

Learning from *Michiyuki*: An Anthro-spatial-temporal Journey in Japanese Arts and Architecture

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This paper analyzes the anthro-spatial-temporal relationships seen in the Japanese concept of *michiyuki* in poetry recital (from 7C) and theatrical performance (from 17C), while also exhibiting the process of *michiyuki* to reveal its nature and its effects. It then examines *Shoin*-style architecture (from 17C) to demonstrate that *michiyuki* exists in architecture as well, through a process parallel to that seen in the arts, but with some notable differences.

Michiyuki means a journey from one place to another.¹ The term has two components: *michi* refers to a road as a space, and *yuki* means going, a continuous human movement during traveling. Together, *michiyuki* links three elements—human beings, space, and time—into a single unified concept. It was first established in the seventh century as a genre of poetry and poetic recitation, later appearing in performing arts during the early modern period.² *Michiyuki* in architectural contexts has been discussed only sporadically,³ and its anthro-spatial-temporal aspect has never been fully addressed. To help fill these gaps, I conduct case studies of representative examples from three fields:

- Poetry: a Kyoto-Nagoya segment of the *Kaido Kudari* chapter in *The Tale of the Heike* (13 C) recited by Tsutomu Imai⁴
- Kabuki: the entrance scene of *Sukeroku* in the *Sukeroku Yukari-no Edo-zakura* (18C–) performed by Danjuro Ichikawa⁵
- *Shoin* architecture: *Shofuso* in Philadelphia⁶ by Junzo Yoshimura (1954) based on Kojo-in (1601)

Michiyuki poetry recital

In a *michiyuki* poetry recital, the traveler is a character in the epic. The performer, while sitting, recites the poem almost as if singing it. Both the performer and the audience follow the journey solely through voicing and hearing it, without any visual cues. (Traditionally, *The Tale of the Heike* is recited by a blind traveling monk (Figure 1.) who plays Japanese lute (*Biwa*) to accompany his performance.) *Kaido Kudari* depicts the journey of Shigehira Taira from Kyoto to Kamakura after his clan's defeat in war. My close analysis of its Kyoto-Nagoya segment reveals the following steps that time, space, and human beings (i.e., traveling character, reciter, audience) take

¹ Hattori, Yukio. "道行." In *日本大百科全書* [Michiyuki]. Tokyo: Shogakkan, 1994.

² Hattori, Yukio. "道行." In *国史大辞典* [Michiyuki]. Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan Inc., 1979.

³ Isozaki, Arata. *Japan-Ness in Architecture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006.

⁴ Unknown. *Heike Monogatari no Ongaku*. Imai, Tsutomu, Koji Inokawa, and Kogo Tateyama. 1991. Nippon Columbia Co., Ltd. (CD)

⁵ *Sukeroku Yukari-no Edo-Zakura*. Directed by Nagayama, Takeomi. Shochiku, 2006.

⁶ Originally built for MOMA (1954) as Japanese Exhibition House and then relocated to Philadelphia in 1956.

together in influencing the imagined sensory and emotional journey experienced by the reciter and his audience:



Figure 1: *Biwa Hoshi in Painting of the Holy Man Ippen: Scroll 6, Section 3 (Detail)*. 1299. By En-i, fl. late 13C. (Colors on silk; 38 x 988 cm. Kyoto, Japan: Kankikoji.)

- a. **Space and time shrink:** Actual traveled time (about three days) and distance (130 km) for Taira shrink by being represented in poem with texts (a space of four lines).
- b. **Their density increased:** Into the shrunken space and time, an excessive number of places (ten) and of Taira's movements (seven) are compressed, thereby increasing the spatial and temporal density experienced by the reciter and his audience.
- c. **Space and human experiences merged to charge, expand and be embodied:** Each place name and movement by Taira appears alternately in the poem, which merges them with one another. This helps the reciter and audience visualize and re-enact Taira's first-person spatial experiences, charging and accumulating their imagined spaces over the travel, and expands the previously shrunken travel distance. The absence of visual cues amplifies this effect, and the extremely slow recitation also expands time. Through this charging and expansion of the once-shrunken space and time, the reciter and audience relive and embody the experience of Taira's journey.
- d. **Added temporal-spatial depth:** In addition to the changing first-person perspectives of Taira, the poem features the transcendence of landscape over a moment (a rising lark), seasons (waves in spring), and history (the scene of a well-known love story). These landscapes, by cutting across time, add depth to the spatial-temporal experience of reciter and audience alike.
- e. **Relived emotional journey:** Through the accumulation of successive instances (b) in which the performer and audience embody Taira's sensual and physical traveling

experiences (c), including even those he imagines in different seasons and historical moments (d), they also relive his emotional journey to reach the same mindset as Taira when he arrives at his destination. The poem ends with the words “sadly remember.” This is the only part that directly tells us how Taira feels.

Michiyuki theatrical performance

In *michiyuki* of a *kabuki* theatrical performance, the traveler is a character in a drama/epic. The actor follows the character’s journey by enacting it while listening to the song (a musical recitation of the epic) performed by musicians who are hidden from the actor and audience. The audience follows the journey by watching the actor and listening to the song. The actor always plays the traveling scenes on the *hanamichi*, a bridge-like stage dedicated to *michiyuki* scenes (Figure 2).⁷ It has no stage set and connects the back of the audience seats with the main stage around one third of the distance from stage-right. In the story of *Sukeroku Yukari-no Edo-zakura*, the male protagonist Sukeroku travels from the outskirts of Edo (Tokyo) to Yoshiwara, a red-light quarter where his lover awaits. The actor performs this *michiyuki* by entering the *hanamichi* from the rear, and always surrounded by the audience.



Figure 2: Danjuro Ichikawa as Sukeroku on the *hanamichi* stage (left image with a *mie* pose) in *Sukeroku Yukari-no Edo-Zakura*. Directed by Nagayama, Takeomi. Shochiku, 2006.

My analysis of the scene identifies five steps that are mostly similar to, yet slightly different from—especially in (c)—those in the poetry recital. Time, space, and human beings together create a dense series of first-person experiences for the actor and audience to embody these experiences and relive the character’s emotional journey. The challenge posed by this theatrical art form is one of overcoming the shrinkage of time and space. The five steps are as follows:

⁷ *Hanamichi* was established as a permanent stage piece in Kabuki theaters in the middle of 18 C (Kawatate 1998)

The actual time-space traveling distance for Sukeroku shrinks by being materialized as a *hanamichi* stage (a). The shrunken time and space are made denser for the actor and audience by numerous places (ten) sung about by musicians as well as the actor's repetitive back-and-forth movements across the *hanamichi* (b). The sung landscapes and the actor's movements are simultaneously and repeatedly presented to the audience, thereby merging them together and helping the actor and audience to both visualize and embody Sukeroku's first-person spatial experiences in succession; this charges and expands the previously shrunken travel distance. For the audience, this embodiment effect is amplified by the actor's frequent and elaborate poses of *mie* (act-of-looking), the absence of visual cues (stage set) on the stage, and physical proximity to the actor. The slow recitations and movements also expand time (c). The recited lines include allusions to landscapes of different seasons (flower blossoms, snow) as well as Sukeroku's kimono and accessories from his previous social status (Samurai), both of which cut across time and deepen the traveling experience of the actor and audience (d). Through the process from (a) to (d), the audience relives Sukeroku's emotional journey. They reach the same mindset as Sukeroku upon his arrival at Yoshiwara, where his lover is. The scene ends with one of his few dialogues that explicitly show his emotion: "if it is for you, if it is for you" (e).

***Michiyuki* in architecture**

Because a spatial component is essential for *michiyuki*, this concept can also be engaged in discussing architecture. However, *michiyuki* has never established itself as an architectural genre or style. In this section, I examine the Shofu-so Japanese House and Garden (Figure 3 &4) to determine whether *michiyuki* exists in it—and, if so, how. I use video footage of Shofu-so recorded from a visitor's first-person perspective during the live workshop conducted in 2021.⁸ It has an entrance garden and a Japanese garden,⁹ both of which are included in the discussion.¹⁰ The traveling path is from the gate to the main house, through the main house, out to the garden, and eventually to the teahouse.¹¹ The traveler is a guest. Because there is no audience to perform for, if *michiyuki* exists, it is only for the traveler himself.

⁸ *Michiyuki: Japanese Time-Space Concept for Mindfulness of Everyone Everyday. Lecture by Yoko Kawai and Takaya Kurimoto.* Japan America Society of Greater Philadelphia, 2021.

⁹ Designed by Tansai Sano in 1958

¹⁰ In Japanese architecture and garden, the former is considered to be accompaniment to the latter.

¹¹ a common path taken by the tea ceremony guests

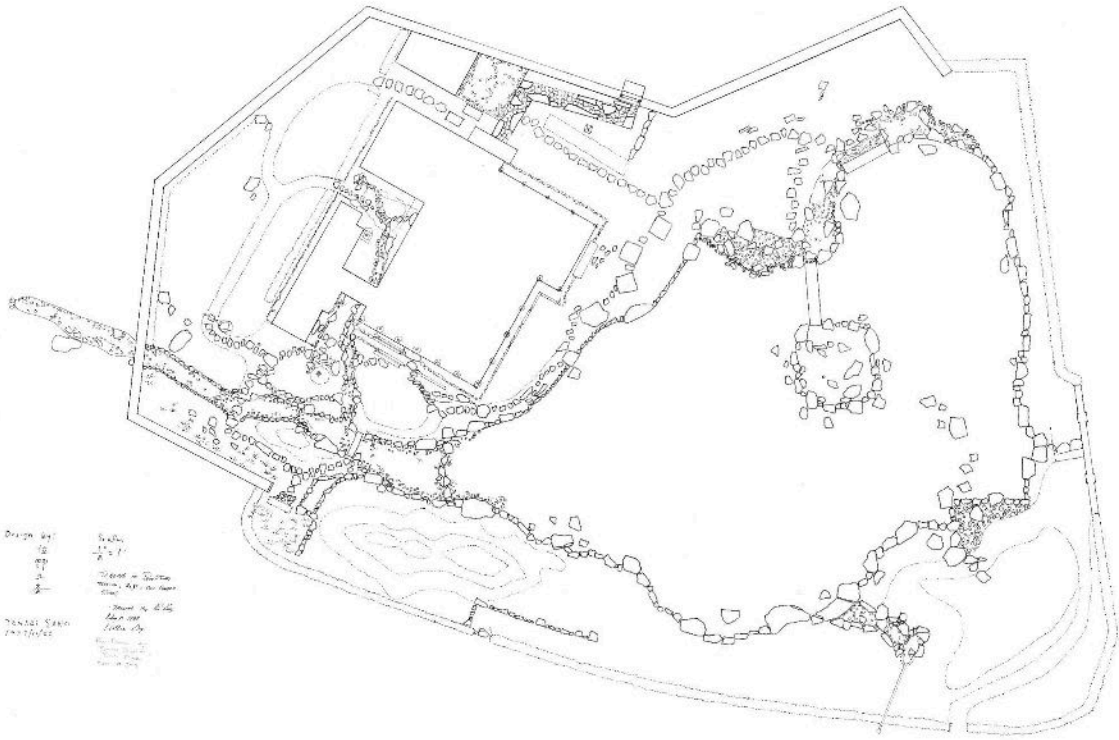


Figure 3: Shofu-so Garden Plan by Tansai Sano (1957) Courtesy to the Shofuso Japanese Cultural Center

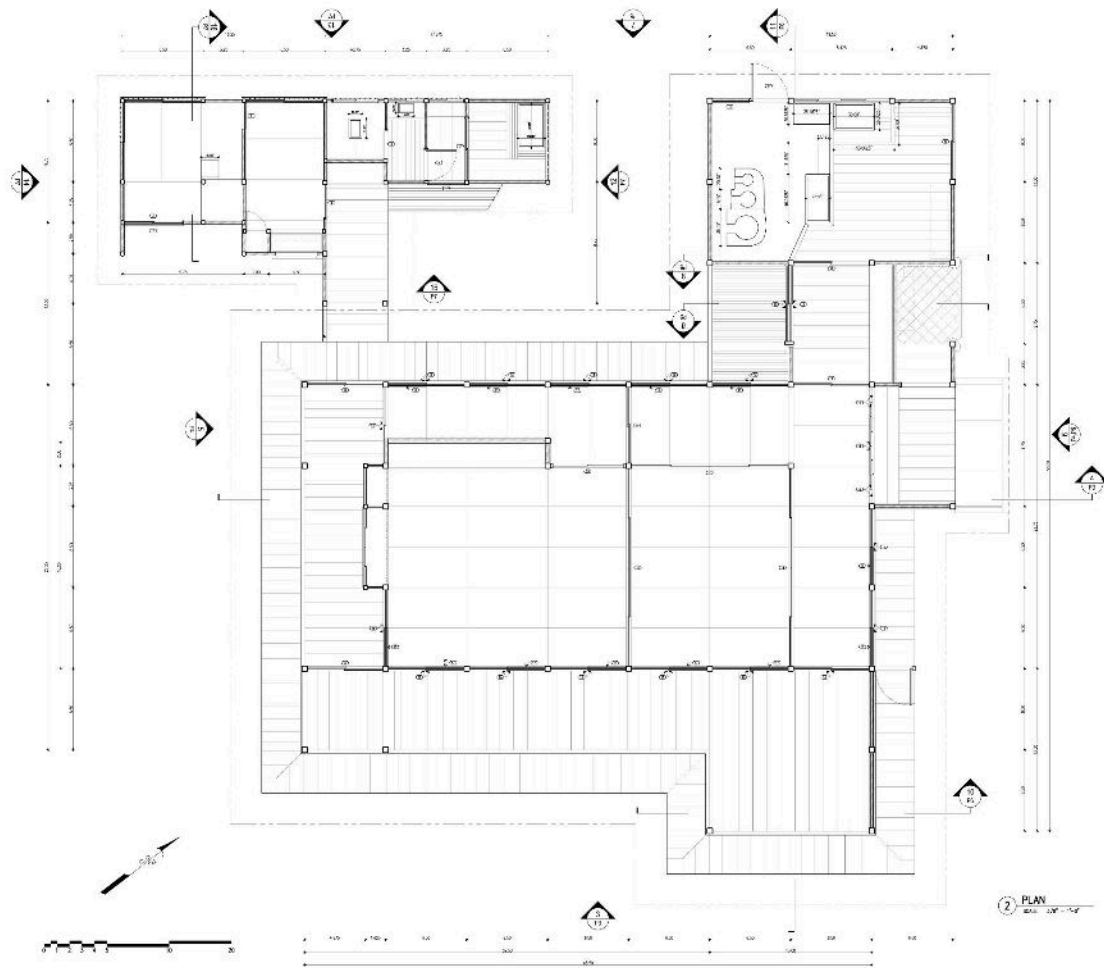


Figure 3: *Shofu-so Floor Plan (as surveyed in 2013, originally designed by Junzo Yoshimura in 1953), Courtesy to the Shofuso Japanese Cultural Center*

My analysis reveals that *michiyuki* indeed exists in Shofu-so and that the anthro-spatial-time collaboration occur in the same five steps as seen in the poetry and *kabuki*. However, core differences emerge in that there is no audience to relate the story of a journey. This usually implies that there is no story; however, I find that Shofu-so has a series of spatial-temporal instruments or mechanisms that “prescribe” a story of the journey, including an emotional one, to be mindfully lived by the visitor. The identified five steps are as follows:

The ideal time-space distance between the gate to the teahouse (a distance from a city to a mountain)¹² shrinks to about 60 meters due the site’s urban setting **(a)**. The shrunken time and space are made denser for the visitor with many small places (at least 12) separated by elements (walls, doors, trees, thresholds) that prevent him from seeing through to other places or making him aware of the change of places, as well as with his horizontal, vertical, and limb movements while passing through these places **(b)**. Each of the small places is perceived solely by the

¹² The desirable atmosphere of a teahouse is that of a mountain where the noise of the city is so far away. This imagined ideal atmosphere is called “*Shichu no Sankyo*” (Mountain living within the city).

traveler's sight and other senses, and this spatial perception continuously changes along with his movements. The traveler's spatial and bodily experiences merge while these places appear and his movements change in close succession. This charges and expands the previously shrunken space-time distance for the traveler, being helped by longer walking distance due to the maze-like layout and by his slower speed, which is effectively imposed by the spatial conditions (entrance steps, narrow and dark hallway, doors to slide open, stepping stones) **(c)**. The small places often contain natural or live elements that remind the traveler of different seasons (e.g., remembering, in summer, the blossoming tree back in spring) and different points in history (e.g., with a stone arrangement featuring a historical anecdote). This deepens the traveling experience **(d)**, and the process from **(a)** to **(d)** choreographs and enriches the traveler's emotional journey. **(e)**

Conclusion and Future Studies

The case studies show that in poetry recital and *kabuki* performance, *michiyuki* is created through collaboration or coordination among human beings, space, and time. *Michiyuki* reveals itself and its effects in five steps: The space and time of the original traveling distance shrinks due to the art form **(a)**. Excessive numbers of spaces and human movements are inserted to increase the density of space and time **(b)**. Spatial experiences and human movements are merged to become a succession of first-person spatial experiences, which helps the performer and audience to charge and embody the traveling experiences, thus expanding the once-shrunken space and time **(c)**. The spatial references to the different seasons and time deepen the sense of enacting for the performer and audience **(d)**. The whole process helps the performer and audience to relive the traveler's emotional journey.

The study also identifies the five similar steps of *michiyuki* in Shofu-so, shoin-style architecture. It differs, however, by its lack of an audience to relate the traveler's spatial, temporal, physical, sensual, and emotional journey. All the enrichment that *michiyuki* brings is for the visitor alone.

Further steps must be taken to elucidate and confirm the last case study and to render the findings more generally useful. The first such step would be to re-examine Shofu-so with greater precision and detail in order to clarify the spatial triggers during the travel, as well as the emotional transformation of the traveler. Spatial constructs of many "places" on the path—including light, sound, and air—will be recorded, and the human movements and emotional status will be traced or measured. A further step would be to investigate how the *michiyuki* concept became instilled in architecture and why we can still sense it in contemporary Japanese architecture.¹³ In doing so, I will determine whether the cultural background is necessary for a person to fully experience *michiyuki* effects and for any space to adapt it. I intend to conduct these studies in the hope of showing whether—and if so, and how—contemporary architects can use *michiyuki* strategies in their designs for visitors' emotional enrichment.

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¹³ For example, Tadao Ando's Children's Museum, Himeji, Hyogo (1989)

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