A Study of Roads Adjunct to the Five Highways
—Focussing Mainly on the Mito and Sakura Roads—

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The Edo Shogunate had direct control of the main highways, and these roads gradually came to be called the “Five Highways”. Furthermore, several routes deriving from these Five Highways were also under the direct supervision of the Shogunate, under the control of the Dōchū Bugyō (Route Magistrate). At present, these latter roads are, for the convenience of research, called “roads adjunct to the Five Highways”.

In this paper, the author examines the concept of the Five Highways within the Shogunate, the naming of the Five Highways, and the characters of the Mito and Sakura Roads, which were roads adjunct to the Five Highways.

At present, the term “the Five Highways” is used extensively; however, it was not recognized as such in the early stages of the Shogunate; the Five Highways came to be recognized, and the name established, during the process of the establishment of the traffic system. It was around the time of the Kanbun era (1661 to 1673) that the Shogunate became clearly aware of the Five Highways; and it was in the Enpo era (1673 to 1681) that the concept of the Five Highways became more firmly established. It was in the 4th year of Jōkyō (1687) that the name of the Five Highways first appeared in an official document of the Shogunate.

Most roads adjunct to the Five Highways were complete in terms of their starting points and destinations, that is these routes linked the main highways, or reached important places. However, in the case of the Mito and Sakura Roads, the sections from Senju to Mito or Sakura were not under the control of the Route Magistrate. The control of the Route Magistrate terminated at Matsudo and Yawata, respectively, both part way along the route. Though clear-cut conclusion cannot be reached due to the lack of historical documents regarding the establishment and control of the Matsudo and Sakura Roads, roads of this type were the Shogunate’s defense against the Tōgoku (eastern part of Japan) and shows how the shogunate of the early modern period looked on the Bōsō Peninsular; in other words, the Bōsō Region was a place of strategic importance to the Shogunate.