



Three sails  
for rough seas

January 2008

# Will Reed's Agili MASTERY

Shortcuts to better energy, awareness, and footwork

## The Way You Walk Extra energy from Namba walking

*The energy of  
the mind is the  
essence of life*  
Aristotle

郷音

RESONATE  
(hibiku)

cast catch echo  
match mirror  
absorb take after  
resound ripple



Fleet foot Hikyaku  
Namba runner as the  
logo for Sagawa Kyubin

### Walk like a Samurai—Run like a Cat

Call it resonance, call it awareness, but the Samurai knew how to walk with a sense of presence. They could run too, though not large in stature, their armor typically weighed about 30 kilograms (65 pounds).

Though this is sometimes portrayed as a swagger in the movies, actually it was more compact and efficient than just throwing their weight about. It was not even exclusive to the Samurai class. With some variations it was shared by people in all walks of life in Edo Era Japan (1603~1868).

This style of movement, in which body movements are compact, centered, and with high upper and lower body integration, is known as Namba Walking.

The word Namba is thought to have originally been written with the Chinese characters 難場, meaning *difficult place*, suggesting that Namba movement was designed to get you out of trouble, or do a physical task more easily.

It naturally evolved into variations to make life and work easier, whether you

were a Samurai drawing a sword, a farmer planting rice, a craftsman working with tools, a Kabuki actor on stage, or a merchant handling goods.

The fleet foot delivery runners (*hikyaku*, or flying legs) ran relay services on foot to deliver packages between Edo and Kyoto, approximately 500 km (310 miles). While ordinary service took 30 days, express services could be run in 10 days, and super express in just 6 days, over 83 km or 50 miles a day, and carrying a load! No wonder Sagawa Kyubin used the *hikyaku* image for their logo.

### Namba came naturally to Japanese

Note how the runner's arms and legs are extended together on the same side, not opposing left and right. This is one characteristic of Namba movement, and it runs all through the Japanese martial arts, Kabuki and Noh drama, use of craftsmen's tools, and of course Samurai walking.

It is also the style of walking featured for virtually all people in the Edo Period woodblock prints by Hiroshige and other artists. Many people today have lost the knack for moving in this way, and when

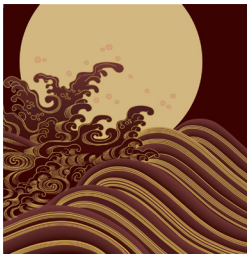
*If you want  
to know if your  
brain is flabby,  
feel your legs*

**Bruce Barton**



**Nanba Walking**

*Hiroshige woodblock print*



**Wave Crest**

*X-media Graphic Library*



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they attempt it, they move like a robot stiffly lurching from side to side.

At the end of the Edo Period Nanba walking was almost eliminated from daily life, in Japan's frantic attempt to catch up with the West. The new Meiji government used Western military marching as the model to instruct elementary school children in how to walk, swinging the arms and legs in large opposing movements.

Although some people contrast Nanba walking with what they call Western style walking, in fact not Western style but military marching, seen most extremely in the artificial Goosestep marching style.

### ***Nanba in sports and martial arts***

Some athletes have a natural Nanba style, such as Michael Jordan in basketball, or Ichiro in baseball. Rhythmical, fast, and natural. High on energy. Resonant.

Professional athletes in Japan have achieved world class results by deliberately applying Nanba style movements in their running, being coached by martial arts teachers to gain an extra edge. Marathon runner Takahashi Naoko used Nanba training and won a Gold Medal at the Sydney Olympics in the year 2000.

### ***Nanba movement in music & dance***

Something similar to the Nanba style of movement can be seen on the walls of the Egyptian Pyramids, popularized by the group Bangles in the 1980s song and disco dance, *Walk Like an Egyptian*.

Rythm Tap dancers move in a Nanba style, putting the same side arm and leg

forward when executing a step, leaning into rather than away from the movement.

Nanba movement is taught at Toho Gakuen, one of Japan's leading music colleges, to help students play their instruments more effectively and to prevent injuries from repetitive practice.

### ***Walk and run to clear your mind***

Many cultures have recognized walking and running as essential to mental and physical health. Make it part of your daily routine. Make it natural, and make it Nanba.

### **RESOURCES**

Check my blog *Nanba Note* for daily articles, resources, and inspiration: <http://nanbanote.blogspot.com/>

Nike and Apple have formed a remarkable collaboration, *Nike + iPod*. You can plan and share running courses anywhere in the world, track your running progress online, and download playlists which motivate you to keep running, visit the site at: <http://nikeplus.nike.com/nikeplus/>

Why do soldiers break step in marching over a bridge? Find out the answer at: <http://www.answerbag.com/question/view/175566>

If you are in Japan, join me for monthly training in Nanba walking and running: [http://web.mac.com/reedwill/ReedCasts/Nanba\\_Event.html](http://web.mac.com/reedwill/ReedCasts/Nanba_Event.html)

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