

Illegal Border Crossing: The Experience of Edo Period Travelers

A. A. Dudko

Abstract. Travel diaries of the Edo period contain records about border posts and descriptions of illegal border crossing. Travelers resorted to paying bribes, changing clothes, and going around border posts if they did not have a *tegata* document, or for other reasons. For example, Kobayashi Kuzufuru (1793–1880) in his diary *Gochi Mōde* describes how he and his wife, with the help of a guide, went around the Sekigawa border post twice because his wife did not have a *tegata*. Furukawa Koshoken (1726–1807) writes in his work *Saiyū Zakki* (1783) how, in order to travel the Satsuma province, he pretended to be a pilgrim. Sakata Kisen’o mentions in his diary of a journey from Edo to Izu, *Izu-no Kuni Futokoro Nikki* (1835), that he asked his friend who worked at the Hakone border post to let him through without making him wait in line. Diaries by female authors do not contain detailed descriptions of going around border posts, but they do mention hardships suffered during checks at border posts and the expenses caused by this. Despite the fact that one needs to consider the documents and diaries preserved at border posts, as well as documents of court proceedings in order to create the full picture of border crossings, the travel diaries of the Edo period give the general idea of the difficulties of travel and of how the travelers dealt with them.

Keywords: travel diaries, Edo period, border posts, *sekishonuke*, *sekishoyaburi*.

In the Edo period, more than 2,500 travel diaries were written, and many of them have not been transcribed yet.¹ The ones already introduced in scholarly circulation differ in their contents, style, and form. There are diaries with literary qualities typical of medieval travel diaries: a great role of *utamakura*, large amount of poetry, numerous references to *monogatari* tales (mainly *Genji Monogatari* and *Ise Monogatari*) and poetic anthologies. At the same time, there are many diaries which are travel records almost without any poetic component, created solely to describe the travel; they were written to be latter presented to the immediate circle of the author. The present article will focus on diaries of private travels (therefore, descriptions of *sankin kōtai* official trips are excluded) which mention illegal border crossings. It is worth noting that, among the diaries containing such mentions, the overwhelming majority are preserved as manuscripts, as printed editions were subject to strict censorship. One should also take into consideration the fact that one can obtain information about border crossings not only from travel diaries, but also from official documents, diaries, and records made at border posts,² as well as court acts and other documents. To create a full picture of an Edo period traveler crossing a border, one has to consider all the above-mentioned sources, but this article focuses exclusively on travel diaries.

One can most frequently find descriptions of illegal border crossings in the handwritten travel diaries of the 19th century. At the same time, it is not the case that, in the last third of the Edo period, it became easier to break the law and therefore the number of people secretly going around

¹ Itasaka Yoko, one of the best known students of travel diaries, counts ca. 2,500 diaries among those known and recorded in document databases, but believes that there are much more of them among the primary sources that have not been described and studied yet [Itasaka 2010, p. 4].

² Records and documents from the border posts of Hakone, Imagire, Hisui, etc., have been preserved, and they are included in respective collections. For example, there exists a collection of documents of the Hakone border post [Hakone Sekisho Kenkyūkai (ed.) 1973].

border posts increased. First, compared to the first half of the Edo period, there are more diaries preserved from the 19th century.³ Second, many of the diaries mentioning illegal border crossings, are only preserved as manuscripts, as the authors did not expect the text to go beyond the close circle of their friends and were not afraid to describe the border crossing in detail. At the same time, in the 17th – 18th centuries, the most numerous among the diaries preserved are printed books, which were subject to censorship [Fukai 1995, p. 174].

There are two expressions denoting an illegal border crossing: *sekisho nuke* 関所抜け and *sekisho yaburi* 関所破り, which usually mean going around a border post without presenting the necessary documents. Travel diaries mention the following three methods of illegal border crossing: a bribe (or other arrangement with a border post official), deception by means of changing clothes, and going around the border post (with or without a guide). Illegal border crossing was punished with execution by crucifixion, and, in the case of a forced offence, for example, in the case of a woman having been kidnapped, she was excluded from the house register and deprived of all rights, forced to work all her life where ordered [Kanamori 2002, p. 184].

There were several reasons for the travelers wanting to evade border posts. The primary one was the lack of necessary documents. In the Edo period, to cross a border, one needed a *tegata* 手形 document, which is often called an Edo passport. There were several types thereof, one of the most universal being *ōrai tegata* 往來手形, providing for crossing the borders to the destination point and back, as well as help in the case of difficulties arising during the trip.⁴ *Tegata* were issued to men as well

³ From the ca. 2,500 known diaries, about 200 have been transcribed and described. A large share of them are diaries from the 19th century. The edition [Tsumoto (ed.) 2007] contains 48 diaries. Analyzing the diaries of travels from the Tōhoku region to Kansai, Takahashi Yoichi concludes that the peak of diary writing happened in the 1840s. [Takahashi 2016, p. 61].

⁴ *Ōrai tegata* were the most useful type, but there were also *tegata* for a single border post, as well as *tegata* which were not a paper document, but a small

as women by their place of residence: in villages, by the village head or the head of the largest local temple, in cities – by district heads, in Edo – by the *bakufu rusui* 幕府留守居 [Kanamori 2002, p. 149]. In the *tegata* passport, one could most frequently find the following information: the name and the place of residence of the holder, the accompanying persons, the means of travel and the belongings taken on the trip, the destination, the reason for the trip. In the end of the document, there was the name and the position of the issuer and, in some cases, the signature or the stamp of the holder (it had to be repeated or presented at the border post). Men could obtain a *tegata* more easily than women, while men usually did not have to present one [Kanamori 2002, p. 149], while a woman could not pass a border post without a document.⁵ Besides the abovementioned information, the *tegata* issued to women could also contain the description of appearance, so that, during the check at the border post (*onna aratame* 女改め) it could also be confirmed. There were cases when women had their hair cut during the check if its length did not match that stated in the *tegata*. The *onna aratame* check was conducted by female officials of the border post. During it, the female travelers had their hair undone and were either thoroughly searched or had to undress. After that, the women were asked several questions to determine whether they had really received the *tegata* by themselves from the local authorities [Kanamori 2002, p. 143].

The difficulties of obtaining a *tegata* and thorough checks at border posts, which were tiring and humiliating for female travelers, were

wooden tablet – these were issued to farmers who had to regularly cross a border for working purposes. For more detail about *tegata* see [Shibata 2016].

⁵ There were cases when a woman could pass a border post without a thorough examination of the document. Imano Nobuo writes: “Only those who headed towards Kyoto were subject to thorough checks, but those who were going to enter Edo could pass a border post without a *tegata*. This applied to women as well. ...as for the women heading for Edo, it was enough to hear from the man accompanying them (women did not travel alone) their name and destination, but there were no other examinations. [Imano 1986, p. 125].

the main reasons for women evading border posts. A male traveler accompanied by a woman also often tried to avoid checks and opted for illegal ways to cross a border.

A detailed account of crossing a border, during which the travelers chose to go around due to the absence of necessary documents, is contained in the *Gochi Mōde* 五智まうで diary, written by a *haikai* poet Kobayashi Kuzufuru 小林葛古 (1793–1880). He was traveling from his native Shinano (now the Nagano Prefecture) to Echigo (now the Niigata Prefecture) in order to visit the Gochikokubunji Temple 五智国分寺 (also known as Echigokokubunji 越後国分寺) together with his wife in 1832. On the way to Echigo, the spouses faced the Sekigawa border post. The author describes its crossing in the following way.

18th day of the Fourth Moon, the Day of the Wooden Sheep. Clear.

There is one *ri* from Nojiri to Sekigawa. According to the instructions of the innkeeper, we got up with the chickens, ate rice with *chazuke* tea. As the innkeeper was extremely nice, we gave him a hundred *mon* tip, and he did not charge us for the cup of sake and the candle that we had asked for at night, and he also said that he would give twelve *mon* from the tip to the guide, and lent us a lamp. <...> The guide went ahead of us. Until Sekigawa, the road went downhill, and there were lots of stones under our feet. In the Kumasaka village, we extinguished the lamp, and when we were crossing the bridge towards the border post, we went without using our canes, not to mention that we were not talking. To the right of the gate there was a fence door, passing through which we went out towards some fields. One could not see well in the dark, but we noticed eight or nine people, most likely from Sekigawa, who were probably collecting fees from the guides. From there, we passed behind the houses, reached the center of the Sekigawa inn without stopping,

and, overjoyed, gave the guide sixteen *mon* for sake.
[Yaba (ed.) 1984, pp. 227-228].

That is, Kuzufuru and his wife made an arrangement about the guide with the innkeeper the day before, left before dawn and, following the guide, crossed the bridge towards the Sekigawa border post as quietly as possible, after which they went around it, thus entering the village behind the post. There, Kuzufuru noticed local residents who were looking for travelers with guides like himself – to charge them money for silence. The residents of villages near border posts had to report strangers crossing the border illegally under pain of death [Kanamori 2002, p. 184].

On his way back, Kuzufuru uses the services of a guide again to pass Sekigawa.

22nd day of the Fourth Moon, Day of the Earth Boar.
Clear, rain after noon.

As before, we stayed at Akakura. There was forty-eight *cho* to Sekigawa, so we intended to leave in the evening and stay for the night in Sekigawa, but we met four maids from Eshshū⁶ and one man, who advised us to band together and go together on the Suginozawa road to Kashiwabara following the directions of a guide. We asked the innkeeper for a guide, gave him thirty-two *mon*, left the inn at half past six and, with the whole group, reached the Suginozawa road. This road leads from Akakura past the Suginozawa village and across the Sekigawa river to the Takazawa village, which is in Shinshū,⁷ and this village is a branch of Nojiri. <...> We crossed the Sekigawa river using a pedestrian bridge. It was just a shaking log leading to the opposite bank, so I gave my hand to the maids and helped them to cross

⁶ Eshshū 越州 – the lands of the provinces Echigo 越後 and Echizen 越前.

⁷ Shinshū 信州 – the Shinano Province 信濃.

it. One cannot describe in words how dangerous it was. And there the guide left us near the bridge and went back. I thought that he would lead us to Kashiwabara, so I was very surprised. [Yaba (ed.) 1984, p. 231].

First, Kuzufuru and his wife, having met the same travelers as themselves, decided to take one guide for them all. But the guide led them to the Sekigawa river and left them there. Then, Kuzufuru and his wife had to look for another guide.

Having crossed the river, we reached the Takazawa village, which is in Shinshū. Here and there one could see houses. We did not know where to go, so we started asking around, but the people did not let us anywhere and only told us to go back the way we had come there. While we were pleading to guide us, more people came from the fields, and they also did not let us in anywhere. As far as we understood, usually all those passing along this road were reprimanded. We were told that many were passing Akakura to see the opening of the Zenkōji holy site⁸, and because of that few people stayed at Nojiri or Sekigawa. Therefore, the rope bridge from Nojiri had been cut and strict orders had been given to not let anyone pass. Takazawa is a branch of Nojiri, so it was difficult to make an excuse that the order had not reached there. Of course, that was so, but going back to Akakura was no easy matter either, so we thought a little about how to trick our way through and we asked to show the way to the Akagawa village. The person whom we asked was afraid of being noticed and said: “Go ahead, and I will follow you, and this is how I will guide you”, and so we reached Niken’ya, after which we went

⁸ Zenkōji 善光寺 – one of the most famous temples in Shinano.

across the fields and meadows, passed through groves. We were sneaking, drawing our *kasa* straw hats lower, we somehow covered some odd one *ri* and reached the Akagawa village. This is how we made our way there and back again. The guide taught us: “If they start asking you questions, tell them that you spent the night in Sekigawa and crossed through Oodani”. And, indeed, in Akagawa we were asked: “Along what road did you cross?”, and we answered as we had been taught without getting caught. We gave the guide a hundred *mon*. [Yaba (ed.), 1984, pp. 231-232].

Men had an easier time crossing a border than women: at many border posts, the *tegata* document was not required, and it was not necessary to go through a search. But some provinces were difficult to get into. For example, Furukawa Koshoken 古川古松軒 (1726–1807) writes in his diary *Saiyūzakki* 西遊雜記 (1783) how he had to resort to a trick when crossing a border post leading to the Satsuma Province.

When you enter the lands of the Satsuma lord, at the border post, you have your luggage checked, and also, you are not let to pass if you do not have whole three golden *bu*⁹ – this is called money for a show (*misegane*). I believe this is done out of caution: if a traveler suddenly dies from illness or falls ill, he will not force his native province to spend money on him. As I have once heard that a regular traveler could not simply visit all corners of this province, I temporarily dressed as

⁹ *Kaneko sanbu* 金子三分 – three *bu* golden coins. Sato Ken'ichi suggests to assume that a golden *ryo* is 75,000 yen, and then one *bu* is about 20,000 yen, while three *bu* are 60,000 [Sato 2005, p. 53]. Even if there is a mistake in the calculations, the takeaway is that, in order to enter the Satsuma lands, one had to have a substantial sum of money.

a *rokujūrokubu*¹⁰ pilgrim, and this is why, at the border post, the guards let me through without saying anything. But, at the same time, having checked my permission to pass and return,¹¹ they issued me the permissions described below, which had to be shown in all villages to their heads and elders, so that they could make records about the month, day, and hour when I stopped there and let me pass through.

Further, Koshoken copies the contents of his *ōrai tegata* and the records made by local officials when he stayed in various villages. Upon finding out that he would not be permitted to travel freely, Koshoken decides to dress as a pilgrim and crosses the border without any problem. Dressing as monks and pilgrims to pass a border post freely was a rather frequent practice. The most well-known example from literature is a scene from the *Tale of Yoshitsune*, which eventually became a *kabuki* play and was extremely popular in the Edo period – *Kanjinchō* 勧進帳. There, Minamoto-no Yoshitsune, accompanied by Benkei and other followers, pass a border post after dressing as monks. Not only men changed clothes. There are known cases of attempts to take girls and women through border posts without documents after dressing them in male clothes [Kanamori 2002, p. 184].

A thorough inspection of women during a border crossing took time. If there were several women, the travelers who arrived at the post after them had to wait for a long time. Records about this are contained in the *Izu no Kuni Futokoro Nikki* diary (1853), written by Sakata Kisen'o¹². The

¹⁰ The *rokujūrokubu* 六十六部の修験者 pilgrims visited sixty-six temples (one in each province) and, in each of these, left a “Lotus Sutra” copied by them.

¹¹ *Ōrai no shōmon* 往来の証文, in this case, what is meant is an *ōrai tegata*.

¹² The title of the diary, the name of the author and the date of composition are quoted from [Plutschow 2006, p. 26]. Unfortunately, the author could not find this diary in the original version, so the title of the diary and the name of the author are not given in Japanese.

diary and a translation of a record from it are provided in a monograph on Edo period travel diaries by Herbert Plutschow [Plutschow 2006, p. 26]: Kisen'ō intends to cross the Hakone border post, but sees a crowd in front of it. It turns out that the line was formed because it took the border officials a long time to examine women. Kisen'ō had a friend named Nomura working at the border post, who made an arrangement with the head of the border post and helped Kisen'ō and his fellow travelers to cross the border without waiting in line and without a search.

There are many mentions of border posts in travel diaries, and some of them are very detailed. It is worth noting that men mention border posts less frequently and often do not describe crossing them at all, while women lament about the border posts and the inconveniences caused by them throughout their entire diaries [Itasaka 2002, p. 99]. Border posts were seen as one of the main obstacles in a travel. In female diaries, it is already in the foreword that authors lament their destiny, mentioning the difficulties at border posts. In the beginning of *Kōshimichi no ki* 庚子道の記 (*Kanoemichi no ki*, 1720), authored by *shirabyōshi* Takejo 武女 (years of life unknown), one can find the following: “In old manuscripts, it is written that women do not cross borders” (*onna wa sakai o koezu to koso furuki fumi ni mo ie*)¹³, and, in the diary by Tanaka Ai 田中愛 (1781-1834), titled *Michi no ki* 道の記 (1827), this phrase turned into: “old manuscripts say that women do not enter border posts” (*onna wa seki o izu to furuki fumi ni wa iedo*)¹⁴. In *Tōkai kikō* 東海紀行 (1681), a female diary probably best known for its description of border crossing, Inoue Tsū (井上通) writes:

We stopped at Arai. We showed the document we had received in Naniwa, in which, for a description of a girl wearing a kimono with cuts on the sides,¹⁵ the word

¹³ 女は境を越えずとこそ古き書にもいへ [Furuya (ed.) 1979, vol. 3., p. 205].

¹⁴ 女は関を出ずと古き文にはいへど [Maeda (ed.) 2001, p. 180].

¹⁵ *Waki akitaru o* – or *wakiake* 脇あけ – a word for a kimono with long sleeves, *furisode*, which was used in the Edo period [Furuya (ed.) 1979, vol. 3, p. 296].

“girl” had to be used, but, out of ignorance, there was just “woman” written there. And so, because it was just “woman” written there, they did not let us through, and we returned to the inn with empty hands. [Furuya (ed.) 1979, vol. 1., p. 296].

As a result, Tsū and her companions had to wait for six days near the border post, until a messenger returned from Naniwa (Osaka) with a corrected document.

In *Tabi no inochige* 旅の命毛 (1805), a diary by Saigū Ayako 三枝斐子 (1759-?) full of sadness due to the hardships and lack of freedom during the travel, there is the following mention of a border post: “When the firebird bowed towards the west, we passed the border post. The border post officials were endlessly droning about how women had to behave”. [Furuya (ed.) 1979, vol. 3., p. 371].

Therefore, it is no surprise that female travelers did their best to avoid border posts. In the *Various Records about the Road to the Ise Shrine* (*Sangū dōchū sho yōki* 参宮道中諸用記, 1862)¹⁶, a collection of travel records by Konno Oito 今野於以登 (years of life unknown), which sometimes resembles a book of expenses, there are many mentions of expenses on guides who helped to go around border posts. For example: “forty *mon* – the Sekigawa border post, a fee for a guide for women”, or a record about the above-mentioned Nojiri: “thirty six *mon* – from Nojiri, at night, Sekigawa, a fee for a guide”. [Shiba 2005, p. 235] Oito does not describe going around border posts in detail, but a diary by Kiyokawa Hachirō 清川八郎 (1830-1863), *Saiyūsō* 西遊草 (1855), describing a travel to Ise, contains a record about girls who were so scared by stories of examinations at a border post that they decided to pay for going around it:

¹⁶ Kanamori Atsuko writes in detail about the diary and about women crossing the border illegally in [Kanamori 2001].

At night, we were visited by a man who also stayed at our inn. He was accompanying thirteen girls, who were heading from Katagai, which is in Echigo, on a pilgrimage to Zenkōji. He brought some sweets famous in Katagai. “The people here are heartless and evil, the hawkers are talking out of the top of their heads, and now the girls are afraid of everything. I cannot calm them down by myself. Could you please help me tomorrow and walk with us at least for one day”, he asked politely, and I answered: “No big deal, don’t worry”, and agreed to accompany them. For the girls, it was their first travel, and that is why, having heard the hawkers’ tales, they were scared to goosebumps. That’s what tales are for – you laugh at them and you forget them, but the girls were not yet used to travels, and I became sorry for them. [Koyamatsu (ed.) 1969, p. 39].

Travel diaries, especially those that were written not for print, but for the family and friends of the author, often contain mentions and, less frequently, detailed descriptions of border crossings. They also describe other difficulties occurring along the way, interesting situations that happened to travelers, things and customs that were curious to the authors. Edo period travel diaries can be seen not only as a source of information about the trip and not only as literary work if the diary contains a poetic component, but they can also be used to study the culture of the Edo period.

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DUDKO Anastasiya Andreevna – master’s degree programme, Kyoto University.

E-mail: stacypanther@gmail.com

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