

— Unearthing the Four-Hundred-Year History of a Wholesale Fish Market —

# The History of Nihonbashi Uogashi

Part 2: The Popularity of Fish in Edo  
By Issei Tomioka

A book titled, *Edo Hanjoki*, by Terakado Seiken (1796–1868) that described the manners and customs of the people of Edo near the end of the Edo period (1603–1867), notes that the people loved fish so much that they said their bones would fall apart if they went without fish for three days. Several tens of thousands of fish were consumed each day. This book also depicted, in a humorous manner, the dynamic way in which the Uogashi, or wholesale fish market, handled their sea of fish. Originally, the Uogashi began as a way to supply fish to the shogunate. As it developed, however, the fish-eating culture of Edo flourished. Let's take a look at the fish-eating culture that bloomed in Edo through events that took place in the Uogashi.

## Tokugawa Ieyasu Loved Fish

Shortly after Mori Magoemon's group of fishermen from Tsukuda village, on the northern shore of Osaka bay, started net fishing in the sea near Edo, they began catching a small, thin fish with a hollyhock pattern on its body that they had never seen before. As the hollyhock was the Tokugawa family crest, the fishermen were extremely surprised, and reported, via Ando Shigenobu (1557–1621), loyal servant of the Tokugawa, their find to Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616), the first shogun of the Edo period. However, this fish—icefish—was known to Ieyasu, as it was often presented by local fishermen in his hometown of Mikawa (eastern part of present-day Aichi prefecture). Magoemon and his men were praised by Ieyasu, who saw the unexpected presence of this fish so near Edo as a good omen. For the rest of Ieyasu's life, icefish could only be caught for the shogun.

This story is a fable made up much later to increase the value of icefish. It is said that, in fact, icefish was brought to Edo from Owari (western part of present-day Aichi prefecture) when Ieyasu entered Edo. It is unknown how the fish was transplanted to the sea off of Edo, but icefish fishing may have been prohibited during the breeding season.

Many anecdotes about Ieyasu involve fish. Legend has it that he often ate salted, dried sardines, that he loved tilefish caught in the sea of Suruga, and that he died as a result of eating sea bream tempura. If Ieyasu did indeed like fish as much as legend implies, his first order to Magoemon's fishermen must

have been, "Bring me good fish." The establishment of the Uogashi as a way to supply fish to the shogunate may have been the result of Ieyasu's fondness for fish.

## The Uncompensated Supply of Fish to the Shogunate

How was fish supplied to the shogunate? An old chronicle of the Uogashi, *Nihonbashi Uoichiba Enkaku Kiyo*, states that in response to an order, Uogashi wholesalers supplied 200 fresh sea bream and quantities of flathead mullet, Japanese sea bass, and other varieties of fish for the seventh-day celebration of the birth of Ieyasu's grandson, Iemitsu (1504–1651), on July 17, 1604. Ieyasu gave them 175 ryo in gold coins and 150 silver coins as payment. Thirty-seven years later, in 1641, the Uogashi supplied 200 fresh sea bream and other fish for the celebration of the birth of Iemitsu's first son, Ietsuna



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

### Issei Tomioka

Director, Uogashiyaro K.K.

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 Uogashiyaro 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>



(1641–1680), and received 295 ryo in gold coins and 150 silver coins.

These payments received by Uogashi wholesalers were unheard of at the time, and were probably so great given the nature of the celebrations. Or, perhaps it was a way for the shogunate to make up for the routine supply of fish for which wholesalers received virtually nothing in the way of payment. The officers of the Uogashi wholesalers' association took turns assuming responsibility for the supply of fish to the shogunate on a monthly basis. Each morning, the officer in charge for that month received an order from the kitchen department of the shogunate, collected the required products from the wholesalers designated for that month, and then delivered the products to the shogunate. The codes for fish wholesalers established in 1644 stipulated that the supply of fish to the shogunate should always have priority, and that selling fish under-the-counter and illegitimate purchases were strictly prohibited. Such provisions indicated that such behavior was occurring. Later, prices were established for fish supplied to the shogunate, but these prices were roughly one tenth that of market prices, making the supply of fish to the shogunate a significant burden on the Uogashi.

### Purveyors of Sea Bream and Carp

One of the primary reasons that supplying fish to the shogunate was such a burden on the wholesalers was the fact that the variety of fish supplied was so limited. The shogunate demanded primarily premium fish, such as sea bream, carp, flounder, and icefish. The more common varieties, such as saury, sardines, and gizzard shad were not supplied to the shogunate. The ruling class did not eat cheap or readily available varieties of fish.

Since white-meat varieties of fish were not available in significant quantities, it was imperative that the Uogashi improve their methods for collecting fish, as well as increase their capacity, in order to satisfy the demands of the shogun's family, the inner palace, the daimyo (regional lords), and direct retainers of the shogun. A stable supply of sea bream, an indispensable dish for both everyday meals and special celebrations, was particularly important. Thus, those who supplied sea bream played a particularly important role among the wholesalers of the Uogashi.

The live sea bream business, started by Yamatoya Sukegoro from present-day Sakurai city in Nara prefecture, began in

1628 and introduced significant changes in the way in which fish was distributed. Sukegoro made a large advanced payment to each of the fishing villages he dealt with so that he would receive all of their catches. He also built boats equipped with tanks to transport full loads of live sea bream to Edo. This was a big project that required a substantial amount of capital and technical expertise. In addition to fishing and transporting facilities, Sukegoro also developed technology for keeping fish alive in the tanks, which consists of sticking a needle in the fish's body to artificially adjust water pressure. Overcoming a number of difficulties, Sukegoro and his successors served as the purveyors of sea bream for the shogunate and gained immense wealth. In later years, Sukegoro was given a residence, commonly referred to as Live Sea Bream Manor, in Yokkaichi-cho, across the river from the Uogashi. Just as sea bream was the king of salt-water fish, carp was the king of freshwater fish. Carp was an essential food, both everyday and at celebrations including those for the new year, at the tables of samurai families. Along with Mori Magoemon, Inoue Yoichibe was a designated purveyor of carp. Working under the trade name, Koiya, or "carp house," Yoichibe built a large fish preserve near Fukagawa, from which carp was transported, by boat, to Nihonbashi every morning. Once reaching Nihonbashi, the fish were kept in a tank set up within the Uogashi to fill orders from the shogunate. The function of carp purveyors was so important that they were given exceptional authority. For instance, in the event that an order could not be filled due to unscheduled demand or flood damage to the preserve, the designated purveyors were authorized to acquire carp from any pond within the city of Edo.

As carp was always in high demand, business at Koiya was very lucrative. Sugiyama Sanpu (1647–1732), a prominent apprentice of the famous haiku master, Matsuo Basho (1644–1694), was the grandson of Yoichibe. In his youth, Basho lived near the Nihonbashi Uogashi for a time. During this time, Sanpu supported Basho devotedly. Koiya's financial strength made this possible. Later, Basho lived in a house that was the remodeled caretaker's lodge at the Fukagawa fish preserve. The following well-known haiku poem illustrates a scene at the carp pond:

*An old quiet pond...  
A frog jumps into the pond,  
Splash! Silence again.*



Fish tubs developed around the Genna era (1615–1624). The fish trade grew gradually larger and larger after these tubs were introduced. (Property of the Wholesales Co-operative of Tokyo Fish Market)

Both Yamatoya Sukegoro and Inoue Yoichibe were entrepreneurs who helped to build the foundation of the Uogashi. They began their business in the new world of Edo. The fish wholesalers who succeeded them at Nihonbashi were purely merchants, and not the descendents of fishermen. Though the duties of designated purveyors were surely a burden, they took advantage of the backing of the shogunate to monopolize the fishing villages. The prestige acquired with serving the needs of the shogunate was an essential tool in doing business at the Uogashi.

## Fish Swimming in a Stream of Money

The economy of Edo developed rapidly during the Genroku era (1688–1704). Price escalation worked to accelerate the money-driven society. The townspeople, namely merchants and artisans, were the central players in the growing economy. Money originating with the shogunate eventually flowed into the purses of the townspeople, which resulted in the lower-class townspeople competing economically with the ruling samurai class.

The lifestyles of the townspeople became more luxurious, and they often splurged on food and clothing. Finding pleasure in



Eight-oared boats were the fastest and sturdiest boats of the Edo period. In large storms, however, the boats were easily overturned, strong men lost their lives, and wives became widows. Therefore, these boats were also called “widowing boats.” (Property of the Wholesales Co-operative of Tokyo Fish Market)

eating the same premium fish served at the tables of the elite, and competing vainly for the prestige of paying exorbitant prices for the, or one of the, first fish of the season, were already noteworthy trends among the townspeople of the Kanbun era (1661–1673). In 1665, the shogunate imposed a ban on the early sale of fish and vegetables, and specified a sales period for each type of product. For example, trout could be sold in January; sweet smelt and bonito in April; salmon and sea cucumber at the end of August; cod, goosfish, and razor shell in November; and icefish in December. However, people refused to give up their luxuries, and the restrictions were not strictly observed.

In particular, people paid an extremely high price for the first bonito of the season, with the price peaking around the period from 1781 to 1789. Bonito unloaded on the coast of present-day Kanagawa prefecture were transported by two competing means—some by fast boats, and others by horse—so that they would reach the Uogashi at night. The fish merchants fell over one another to acquire the fish and sell them in town as quickly as possible. Sale of the first bonito was an arrogant business and those who tried to bargain for a lower price were refused. There are many tales regarding the first bonito of the season throughout Japanese history, but one about Kinokuniya

Bunzaemon (ca. 1669–1734), a wealthy business tycoon, is especially well known.

One day, Bunzaemon told a man named Jube, who managed a large-scale establishment in the famous Yoshiwara red-light district, that he wanted to eat the first bonito of the season in the Yoshiwara before anyone else in Edo could get it. Jube paid all of the fish wholesalers in order to monopolize the bonito shipments. When Bunzaemon and his party arrived at the Yoshiwara, Jube served just one bonito. As Bunzaemon had brought quite a large party with him, the fish was quickly consumed. When asked for more bonito, Jube refused. When asked for the reason, Jube uncovered a large box to show that although he still had quite a few bonito, Bunzaemon and his party had already eaten the “first bonito.” Jube said he would give away the rest of the first because they could no longer be called “first bonito.” It seems that Bunzaemon rewarded Jube’s humor with a hefty tip.

Although the warrior class was beginning to lose power by the extended peace within the country, the townspeople took advantage of their financial strength to increase their own

power. With their seemingly extravagant spending habits, the townspeople were good customers for the Uogashi. Undoubtedly, selling fish at higher prices in town was much better than supplying the shogunate at very low prices. Thus, while the Uogashi preserved its honor and vested interests by officially making the supply of fish to the shogunate its official priority, the fish merchants increased their profits with lucrative sales to the townspeople on the side.

## Edo-mae Fast Food

In the early morning of November 23, 1703, Edo was nearly devastated first by the great Genroku earthquake with its epicenter off the southern coast of the Boso peninsula, and then by the great fire that immediately followed. In the ruins of this fire, many peddlers selling dengaku (grilled tofu on a wooden skewer) appeared. This inexpensive food was favored by the victims of the earthquake and even by samurai who were not in the habit of buying prepared food on the street. This terrible disaster triggered the birth of the prepared food service industry in Edo.

After the great Meireki fire of 1657, shops selling chameshi (rice cooked in green tea) emerged in the Asakusa district of Edo. The shops quickly gained popularity by offering a meal

of chameshi, tofu soup, and side dishes of vegetables and beans. These are considered the beginning of restaurants in Edo, and they gradually began to offer more sophisticated dishes. Eventually, they developed into luxuriously furnished high-class restaurants that used refined tableware to serve meals to samurai, merchants and their guests out for business or entertainment, as well as those with a fine palate, including the educated and artists.

Enjoying prepared food from street peddlers and stalls also spread among the common people. Much of Edo's populace consisted of artisans and workers who had to stay healthy and didn't skimp on their food. Eating was a primary enjoyment for these people who could never dream of becoming wealthy.



The Uogashi's gate saw so much traffic when the market opened that it was sometimes difficult to pass through. Near the gate are street stalls selling sushi. (Property of the Wholesales Co-operative of Tokyo Fish Market)

They preferred foods that were easy to eat, low-priced, tasty, and provided a lot of energy. Many of today's standard Japanese dishes, such as soba (buckwheat noodles), charcoal-broiled eel, tempura, and sushi, began as fast foods that met the needs of Edo's masses. The major foodstuff was the particularly abundant seafood available from Edo bay and dishes made from this seafood were known collectively as Edo-mae. Though Edo-mae is most often associated with sushi, it was eel shops that first used the term as a catch phrase. Eels caught locally were considered best while those transported from other regions were thought to be of inferior quality. Hence, there was a time when Edo-mae referred to eels caught locally in the sea off of Edo. Edo-mae is also used to mean "Edo style." Edo-mae eel is first broiled and then steamed. It is then coated with a special sauce and broiled again. Eel prepared in this manner is soft and delicious without any extra fat. Therefore, Edo-mae eel tastes quite different from that pre-

pared in the Kansai style in the region around Kyoto and Osaka.

There were many troublesome beliefs about eel at the time. For example, only eel caught locally was good, eel should only be eaten in a shop, eel should be eaten while hot, and rice should not be served with eel. To avoid these inconveniences, people devised various new ideas. One new idea was to place charcoal-broiled eel in a box on top of heated soybean pulp so that customers could take their eel home and still eat it hot. This is considered the first example of takeout food in Japan. The manager of a theater near Nihonbashi invented a new dish that consisted of charcoal-broiled eel on rice. To treat someone to eel, the "host" would pay an eel shop in advance and a

receipt was issued. The host would then give the receipt to the recipient who could enjoy their eel at their own convenience. The receipt was called an eel ticket, and was the equivalent of a gift certificate. The tradition of eating eel on a particular midsummer day began with product copy written by Hiraga Gennai (1728–1779). The use of disposable wooden chopsticks spread widely due to their convenience when eating eel. It seems that many aspects of the dining-out culture began with ideas that increased the ways in which eel was enjoyed. Edo-mae tempura, made with local seafood such as prawns, Japanese conger, sillago, squid, and surf clams, began at street stalls and rapidly gained popularity for its low price and excellent flavor. Tempura seems to date back to the Azuchi Momoyama period (1573–1598), when Spanish or Portuguese ships introduced a deep-fried dish to Japan. Tempura was originally quite hard and crunchy, but light and crispy tempura, which holds in the juiciness of seafood, made its appear-

### The Founder of the Nihonbashi Uogashi and an Historical Background of its Birth

Mori Magoemon from Tsukuda village in Settsu, located on the northern coast of present-day Osaka bay, is the founder of the Nihonbashi Uogashi, or wholesale fish market. Archives show that after an unexpected encounter with Tokugawa Ieyasu, Magoemon followed Ieyasu as the warlord entered Edo in 1590 after his troops had seized Edo castle. This marked the first step in the Magoemon fishermen's advance into the city of Edo.

There are several mysterious stories explaining the relationship between Ieyasu and Magoemon. Magoemon supplied Ieyasu with fish during his stay at Fushimi castle in Kyoto. When Ieyasu needed to pass through enemy territory to return to his own castle in Mikawa (present-day eastern Aichi prefecture) after the death of Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582), Magoemon assisted Ieyasu by transporting him safely home on one of his boats, an adventure worthy of ninjas. During the two battles the Tokugawa fought against the Toyotomi in Osaka (the winter battle of 1614 and the summer battle of 1615), Magoemon's men scouted the neighboring seas and collected information

regarding enemy positions and numbers using warships disguised as fishing boats. This information was then relayed to Ieyasu's command headquarters.

It is easy to see how this group of fishermen, who served Ieyasu so well in war, was not merely a group of fishermen, but rather they were maritime mercenaries who already had the necessary skills and abilities. Magoemon and his fishermen were given broad fishing rights over Edo bay, were given exclusive contracts for supplying fish to Edo castle, and later received land for a residence they named Tsukudajima after their hometown. These rewards from Ieyasu to Magoemon and his fishermen must have been for their outstanding services.

In 1606, the shogunate granted permission for the establishment of a wholesale fish market in Nihonbashi. It is known that several years prior to this, a son of Magoemon, Kyuzaemon, opened the first wholesale fish shop on the bank of a man-made canal called Dosanbori, a part of the initial castle town district built after Ieyasu's arrival in Edo.

Please see FOOD CULTURE No. 14. for more information on Mori Magoemon and the origins of the Nihonbashi Uogashi.



Fish were placed on wooden shutters, called itabune, for sale. This illustration depicts the Uogashi during the Ansei era (1954–1960). A fish broker is auctioning fish in the lower left-hand corner, and fish merchants from various regions of Japan are visible on the street. (Property of the Wholesales Co-operative of Tokyo Fish Market)

ance during the late Edo period.

The earliest form of sushi is believed to be narezushi (fermented sushi). It was a preserved food made by utilizing the fermentation of rice to age fish, and only the fish was eaten. Later, iizushi evolved and both the fish and fermented rice was eaten. Hayazushi emerged next. Hayazushi was made by adding vinegar to rice to speed up the fermentation process. Hayazushi could be prepared overnight and was

sold by street peddlers and stalls. It became very popular with the people of Edo, who always appreciated quick service. The nigirizushi (hand-formed sushi) that first appeared around the Kasei era (1804–1830) was a revolution in the history of sushi. It did not require fermentation, and it was not a preserved food. Rather, it was a completely new dish that could be prepared instantly and made the most of the freshness of Edo-mae seafood. However, the originator of nigirizushi is unclear. Some say Hanaya Yohei while others believe it was Sakaiya Matsugoro. In any event, people were highly entertained as they watched nigirizushi being prepared.



Tuna was filleted using a large knife called a deba bocho. During the Edo period, tuna was transported to Edo from remote waters including those off the Oga peninsula of northeastern Japan, and the Goto islands in the East China Sea. Though tuna does not spoil quickly, it lost much of its freshness during journeys taking several days. (Property of the Wholesales Co-operative of Tokyo Fish Market)

The development of *Edo-mae* cuisine, with which fish and shellfish are the main ingredients, was as dependent on the use of seasonings as it was on the fish and shellfish. The emergence of dark soy sauce was a true milestone. Prior to the mid-Edo period, sashimi was not flavored with soy sauce. It was dipped in a concentrated mixture of bonito soup and sake seasoned with salt and vinegar, or in mustard vinegar. The spread of the Kanto soy sauce produced at Noda and Choshi, in present-day Chiba prefecture, greatly expanded the cooking methods and flavors of food at the time. Charcoal-broiled eel, tempura, and sushi would likely not have developed had it not been for soy sauce. The emergence of this seasoning, superbly suited to fish, made fish such a major source of protein for the

people of Edo that it was said that their bones would fall apart if they did not eat fish for three days.

## Prosperity of the Uogashi

Terakado Seiken depicted the Nihonbashi Uogashi with a touch of caricature in one chapter of *Edo Hanjoki*, published in 1832. Let's take a look at the fish he saw at the Uogashi with a free interpretation of his comments.

“Righteye flounders spew water high into the air in the spring, and Japanese sea bass are perky in the autumn breeze.”

There are a number of varieties of righteye flounder, each with its own season and recipes for which it is best suited. In the spring, dried Edo-mae righteye flounder would have been sold at the Uogashi. In the Edo period, righteye flounder served as sashimi was preferred due to the light flavor and absence of excess fat of the meat. In the fall, Japanese sea bass sashimi took over from carp sashimi. Thin slices of the sea bass immersed in water were pure white and gentle to the palate.

“Bonito are transported through the night with a swiftness comparable to a bird in flight, and horse mackerel at the evening market compete against eggplants.”

The first bonito of the season were transported with great speed by eight-oar boats so that they could reach the market in the middle of the night. Horse mackerel is the standard representative of Edo-mae fish. As horse mackerel came into season, the fish market escaped the summer doldrums. The market was open in the evening only during the summer months, and offered special bargains on Edo-mae fish.

“Flathead mullet arrives in tanks and blowfish are packed in snow. The bellies of goosfish are cold, and the eyes of left-eye flounders are chilling.”

Flathead mullet arrived at the Uogashi in tanks, and in winter, blowfish were packed in snow for transport. Flathead mullet has various names, depending upon the stage of its growth. The blowfish was sometimes referred to as teppo, or gun, because although its toxin is incredibly poisonous, the chances of consuming it were extremely rare, just as it was very difficult to hit a target with the guns of the time. In Edo, blowfish was used in soups rather than stewed with vegetables.

Almost all parts of goosfish were eaten, including the liver, fins, cheek, ovaries, stomach, gills, and skin, in addition to its



On the May 5th Boys' Day, the Uogashi enjoyed the largest sales of the year. It was customary for the salted and dried fish wholesalers of the Uogashi to present dried cod and dried blowfish to Edo castle on this day. (Property of the Wholesales Co-operative of Tokyo Fish Market)

meat, with practically nothing wasted. The wisdom and ingenuity that led to such economy is the defining characteristic of a true fish-eating culture. Flounder are often divided into left-eye and righteye species, but during the Edo period, this distinction was not so clear. Lefteye flounder sashimi and tuna sashimi were sometimes served together to take advantage of the celebratory red and white colors of the meats.

“Various species of gurnard intermingled together look like a field of flames, and tuna and pike conger lie side by side.”

As gurnards are red in color, they are considered lucky fish, and some shops in the Uogashi specialized in auspicious fishes used primarily in celebrations. Tuna, on the other hand, was considered an inauspicious fish and therefore unpopular, particularly among the samurai class. One reason for this was that tuna was not caught near Edo, but was transported from distant waters. In addition, without any type of refrigeration, tuna meat turned blackish by the time it reached Edo. However, in 1832, a large amount of tuna was caught quite near Edo. As tuna did not sell well, despite its low price, one astute individual served it as sushi, triggering a tuna boom. Some say Hanaya Yohei initiated this boom by soaking slices of tuna in soy sauce and using it in his nigirizushi. Pike conger was considered a premium fish, particularly favored in

Kyoto. Elaborate skills with a knife are required to deal with its countless bones. In Edo, charcoal-broiled conger was thought to have a more sophisticated flavor than charcoal-broiled eel.

“The number of octopuses is greater than that of shaven monks. Likewise, there are countless numbers of Heike crabs, flatheads, Japanese Spanish mackerel, and croakers in the Uogashi. The backs of red stingray are larger than the door to the furnace of hell.”

Seiken compared an array of octopuses to the bald heads of monks. However, the round part of the octopus is actually the body, and the head is at the base of the arms. In the Kansai region, octopus was cooked with sake and mirin (sweet cooking sake), while in Edo, boiled and vinegared octopus was more common. Heike crabs (*Heikea japonica*) have the fearsome face of a warrior on their shells. It is hard to believe that these crabs were actually sold at the market. Flatheads have an extremely hard head, but the cheek is tender and delicious. Japanese Spanish mackerel can be served in a variety of ways: as sashimi, boiled, or grilled. Its flesh is so soft that a delicate touch is required when handling it. Croakers, or drums, (*Argyrosomus argentatus*) and red stingrays were good ingredients in kamaboko (processed fish cakes). Near closing time,



Fish available in large quantities, such as sardines, gizzard shad, mackerel and horse mackerel, were not sold individually, but rather, by the scoop of a bamboo strainer or by the barrel. (Property of the Wholesales Co-operative of Tokyo Fish Market)



the rhythmical sound of large knives mincing the meat of these fish could be heard from kamaboko shops in the Uogashi.

“What if the sand from sea cucumbers were used to build the walls of a boar meat shop, and squid ink to write a baked sweet-potato shop’s sign?”

Dried meat, salted intestines, and dried ovaries are prized delicacies from the sea cucumber. Edo-mae squid were available at the Uogashi, but were never eaten raw.

"Gizzard shad, sardines, and mackerel are piled up like dust, and there

are too many salt- and freshwater clams to weigh. It seems unfair to catch them in such large quantities and treat them like insignificant grains of sand.”

Gizzard shad does not taste very good when it has been boiled or grilled, but it is delicious when salted and soaked in vinegar. It was a very popular fish in Edo-mae nigirizushi. Fish with shiny blue skin, such as sardines and mackerel, were truly common fish for the people of Edo, and they were never wasted. Fish such as these that were available in such large quantities were kept in barrels and sold by the scoop of a bamboo strainer.

“Of the sharks, Japanese bullhead sharks, Japanese sawsharks, and hammerhead sharks are represented. Spiny lobster, Shiba shrimp, freshwater prawns, Japanese tiger prawns, and krill are also available.”

Sharks were minced for use in kamaboko and hanpen (soft processed fish cakes). Shark fins were exported to China along with dried abalone and dried sea cucumber. When shark sashimi is made, the meat is boiled first to eliminate the smell. Spiny lobsters sold at the Uogashi were delivered from Kamakura. Shiba shrimp were once caught off the coast of Shiba, in Edo, and were an essential ingredient in tempura and sushi. However, Edo-mae shrimp no longer exists. Prawns have been used in celebratory dishes since the Edo period because they turn red when they are boiled. Krill are boiled down in soy sauce.

“Many large and small fish, including whales, salmon, and cod, caught in distant waters, as well as salted and dried products, are also delivered to the Uogashi from over the sea.”

A typical whale dish of the Edo period was miso soup with whale skin, customarily served on December 13, after the customary year end cleaning. On this day alone, it is said that five or six whales were consumed by the people of Edo. Salmon were not regularly transported to Edo from Hokkaido until the Kansei era (1789–1801). Until that time, only a limited number of salmon caught in the Kanto region’s Tone river were sold at the Uogashi. Due to the limited supply of salmon, the first salmon of autumn were priced just as high as the first bonito of spring. Cod appeared in the fish markets

with Edo's first snow of the year. Cod are big eaters. It is said that when its belly is opened, a hundred varieties of seafood can be found inside. Cod are also known for living long lives.

## Dealing in Life

In the days when Tokyo was called Edo, referring to high-spirited men meant those working at the Uogashi in Nihonbashi’s Odawara-cho. As speed is the main essence of the fresh fish trade, every action of those men was quick, and naturally, even their speech was straightforward. Some believe that it was the climate of the Uogashi that nurtured the spirit unique to the people called Edokko.

Fish are products of nature. It is not absolutely known where they come from, and there is no way to predict tomorrow’s catch. While there may be a large catch one day, there will also be days with nothing. Despite dealing with nature’s whims, the Uogashi has continued to thrive for four hundred years. The key to its survival has most likely been the full understanding of the individual characteristics of fish, and the manner of business best suited to these characteristics. The Uogashi was a significant contributor to the development of the fish-eating culture that bloomed in Edo. When all is said and done, the most important aspect of the Uogashi is that it has always been attuned to the nature of fish. The high spirits and briskness of men working at the Uogashi must be a vitality acquired from handling fish, which are, themselves, life.



A shrine to thank fish for their sacrifice established within the Namiyoke Inari Shrine in Tsukiji, Tokyo

### 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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