

— Unearthing the Four-hundred-year History
of a Wholesale Fish Market —

The History of Nihonbashi Uogashi

Part 3: Fish Traveling to Edo
By Issei Tomioka

Fish-eating culture blossomed in the city of Edo due to an abundant supply of seafood from Edo bay. Lively trading took place every morning at the Uogashi to meet the demand of the fish-loving people. What made such a large-scale business possible? Where did the fish traded at the Uogashi come from? Let's trace the course of seafood distribution during the Edo period with a look at both the front and back sides of the Uogashi.

Early Morning at the Nihonbashi Uogashi

If you were to stand on the Nihonbashi bridge in Edo on a morning in 1808, the nose-wrinkling smell of fish would be the first noticeable sense. The Nihonbashi district at the center of Edo was packed with over 300 fish wholesalers. The Nihonbashi Uogashi was considered the greatest business of the time, and was described, "fish are transported here from coasts near and far, by land and by sea, and the markets are extremely busy day and night," in the *Guide to Famous Edo Sites*.

Today, Nihonbashi is situated beneath a major highway, but in its heyday, the Nihonbashi river was a key distribution route jammed with boat traffic. Fresh fish was traded on the northern side of the river and salted and dried seafood was traded on the southern side at the Yokkaichi market. Many of the slender, flat-bottomed boats moored along the northern, or Uogashi, side were used as piers. A wide variety of seafood caught in Edo bay, off the Pacific coast of the Boso peninsula, and far away in southeastern waters, was delivered by boats arriving in continuous succession to these makeshift piers. Nihonbashi was already crowded with people unloading and carrying fish at around 4:00 a.m., before the first cock had even crowed.

By the same early hour, the Nihonbashi bridge was thronged with a variety of people, many of whom were fish vendors carrying tubs suspended from poles carried over their shoulders. The residents of Edo found these fish vendors, who arrived in neighborhoods shouting their own unique calls and cleaned the fish they sold, extremely convenient. Let us imagine a fish vendor named Jirokichi rushing to the bridge with his empty

tubs. Some say he has another business on the side. Weaving his way through the crowd, Jirokichi slips into the Uogashi through a black gate. Let's follow him to get a glimpse of morning trading at the Nihonbashi Uogashi.



Price codes used in the Uogashi. Nine auspicious characters were used instead of the numbers 1 through 9. (Property of the Wholesales Co-operative of Tokyo Fish Market)

No Fixed Prices for Fish

Jirokichi enters a shop in Honfuna-cho, the main street of the Uogashi. The street is lined on both sides with fish wholesalers. Although the buildings are crude, hundreds of these

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Born in Tokyo in 1962, Mr. Tomioka first worked as an event planner for museums and businesses. He later worked in the office of the Tokyo Metropolitan Central Wholesale Market in Tsukiji where he learned first-hand the culture and traditions of one of Japan's first fish markets, established during the Edo period, which have been preserved to this day. Ten years ago, Mr. Tomioka began recording the stories of Market old timers. With these stories, he began developing the *Uogashi-yaro* and *Tsukiji no Uogashi-yaro* web sites. His trilogy, *Uogashi Yonhyakunen*, *Kodan Uogashi Nendaiki*, and *Saigen Nihonbashi Uogashi Chizu*, based on broad investigation of historical evidence and released on the World Wide Web, have been highly acclaimed. Mr. Tomioka has described the vanishing wholesale fish-market culture, including in-depth historical information as well as fantastic stories told by the old timers, from an insider's perspective.

Web sites

Uogashi-yaro <http://www.sakanaya.co.jp>

Tsukiji no Uogashi-yaro <http://www.uogashi.co.jp>



Illustrations
Kazan Mori
(Property of the Wholesales
Co-operative of Tokyo Fish Market)



Wholesalers handed fish over to brokers without fixed prices. The two men bowing are brokers. The man at far left is a fish vendor. All fish vendors of the Edo period carried fish in this manner. (Property of the Wholesales Co-operative of Tokyo Fish Market)

wholesale shops carried out a vigorous trade throughout the Uogashi, collecting a tremendous amount of money every morning.

We may overhear the following sort of exchange:

“Hey, Jirokichi, you’re getting a late start this morning. Why don’t you take this horse mackerel with you?”

“Look at this beautiful nibe croaker (*Nibea mitsukurii*)! It’s just been caught!”

Jirokichi is widely known at the Uogashi. Shrugging off all brokers, he stops at one of his favorite shops,

“You have good chicken grunts (*Paraprastipoma trilineatum*).”

“That’s very discerning of you.”

Jirokichi plans to deliver a plump in-season chicken grunt to one of his best customers.

“How does 100 *mon* sound?”

“It sounds a little high to me. Make it 90 *mon*.”

With no price tag or fixed price for fish, how were the prices determined?

Each fish wholesaler contracted with a number of fishing villages, and all fish caught in these villages were sold to the wholesaler. Fish were transported from these villages to the Uogashi every morning. The wholesaler received the fish and then handed them off to brokers under contract to the wholesaler. The brokers received the fish with no price tag attached.



Kansei era (1789—1801) wholesaler and brokers (property of the Wholesales Co-operative of Tokyo Fish Market)

While some brokers were independent and had their own shops, most of them sold fish from the wholesaler’s shop. They sold the fish entrusted to them to fish vendors and restaurants at their own discretion. The 90 *mon* that Jirokichi wanted to pay for the chicken grunt would only be accepted if the broker considered it enough to make up for what he would have to eventually pay the wholesaler for the fish.

After the market closed in the afternoon, wholesalers would meet to discuss fish prices. Once prices based on daily volume, season, climate, and other such factors had been determined, the brokers would be called in and notified of the

prices. The brokers only profited if they had sold their fish at prices higher than those determined by the wholesalers. In some cases, the brokers suffered losses, but were often able to negotiate discounts from the wholesalers. Therefore, being a successful broker demanded knowledge of a wide variety of issues related to fish and fishing, as well as some ability to predict trends and the decisions of wholesalers.

Wholesalers and brokers at the Uogashi were the forerunners of wholesalers and intermediate wholesalers at today’s Central Wholesale Market in Tokyo. However, there are some significant differences. At the present Wholesale Market, the first prices of fish collected by wholesalers are determined, through auction, by the intermediate wholesalers. Next, the intermediate wholesalers set prices for their customers, primarily mass retailers such as supermarkets as well as some restaurants, based on the prices they paid at auction. The entire pricing process is transparent and based on the principles of fair dealing. In contrast, prices at the Uogashi during the Edo period were determined behind closed doors by only a few of the market players. Though auctions were held, they were usually held by brokers for fish vendors and not meant to determine fair prices for fish.

Though the manner in which prices were determined at the Uogashi was somewhat lacking in fairness, regulations were not strict because the primary function of the Uogashi was to supply fish to the shogunate. Prices were low when supply was high and high when supply was low. Following the laws of fish supply and demand set by Nature herself, this way of doing business continued successfully for over three hundred years with no particular problems.

Town Magistrate Hands Down a Ruling to Brokers

In order to collect the fish he wants, Jirokichi must visit several brokers. Brokers used flat boards called *itabune* to display their fish. The dimensions of these *itabune* were fixed at 1.5 meters long by 0.7 meters wide. *Itabune* were not merely boards for displaying fish, but also acted as a broker’s license. Each broker paid his wholesaler or shop owner rent on the space he used at a specified rate per *itabune*. As the establishment of regulations and the system regarding *itabune* is relevant in the development of the market itself, let’s take a look at its beginnings.

As indicated in previous installments of this article, the Uogashi fish market began with seven fish wholesale shops established in Nihonbashi's Odawara-cho by Mori Kyuzaemon, son of Magoemon, and his associates. The market expanded as these shops branched out, and as other fish merchants from Kansai opened their own wholesale shops.

As Edo grew in area, the volume of the fish trade also increased. Wholesalers, cramped within the limited market space of the Uogashi, did not have much in the way of options for expanding the size of their businesses. The creation of subsidiary wholesalers was not a good solution as it would spread their capabilities for acquiring fish too thin. In order to expand their businesses without giving up any of their existing rights, individual wholesalers contracted with brokers to sell their fish. This led to the creation of a sales division somewhat separate from the wholesale business, and greatly enhanced efficiency.

The Uogashi gradually expanded to nearby neighborhoods. The Honfuna-cho area, with its prime riverfront location for unloading cargo, had been home to ship chandlers since the early Edo period. Brokers rented the front portion of chandlers' shops with the promise that they would not use the shop after 6:00 a.m. However, this led to a number of problems, including those caused by brokers who failed to observe the 6:00 a.m. limit and frequent rowdy behavior. On the morning of April 12, 1727, an argument became a fight that ended in the injury of one of the participants, and a ship chandler brought the matter before the town magistrate.

The magistrate, Ohka Tadasuke (1677–1751), ordered the brokers to immediately vacate the site and to obey all laws, including that preventing them from blocking busy public roads in order to do their business. Thanks to Tadasuke's ruling, the brokers were temporarily forced to suspend operation, but were spared from closing up shop all together. As the ship chandlers were receiving rent for the space used by the brokers, it was decided that the brokers would be controlled with the determination of a fixed rent. Thus, the use of *itabune* was initiated.

With the establishment of the *itabune* system, fish brokering, which had previously been considered somewhat of an outlaw operation, became a legitimate business. The existence of brokers was recognized as being essential in managing the expanding sales in the market. In hindsight, Tadasuke's ruling helped to facilitate the development of the Uogashi. The *itabune* system continued for a long time. When the market was relocated from Nihonbashi to Tsukiji in 1923, compensation for *itabune* licenses and other rights became a major issue. Bribes paid to some city council members came to light and the case developed into the so-called *itabune* bribery scandal.

Fish Seized by the Authorities

Small fish available in great abundance, such as sardines and gizzard shad, were not displayed on *itabune*, but kept in large tubs of water. These inexpensive fish were sold by the scoop by brokers who specialized in small fish.

With the appearance of chicken grunts at the market, Jirokichi knew that sardines would soon be in season. He filled one of his tubs with beautiful fresh sardines thinking the housewives would love them.

“He is the last person I want to bump into!”

Jirokichi recognizes the man coming towards him and swiftly slips into an alley. The stylishly dressed man with piercing eyes has a hook for grabbing fish sticking out of his kimono. He is an assistant of the shogunate's food supply officials and as dreaded as the plague in this neighborhood.

The primary function of the Uogashi, that of supplying fish to the shogunate, had become quite a burden. As the price of fish escalated, wholesalers secretly schemed to sell their best fish at high prices in the market, and to deliver somewhat lower



Horeki era (1751–1764) fish market. A row of simple fish shops with their fish displayed on *itabune*.

grade fish to the castle. However, castle residents and those serving them had also developed a discerning palate and became dissatisfied with what they were receiving from the Uogashi. The exasperated shogunate established a food supply office to collect fish directly rather than wait for it to be delivered by wholesalers. Those knowledgeable about fish were hired to collect fish from the market every morning. These men could seize any fish they desired for a price significantly below market price, regardless of the grade of the fish. Fish could even be seized from fish vendors on their daily rounds. Many of Jirokichi's fellow vendors had countless such experiences. Jirokichi, though disgusted by the new system, was powerless to do anything about it. Instead, he escaped the shogunate's official by taking a different route.

As the first light of dawn appeared, Jirokichi's tubs were heavy with the fish he had purchased.

“Jirokichi, come in and take a break,” an acquaintance from a tea house popular with the fish vendors called.

“Not today. I'm in a bit of a hurry,” he declined.

Suddenly remembering his other business, however, Jirokichi asked, “Do you know anybody in need of some cash?”

In the morning haze, fish vendors fan out from the Nihonbashi in all directions. Soon the housewives will get up to prepare breakfast.

Fresh Fish Transport Routes

At the very beginning of the Edo period, fishing in the Kanto region was an underdeveloped industry of local fishermen. After Mori Magoemon's group moved to Edo, other Kansai fish merchants began making their way to the Kanto region one after another.



(Property of the Wholesales Co-operative of Tokyo Fish Market)

The initial purpose of most of the Kansai merchants who followed the Mori group to the Kanto region was to acquire dried sardines to send back to their Kansai homes. Yet before long, many began shipping fresh fish to Edo. Some of these Kansai fish merchants were under the protection of the shogunate while others made their way to the Kanto region anticipating the development of Edo. As with the Mori group, which split

into wholesalers based in Nihonbashi and fishermen based in Tsukudajima, some of the Kansai merchants also became wholesalers who received loads of fish at Nihonbashi as the volume increased with the development of fishing villages. Like their predecessors, the new wholesalers contracted with fishing villages near enough to provide fresh fish to Edo, and this is how the relationship between fish wholesalers and fishing villages was formed.

Other Kansai fish merchants settled in fishing villages and became resident brokers between the village and wholesalers, supplying fresh fish to Edo. They owned boats that carried fresh fish caught by neighboring villages as well as their own to the Uogashi. Thus, as both the founders of the Uogashi and those who transported fresh fish to the Uogashi during the early Edo period were Kansai fish merchants, the foundations of seafood distribution to Edo were established as a result of the transfer of people and techniques from the Kansai area with its more advanced fisheries.

Also during the early Edo period, the Tokugawa shogunate was attempting to transport marine products from Suruga (present-day Shizuoka prefecture), a region under the direct rule of the Tokugawas, to Edo. In the Kanbun era (1661–1673), the shogunate encouraged villages around Suruga bay to organize a cooperative of gatherers of marine products to facilitate shipments to Edo. At the time, marine products were transported overland in a journey that took four days despite special licenses that exempted them from time-consuming inspections at various checkpoints along the route.

To improve the situation, fish merchants in the fishing villages worked to establish faster routes that combined land and sea transportation. Fish caught in Suruga bay were transported overland to the east coast of the Izu peninsula, then by boat to the Uogashi. This reduced transport time to two days. Sea transport brought with it the additional advantage of allowing the fish to be preserved in salt water and allowed premium fish, such as sea bream, to be transported alive in boats equipped with saltwater tanks.

Maintaining the freshness of fish with transport was the key, and it required a lot of ingenuity. Particularly difficult was the shipping of fish from villages above Choshi, facing the Kashima sea, from August to April. During this season, low water levels and strong northwest winds prevented the use of boats on certain parts of the Tone river. Instead, shipments left Choshi by boat in the evening, landed at Fusa the next morning, were then transported overland to Matsudo on the same day, and were then again loaded on boats to arrive at

Fish-Eating Culture Blossomed in the City of Edo— Edo People Loved Fish

The Uogashi was organized to supply fish to Edo castle. To supply fish to the shogunate on a daily basis was both an honor and a priority. In reality, however, delivering only premium varieties of fish—sea bream, carp, flounder, flathead mullet, Japanese seabass, and icefish—available in small quantities, at prices as low as a tenth of market price, was a tremendous burden. Around the Genroku era (1688–1704), Edo's economy developed rapidly, leading to a money-driven society. The townspeople, namely merchants and artisans, played central roles in this growing economy and competed financially with the ruling samurai class. The lifestyles of the townspeople became remarkably luxurious, and they often splurged on food and clothing. Competing vainly for the prestige of paying exorbitant prices for the, or one of the, first fish of the season became a noteworthy trend. While the shogunate repeatedly issued orders that urged frugality, all was in vain. Thus, the townspeople became the main target of Uogashi business.

Supported by Edo's fertile waters, the townspeople consumed all kinds of fish, ranging

from abundantly available varieties such as horse mackerel, sardines, and gizzard shad to the more premium varieties. A book titled, *Edo Hanjoki*, by Terakado Seiken (1796–1868) notes that the people of Edo loved fish so much that they said their bones would fall apart if they went without fish for three days. Seafood was an important source of protein for the residents of Edo.

Typical Japanese seafood dishes, such as charcoal broiled eel, sushi, and tempura, originated in Edo. These dishes would not have been possible without the abundant supply of seafood from Edo bay, or the emergence of the stronger soy sauce produced in the Kanto region. The *nigirizushi* (hand-formed sushi), believed to have been created by Hanaya Yohei in the Kasei era (1804–1830), suited the character of Edo people as a way to quickly enjoy fresh seafood. At that time, tuna was considered an inferior fish. However, when a large amount of tuna was caught in 1832, Yohei soaked slices of tuna in soy sauce and then used them in *nigirizushi*, triggering a tuna boom. Since that time, tuna has been a common ingredient in sushi, which itself has become popular throughout the world.

● See FOOD CULTURE No. 15 for more information on the food culture of Edo.

Nihonbashi the following morning. The 29.5-kilometer leg of the journey from Fusa to Matsudo became known as the fresh fish road, which is said to have been traveled by villagers of Fusa and neighboring villages leading 120 to 130 horses loaded with fish cargo everyday. Clearly, transporting fresh fish over long distances at this time was extremely difficult. Fresh fish routes were developed only with the great effort of all those involved.

Edo Bay Fisheries

A tremendous variety of fish and other seafood was caught in Edo bay. Looking at today's highly industrialized Tokyo bay it is difficult to imagine, but during the Edo period these waters were fertile fishing grounds. Fishermen in the villages on Edo bay were governed by a number of regulations, including those regarding the equipment that could be used. Villages were classified into eighty-four primary fishing villages and eighteen secondary fishing villages. In the secondary fishing villages, fishing was only allowed as a side business and the use of fishing boats was prohibited. It was upon these rules that fishing rights were eventually established.

From the fishing villages, all catches were sent to fish wholesalers in Edo. Backed by their status as fish purveyors to the shogunate, fish wholesalers had tremendous power over these villages. The most powerful fish wholesalers were from the Uogashi's Honodawara-cho, Honfuno-cho, Honfuno-Yokodana, and Anjin-cho cooperatives, which took turns supplying fish to the shogunate. The Honshiba, Shiba-Kanasugi, and Shinba markets were also responsible for supplying fish to the shogunate, making for a total of seven fish wholesale cooperatives.



Nishimiya Genbei (1728—1805) was a prominent Edo fish wholesaler with a number of branches and extensions to his business. His family's wholesale business continued for five generations. Kazan Mori is the son of the 5th generation Genbei. (Property of the Wholesales Co-operative of Tokyo Fish Market)

The Honshiba and Shiba-Kanasugi markets were established by local fisherman in Edo's Shiba district, who began by selling their catches along the great Tokaido road at the start of the Edo period. Shiba's coastal villages made up the core of the eighty-four primary fishing villages, and were therefore given license to open fish markets.

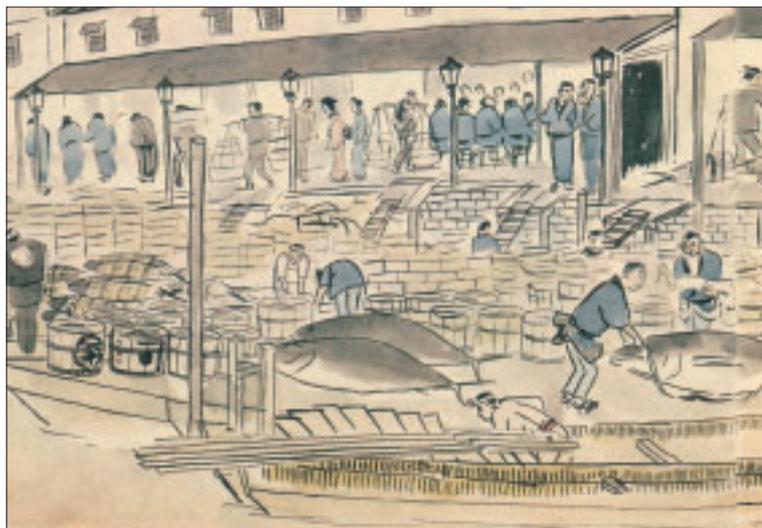
Fish caught in large quantities were sent to the Uogashi, while the two local markets sold a large variety of fish caught in smaller quantities. The Shinba market was established in 1674 by fishermen from the coastal village of Honmoku, with the assistance of fish merchants from Kyoto, as a result of disagreements with the Uogashi over the high commission charged for products from the village.

These three fish markets were run by fishermen turned wholesaler, broker, and fish vendor. The scale of their markets could not be compared to that of the Uogashi as the Honshiba and Shiba-Kanasugi markets were only allowed to purchase

fish from October to April, while the Shinba market could only receive shipments from thirty-one fishing villages. Thus, the Uogashi remained at the helm of fresh fish distribution. During the Genroku era (1688—1704), about a century after the establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate in Edo, Edo's fisheries were dominated by fish wholesalers based at the Uogashi, and all those at the lower end of the supply chain were subordinate to them.

Uogashi Control over Fishing Villages

The owners of fishing boats were controlled by the wholesalers in Edo who financed the fishing villages. Commonly, fish wholesalers advanced the fishing boat owners funds to cover everything from the fishermen's food and wages, to repair of fishing equipment, to the purchase of the fish itself in exchange for all catches made by the villages. These advance funds did not cover expensive fishing boats, and the amount given as the purchase price of the fish was determined by the wholesalers. In this way, wholesalers exploited the fishing boat owners and acquired fish from them at a fraction of what they sold it for.



The Uogashi during the Meiji era (1868-1912). The practice of unloading fish from the Nihonbashi river to flat-bottomed boats used as piers had remained unchanged since the Edo period.

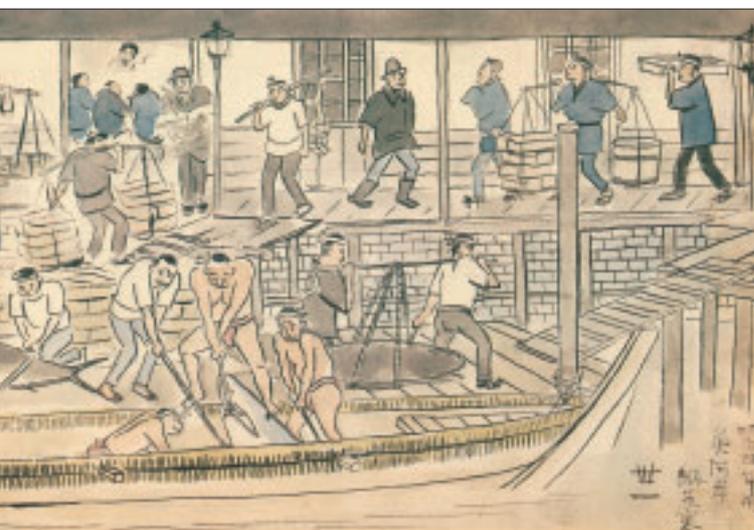
Should a fishing boat owner wish to free himself from his wholesaler's control by paying back the advanced funds, the arrangement did not allow for lump-sum repayment. In common practice, fish could only be liquidated at a fixed rate according to weight. In addition, the advanced funds bore interest, meaning that the period for paying back the advanced funds was continuously extended and the fishing boat owners found themselves in an inescapable cycle that kept them indebted to the wholesalers. Edo fish wholesalers took advantage of this system to control fishing boat owners over a long period of time.

Most fish was not shipped to Edo directly from the fishing villages, but rather via resident fish brokers who owned boats for carrying fresh fish. Edo wholesalers also invested in the operations of these resident fish brokers. In this way, the wholesalers were able to secure a steady supply of fish using the same system that prevented fishing boat owners from getting out from under their control.

One of the factors that made it possible for the Edo wholesalers to gain control over the resident fish brokers was the control enforced over marine traffic in Edo bay. In 1720 the

shogunate established the Uruga magistrate for sea security. All boats, including those carrying fresh fish, were required to have their cargo inspected at the magistrate's office. Fresh-fish wholesalers pleaded for exemption from this regulation, and were granted authorization to issue passes to those who transported fresh fish for them. Since those transporting fresh fish needed these passes in order to assure that their fish arrived fresh, ties to Edo fish wholesalers were absolutely necessary.

Because the boats owned by resident brokers were built and maintained using funds received from the wholesalers, they were often named after the wholesaler and the resident fish broker. Uogashi regulations stipulated that no wholesaler could buy cargo from brokers associated with other wholesalers, or buy fish directly from fishing villages. The sale of fish from fishing villages was left entirely to the resident brokers because their indirect control over the fishing villages was extremely efficient. Resident brokers, sometimes doubling as the owner of fishing boats and nets or the village headman, collected the catches. With the fishermen and the distribution of the fish under their control, these resident bro-



(Property of the Wholesales Co-operative of Tokyo Fish Market)

kers profited. Eventually, the brokers formed their own association and paid a fee to the feudal lord governing the area. This system, which continued from the mid to late Edo period, allowed fish wholesalers in Edo to secure fish at low prices, and was the basis for the Uogashi's prosperity.

The End of Uogashi Control

During the period from 1804 to 1830, significant changes in the relationship between Edo fish wholesalers and fishing villages came about. Powerful leaders in some fishing villages began acting as resident wholesalers. They functioned as local magistrates who supported the economic development of their villages and attempted to break away from the control of Edo wholesalers.

In 1841, Mizuno Tadakuni (1794–1851), senior councilor to the Tokugawa shogunate, forced political reforms commonly known as the Tempo Reforms. The distribution system monopolized by associations of merchants, including the Edo wholesaler cooperatives, was blamed for soaring commodity prices and these associations were ordered to disband. Organizations of the Uogashi were spared due to their role as

fish purveyors to the shogunate, but their privileged dominance was lost. The elimination of fish broker associations dealt a particularly strong blow to the Uogashi, and the system of control over fishing villages tumbled like a house of cards, paving the way for unrestricted shipment by resident wholesalers in fishing villages.

With the reduction of distribution monopolies caused by the Tempo Reforms, new fish markets opened at Fukagawa and Tsukiji. The Fukagawa market was established by local fishermen who began fishing around the beginning of the Edo period, and the Tsukiji market was established by fish merchants who had previously been the subcontracted wholesalers for icefish to the shogunate. As these markets received a high number of shipments by offering fishing villages higher prices than did the Uogashi, fierce competition arose with the Uogashi.

In February 1852, boats carrying fresh fish from Futsu, in present-day Chiba prefecture, to the Tsukiji market were seized by the Uogashi, bringing the conflict between the Uogashi and other fish markets to the notice of local officials. The magistrate recommended that the Fukagawa and Tsukiji fish markets be incorporated into the Nihonbashi Uogashi.

With the incorporation of these two markets, the number of Uogashi wholesalers increased. However, acceptance of the new participants meant a weakening of Uogashi solidarity, forcing the Uogashi to reduce its control over the supply chain. Before long, the shogunate collapsed and the Uogashi lost its backing, despite hopes for a return to dominance. The resident brokers who had lived under the thumb of wholesalers were unable to cope with the changes and most disappeared, leaving outstanding loans.

Times Change

The Meiji era (1868–1912) began and Edo was renamed Tokyo. Fishing villages freed from feudal dominance were now faced with a different form of control, that of capitalism. The Uogashi was left behind by modern society and barely survived the competition. It was only after the Great Kanto Earthquake (1923) and World War II that the Uogashi again began to play a significant role as the hub of fresh fish distribution.

About the Illustrator

Kazan Mori was born Shigesaburo Mori in 1881 in Honfuna-cho, Nihonbashi Ward, Tokyo. He was the third son of Genbe Mori, a fish wholesaler at the Nihonbashi Uogashi. While working for Nishinaga, a wholesaler in another part of the Uogashi, Mori taught himself to draw and paint. Later he worked for the *Maiyu Shimbun* and *Jiji Shimbun* newspapers, and joined the *Tokyo Manga-kai* (a group of Japanese cartoonists), established in 1916. Having received his father's tutelage, Mori referred to himself as a Nihonbashi Uogashi research artist and spent many years drawing the people, their lifestyles, and work, from the beginning of the Edo period through the Taisho era (1912–1926), at the Nihonbashi Uogashi. Great numbers of his scrupulous and historically valuable drawings have remained to this day. Mori died in October 1944 in Shirogane, Minato Ward, Tokyo.

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