Introduction

Everything Flows

Living only for the moment, turning our full attention to the pleasures of the moon, the snow, the cherry blossoms and the maple leaves; singing songs, drinking wine, diverting ourselves in just floating, floating; caring not a whit for the pauperism staring us in the face, refusing to be disheartened, like a gourd floating along with the river current; this is what we call the floating world.

—Asai Ryūsō, Tales of the Floating World (Ukiyo monogatari, 1665)

The Edo period (1600–1868) was the age of movement par excellence. Motion characterized and imbued its every aspect, from the gourd of the floating world slowly descending along the river to the fluid creations of linked-verse poets, from the dynamism of an expanding society to the innovative spatial logic of its made-for-strolling gardens. It was only normal, and inevitable, that in a place and time where movement reigned supreme travel would become an activity through which life itself could be defined: “Days and months are travellers of eternity. So are the years that pass by,” sang poet and traveler Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694) at the onset of The Narrow Road to the Deep North (Oku no hosomichi, 1689). The general goal of the pages that follow is to examine some of the ways in which early modern travel intersected with life in and around the floating world, and to assess its impact, pervasiveness, and functions against the background of Edo culture and society.

Travel was by no means an invention of the Edo period. In the centuries that preceded the rise to power of the Tokugawa, soldiers and merchants, poets and entertainers, pilgrims and wanderers had trodden the roads in search of inspiration or profit, enlightenment or escapism. With a few notable exceptions, however, journeys through the seventeenth century were prominently utilitarian or generally undertaken out of necessity. Wayfarers were mostly concerned with the destination rather than the road, for movements through space were essentially contingent to the accomplishment of other goals.
Uncomfortable and dangerous, travel was the unavoidable price one had to pay to “get things done” elsewhere. The expeditions of the frontier guards sung in the *Anthology of Ten Thousand Leaves* (*Man’yōshū*, eighth century), the imperial pilgrimages to Kumano between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, and the journeys of merchants in the medieval period provide fitting examples of travel as a military, political, or commercial obligation. In the early modern period a new type of journey became prominent: travel as a conscious sociocultural act, undertaken not out of practical necessity but from the simple desire to break with the ordinary and engage with an out-of-the-ordinary space and time—a goal only the lifelong peregrinations of wandering monks, nuns, and mountain ascetics (*yamabushi*) had approximated in the past. With the shift in focus the road took on a new function. No longer the inert, flat line between two points of interests, it became an active stage on which meanings could be “discovered, created, and communicated.” For many a traveler reaching the final destination became subordinate to the greater goal of being in motion and, as novelist Jippensha Ikku (1765–1831) aptly put it, “enjoying all the delights of the road.”

In the Edo period, physical mobility (travel along horizontal lines) was tightly regulated and social mobility (travel along vertical lines), though not impossible, was not always a viable option. Parameters based on status and gender permeated every facet of one person’s life, and to a certain extent travel was no exception. I contend, however, that recreational travel, as a space and time apart, provided a convenient platform to question and alter some of these parameters. Shaped by multiple interpretations, the spaces of travel constituted malleable terrains that stood in sharp contrast to the predominantly static spaces of the ordinary. When travelers began their journeys and were no longer “tied by convention as when they live[d] in the same row of houses,” they eagerly exploited the flexibility and the “anything-goes” atmosphere of the open road to redraw both horizontal and vertical lines, reshaping personal hierarchies and, on more than one occasion, temporarily crafting new identities. Along the road, recreation (as in “leisure”) became synonymous with re-creation (as in “regeneration,” or “creation of a new self”). The modalities of such re-creation were not static, and diversified over time in parallel with the evolution of the Edo period into an age of pervasive commercialism and widespread literacy.

This cartography of self-assertion on the part of the individual emerges more prominently at the junctures of travel with space, gender, status, literacy, the economy, and the body. These are the main intersections to which this study is dedicated. Although I remain aware that crossing such vast categories of inquiry forced me to make inevitable selections, and that by choosing
certain avenues of investigation I had to walk away from many others, I nevertheless believe that the complexity of early modern travel culture as a site of creations, re-creations, and challenges is best understood through a combination of all of the above. When projected onto the plane of travel, issues of spatial control, gender, status, literary prowess, economic necessity, and physicality manifest themselves as mutually interdependent and often invisible. Their inseparability affected the structure of this work: although each of the chapters deals with one major theme, common issues and problems constantly resurface.

In its first part (“Re-creating Spaces”) this study introduces the notion that the spaces of travel were malleable and could be continually reconceptualized across interpretive frames. Divergent views on the degree to which gender and status should affect mobility, the weight of religious and cultural precedent, and ever-powerful economic considerations all played a decisive role in the formation of a plurality of spatial hierarchies and of highly polysemic terrains. Consequently, the modalities of a traveler’s interaction with the landscape were never cast in stone. By the simple act of looking at a space through a different lens travelers discovered that they could successfully question the geography of power envisioned—if ever attained—by officialdom. In a silent yet fierce tug-of-war, landscapes were continuously appropriated, shaped, defined, and contested. Far from being static backgrounds, the complex spaces of travel proliferated in a myriad of loci where one person’s center was another’s periphery. The multifaceted character of landscapes buttressed a sense of autonomy and agency on the part of the traveler vis-à-vis the institutions and the social pressures that regulated life in the space of the ordinary.

Once physical detachment from one’s preassigned niche took place, individual travelers began to interact with the landscapes through the set of conventions they found more congenial. In the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries educated travelers, mostly of high social standing, engaged with landscapes in a conscious effort to establish a connection with the sites’ lyrical heritage, hence confirming their own position within pre-existing cultural hierarchies (Part II: “Re-creating Identities”). They used travel to, or through, revered lyrical sites as a way of asserting and enhancing their roles and identities. By the mid-eighteenth century the dynamics and goals of self re-creation through cultural engagements began to diversify as the popularization of culture and the rise of commercial printing ushered in a new wave of informed travelers—commoners who had discovered the layered meanings of sites in the pages of popular literature and in woodblock prints. The forging of a link with a hallowed past and the self-identification
with its icons empowered this new brand of wayfarers to put identity up for
debate, not so much (or not exclusively) for the purpose of asserting their
worth within cultural circles as to escape, if only for the length of the journey,
some of the handicaps that limited their agency in the space of the ordinary.

Men and women alike engaged in the recovery of literary precedent
and in the intellectual acquisition of the spaces of travel. Gender, however,
a ffected their respective approaches. While educated travelers of both sexes
turned their movements into sociocultural acts by investing them with rich
literary meanings, women seemed particularly devoted to the search for
validation in preferred sites of lyrical authority and gendered power. I have
chosen to devote special attention to the case of female travelers, not only
because they have thus far been relatively neglected in the pages of Western
language historiography on the topic, but also because looking at gender
most forcefully highlights the disjunction between modes of control on one
side and practices on the other.

I approached the gendered history of travel in early modern Japan
informed by the notion that, historically, women have always been the
silenced, immobile, and confined ones. In a study of travel practices across
cultures, for instance, Eric J. Leed affirms, “In a vast portion of human history,
men have been the travelers; and travel literature is—with a few significant,
and often modern, exceptions—a male literature reflecting a masculine point
of view. […] There is no free and mobile male without the unfree and sessile
female.” The Tokugawa period in particular, as Martha Tocco has observed
(and refuted), tends to be “widely understood to represent the nadir in the
status of Japanese women.” The intersection of travel and gender in early
modern Japan simply proves that the picture was far more nuanced, and that
women were remarkably capable of achieving mobility by exploiting the
discrepancies between overlapping spatial discourses.

As travel became pervasively commodified in the nineteenth century,
so did the dynamics of the interaction between wayfarers and landscapes.
When educated divertissements met commercial pressure, the recovery of
literary or historical precedent became but one of the many ways in which
visitors bonded with the spaces of travel. In its final part this study looks at the
intersection between recreational travel and the rising commercial economy,
which allowed visitors to appropriate landscapes through new means: mone-
tary transactions, acquisition of tangible icons, or physical intercourse (Part
III: “Purchasing Re-creation”). The process that had begun in the seven-
teenth century had by the nineteenth reached its zenith. In the final century
of Tokugawa rule the culture of recreational travel combined with consum-
erism to generate a proliferation of simulacra: miniature pilgrimage circuits
as alternatives to full-scale circumambulations across provinces; souvenirs that distilled the identity of a site into purchasable units; and an array of services and icons that offered a convenient alternative—or complement—to the intellectual interaction with the landscape. The cultural discovery of a site and an educated engagement with its history ceased to be the sole coordinates along which visitors mapped and seized space. The many spaces of travel became increasingly complex, now invested with a multiplicity of meanings, values, and symbols to better respond to the rapidly rising demands of the market. Material icons such as souvenirs, gastronomic specialties, or local courtesans worked just as effectively as quotations from the classics in the travelers’ process of integration with the extraordinary landscapes of travel, and in the reelaboration of their own identities: “I buy, therefore I am” was the new mantra of nineteenth-century recreational travelers.

The Many Cultures of Movement

As a cultural practice, travel has received extensive attention in scholarship, both across disciplines (anthropology, the social sciences, literature, history) and across diverse geographical regions. The works of John Urry, Judith Adler, Dean MacCannell, or James Buzard, just to name a few, have placed the phenomenon under the microscope, highlighting practices and agendas, short-lived fads and long-lasting trends, challenges and individual responses to novelty. Though I use them sparingly, these studies, conceptualized to explain Western (and often modern) manifestations of the cultures of movement, have helped me bring the recreational travels of early modern Japan into better focus. Mostly I resorted to Western theories when studies on the specific case of Edo period Japan were not available; the field has only recently been gathering momentum and there is still much work to be done. In other cases I used them to provide food for thought, though never with the intention to engage in a comparative study of travel practices in the “East” versus travel practices in the “West.” Theories formulated for the understanding of Western historical phenomena can still serve as valid tools to interpret, in this case, a Japanese tradition either by way of comparison or by way of contrast, as long as they do not force or distort interpretations.

In the more confined field of early modern Japanese history, the works of Constantine N. Vaporis in English and the extensive publications of Kodama Kōta, Maruyama Yasunari, Igarashi Tomio, and many others in Japanese have offered a tremendous contribution to the knowledge of Edo period travel. In the majority of cases, it ought to be noted, scholars have focused primarily
on the institutional side of the story, mostly honing in on the detailed travel legislation put forth by the Tokugawa. Titles such as *A Basic Study of Early Modern Post Stations*, *A Basic Study of Early Modern Checkpoints*, or *Study of the Post Station System in the Early Modern Period* reveal a tendency to define travel almost exclusively in terms of official edicts, government-mandated post towns and checkpoints, and legally sanctioned stages for the transportation of official goods and correspondence. In this view from above, rarely if ever does leisurely travel appear as a category in itself. If mentioned, it is frequently within the convenient frame of the clash between legality and disobedience.

Government-centered institutional histories also tend to define recreational travel—when they define it at all—for what it is not (i.e., nonofficial) rather than for what it is, and to peruse it from the viewpoint of the authority. The result is often a plot that bases its social characterization on a convenient dichotomy between samurai and commoners—the epitome of officialdom being the former, the embodiment of defiance the latter. Alternatively, recreational travel is quickly introduced as a superficial, frivolous activity akin to modern tourism and is associated almost exclusively with the lower echelons of society (the masses of “mass tourism”).

More nuanced, in this respect, is Constantine N. Vaporis’ *Breaking Barriers*, a monograph that, while focusing largely on the institutional organization and control of movements (as the subtitle *Travel and the State in Early Modern Japan* indicates), also brings the voices of actual travelers into the picture. In his concluding chapter Vaporis offers one of the most substantial contributions to the history of early modern recreational travel to date, outlining the rise of popular leisurely journeys despite and against the will of the Tokugawa, who, all evidence to the contrary notwithstanding, still “did not recognize the concept of tourism.” This volume departs from the point where Vaporis leaves off by focusing as much as possible on the view from within. Starting from a reexamination of the ways in which many travelers “broke the barriers” erected by the government and moved somewhat freely along the roads, this study seeks to evaluate the deeper meaning and the short- and long-term repercussions of such movements and of the narratives and commercial transactions they generated. It goes without saying that writing a comprehensive social and cultural history of travel is well beyond the scope of this work. As Hiruma Hisashi suggests, there were “many cultures of movement,” and while they all deserve equal attention, this study presents a selection of themes in the hope of generating debate and stimulating further inquiries.
**Travel and Pilgrimage**

Even outside of strictly institutional frames of interpretation recreational travel in Japan has hardly been granted a historiographical identity of its own, for in most cases it has been presented as an offspring of pilgrimage, simultaneously assuming that the religious experience per se was inherently devoid of any mundane aspects and that it automatically excluded the possibility of amusement. Several schools of thought have attempted to explain the intricacies of the relationship between faith and fun, prayer and play, sacred and profane, both within and without the sphere of travel. Some, perhaps believing that statistics are the key to uncontestable truths and that numeric coordinates can measure the human experience, have even set out to quantify the ratio to which faith and leisure mixed on the road. Konno Nobuo establishes that by the late Edo period the proportion was 80:20 in favor of recreation, while Shinjō Tsunezō settles for a 70:30 ratio. The works of scholars who avoid mathematical formulations to explain the “emergence” of recreational travel still tend to present an evolutionary process that culminates with the metamorphosis of an essentially religious act into a mixed concoction of pleasure and devotion.

Other studies, however, have challenged this view. In line with the argument that “a tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist,” they have asserted that the two elements of recreation and devotion were in fact thoroughly combined, promoting the notion that “prayer and play were complementary and indeed inseparable.” As evidence bolstering their claim, the supporters of the complementarity theory point to such examples as the boisterous dance the gods staged before the cave where the Sun Goddess Amaterasu had gone into hiding (an episode narrated in Record of Ancient Matters, Kojiki, 712), to religious phenomena that feature a remarkably entertaining character (such as exhibits of sacred icons during festivals and kagura dances), and to recreational events that bear the signs of an intrinsically religious origin (sumo wrestling and rural festivals, to name a few). Further proof of the interconnectedness of the two spheres, they argue, is the ambivalence of terms that overlap the two semantic fields of pleasure and religion. Words such as tayū (by which both Shinto priests and high-ranking courtesans in pleasure quarters were identified) and gozen (literally meaning “those who serve the deities,” but also a synonym for “prostitute”) are the most eloquent examples of such complementarity. The proponents of the “inexorable conjoining of faith and pleasure” reject the distinction between sacred and profane by asserting that, throughout the early modern period, “religion was one form of enjoyment, [...] one of the great pleasures of life.”
Following in the footsteps of these scholars, I do not intend to draw at any point a precise line of separation between travel as “religion” and travel as “leisure,” for I regard them as inseparably linked at all stages of Edo history. The memoir written by an eighteenth-century woman to commemorate her journey, for example, confirms that certain travelers tended to invest space with ever-changing meanings, depending on location, time of the year, and personal inclinations. They also did not think it inappropriate to shift freely from times and spaces of the sacred to times and spaces of the mundane, for they saw no boundaries between the two. In 1777 Arakida Reijo (1732–1806), the wife of an Ise priest, traveled through a series of famous locations in western Japan. On 1777/3/20 she left Yoshino to reach the Hall of Five Hundred Arhats in Sumiyoshi. After spending time in this sacred space, she headed to Noda to enjoy a seasonal spectacle, the sight of blooming wisterias. While in Noda, she once again put secular amusements aside and paid homage to a shrine dedicated to Kasuga no Kami. Should we define Reijo’s tour as “just” a pilgrimage or as “primarily” a pilgrimage? Was it an excursion through places celebrated in literature intertwined with occasional stops at sites of cult, or was it “tourism” pure and simple? As in many other cases, Reijo’s journey defies a clear-cut definition in these terms and shows that the character of Edo period recreational travel was multilayered and adaptable.

Maps and Texts: The Original Stones

In the pages that follow I will use maps to look at the manifold ways in which spaces were interpreted, assigned specific meanings, re-presented, and, ultimately, exploited. I am using the word “map” as a general term of convenience to describe all types of visual representations of a given space—from cartography to art, from textbook illustrations to board games, from mandalas to woodblock prints. The recent works of Marcia Yonemoto and Jilly Traganou have effectively demonstrated that mapmaking and spatial illustrations were in fact dense, complex languages, and that as such they provided a fertile terrain, not only to outline political agendas, but also to bend and invert the established order with satirical twists and irreverent parodies.

An analysis of the contrasting creations and definitions of space, however, cannot stop at the visual level. Equally significant was the verbal production of landscapes effected through edicts, annotations, explanations, jottings, mantras, evocations, and narratives that, more often than not, complemented visual images. Language (in the strict verbal sense) appropriated spaces and
affirmed authority just as pervasively, effectively, and decisively as images. Official edicts, village records, and documents issued by religious institutions are discussed in conjunction with educational textbooks, travel guides, and popular fiction to cast a light on the different discourses and meanings overlapping in the spaces of travel. The occasional use of fiction (and comical fiction, no less) as a source of historical investigation is in part a reflection of my love for the works of Jippensha Ikku, and in part a deliberate decision dictated by my belief that every documentary source is ultimately distorted in its own way. I am fully aware that the interest of commercial authors like Ikku never lay with a realistic rendition of Edo life but rather with creating farfetched situations that would amuse the readers and sell the books. At the same time, however, the very fact that many popular works of fiction courted the theme of travel speaks volumes about the role of movement as a pillar of Edo culture and about travel as a marketable commodity.

Above all, the view from within that this study wishes to present is achieved by using personal diaries as windows into the experiences of individual travelers. It is only recently that historians have turned to travel diaries as fully legitimate sources of investigation. Both Herbert Plutschow and Marcia Yonemoto, for example, have pointed at the degree of empirical curiosity and even scientific observation that defines some Edo period travelogues. In this study prominence is given to the ways in which travel narratives enabled their authors to affirm personal orders as they crossed extraordinary terrains, and to the ways in which such authors reimagined their roles and forged relations with space through the written word or through material items. By complementing the view from above of existing histories with a view from below and within, it becomes clear that the open road offered travelers across the social spectrum a platform to re-create themselves through a variety of means, some elaborate and some quick and easy. Warriors and literati, townspeople and farmers, men and women all looked at the road as a stage, and used it to fulfill personal goals and aspirations far more profound than a mere diversion.

All in all, “maps,” narratives, and tangible objects associated with movement reverberate with a chorus of fresh voices that compel us to adjust, or at the very least complement, some long-standing arguments about early modern travel. They show us that authority could be mediated and challenged without direct confrontation, that identities could be quietly re-created, that even government officials constructed personal hierarchies that stood in sharp contrast to the existing geopolitical order, and that ordinary travelers—including women—easily identified and successfully exploited specific areas
(the open road, the blank page, the body) where conventions could be invisibly yet effectively questioned without fear of repercussion or punishment.

No one document, of course, is more reliable or tells a greater truth than another. Every source, while opening a new window, necessarily forces the historian to look in certain directions only. A combination of access points, however, can approximate—without ever reaching it—an ideal 360-degree view: “Whatever one does, one always rebuilds the monument in his own way. But it is already something gained to have used the original stones.”