fields, woods, and the open air. It is time we bought a good set of walking shoes, and we cannot avoid getting some mud on them.”¹¹⁾ Murao’s many sets of sandals allowed him to get “down to the earth itself”—and thus to deepen and broaden his ties with a familiar and well-loved physical and cultural environment. His *Edo kinkō michi shirube* offers us a close-up view of the physical landscape of Edo and its environs in the years immediately before their modern transformation.

Notes

- 1) Nishiyama Matsunosuke (trans. Gerald Groemer), *Edo Culture: Daily Life and Diversions in Urban Japan, 1600–1868*, Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1997.
- 2) Pompe van Meerdervoort, (trans. Numata Jirō and Arase Susumu), *Nihon taizai kenbun—Nihon ni okeru gonengan*, Tokyo: Yūshōdō, 1968, 342.
- 3) Ichimura Soichi and Kondo Akihito, “Sanpo’ to iu kotoba no hajimari to Meiji jidai no sanposhatachi, *Tōkyō Seitoku Daigaku kenkyū kiyō*, No. 11 (2004), 91–102.
- 4) See the explanation by Asakura Haruhiko, 407–18, in his edited volume (note 5 below).
- 5) Murao Karyō, (ed. with notes by Asakura Haruhiko), *Edo kinkō michi shirube*, Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1985 and Murao Karyō (ed. Abe Takashi), *Edo kinkō michi shirube gendaigoyaku*, Tokyo: Kodansha, 2013.
- 6) Murao Karyō (ed. Asakura Haruhiko), 223–36; Murao Karyō (ed. Abe Takashi), 176–92.
- 7) Murao Karyō (ed. Asakura Haruhiko), 12–16; Murao Karyō (ed. Abe Takashi), 30–34.
- 8) Murao Karyō (ed. Asakura Haruhiko), 22–26; Murao Karyō (ed. Abe Takashi), 35–40.
- 9) Murao Karyō (ed. Asakura Haruhiko), 305–20; Murao Karyō (ed. Abe Takashi), 251–69.
- 10) Bruce L. Batten and Philip C. Brown, eds., *Environment and Society in the Japanese Islands: From Prehistory to the Present*, Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2015, 1.
- 11) Donald Worster, “Doing Environmental History,” in Worster, ed., *The Ends of the Earth*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989, 289.