

## Japan's Modern Postal Service as a Reorganization of the Early Modern Post-Station System

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## Japan's Modern Postal Service as a Reorganization of the Early Modern Post-Station System

ABE Akio

*Bunkyo Women's University*

1. The Formation of the Japanese Postal Service
2. The Established Position: "Importation" and "Transplantation" Theories
3. Japan's Modern Postal Service as a "Reorganized *Shukueki* System"
4. The Separation of Transport and Communication as the Organizing Principle behind the Reorganization of the *Shukueki* System
5. The Characteristics and the Application of the *Shukueki* System
  - 1) *Shukueki* system directly under *Bakufu* and Restoration government
  - 2) The *sukegō* system
  - 3) Communication systems in the domains and prefectures
  - 4) *Machi-bikyaku* (private) transport and communication
  - 5) *Shukueki* rates for ordinary people
  - 6) The combination of transport and communication under the *shukueki* system
6. The Separation of Transport and Communication under the *Shukueki* System
  - 1) The separation of transport and communication along the Tokaido
  - 2) The separation of transport and communication nationwide

### 1. THE FORMATION OF THE JAPANESE POSTAL SERVICE

This paper treats the emergence of a modern postal service in Japan, and it stresses two points. First, it proposes that the modern postal service was not an institutional complex that was imported into Japan from the West, but rather, it was primarily a reorganization of the *shukueki* (post-station) system that had developed in Japan during the Edo period (1600–1868). I first posited this new perspective in a 1994 paper, "A Study of Postmarks (*kiban-in*): The Formative Process of the Modern Postal Service" [ABE 1994], in which I took issue with the position that has been conventionally accepted for more than a century. That is, an experimental postal service started between Tokyo and Osaka on March 1, 1871. Nationwide service started on July 1st the next year. These events have been said to mark the start of the modern postal service in Japan. For more than 120 years since then, the Japanese postal service has been regarded as largely an importation or transplantation of Western postal institutions. This chapter expands upon my

arguments in my earlier paper against foreign importation and for an indigenous origin of the modern postal service.

Secondly, this paper considers what might have been the basic organizational principle behind the transformation of the shukueki system to the postal service. There must have existed numerous policy ambitions for this reorganization in the actions and efforts by the postal authorities at the time. However, I believe the most important of these to have been the aim of separating transport and communication. I believe that my 1994 paper would benefit from more elaboration on this point at this occasion.

## 2. THE ESTABLISHED POSITION: "IMPORTATION" AND "TRANSPLANTATION" THEORIES

The generally accepted view on the formation of the Japanese postal service is that it was essentially an import or transplant from the West. A typical example of this is the official "History of the Postal Service" (*Teishin Jigyōshi*) [TEISHINSHŌ 1940], edited by the Ministry of Communications (*Teishinshō*). Consider for example the titles and sections of its opening chapters on the origin of mailing and the founding of the postal service:

- Chapter 1: The Origin of the Postal Service
  - Section 1: Communication System
  - Section 2: Lessons from Various Systems
- Chapter 2: Founding the Postal Service
  - Section 1: Japanese Founding Fathers
  - Section 2: Planning
  - Section 3: Founding the Service

In brief, the first section of Chapter One deals with the history of the indigenous mail courier horse relay (*tenma*) and mail courier (*hikyaku*) systems from ancient times to the Edo period. The second section begins with how strange the Japanese mailing situation must have struck the visiting foreigners from advanced countries in the late Edo to early Meiji period, then goes on to the reports on the Western postal services that were prepared by Fukuzawa Yukichi, Kurimoto Joun, and the fact-finding mission to the West headed by Iwakura Tomomi in France, Great Britain and the United States in the early Meiji period.

Chapter two discusses the important figures Maejima Hisoka, Sugiura Yuzuru, and Shibusawa Eiichi, and argues that the true founding father of the Japanese postal service was none other than Maejima, who served as Principle Officer of Posts (*ekitei gonnokami*). Its second section introduces Maejima's "Postal Service Inauguration Plan" of May 1870, and the chapter concludes with a depiction of the inauguration of the postal service between Tokyo and Osaka on March 1, 1871.

An unsuspecting reader would assume from the book's narrative that although Japan historically had postal systems, they were inferior to the ones used in the

advanced countries, and that the Japanese postal system became viable only after the latest system from the West had been introduced.<sup>1)</sup>

The transplantation model is similar to this, holding that the modern Japanese postal system is but one of many modern industries, such as textile, iron works, railroad, mining, shipbuilding, machine industries, chemistry, printing, telegraph, and telephone, that were wholeheartedly transplanted, as it were, from the nursery of the West.<sup>2)</sup>

There is also the philatelist perspective that does acknowledge the existence of the hikyaku system before the modern postal service, and that these postal systems were actually very much alike. This is because philatelists cherish the existing collection of mailed paraphernalia called the “entire” collection,<sup>3)</sup> and among these, they especially value the hikyaku letters. However, it seems to me that this view falls short of acknowledging that the modern system was a reorganization of the Edo system.<sup>4)</sup>

I might add that one of the reasons that have kept this view dominant for so long is Maejima's terminology of a “new mail system” (*shinshiki yūbin*).<sup>5)</sup> The words “new system” must have given the impression that mailing was indeed a new system, and although the word “yūbin” is said to have been used in the Edo period, to most, it was a coinage by Maejima. In his autobiography, Maejima boasted that the “inauguration of the postal service was my proposal,” and that he “named it *yūbin*” [ICHINO 1920: 95, 96]. It was thus natural for the public to think that “new system mail” was among the things brought in from the West for civilization and enlightenment.

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- 1) The volume, *Yūsei Hyakunenshi* (One Hundred Years of the Postal Service), also edited by the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (*Yūseishō*) and published in 1961, has a similar organization in the opening chapters and sections. It provides more details than the earlier volume, *Teishin Jigyōshi*, but its underlying thesis is that of importation.
  - 2) See for example, Tōyama Yoshihiro, *Gendai Kōkigyō Sōron* (A General Treatise on Contemporary Public Corporations), page 107 [TŌYAMA 1987].
  - 3) “Entire” here is a philatelic term, denoting the complete set of a mailed letter, including the envelope. In fact, though, parts of mail, such as the envelope and postcards are categorized as “entire.”
  - 4) See Yamazaki Yoshiyuki, *Hikyaku: Bakumatsu Meiji no Minkan Tsūshin* (Public Communication of Late Edo to Meiji Period) [YAMAZAKI 1980]; Ninomiya Hisashi, *Nihon no Hikyakubin: Yūbin eno Jokyoku* (Japanese Hikyaku Mail as Prelude to the Postal Service) [NINOMIYA 1987]; and Kawai Kiyotoshi, 1991 Phila-Nippon Presented Collection.
  - 5) The words, “new system mail” first appeared in the joint conference document of the Ministries of Civil Affairs and Finance in June 1871.

### 3. JAPAN'S MODERN POSTAL SERVICE AS A "REORGANIZED SHUKUEKI SYSTEM"

As against this view, I have postulated in my papers and books that the modern Japanese postal service was a reorganization of the shukueki system [ABE 1993; 1994]. The works that have greatly helped in thinking about this issue are those by Yabuuchi Yoshihiko [YABUCHI 1975], Yamamoto Hirofumi [YAMAMOTO 1972], and Amano Yasuharu [AMANO 1986].

*Nihon Yūbin Sōgyōshi* by Yabuuchi was very instructive for me, particularly on the history of official document delivery systems through the ages [YABUCHI 1975: 62–64]. Yabuuchi pointed out that when the expressing of official documents, which had been delegated to regular delivery business (*jō-bikyaku don'ya*),<sup>6)</sup> was reassigned in June 1871 to the "*tenmajo shukuekibin*" which was based on the system of *shukueki tsugi-bikyaku*,<sup>7)</sup> this marked the beginning of the Tokaido new system mail.

Yamamoto's *Ishinki no Kaidō to Yusō*, which collected all of his published papers after *Nippon Tsūin Kabushikigaisha: A Company History*, was helpful in understanding how the mail courier horse relay stations (*tenmajo*) were first reorganized into a transport company and then restructured into a larger parent transport company, before ultimately dying out. And the paper by Amano about the Onomichi area at the beginning of the Meiji postal service clarified the reasons why the shukueki system, which had continued for several hundred years, was no longer viable.

I must admit, however, that the most helpful sources for my position have been my own studies of postmarks (*kiban-in*),<sup>8)</sup> which have come to constitute the bulk

6) Hikyaku that used the *Bakufu* delivery facility of *shukueki don'ya* were called *tsugi-bikyaku* (see footnote 7). *Daimyo-bikyaku* was used by the domains. These two constituted, as it were, the official hikyaku, as opposed to *jō-bikyaku don'ya* among the private *machi-bikyaku*. *Machi-bikyaku* started when samurai who were stationed away from their families at Osaka Castle and at Nijō Castle in Kyoto sought to send mail to their home residences. *Machi-bikyaku* contracted the delivery, dressed in samurai apparel. They delivered goods and documents for ordinary people as well. Born of convenience, they gradually formed a guild (*nakama*), paid fees (*myōgakin*) to the authorities, and gained the privilege of using the shukueki system. Eventually, they became known as the *jō-bikyaku don'ya*, with scheduled service along the Tokaido trunk road. They were even commissioned for the delivery of official express documents.

7) *Tsugi-bikyaku* was a relay delivery system, primarily for documents, via *ton'yaba* at shukueki. It was utilized by the Bakufu and then the new Meiji Restoration government, which renamed *ton'yaba* into *tenmajo*.

8) "*Kiban-in*" is an abbreviated term for a "lettered and enumerated postmark" (see Figure 1). It was used by post offices nationwide from late 1874 to late 1880. Postmarks are known for their variety, but the *kiban-in* are particularly peculiar in that we still do not know just how the kana syllabary and numbers were substituted for local names and dates or how the *kiban-in* were differentiated among the post offices.

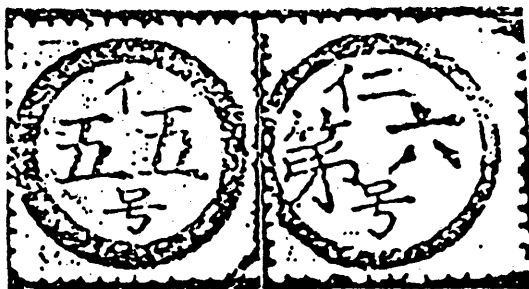


Figure 1. Two Examples of *Kiban-in*  
 Left: Chichibu Ōmiya of Musashi      Right: Ōmori of Iwami

of my publications. In trying to better understand the postmarks, I had to embark on a long investigation of the details of when, where, how, and why the Japanese postal service started. What I have come to understand is that for building a system of information transport called the postal service, the most crucial imperative was to construct a nationwide delivery network, using the issuing of stamps or the devising of a postmark system.

It is known that the *tenmajo* from the days of *shukueki* system were used as nodes in the delivery network, and were called *yūbin toriatsukaijo* (postal handling offices).<sup>9)</sup> Areas distant from a major road and lacking a *tenmajo* used those of the larger villages along the *kaishō* routes.<sup>10)</sup> What was more, the *yūbin toriatsukainin* (postal handlers),<sup>11)</sup> that is, the persons responsible for mail at each station-point, had been the top officials of the *tenmajo* (at the time they were called station officers or *shuku yakunin*). Sometimes these posts were filled by regular village officers or their designated alternates. All of these connections I take as support for my argument that the postal service was basically a reorganization of the existing *shukueki* system.<sup>12)</sup>

To put it metaphorically, the postal service as software was drawn from Western models, but the system's "hardware," the mail delivery network, utilized a

9) *Yūbin toriatsukaijo* were renamed *yūbin kyoku* (post offices) in January 1875.

10) The compound *kaishō* (廻章) was written with several variations of the Chinese characters like 回章; there were also alternate terms, such as *kaitatsu* (廻達) and *shokutatsu* (触達). It was a system of communication by which documents that left the office were relayed between and registered at the village halls they passed through in a certain order. To verify that the document had reached all its destinations, the original document was sent back to the original sending office by the last in line of the village halls.

11) The postal handler (*yūbin toriatsukainin*) was the equivalent of today's postmaster. The background details of the early postal handlers at the *yūbin toriatsukaijo* across the nation are regrettably sketchy. From what I do know, they were drawn from officials of the existing post-stage system and the local village administration (e.g., village headmen, village elders, village group headmen).

reorganization of the shukueki system. I am gratified that this position has met with considerable agreement since my 1994 paper.

#### 4. THE SEPARATION OF TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION AS THE ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE BEHIND THE REORGANIZATION OF THE SHUKUEKI SYSTEM

I would state here that the basic principle of the reorganization of the shukueki system was the "separation of transport and communication."<sup>13)</sup> Transport is that of people and goods. Communication is the transport of information. In the shukueki system, the two were integrated. The postal service separated the two.

To understand this better, the basic characteristics, areal coverage, institutions and functions of the shukueki system and their characteristics have to be examined. Data and works on the shukueki system are abundant, but here I will mostly borrow from the numerous works of Kodama Kōta [KODAMA 1957; 1992].

The *ekiden* system dates back to the ancient Ritsuryō period. However, the system did not mature in the Nara period. There are troubling records, such as one of a taxpayer, who had to provide for himself for the taxpaying trip to and from Kyoto, being found dead on the way home. Even in the Heian period, it took three months for a high-ranking official to return to Kyoto from his stationed post in what is now Ibaragi Prefecture. In the Muromachi period, traveling was not much easier, due to the many checkpoints.

The shukueki system in the narrower sense<sup>14)</sup> greatly developed in the Edo period, when the mailing stations, originally called *eki*, were renamed *shuku*.<sup>15)</sup> This was because as Edo became the headquarter of *Bakufu* government, nationwide travel, partly due to the newly instated alternate residence system for daimyo, became the norm, and the need arose to improve the roads and lodgings.

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12) The reasons why a system as longstanding as the shukueki should have been abolished may include the resistance of the *ekigō* residents. However, an even more fundamental reason was that increasing production had raised the demand for transport of goods beyond the capacity of the shukueki system to keep up.

13) I drew insight for my term, "the separation of transport and communication," from a management concept, "the separation of ownership and management." In large-scale companies, such as joint-stock corporations, the stock holder as the owner of the company is a separate entity from the professional management, where as in small-scale businesses, the owner is often the same as the management.

14) The shukueki system in the narrower sense was directly controlled by the Bakufu supervisory officials (*ōmetsuke*), to whose duties were added those of road management officials (*dōchūbugyō*) in 1659. In 1698, the Bakufu finance officials (*kanjōbugyō*) were jointly appointed as road management officials.

15) What were called the *eki* in ancient times and *shuku* in the early modern period were again named *eki* in keeping with the retrograde atmosphere of the times. I have termed the system shukueki instead of just *eki* or *shuku* for this reason.

The shukueki system begun by the Bakufu was not only utilized by the daimyos and shogun's retainers, but they themselves established a similar system in their fiefdoms and between them and Edo. The private hikyaku business also flourished in the Edo period, using the shukueki network to deliver goods and mail. The travel boom of the general public in the several millions to visit Ise Shrine and Zenkōji Temple in the late Edo period was possible owing to the shukueki system.

I use the term "shukueki system" to loosely denote the various mail delivery systems of the Edo period used by the Bakufu, fiefdoms, and private hikyaku business and the transitional system used by the Restoration government until the shukueki system was abolished.

## 5. THE CHARACTERISTICS AND THE APPLICATION OF THE SHUKUEKI SYSTEM

### 1) Shukueki system directly under Bakufu and Restoration government

The shukueki system of the Bakufu continued under the Restoration government, for it was announced briefly after the Restoration that, "(communication) shall continue in the old way." In the narrow sense, the shukueki is basically a system to deliver (*teisō*)<sup>16)</sup> official *kakyaku* (travelers, parcels and letters) using the manpower of the ruled.

The facilities for the above purpose were the shukueki. In some cases, rice compensated for manpower, but generally, residents would receive a tax exemption called "*chigo menkyo*" for their duty as *tenmayaku* (or *jinbayaku*)<sup>17)</sup> in maintaining the manpower and horses for the delivery. Therefore, the cost of official *kakyaku* delivery for the Bakufu and Restoration government was nil, although there were limits on the extent and volume. It is said that such "free" delivery accounted for roughly 10% of the total volume of shukueki mail.

Bakufu *dōchūbugyō* (road management officials), and their Meiji government

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16) *Teisō* (scheduled sending) actually applied to the relay of mail from station to station. The basic characteristic of shukueki delivery was the relay carry (*tsugiokuri*) rather than carrying through by single courier (*tsugitōshi*).

17) The *tenmayaku* (or *jinbayaku*) consisted of the *umayaku* and *hokōyaku*. All served one year terms. Requisition was determined by the frontage width of one's property; later, the location of the residential plot was added to the calculation. For example, if one's plot was at the center of the post-station and its frontage width was 5 *ken*, or 30 feet, it was assessed as one unit of duty, which equaled the provision of one horse. If the location was mid-way from the central area and the frontage width was 6 *ken*, the assessment was also one horse. For residences on the edge of the post-station, a frontage width of 12 *ken* equaled a one horse assessment. For those who could not afford or did not have available either manpower or horses, monetary payment was an option; requisitions not paid by individual households became the collective burden of the post-station residents.



successors, *ekiteishi* and *ekiteiryō*, directly oversaw the five major roads and eight side roads called, "Wakiōkan."<sup>18)</sup> For these thirteen roads, the shukueki were spaced roughly every 2 to 3 *ri*, or about 8 to 12 km apart.

The headquarter office of the shukueki for arranging manpower and horses for the kakyaku and official documents passing through was called the "*ton'yaba* (or *kaisho*)."<sup>19)</sup> This was renamed the *tenmajo* after the Meiji Restoration. The highest-ranking official at the *ton'yaba* was the *ton'ya*, and his aide was the *toshiyori*. After the *ton'yaba* was renamed in Meiji, *ton'ya* became *torishimariyaku*, and later, *motojimeyaku*. Sometimes, the residence of the *motojimeyaku* was used as a *tenmajo*. For larger shukueki and *gasshuku*,<sup>20)</sup> which combined small shuku, there were more than one *ton'ya* or *motojimeyaku*. These would take turns on duty either by the month or periods of several days.<sup>20)</sup>

There were other officials at the headquarter offices, such as *chōzuke* (bookkeepers); *umasashi* (horse arrangers); *hijimechōyaku* (daily clerks); *tomarichōzuke* (lodging bookkeepers); *chaban'yaku* (teaservers); *kaishozume* (waiters); *odemukaeban* (V.I.P. receptionists); and *jinbasairyō* (manpower and horse overseers).

The above officials were the purveyors of the shukueki system of the Bakufu and Restoration government, but at the same time, these officials were normally village appointees like *nanushi*, *kumigashira*, and *hyakushōdai*, because the shukueki were under the double auspices of the Bakufu government and the local fiefdom.

Other than the above facilities, shukueki sometimes had lodgings according to rank, *honjin*, *wakihonjin*, *hatagoya*, and *kichin'yado*, and teahouses, depending on the scale.

There were other duties as well. The maintenance of roads, riverfronts, and roadside trees, fire control of the vicinity and special white sand layering of the road

18) The five officially-designated post highways were the Tokaido (with fifty-three *tsugi*), the Nakasendō (with sixty-seven *shuku*'s up to Moriyama-shuku); the Kōshūdō; the Nikkōdōchū; and the Ōshūdōchū (which branched from the Nikkōdōchū at Utsunomiya for Shirakawa). The Wakiōkan were the Yamazakidō (from Fushimi-juku on the Tokaido to Nishinomiya); the Minoji (from Atsuta-juku on Tokaido to Tarui-juku); the Sayaji (around the north shore of Ise Bay); the Honsakamichi (around the north shore of the Lake Hamana); the Nikkō-reiheishidō (from Jōshū Kuragano to Shimotsuke Kanazaki-shuku); the Mibudō (from Oyama-juku to Imaichi-juku); the Nikkō-onaridō (from Edo through Iwabuchi to the Sattedō); and the Mito-Sakuradō (which left Edo through Senju to Matsudo and Yahata).

19) *Gasshuku* was the term for several small post-stations grouped together to handle the station duties equivalent to one post-station.

20) There were rare cases of dividing official business in two rotating half-month terms, as in the two *yūbin toriatsukaijo* of Ōfuruma and Kashiwabara. In Utsunomiya, there were two *yūbin toriatsukainin* in one *toriatsukaijo*. Such practices probably reflected the local arrangement of the Edo period.

for V.I.P. travelers were among them. Local residents earned cash by delivering private mail at a volume beyond the limit or by managing eateries and vending stalls.

## 2) The *sukegō* system

Originally a military policy, the *tsugiokuri* (relay) between the shuku quickly grew so large that it became impossible to manage the system only with shuku manpower. To compensate for the lack of manpower or horses for transport, temporary assistance requests were made out to the neighboring villages, called *sukeuma* (or *sukettouma*). After about 1694, regular assistance called *sukegō* (regular mail duty assistance), which came in many forms such as *jō-sukegō*, *dai-sukegō*, and *ka-sukegō*, became a fixture.

As transportation grew with the amount of communication, the *sukegō* share for the villages grew as well. The burden was paid in the form of tax in some areas, and even distant villages were appointed *sukegō* to specific shuku.

The Restoration government announced a nationwide *sukegō* duty on every village as early as 1868. This shows how overmanaged the shukueki system had become by this time (see footnote 12).

## 3) Communication systems in the domains and prefectures

In the Edo period, all domains and shogun retainer lands adopted the shukueki system of the Bakufu in areas where it was possible, and otherwise developed a communication system modelled after it. The *shichi* (seven)-*ri-bikyaku* among the shogun's relatives' fiefdoms was so famous that it came to denote all hikyaku among the daimyos. For example, Kawagoe Ōkan, which diverged from the Nakasendō at Itabashi to reach Kawagoe, had the six major shuku of Kamiitabashi, Shimonerima, Shirako, Hizaori, Ōwada, and Ōi, that came to be the Kawagoe fiefdom's shukueki.

The fee for using the Bakufu shukueki systems among the fiefdoms were determined by rank and nobility. But overall, it was inexpensive, and called *osadame chinsen*, set at about half the *aitai chinsen* (or *kasegijinba chinsen*) collected both for amounts beyond the limit and private mail.<sup>21)</sup>

Usually, the fiefdoms were divided into several areas, and official documents and parcels were sent from one village to another in fixed order, first within an area, then sent to the next area. The last village was to return the mail to the sending office. This system was called the *kaishō*. Among such a system, the *muraokuri* system of the Tosa fiefdom was well known.<sup>22)</sup>

21) There were three *chinsen* fees: *hondachin* for a horse-carried parcel of about 40 *kanme* (or 330 pounds); *karajiri* or *karujiri* (about 60% of the *hondachin* rate) for a person on horseback with a parcel weighing under 5 *kanme*; and *ninsokuchinsen*, (about 50% of the *hondachin* rate) for a 5 *kanme* parcel carried by a runner. The fee was calculated by the difficulty of the topography of the delivery route, and not by a unit of distance.

The prefectures in Meiji were formed first by the Hanseki Return, then by the abolition of fiefdoms and the creation of prefectures, and finally by the integration of *fu* and prefecture. The borders were not well thought out, and outlands were not uncommon. Delivery of mail and parcels had to accommodate such outlands.<sup>23)</sup>

#### 4) *Machi-bikyaku* (private) transport and communication

Whereas the Bakufu and the Restoration government maintained *tsugi-bikyaku*, the *shukueki* system in the narrowest sense, and the fiefdoms and prefectures had *daimyo-bikyaku* and *kō-bikyaku* respectively, there were private delivery businesses called *machi-bikyaku*. *Machi-bikyaku* developed greatly in the Edo period. Edo, Kyoto, and Osaka had numerous *hikyaku don'ya*, called the *santo-bikyaku*. Not just Tokaido, but Nakasendō, Kōshūdō, Nikkōdōchū, Ōshūdōchū, Hokurikudō, San'yōdō, San'indō and other roads saw the rise of many *hikyaku* businesses, that connected their service to the *jō-bikyaku* between the three major cities, called the *aishi* system, to form a nationwide network.

As the *machi-bikyaku* developed, they formed *kabu nakama* (a kind of guild) and collectively paid *myōgakin* cash to the authorities to buy privilege. Eventually *machi-bikyaku* were allowed to use the manpower and horses at the *shukueki* at the *osadame chinsen* at discount rates. Goods and mail for the Bakufu and the Restoration government as well as for *daimyo* and retainers frequently came to be commissioned to private *hikyaku* businesses. In early Meiji, prefectures also commissioned communication to and from Tokyo.

It may seem that these private businesses only delivered letters. While ultra express delivery was only available for documents, usually both parcels and mail were delivered on horseback by the *hikyaku sairyō*.

#### 5) *Shukueki* rates for ordinary people

Ordinary people were permitted to travel between *shukueki* with a permit known as a *tegata kansatsu*. Although not officially required, they usually had to pay a passage fee known as *aitai chinsen*.

22) For details on the *muraokuri* system of Tosa, see *Kōchi-ken Shiryō* [KOKURITSU KŌBUNSHO KAN] volumes 3 and 14; *Tosa no Muraokuri Kite* [KŌSOKABE 1970]; *Yūbin Fudoki, Shikoku Hen* [TAKAHASHI 1972]; *Tosa Ekiteishi* [NAKAJIMA 1972]; and my paper [ABE 1994: 417–420].

23) The *kannai yūden* (intra-prefectural postal) system of Hokujo and Okayama prefectures, the *kōshi dentatsu* (public and private message transmission), system of Yamagata Prefecture, the *muraokuri* system of Kōchi Prefecture (formerly Tosa), the *gōtsugi* (county relay) system of Kagoshima Prefecture, and the *yūbin-ki* system of Urawa and Saitama Prefectures were all distinct communication systems formed after the establishment of the prefectures.

## 6) The combination of transport and communication under the shukueki system

I have shown that the shukueki system utilized by the Bakufu, fiefdoms, the Restoration government, prefectures, and businesses, had not separated the "transport of goods to be delivered" and "communication of information to be delivered."

All official deliveries by the Bakufu and the Restoration government were marked with special "*goyōjō*" and "*goyōmono*" insignias, where transport and communication were usually indistinguishable. This same situation applied to the *machi-bikyaku* as well.

## 6. THE SEPARATION OF TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION UNDER THE SHUKUEKI SYSTEM

### 1) The separation of transport and communication along the Tokaido

The second Ekihō amendment in the middle of 1870 separated transport and communication on the Tokaido (See Table 1 for the historical chronology). First, the Ministries of Civil Affairs (*Minbushō*), and Finance (*Ōkurashō*) jointly announced the "*Shukueki Jinba Aitai Tsugitate Kaisha Toritate no Shui Setsuyu Buri*" (guide to found private company for transport and communication) [Nōshōmushō 1882a] on 12 May 1870. This created a private *tsugitate kaisha* organization apart from the *tenmajo* in each *eki*. As *ekiteishi* officials made their rounds on the Tokaido, applications for founding a *tsugitate kaisha* and business estimates were to be handed in to them.

In June 1870, the Ministries of Civil Affairs and Finance also announced the "*Yūbin Sōgyō no Kengi*" (postal service inauguration proposal) [Nōshōmushō 1882b]. Until a regular postal service began, commissions of delivering express official documents given to *jō-bikyaku* were to be replaced by *shukutsugibin* of *tenmajo*. This was in effect, a dry run for the Tokaido new system mail.

Rules for handling mail at the *tsugitateba eki*, delivery schedules and rates, instructions for the sender, and postal office regulations were created, stamps issued, and equipment such as collection boxes were set. In November 1870, the *Yūbin* offices in Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka were opened. Originally planned to start in December, actual postal service began between Tokyo and Osaka on 1 March 1871.

The *ekiteishi* in May 1871 tried to rename and reorganize *Jinba Aitai Tsugitate Kaisha* in the "*Riku-un Kaisha* (surface transport company) Rule Proposal" [Nōshōmushō 1882c]. This created private and union-like surface transport companies at each *eki* on the Tokaido.

The Tokaido shukueki system was finally abolished in January 1872. This meant that the *tenmajo*, the shukueki organization for delivery, was separated into *riku-un* companies and postal handling offices.

**Table 1.** Historical Chronology of the Separation of Transport and Communication

	Shukueki System	Separation of Transport and Communication	
		Transport (Riku-un transport and Riku-un Moto companies)	Communication (Yūbin)
1870/3/9	Eki Rule Reamendment. <i>Ekitei</i> amendment table, <i>Kanme Aratamejo</i> (weighing station) rule, post office regulation.		
1870/5/12		<i>Shukueki Jinba Aitai Tsugitate Kaisha Toritate no Shui Setsuyu Buri</i>	
After 1870/5		Ekiteishi officials sent out to patrol Tokaido; instructions issued for founding tsugitate companies and preparing business estimates.	Tokaido new system mail is tried out.
1870/6	Abolition of the commissioning of official express mail to Jō-bikyaku don'ya, and its replacement with Tenmajo Shukutsugibin until postal service is started.		Proposal to found a national postal service.
After 1870/6			<i>Tsugitate Ekiba Toriatsukai</i> rules issued, with time and rate table for different areas, instructions for senders, mail offices regulations, the issue of stamps, etc.
1871/3/1			Postal service starts between Tokyo and Osaka. Main post offices (yūbin yakusho) are built in the three major cities, and smaller mail handling offices (yūbin toriatsukai-jo) are established in 62 areas.
1871/5		Riku-un company rule proposal.	
Late 1871 to early 1872		Several riku-un companies are founded at many Tokaido post-stations. Government issues instructions for founding of such companies elsewhere.	

1872/1/10	Abolition of Tokaido shukueki system.		
1872/6		Riku-un Moto Company is founded in Tokyo.	
1872/7/20	Declaration abolishing all tenmajo and sukegō after August.		
1872/7/1			Postal service starts nationwide.
1872/8	The abolition of national shukueki system		
1873/6		Announcement forbidding the founding of delivery companies after September. To enter the business, one must now join the Riku-un Moto Company or acquire a permit from the ekitei head, giving monopoly of transport to Riku-un Moto Company.	
1873/12		Minister of Finance proposes to the Dajōkan the dissolution of the riku-un companies.	
1875/2		Riku-un Moto Kaisha is renamed the Naikoku Tsūn Kaisha.	
1875/4/30		Simultaneous dissolution of riku-un companies at the end of May.	

## 2) The separation of transport and communication nationwide

After the postal service started on the Tokaido, it was extended to western Japan. To provide a service in north-Kantō, Shin'etsu, Tōhoku and Hokkaidō, seven ekiteiryō officials were sent on fact-finding trips in east Japan from March 1872. Their mission was to create the postal networks, and at the same time, to found riku-un companies modeled after those founded on the Tokaido.<sup>24)</sup>

From 1 July 1872, a postal service began in east Japan, completing the nationwide network. Surface transport companies started their business

24) There are many local documents about the ekitei officials' trips to eastern Japan. The Komatsubara Yasunosuke family documents of Sakaichō, Sarushima County, Ibaragi Prefecture offer one example.

nationwide in that year as well. The Tokaido shukueki had been abolished by this time, and the rest of the system in the nation was also abolished in the same year. The tenmajo and sukegō systems were abolished in August. The shukueki system was clearly separated into transport in the private sector<sup>25)</sup> and postal service by the government.<sup>26)</sup>

Above is the history of the “separation of transport and communication.” The latest publication of the Teishin Sōgō Museum, “*Shiryō Zuroku*” (Data Catalogue) [TEISHIN SŌGŌ MUSEUM 1995] used the phrase, “to reorganize the shukueki system and separate transportation and communication” and although what I have advocated is “transport and communication,” I am happy to see my argument acknowledged.

My thesis has been that the formation process of the modern postal service was the reorganization of the shukueki system, and the basic reorganizing principle was the “separation of transport and communication.” I look forward to much criticism.

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25) It must be added that the surface transport companies were not able to transform themselves from their original tenmajo characteristics, and were dissolved by the government. To unify the riku-un companies, a company named “Riku-un Moto” that had been founded by the hiyaku businesses was given a monopoly. It eventually renamed itself the Naikoku Tsūun Company. Refer to my table, and to Yamamoto Hirofumi, *op. cit.*, Chapters 7 ff.

26) The government monopoly of the postal service started in May 1873.

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