

"The reader will see Tokyo's colossal fish emporium through Bestor's eyes, far better than we could ever see it with our own." —SIDNEY MINTZ, author of *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom*

THEODORE C. BESTOR

# TSUKIJI

An aerial photograph of a bustling fish market. Numerous workers in various uniforms are seen pushing wooden carts and handling large fish. The ground is wet and reflective. In the background, there are stacks of yellow fish. The scene is filled with activity and the organized chaos of a major food market.

THE  
Fish  
Market  
AT THE  
Center  
of the  
World

### 3 From Landfill to Marketplace

As torrential rain lashed their faces and pasted their thin cotton festival robes flat against their bodies, Tsukiji's traders hove an enormous *mikoshi*—a god's palanquin, a portable shrine—through the marketplace during a typhoon in late September 1990. The festival honored the marketplace's tutelary deity, Suijin-sama (the god of water), and deluge or not, the Uogashi Suijin-sai—the Fish Market Suijin Festival—would go on as scheduled. Organizers buoyed their spirits by noting that the weather was “tottemo Suijin-sama rashii” —“so very like the Suijin-sama.”

From the palanquin's temporary resting place just inside the market's northern entry, across the bridge past the Namiyoke Shrine, through the outer marketplace, across Harumi Avenue, around the walls of the Hongan-ji temple, down Shin-Ōhashi Avenue, back past the outer market, and then through the main gate of the inner marketplace across from the headquarters of the *Asahi* newspaper, the enormous *mikoshi* navigated the storm. In front of the portable shrine walked a solemn, sodden procession of market elders and a troupe of their daughters and granddaughters wearing antiquated costumes and elaborate stage makeup, bedraggled and stoically miserable in the face of the downpour. Teams of young men from the marketplace struggled under the shifting weight of the slick lacquered poles that supported the heavy palanquin, trying to keep their balance on the drenched pavement.

Despite the storm, the portable shrine bounced with its predictable enthusiastic rhythm, signifying that the god rather than its bearers was in control. But, in the rain, the procession did not lurch out of bounds as it had at a previous Suijin festival, a generation earlier, when the *mikoshi* headed off for the Ginza, only to be blocked near the Kabuki-za theater by the police. To stop its travels further toward Tokyo's main shopping street, they

had confiscated the mikoshi's support poles, leaving it to sit on the pavement until a crane could be called to lift it onto a flatbed truck for a sedate trip back to the marketplace. This time, festival organizers were pleased that the frisky Suijin-sama had surprised them with only a typhoon. The god repaid their years of planning and preparation with a safe and sane Suijin-sai.

It was all very *iki*, everyone agreed, referring to the sense of style that underlies the more flamboyant aspects of *shitamachi* life: an aesthetic that relies on painstakingly artless use of color, pattern, and visual contrast to frame flashes of devil-may-care bravado, physical derring-do, and fiscal improvidence (Kōjiro 1986; Nishiyama 1997: chap. 3). What could be more *iki* than spending millions of yen to refurbish an elaborate mikoshi for a parade held in the teeth of a typhoon?

For the several days of the festival, Tsukiji's Suijin Shrine—inconspicuously tucked away among shops and office buildings in the inner marketplace—opened its gates for prayers and offerings. The tiny shrine structure, itself too small for anyone to enter, was cleaned and refurbished and its compound festooned with banners offered by merchants from the marketplace. Carpenters from nearby neighborhoods built a temporary resting place for the palanquin close to the shrine. The day before the festival, a pair of enormous bulls were brought from a shrine near Nikkō to pull the Suijin Shrine's *dashi*: a cart that towers almost three stories high, topped by an elaborately carved life-sized figure of a character from the *Nō* drama whose ancient silk robes were fitted to it by a dresser recruited from the kabuki theater. Auspicious red-and-white bunting decorated the loading docks near the shrine. The wholesalers' meeting hall adjacent to the shrine became the reception area and command post for the festival. For three and a half days, the normal activities of the marketplace came to a halt.

This was only the third full-blown Suijin festival of the twentieth century (the others were in 1920 and 1955); it takes place once a generation.<sup>1</sup> For several years, the market's festival committee had discussed putting on the festival again. During the long decline of the Shōwa Emperor and the period of mourning that followed his death in January 1989, they suspended the planning, but in 1990 Tsukiji's elders decided the time was right. It was the 400th anniversary of the occupation of Edo Castle by Tokugawa Ieyasu. Under the rule of the Tokugawa dynasty, which lasted until 1868, Edo (now Tokyo) grew to be Japan's predominant metropolis. Because of the market's claims to have originated with fishers who accompanied Ieyasu on his march to occupy Edo, the 1990 celebrations marked the putative 400th anniversary of the fish market as well. It was also the 40th anniversary of the revival of the marketplace, dated from the lifting of rationing and price

controls after World War II and the relicensing of intermediate wholesalers. And in the spring of 1990, the marketplace had completed one of its periodic rotations of stalls, so the intermediate wholesalers were all established in fresh locations.

The most pressing reason to hold the festival in 1990 was that reconstruction of the existing marketplace was scheduled to begin in 1991. The massive project would tear up the market for over a decade. After full-scale construction started, there would be no opportunity to hold a festival until sometime in the early twenty-first century. With a new marketplace on the drawing boards, 1990 would be the last chance to celebrate the marketplace as it had been for most of the working lives of all but the oldest Tsukiji denizens. This was the last chance to hold the festival while some of those who had participated in the previous festival in 1955 were still active, and for them to share their experience with younger people.

Tsukiji's Suijin-sama holds title to a domain that is discontinuous geographically and, to an increasing extent, socially (map 4). The tiny Suijin Shrine at Tsukiji is a branch of a slightly larger shrine to Suijin-sama located in the precincts of the Kanda Myōjin Shrine, several kilometers to the northwest.<sup>2</sup> Kanda Myōjin, one of the city's largest Shintō shrines and home to one of Tokyo's three major annual festivals, is the tutelary shrine for Nihonbashi, the center of mercantile life in old Edo where, until 1923, the old fish market stood. The guardian god of the marketplace therefore defends many domains. It is a god of the domestic hearth or *daidokoro*, a protector of the fish market (which, after all, regards itself as "Tokyo's *daidokoro*"), and a champion of the Nihonbashi mercantile district as a whole.

Suijin-sama watches over the marketplace, not the Tsukiji district per se. The neighborhood of Tsukiji has its own guardian deity, the Inari-sama resident in the Namiyoke Shrine ever since the area was first reclaimed from the bay in the seventeenth century. A third shrine—the Sumiyoshi Shrine on the islet of Tsukudajima—houses a guardian deity also significant to some market participants. This shrine, a branch of the large Sumiyoshi Shrine in Osaka, was reputedly established in the late sixteenth century by the fishers who accompanied Ieyasu on his journey to take possession of Edo. For Tsukiji traders who trace their ancestry and that of the marketplace to that momentous event, the Sumiyoshi Shrine is an important landmark.

In staging the festival for Suijin-sama, the elderly members of the Uogashi-kai—the committee responsible for the upkeep of the Suijin shrine and for organizing the infrequent festival—called on younger generations of Tsukiji traders and workers to provide financial support and energy. The invitation did not go unheeded; firms and individuals donated millions of yen.

Wholesalers ordered thousands of cotton festival robes (*yukata*) decorated with the symbols of the fish market. Firms organized more than a hundred teams of men—eight to ten to a team—to help carry the mikoshi. Individuals spent countless hours planning the festival, renovating the mikoshi and other paraphernalia, and cleaning and decorating the marketplace.

The Tsukiji marketplace the festival celebrated in 1990 was far different from the fish market of the past, certainly different from the representations of its past that the festival memorialized. A couple of generations of change had eradicated the character of the fish market as simultaneously a workplace and a residential community, and had eroded the sense that market workers pursue an occupation situated within an all-embracing social world.

In the Nihonbashi era, workplace and home were often the same for traders, many of whom lived above or behind their shops. With the market's relocation to Tsukiji in the 1920s, the new marketplace physically separated workplace and home. Yet because the nearby neighborhoods north of the marketplace became home to many of Tsukiji's traders, family and shop remained close. Today, after a couple of decades of prosperity for the fish market and in the wake of Tokyo's astronomical real estate inflation, only a few Tsukiji traders live in the area; many commute by private car from distant suburbs.

With geographical dispersion, the daily life and social contacts of the marketplace are alien to many members of the traders' own families. Moreover, the sense of loyalty, identity, and participation in a common enterprise, a common way of life, that bound together (at least in memory) employers and employees, elders and juniors, masters and apprentices, buyers and sellers, has weakened as the business of the fish market increasingly has taken on the character of corporate Japan. Family firms now have boards of directors; workers are recruited through newspaper advertisements; some employees commute to and from company apartment complexes; apprentices can no longer hope to be set up in business by their masters (although marrying the boss's daughter remains a possibility). The marketplace is no longer a circumscribed, face-to-face community.

The older Tsukiji traders who planned the 1990 festival knew all this, of course, and would occasionally lament the passing of the spirit of the Nihonbashi uogashi, the old fish market. As the years have gone by, nostalgic recollection had blurred the sharp edges of economic and political conflict that rocked Nihonbashi throughout much of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In memory, turbulence appears as communal bustle. The festival sought to recapture some of that spirit of affinity and to

mobilize—or create—a community sustained for the moment by the reflected glory of the fish market's past.

In organizing the fête to honor the Suijin-sama, the Uogashi-kai not only called on the resources of the marketplace itself but also drew in a more extensive range of people for whom such festivals have meaning. Because of Tsukiji's venerable, if at times contrived, ties to the mercantile quarters of old Edo, its festival lays claim to space in the city's nostalgic imagination. The Suijin-sama's festival is but one landmark on an almost imperceptible social topography marked off by shrine parish boundaries that both outline the territories of tutelary deities and also—for the cognoscenti—help to place self and other in a complex system of local identity and social standing. This is a dimension of Tokyo's social space in which festival aficionados identify themselves by the tutelary shrines of their neighborhoods: Minato's Teppōzu, Monzennaka-chō's Hachiman, Yushima's Tenjin. In this social world, volunteer firemen and old-fashioned construction foremen—known as *tobi* or *tobishoku*—are the cocks of the walk.<sup>3</sup> They carefully delineate and protect their *jiban* or *nawabari* (spheres of influence or stamping ground) and are as knowledgeable about the territorial claims of *yakuza* gangs as they are of the hierarchical layers of municipal authority. In this shadowy realm of social geography, a flash of ornate tattooing is an admission ticket, even as those so inscribed hasten to assure onlookers that they are “men of honor” (*katagi na hito*), not outlaws (Egawa 1990; Richie and Buruma 1980).

For Tsukiji's festival to happen, the Suijin-sama was put on the shoulders of others, others with pasts constructed out of the repertoire of spatial-historical memories embodied in shitamachi identity today. Of the hundred-odd teams of men recruited to hoist the mikoshi, roughly half were from outside the marketplace: residents of nearby neighborhoods; groups of festival fans from throughout the city; volunteer firefighters from shitamachi neighborhoods; and members of the gang, Tsukumasa Ikka, that considers the Tsukiji district its turf. Festivals like Tsukiji's Uogashi Suijin-sai have particular force and legitimacy because they so neatly connect place, history, and contemporary social reality. For participants as much as for onlookers, the identity of locale and the sense of historically situated tradition become almost entirely intermingled: Nihonbashi, Tsukiji, and the heartland of old shitamachi.



This chapter depicts Tsukiji's history through a rearview mirror. The view is narrow, it bounces quite a bit, and it is seen almost entirely from the per-

spective of the current driver. And a rearview mirror mainly reflects landmarks of the very recent journey. Here I outline briefly a few of the central trends in Tsukiji's development that one major set of actors—the intermediate wholesalers—sees as the most important for understanding the contemporary marketplace. This account focuses on those aspects of Tsukiji's history that most clearly exhibit their views of their own occupation and its place in the market's development.

In the minds of Tokyo's residents, Tsukiji and its environs are now almost indelibly fused with the fish trade; yet market and place were in fact brought together quite recently, in the mid-1920s. But even though the long histories of place and market have intersected only in the past several generations, the venerable institutions of the fish trade and the events that formed the Tsukiji district—the confluence of market and of place—have significantly shaped the present structure of the marketplace as well as the images of it held by market insiders and the general public alike.<sup>4</sup>

### **THE PLACE: FROM LANDFILL TO FOREIGN SETTLEMENT**

Tsukiji rose during the seventeenth century out of the marshy lowlands along the mouth of the Sumida River. Throughout the Tokugawa period (1603–1868), low-lying areas in the river delta were systematically filled. Earth from the gigantic excavations undertaken by the shōgunate to build castle moats and transportation canals created space for Edo's growing merchant quarters and for aristocratic estates and villas along the waterfront.

After the great Meireki fire of 1657, which destroyed almost two-thirds of Edo's buildings and killed perhaps as many as 100,000 people, the Hongan-ji temple, the enormous Kantō headquarters of the popular Jōdo Shinshū sect of Buddhism based at the Nishi Hongan-ji temple in Kyoto, was relocated from Asakusa to Tsukiji. The fishers of nearby Tsukudajima—themselves transplanted from the Kansai area where the sect was based—contributed greatly to constructing the Tsukiji Betsuin (as Hongan-ji was originally known), and the temple rewarded them with hereditary sinecures as guards, attendants, and cemetery keepers.

South of the main temple, on land that is now the outer marketplace, many sub-temples were erected, numbering almost eighty in the eighteenth century. A wide swath of villas and estates of feudal lords separated the densely clustered complex of temples from the rest of the commoners' city. Still extant is the garden of the Hama Rikyū (Hama Detached Palace), a former waterfront villa, now a public garden just to the west of the present-day Tsukiji marketplace. Between the Hama Rikyū and the sub-temples of

Hongan-ji were a garden and villa of the influential Matsudaira clan; the site of this estate is where the marketplace now stands.

East of Hongan-ji, isolated from the commercial center of the city, a small district of commoners' residences and workshops lay in a narrow strip along the riverbank.<sup>5</sup> Just across the Sumida River from this settlement was the tiny islet of Tsukudajima, poised defensively at the mouth of the river. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Tsukudajima was home to a village of fishers, who settled there supposedly under the sponsorship of Tokugawa Ieyasu, founder of the dynasty bearing his name. Today, these fishers are popularly credited as having founded Edo's fish market and as the occupational forebears of Tsukiji's contemporary traders.

The proximity of Tsukudajima, however, did not involve the Tsukiji area substantially in the fish trade, although in the early nineteenth century a small market briefly sprang up along the riverbank behind the Hongan-ji temple. Edo's major fish market developed in the heart of the city, at Nihonbashi (literally "Japan Bridge"). Built in 1603, it and the surrounding district just outside the main gates of Edo Castle quickly became not only the commercial center of Edo but also the symbolic center of the city and the nation. Throughout the Tokugawa period, the bridge itself was the zero point from which all distances throughout the realm were measured, and it was across Nihonbashi that all formal processions visiting or departing from the shōgun's court passed.

Edo was a city of canals. The eastern parts of the old city, the low-lying districts between Edo Castle and the Sumida River, were mostly landfill, created from the massive seventeenth-century excavations that rechanneled rivers and created defensive moats circling the shōgun's castle. In the mercantile districts, specific stretches of the canal banks became the destinations for particular cargoes—fish, vegetables, wood, rice, and so forth—and along these quays (*kashi* or *gashi*) more than fifty specialized commodity markets developed for lumber, clothing, and other products (see Suzuki 1999: 74–75; McClain 1994). The uogashi, or fish quay, was located along the northern bank of the canal to the east of Nihonbashi. The Nihonbashi uogashi, the Nihonbashi fish market, which remained there until 1923, occupied a site very near the present-day Mitsukoshi department store, and a monument to the market's long history stands at the northeastern corner of the contemporary bridge.

I will return shortly to the development of the Nihonbashi uogashi; as for Tsukiji, throughout the Tokugawa period it remained commercially a remote cul-de-sac. This isolation helps to account for the next significant





**Figure 25.** The fish market at Nihonbashi. “Clearing After Snow, Nihonbashi,” by Hiroshige. From his 1856 series *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*. Bequest of William P. Chapman, Jr., Class of 1895, in the collection and reproduced with permission of the Herbert F. Museum of Art, Cornell University.

development of Tsukiji’s history: the creation in the late nineteenth century of the Tsukiji Foreign Settlement (Tsukiji Kyoryūchi).

In 1858, major Western powers negotiated treaties with Japan that opened Edo and several other cities to foreigners. The Tokugawa regime began preparations for a foreign settlement in Edo, which the new Meiji imperial government inaugurated at Tsukiji in 1869 to 1870.<sup>6</sup> The Tokugawa authorities probably had several reasons for choosing Tsukiji. It was convenient by boat to Yokohama, where the majority of foreigners had settled, and it was close to Shinbashi, the planned terminus of the railroad being built from Yokohama. Since Tsukiji had also been the site of various early efforts to cultivate “Dutch studies” (i.e., the study of the West), perhaps the area seemed already ripe for—or tainted by—internationalization.<sup>7</sup> But perhaps most important, the Tsukiji site was cut off from central Tokyo by canals, by a swath of secondary villas and estates of middle-ranking feudal lords (*daimyō*), by the huge Hongan-ji temple complex, and by the general remoteness of the lower Sumida from the centers of both aristocratic and plebeian Tokyo. Foreigners therefore would be safely out of sight in Tsukiji.

Tsukiji was never popular with foreign residents; indeed, its non-Japanese

population “wavered around a hundred” (Seidensticker 1983: 38). Shortly after the settlement was completed, the Ginza fire of 1872 wiped out some of the early hotels and public buildings that had given Tokyo its first glimpses of what one of the Meiji period’s leading intellectuals, Fukuzawa Yukichi, heralded as “Civilization and Enlightenment.” That same year, the Shinbashi terminus of the new railway that linked Tokyo with the major international port (and the much larger foreign settlement) in Yokohama was completed. Most foreign traders deserted the capital for the bustling port city, leaving the Tsukiji settlement to diplomats, missionaries, and teachers. Although many residents were undoubtedly as respectable as the missionaries portrayed in *Clara’s Diary* (Whitney 1979), the journal of a young American woman who lived in Tsukiji from 1875 to 1884, others were less savory—as suggested by Tanizaki Jun’ichirō’s speculations about the nocturnal occupations of the young European women who tutored him at an English language academy in Tsukiji, where he studied briefly as a young boy (Tanizaki 1988: 166–70; Seidensticker 1983: 36–42).

But the settlement’s influence was disproportionate to its population. A number of institutions that have since become eminent—such as Rikkyō (St. Paul’s) University, Meiji Gakuin University, Aoyama Gakuin University, and St. Luke’s Hospital—can trace their origins to the efforts of Tsukiji’s foreign missionaries. Nearby, the Meiji government acquired the estate of the Matsudaira clan south of the Hongan-ji temple and established on the site a naval training school, one of Japan’s first Western-style military academies. It remained only until 1888, when it moved to Etajima, near Hiroshima, where it became the premier academy of the Japanese Imperial Navy.

The Tsukiji foreign settlement survived only a generation, until the Meiji government negotiated an end to the international agreements for extraterritoriality—which exempted foreigners from the laws and control of the Japanese state—in July 1899. With the abolition of extraterritoriality, foreigners and foreign institutions were free to locate elsewhere in Tokyo, and most did. The foreign legations moved to Kōjimachi and other areas closer to the Imperial Palace and the centers of national government; the churches and schools, along with most of the resident foreigners, moved to the more desirable and spacious western fringes of the city. All that remained of the foreign settlement—with the sole exception of St. Luke’s Hospital—disappeared in the fires that followed the Kantō earthquake.<sup>8</sup>

This earthquake, which destroyed most of central Tokyo on September 1, 1923, had incalculable impact on the future development of the entire city. The earthquake and the fires that raged in its aftermath completely razed the old fish market at Nihonbashi and devastated the Tsukiji district as well.

Visiting Tsukiji a few days after the earthquake, Joseph Dahlmann, a Jesuit priest and professor of German literature at Tokyo Imperial University, wrote an eyewitness account:

I follow the road to the spot once occupied by the great Hongwanji [Hongan-ji] temple. . . . To-day there is no trace of it left. From here on I pass through another of those terrific fire areas, which must be seen to appreciate to the full the effects of the catastrophe. The former sites of big business are now heaped with ashes from which the odor of burnt and rotting corpses urges the wayfarer to hasten. . . . Now the vista opens on the Tsukiji settlement, formerly reserved for the occupation of foreigners. . . . Heaps of ruins are the only reminder of the fact that this street was lined on both sides by neat residences in American style. The Metropole and Central Hotel in the vicinity could not be saved though they fronted on Tokyo bay, where plenty of water was available. Through the fitful shifting of the breeze the fire rushed on Tsukiji—from two, later on from three different directions, so that the inhabitants were hard pressed to escape with their bare lives. . . . Every avenue of escape was barred except one road leading into Shiba. (Dahlmann 1924: 98–100)

The earthquake and fire cleared land, at incalculable human cost, and in the rebuilding of Tokyo the marketplace moved from Nihonbashi to Tsukiji, firmly relocating the linkage between market and place in Tokyo's popular imagination.

## **THE MARKET: FROM TSUKUDAJIMA TO TSUKIJI**

### Founding the Market

Tokyo's fish market conventionally traces its origins back to 1590, the year that Tokugawa Ieyasu assumed control of Edo Castle. In the heroic history of Tsukiji, the market originated from the relationship between Ieyasu, the brilliant general who was confirmed as shōgun in 1603, and Mori Magoemon, a fisher from the village of Tsukuda in Settsu province, in what is now Osaka Prefecture.<sup>9</sup>

Magoemon was born in 1569 and, according to legend, encountered Ieyasu in 1582 when he became a fisher supplying Ieyasu's entourage. And when Ieyasu formally entered Edo to take possession of the city and its castle in 1590, Magoemon supposedly headed a band of thirty-odd fishers who formed a tiny part of Ieyasu's retinue.

The fishers had proved their loyalty to Ieyasu during the preceding civil wars. This fealty and the strategic location of the tiny island on which they

settled gave rise to their slightly sinister reputation as water-borne spies for the Tokugawa regime and guardians of the riverine approaches to the city. Whatever their true services, Magoemon and his companions received the island at the mouth of the Sumida River—now named Tsukudajima, after their ancestral village—and fishing rights to the waters of upper Edo Bay. In return for this monopoly, they supplied Ieyasu's court with fish. In particular, the fishers were required to present the castle with the first catches of the whitefish (*shirauo*) that were plentiful at the Sumida River's mouth from November to March (see Tōkyō-to Kōbunshokan 1978).

In 1603 Magoemon's son Kyūzaemon requested and received permission to sell surplus catches to Edo's commoners. In 1613 he and others opened a shop called Tsukudaya Kyūzaemon in Hon-Odawara-chō, a section of Nihonbashi. At roughly the same time, Ōwada Sukegoro, also from the Osaka region, opened a business in nearby Hon-Funa-chō serving Edo's warrior elite with live sea bream imported from the coastal waters near present-day Shizuoka. By 1641 at least fourteen fishmongers were operating around Nihonbashi, half of them affiliated with Magoemon's group from Tsukuda. Magoemon, his son Kyūzaemon, and their followers thus became credited as the marketplace's legendary founding fathers.<sup>10</sup>

Tsukudajima also holds its time-honored place in the history of Japanese cuisine for its delicacy known as *tsukudani* (boiled in the Tsukuda fashion): seafood and vegetables steeped in thick soy sauce. A handful of present-day Tsukiji intermediate wholesalers claim genealogical descent from the original fishers of Tsukudajima, and the first character of the name is used in several dozen Tsukiji shop names, implying to customers (though by no means proving) the shops' venerability.

Fishing and markets had existed in Edo long before the arrival of Ieyasu and Magoemon, of course. Edo had been a fishing village for centuries. In 1457 a local warlord, Ōta Dōkan, erected a castle there to control the fertile Kantō Plain. A fish market regularly operated at Shiba, along the bay to the southeast of the castle. Just outside the castle gates, a mixed market called Yokkaichi ("Fourth-Day Market")<sup>11</sup> sold fish—primarily dried and salted fish brought from the Kamakura area—and other necessities to both the castle and the townspeople. Both these markets, which predated the establishment of the Nihonbashi market, continued throughout the Tokugawa period; indeed, the Nihonbashi marketplace grew up next to the Yokkaichi market, which survived as a distinct entity until 1923.

The "establishment" of Edo's fish market by Magoemon's kin and followers is a historical myth that respectfully credits the dynastic founder of the Tokugawa regime, Ieyasu, with the creation of all things. But in several



**Figure 26.** The daily bustle of the Nihonbashi market during the Tokugawa period. Sketch by Mori Kazan.

important respects, the Nihonbashi market that developed *was* new and not simply a continuation of its predecessors.

#### Nihonbashi Uogashi

Against the backdrop of Edo's population growth and the increasing prosperity of its merchant classes during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the Nihonbashi marketplace developed rapidly. Its organization reflected the intricate and shifting relationships among fishers, merchants, and consumers, all dependent on feudal patronage in different ways. Shōgunal officials were always ambivalent about merchants; on the one hand, they constantly inspected the market for tax evasion, and on the other hand, they regarded merchants as a ready source of cash. The castle demanded the best seafood at nominal prices, while its elaborate sumptuary regulations prevented wealthy townspeople from (openly) enjoying the best the marketplace could offer.

Edo strategically dominated the entire Kantō Plain, and for this simple reason Ieyasu chose it as his headquarters after defeating rivals for control of eastern Japan. After the arrival of Ieyasu and especially after the establishment of the Tokugawa shōgunate, Edo grew explosively. Although population figures for the premodern city are unsystematic, around 1600 Edo

probably had no more than a few thousand residents. By the 1650s its population had reached nearly half a million, making Edo Japan's largest city. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the population had grown to about 1 million, and by the 1720s, 1.3 million, making Edo the world's largest city of the time (eighteenth-century London had a population of about 600,000; Beijing, about 1 million). After the 1730s, Edo's population remained relatively constant until the mid-nineteenth century (Cybriwsky 1998: 54).

As the Nihonbashi market began to supply the populace of a rapidly expanding city, its scale quickly surpassed that of Edo's earlier markets. Urban growth, the expansion of long-distance transportation, and the peace imposed during the long Tokugawa rule all helped to foster prosperity and the growth of a cash economy, despite official efforts to suppress it. Ideologically, the feudal regime espoused an economic ideal of physiocratic agrarianism (the idea that wealth is land and the products that can be extracted from that land) and despised the urban artisan and merchant classes in whose hands a market economy flourished. Even though the shōgunate exercised tight controls over economic activity in general, merchants of the period developed highly sophisticated commercial practices, perhaps in part because the feudal authorities had no conception of a market economy and could hardly recognize it as such, let alone formulate rules to contain it effectively. The powerful Osaka merchants, for example, who controlled much of the nation's long-distance trade during the Tokugawa period, developed what was perhaps the world's first organized futures trading. In the early eighteenth century, the Osaka rice futures market "developed without any guidance from financial authorities . . . a market that materialized solely in response to the needs of market participants," without either a priori economic theorizing or the institutionalized regulatory authority that characterizes contemporary futures markets (Schaefer 1991: 340; see also McClain 1999).

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, urban commoners (*chōnin*—merchants and artisans) grew wealthy as a class even as samurai and the regime as a whole fell further and further into debt. The merchants prospered despite rigid sumptuary regulations designed to curb commoners' consumption, to increase revenues for the state, and to enforce the stylistic boundaries sharply separating society's various classes from one another (e.g., Shively 1955; Coaldrake 1981). The authorities' disapproval notwithstanding, in Edo and elsewhere *chōnin* developed a lively, flamboyant, hedonistic, and materialistic culture that celebrated—among other things—consumption. The fish merchants of Nihonbashi both catered to and reveled in

this consumption, and as they prospered they too became leading patrons of Edo's urbane culture.

A satiric verse (*senryū*) alludes to the Nihonbashi market:

Yoru to hiru, asa to ni chiru nichu sen ryō

Evening, noon, and dawn, a thousand ryō are scattered each day

(*Tōkyō-to Chūō Oroshiuri Shijō* 1985: 4)

The lines refer to three places in Edo where a thousand gold *ryō*<sup>12</sup> changed hands every day: the pleasure quarters of Yoshiwara at night, the theaters in midday, and the fish market in the morning. An earthier verse with a similar message was recited to me by a Tsukiji official: "Three things that consume a thousand *ryō* a day—above the nose, below the nose, below the navel" (i.e., eyes—theater; mouth—food; loins—sex). Tsukiji legend makes the connection in other ways as well: the calligraphy for the uogashi symbol that dots the marketplace today reputedly was first used on an elaborate curtain presented to a kabuki troupe in the middle Tokugawa period by its wealthy fishmonger patrons, as an advertisement—certainly of their wealth, perhaps of their wares.

The Tokugawa regime was perpetually suspicious of commerce and mercantile life in general, and the Nihonbashi fish market was highly regulated. Officially, the market was authorized, indeed required, to supply the court—it was a *goyō ichiba*, a marketplace "by appointment to his majesty"—and the feudal privileges and obligations that this status imposed closely linked the marketplace to the shōgunate. The shōgunate exacted tribute in specified amounts or kinds of seafood from fishing villages (as did local feudal lords); the rights of these villages to exploit certain waters and monopolies over particular species were themselves under the control of the regime, which could grant them, reconfirm them, or take them away almost at will.<sup>13</sup> The tribute exacted for control over a fishing ground was sometimes purely nominal, a symbolic token acknowledging fealty to the lord; in most cases, however, the tribute was substantial and provisioned the regime through taxation in kind.

As Edo's fish trade grew, its character changed. Traders in the older markets (like the early fishmongers from Tsukudajima) included many fishers selling their own catches; as the Nihonbashi marketplace developed, many of its traders became true wholesalers (*ton'ya*) who bought rather than caught the seafood they sold. Control over particular fishing grounds became entangled with the rights to sell the catches in Edo. In some cases fishing villages like Tsukudajima requested permission to sell surplus

catches in Edo and thereby acquired a monopoly. In other instances (for example, the case of Ōwada Sukegoro and the Shizuoka sea bream mentioned earlier) fish merchants gained control over the sale of a particular locality's catch. But the end result was similar: fishers and wholesalers were quickly and irrevocably locked together under the feudal system. The business of Edo's ton'ya revolved around so-called proprietary coasts (*mochiura*), that is, fishing villages and grounds with which they had exclusive trading rights. Typically an Edo ton'ya would advance cash to local fishing bosses—"net masters," or *amimoto*—for the costs of equipment and would enter into a long-term trade relationship with net masters or with a local ton'ya in the vicinity of the fishing port. Fishers could sell their catches only through a licensed ton'ya; a ton'ya could control a catch only at the sufferance of the authorities, who granted permission at a price.

The wholesalers of Nihonbashi were also caught up in—and created by—a system of feudal tribute known as *jōnō*: a complicated combination of rights to engage in trade, tax exemptions, and the serious matter of provisioning the shōgun's court, his direct retainers, his garrisons, and his hangers-on. In 1644 fish merchants in the Nihonbashi area organized themselves, and the shōgunate officially recognized the "Four Guilds of Fish Wholesalers" (Uodon'ya Yongumi), each located in a distinct neighborhood within the larger Nihonbashi district: Hon-Funa-chō, Hon-Funa-chō Yokomise, Hon-Odawara-chō, and Anjin-chō.<sup>14</sup> The *raison d'être* for official recognition was the *jōnō* system, under which merchants supplied fish to the shōgunate in return for licenses entitling them to conduct long-distance trade and to sell seafood to the general public. The shōgunate established three *uokaijo* (fish offices) at Nihonbashi, to supervise the guilds and to ensure that the castle was well supplied.

In 1674 fishers from thirteen villages in the Kantō region around Edo protested the monopolies of the Four Guilds and their "proprietary villages." In response, the shōgunate established an additional marketplace in Moto Zaimoku-chō, just south of the Nihonbashi Bridge, near the Yokkaichi marketplace for dried and salted fish. This market was called Shinsakanaba (literally, the "New Fish Place"), or simply Shinba, the "New Place," and it, too, became part of the *jōnō* system. The merchants of the Shinsakanaba were responsible for supplying the shōgunate during the first *shun*—the first ten-day segment—of each month, and the original Four Guilds for the latter two *shun*.<sup>15</sup>

Although the feudal privilege of trade was, in a sense, a boon, in the long run merchants considered it "the cancer of the fish trade." The *jōnō* system created a class of fish merchants under perpetual obligation to provide low-



cost fish to the shōgun and his massive retinue. During the system's first century, the shōgunate paid only about 10 percent of the market value of the fish it received, and its agents naturally expected to receive the finest fish available. Although wholesalers were individually obligated to provide fish according to the shōgunate's daily specifications, the members of each guild were collectively responsible for filling the appropriate quotas, and individual wholesalers frequently cooperated to cover each other in the face of shortfalls.

Official patronage had its benefits, of course, and at least in the first century or so of Nihonbashi's existence, wholesalers enjoyed both the material advantages of privileged trade and a sense of pride at being in the service of the shōgunate. The merchant guilds were constantly on the lookout for ways to exploit their connections to the shōgunate to advance their material interests. For example, in 1720 the shōgunal authorities established a port office in Uraga, just south of Edo, to control shipping and to increase tax revenues. Permits and inspections were mandatory for all ships entering Edo Bay. Seven guilds of Edo wholesalers—from Nihonbashi and the older Shiba market—who dealt in fresh fish, however, requested exemptions for their fishing vessels, carefully noting that delays would impair the quality of the fish they provided the castle. The officials evidently saw their point, and sixty-four wholesalers were designated as "certified wholesalers" (*inkan ton'ya*), that is, wholesalers authorized to issue letters of transit to fishing and cargo vessels in their service. Together these sixty-four wholesalers controlled roughly 1,200 vessels, both fishing and cargo craft (*Uogashi hyakunen* 1968: 70–71).

These wholesalers, however, were only a fraction of the fish trade. For example, as of 1743, the six guilds of wholesalers in the Nihonbashi district (the Four Guilds, the Shinsakanaba, and the merchants of Yokkaichi) numbered 512 members. Although the guilds had their origins in specific neighborhoods, over time their membership dispersed somewhat; thus members of, for example, the Hon-Funa-chō guild could be found throughout the Nihonbashi area as well as in other regions of the city—even as far away as Shinagawa, near the city's southern gates (*Uogashi hyakunen* 1968: 160–75). But the guilds remained tightly defined by the rights and obligations that continued to bind them to the specific fish offices the shōgunate had established in Nihonbashi to administer the jōnō system.

Wholesalers—ton'ya—whether specifically bound by the rules of the jōnō system or not (as was the case for the wholesalers of Shiba and Yokkaichi) were all beholden to the shōgunal authorities through their licenses to engage in long-distance and local trade, as well as through the

monopolies that entitled them to control particular fishing grounds and catches. A secondary group of fish merchants, lacking either any entitlements to engage in long-distance trade or any specified obligation to the regime, developed at Nihonbashi and elsewhere as quasi-wholesale/quasi-retail traders, commonly known as “middle traders” (*nakagai*) or as “lower receivers” (*ukeshita*). The essence of the trade was twofold: buying and selling fish that ton’ya had “imported,” and then selling directly to the public. Many of the smaller ton’ya developed side businesses along these lines, and became known as *ton’ya-ken-nakagai* (wholesaler-middlemen). Middlemen without established places of business set up shop on the streets of Nihonbashi (which was a commercial center for many other trades as well),<sup>16</sup> bringing protests from established merchants that fish peddlers were disrupting the flow of other business. Eventually the shōgunal authorities imposed a compromise: middlemen were granted the rights to rent the areas in front of other merchants’ shops—what one might think of as sidewalk space, except that Edo had no sidewalks. These rights, called “board rights” (*itafuneken*), entitled middlemen to put out one or two large cutting boards apiece in front of shops, but only during the early morning hours.

Most of the major institutions and practices of the Nihonbashi market were well established and set in place by the early eighteenth century. Over time, however, the cost of *jōnō* grew oppressive; inflation on the one hand and the increasingly autocratic bureaucracy of the shōgunate on the other undercut those benefits of feudal protection and patronage that the system had originally provided. Repeatedly, wholesalers and fishing villages alike sought relief from the shōgunate, which sometimes assisted with land grants, the revenue from which would supposedly subsidize costs incurred in providing the fish required by the *jōnō* system.

Cheating was rampant. Fish merchants designed baskets with false bottoms to conceal high-quality fish; others hid fish at the bottoms of cesspools and latrines, hoping that official inspectors would not search carefully. In 1792 a new and more powerful fish office was established to regulate the trade, and its officials relentlessly extracted their due from the daily traffic in fish. Throughout the remainder of the Tokugawa period, conflicts between the fish offices and the ton’ya were frequent. Although many reforms and countermeasures were tried, none addressed the basic structural problems at the heart of the *jōnō* system.

Protests over the shōgunal authorities’ onerous regulations, their attempts to crack down on cheating wholesalers, and reforms to correct the institutional problems all continued apace, but for nearly a century from the 1720s onward relatively little changed. By the 1830s and 1840s, however,



**Figure 27.** Hiding fish to avoid the tax collector. Sketch by Mori Kazan.

the political and economic power of the Tokugawa regime was in serious danger of collapse. In the face of rising debts to the merchant classes, the Tokugawa regime systematically debased the currency nineteen times between 1819 and 1837. Samurai stipends (paid as fixed amounts of rice) had long since fallen behind inflation. The regime's dependence on the despised merchant classes clashed with its attempts to reexert feudal control over what had become a highly sophisticated domestic economy (see Schaefer 1991; Hanley 1997). During the Tempō era (1830–44), reformers within the shōgunal government tried to purify the economic system of endemic corruption and to revitalize the political regime. Among many other measures, in 1841 the shōgunate revoked the system of feudal monopolies and ton'ya licensing. This reform was expected to lower prices; instead, the result was wild speculation in commodities, massive inflation, and general economic chaos. In 1851 the authorities reinstated the monopolies and guilds. Throughout this economic turmoil, the shōgunate retained the jōnō system, and Nihonbashi's dealers remained obligated to supply the castle with the finest catches. But the larger political and economic problems of the Tokugawa regime continued to worsen and in the 1850s and 1860s, rebellious clans began to rally against the Tokugawa regime in a movement to depose the shōgun and restore imperial rule.

In the last days of the shōgunate in 1868, as armies supporting the Meiji Restoration neared the city, the Tokugawa regime appealed to the Nihonbashi wholesalers to raise troops to defend Edo. The ton'ya hesitated, loyal to the ancien régime but befuddled by this request from warriors that *they*, merchants, should take up arms. At a meeting to discuss the request, support for the shōgun—or, more likely, support for Edo—finally won the day. Fish dealers recalled that when Commodore Perry had anchored his black ships off Uraga in 1853 (coincidentally in the vicinity of the port office that regulated ton'ya shipping) and the residents of Edo had been on the verge of panic, the Nihonbashi ton'ya had bravely sent their boats out to inspect the fearsome foreign fleet. If we men of Nihonbashi could face down foreign invaders, the argument ran, how can we do less when the warriors marching on our city are simply Japanese bumpkins? (The invading armies troops were from the distant southern provinces of Satsuma and Chōshū.) Emboldened, the uogashi raised a body of 1,000 men, armed them with staves and pikes and huge fish cleavers, dressed them with headbands clearly marked with the symbol of the fish market (prudently assuming that if the fighting went against them, their attackers would recognize them—perhaps spare them—as mere fishmongers, not warriors), and laid plans for the defense of central Edo around Nihonbashi and Edobashi.

Their valor was never tested. The battle never came. Their pride as defenders of the city went unchallenged. The shōgunate fell.<sup>17</sup>

### From the Meiji Restoration to the Kantō Earthquake

With the success of the Meiji Restoration in 1868, which replaced the shōgunate with nominally direct imperial rule, Japan's leaders began to establish the strongly centralized Meiji government, which was intent on unifying and strengthening the nation to resist and ultimately to equal the Western powers. To that end, the Meiji state launched policies to direct and channel massive changes in almost every realm of political, social, economic, and cultural life.

From the parochial perspective of Nihonbashi fish merchants, the most stunning immediate transformation was the Meiji government's decision in 1872 to close the shōgunate's fish offices and abolish the jōnō system. The merchants gained newfound economic freedom, but this was scant comfort as Tokyo tottered near economic collapse. When the shōgunate was disbanded, the Meiji government ordered samurai in the service of the shōgun and the regional lords to "return" to their home provinces. Although many samurai families had lived in Edo for generations as part of their lords' permanent retinues in the capital, they officially had residences elsewhere;

many went “home” as if to exile (McClellan 1985). With their departure, the city’s population plummeted, by as much as 600,000, to a little more than half of its previous size (H. D. Smith II 1979: 51). A good number of samurai and shōgunal officials remained, of course, but many of them were impoverished, as the Meiji government first reduced their hereditary stipends and then eliminated the stipends altogether. Poverty trickled down and Tokyo’s tradespeople suffered.

But people must eat, and the fish market, of course, stayed in business, freed from feudal regulation and deprived of officially licensed monopolies, yet still operating through established trade channels already well developed and easily adapted to capitalism. The control and exploitation of fisheries by Nihonbashi merchants continued in familiar ways. The old system of “proprietary coasts” (*mochi-ura*), also known as “subcontracted coasts” (*ura-ukeoi*)—that is, fishing grounds controlled exclusively by wholesalers—remained intact as merchants in Tokyo or in local fishing ports consolidated their power over entire fishing villages through loans and capital advances to local fishing bosses (*amimoto*).<sup>18</sup> Although such relationships had been cemented in the past by varieties of capitalist exploitation masked by feudal privilege, during the Meiji period overt, unfettered capitalism was the rule. Wholesalers obtained exclusive rights to purchase catches at predetermined prices from fishers in exchange for long-term loans of capital and advances on operating expenses. Ties between wholesalers and fishers were those of creditor and debtor. Little or no competition existed among buyers; producers and suppliers could trade only with those to whom they were already in debt. And the chance to escape from debt was slight.

Changing patterns of economic control simply extended wholesalers’ domination over fishers in new ways. Nonetheless, conditions for wholesalers shifted substantially. Without monopoly rights backed by feudal authority, wholesalers themselves had to compete with one another to control supplies and markets. With the loss of feudal protection and privilege, Tokyo’s fish market became a far more fluid place. The old distinctions between ton’ya and nakagai—wholesalers who controlled the fish coming into Tokyo, and quasi-wholesaler/quasi-retailer merchants whose businesses lay entirely in the city—remained, but the lines became blurred. Many old family firms went out of business, unable to adjust to new conditions and competition from new entrepreneurs. The number of ton’ya increased and many more ton’ya operated as combined ton’ya-nakagai. During 1881 to 1882, for example, in the city as a whole, the number of wholesalers fluctuated between 318 and 503, and the number of middlemen ranged between 297 and 481.<sup>19</sup>

In 1889 the fish market's location became an urban planning issue. Tokyo officials sought to remove the market from the commercial heart of the modernizing city. The unseemliness of a messy, smelly marketplace in the center of the city's financial district—outside the windows of the new Bank of Japan—offended Meiji bureaucratic sensibilities, and officials argued for relocation on the grounds of sanitation, public health, and the logistical difficulties of transportation around Nihonbashi. Many Nihonbashi fish merchants stoutly resisted pressure from the Tokyo municipal government to move, and proposals to relocate the marketplace were delayed, derailed, or debated to a standstill again and again. Over the next generation, two factions—one pro-relocation, the other adamantly opposed—developed within the marketplace, with the anti-relocation camp skillfully exploiting its political clout to resist the move. A major issue was compensation for rights of access to space in the marketplace, especially the ephemeral but by no means inexpensive land-use rights implied by the long-established “board rights” (*itafuneken*) exercised by fish merchants who set up for business in the early morning hours in front of shops and offices in Nihonbashi. Supporters of a relocation were generally newer *ton'ya* and *nakagai* without extensive property or usage rights in the Nihonbashi area. Resistance by Nihonbashi's established merchants and their political allies blocked any action by the municipal government.

The issue was settled as if by a *deus ex machina* on September 1, 1923, when the Kantō earthquake struck the city just before noon, when cooking fires were alight everywhere. The quake—with a magnitude estimated at approximately 7.8 on the Richter scale—and the fires it sparked destroyed more than 700,000 buildings, killed close to 100,000 people, and left 60 percent of the survivors homeless. On both land and water the destruction was nearly total. Boats and barges burned to their waterlines, choking the canals of Tokyo and paralyzing supply lines to the Nihonbashi market. Tokyo's fishing fleet was pulled out of service and put to the gruesome task of pulling corpses from the waters of the bay. At least 20,000 people drowned, particularly in *shitamachi* areas such as Honjo and Fukagawa, where people had sought refuge in canals to escape the raging fires (Dahlmann 1924: 93–98).

Nihonbashi's devastation was no greater and no less than that of the city as a whole. Within a day or two, facing the reality of the destruction, most of the surviving Nihonbashi merchants met and agreed to organize a temporary fish market at Shibaura (south of the central city, near the present-day Hamamatsu-chō Station), which opened for business under tents on September 17. It remained there only until December, when again the market moved—this time to Tsukiji, to the site of the old naval training acad-



**Figure 28.** “Before the Earthquake—West from Nihonbashi (Bridge), Tokyo, Japan.” American stereopticon slide, ca. 1925 (Keystone View Company, no. V14945). Reproduced with permission of the Morita Photo Laboratory.

emy. Eventually the municipal government and a majority of the Nihonbashi traders concurred that here a new, permanent marketplace would be erected. Meanwhile, immediately after the earthquake, a die-hard anti-relocation faction of Nihonbashi dealers attempted to reopen for business at Nihonbashi, with permission granted by a local police official. For several days they operated amid the rubble until the municipal government forcibly closed the marketplace for good. The police official who granted permission to the diehards to reopen at Nihonbashi was summarily transferred to Hokkaidō, the shops were closed, and some disgruntled Nihonbashi dealers left the fish business forever (Takarai 1991: 97–98).

The physical relocation of the marketplace to Tsukiji after the destruction of the old Nihonbashi market coincided with major political and economic reforms initiated by the national government to stabilize urban food supplies and reduce or eliminate speculation in and oligopolistic control over basic foodstuffs. These reforms were a direct response to the so-called Rice Riots (*Kome Sōdō*) that convulsed the country in 1918. The riots began as a protest against spiraling rice prices in a small fishing village on the Toyama coast. There the control of local fishing grounds by amimoto was near absolute, and most Toyama fishers had had to turn to migratory work, shipping out as crew members bound for the fishing grounds off Hokkaidō and the Siberian coast (Lewis 1990: 37–40). The underlying discontent was widespread, and economic conditions for working people in rural and urban

areas alike had been dire for many years. Within eight weeks of the first violence in Toyama, riots had broken out in 141 towns and cities across the country. The protests' immediate targets were rice dealers accused of profiteering from the inflation of rice prices, but, more generally, speculative control of the food supply was at issue; rioters attacked any "middleman group unfairly taking advantage of scarcity" (Lewis 1990: 107).

In the aftermath of the riots, reformers proposed major legal reforms in the distribution of foodstuffs (Lewis 1990: xix). One was to create a system of nationally regulated central wholesale markets (*chūō oroshiuri shijō*) for the sale and distribution of perishable foodstuffs. In 1923 national legislation, the Central Wholesale Market Law (Chūō Oroshiuri Shijō-Hō), established these markets in six major cities. The first central wholesale market opened in Kyoto in December 1927, formed by a merger of twelve privately operated marketplaces.

The law established several important principles: it defined the range of perishable commodities in which such markets could deal; it mandated municipal ownership and administration of the markets; it clearly separated the spheres of activities of *ton'ya* and *nakagai*; it regulated the commissions that could be charged by traders; it allowed for other private markets to coexist with central wholesale markets; and it established an auction system to ensure fair and open pricing. The new central wholesale market system promised to curtail the activities of *ton'ya* whose operations spanned financing of fishing enterprises, monopolistic control over entire catches of particular villages or fisheries, price-fixing and attempts to corner markets, and distribution of products at both the wholesale and retail levels through exclusive marketing agreements with secondary wholesalers (*nakagai*). By instituting publicly supervised auctions as the major price-setting and allocative mechanism within central wholesale markets and by setting new licensing requirements for participants in the new wholesale markets, the new system split the various functions embodied by the old *ton'ya* among firms located on discrete levels within the marketing hierarchy (e.g., the contemporary consignment auction houses, or *oroshi gyōsha*; intermediate wholesalers, known at the time as *nakagainin*; and so forth).

None of these reforms was uncontroversial, and even as the temporary market opened at Tsukiji and the Tokyo government began to plan construction of a permanent marketplace, heated negotiations continued between fish dealers and the municipal (and national) governments over financial issues. The problem of "board rights" (*itafuneken*)—the rights to lease and use space in front of shops in Nihonbashi—proved particularly



intractable. The shops that benefited from these rights demanded compensation of ¥7,000,000 for the losses they suffered in the relocation. Over the years, the issue took on a life of its own. In 1928 it engulfed the Tokyo Municipal Assembly; open bribery by advocates of compensation became so flagrant that the home minister intervened to cancel a proposed settlement of the claims and to dissolve the assembly itself (Seidensticker 1990: 90–91). The board rights issue lingered unresolved until 1942, when, because the marketplace was tightly controlled as part of the wartime mobilization, the merchants were forced to settle for only ¥500,000 (Tōto Suisan 1987: 1.92).

### THE TSUKIJI MARKETPLACE, 1923–50

Although the marketplace was physically relocated to Tsukiji in 1923, the new institutional framework of the market was not inaugurated until new facilities were completed in 1935. Many of Nihonbashi's *ton'ya* incorporated themselves into a major auction house—an *oroshi gyōsha*, Tōkyō Uoichiba K.K.—to supply the marketplace under the new auction-based rules. The company was created only after much wrangling and political maneuvering among the surviving firms from Nihonbashi. The major debate—known as the *tanpuku mondai* (the “one-or-several problem”)—centered on the question of whether there should be one or several such supply houses. As was frequently the case, the debate was settled by political intrigue, bribery, and intimidation. A competing supply house sprang up, only to be quickly put out of business.

Some *ton'ya* took the path that linked them with the market's upstream suppliers by joining Tōkyō Uoichiba K.K.; other *ton'ya*, *ton'ya-cum-nakagai*, and *nakagai* entered the new market regime as intermediate wholesalers (called, in the new system, *nakagainin*) trading within the marketplace and supplying retailers further downstream. Although the earlier marketplace regimes had usually separated these aspects of the trade, these distinctions were now made institutionally clear and absolute: relations upstream with producers would be in the hands of auction houses; *nakagainin* would take charge of relations downstream; and relations between upstream and downstream would sort themselves out through competitive auctions.

In February 1935 the new Tsukiji marketplace opened as an official central wholesale market with divisions for produce, poultry, and freshwater fish. Later in the year, in June, sales of salted and dried fish began, followed in December by the start of trade in fresh fish.<sup>20</sup> During the market's first

full year of operation, it handled 183,000 metric tons of seafood valued at ¥45 million, more than \$20 million in 1936 dollars (Tōkyō-to Chūō Oroshiuri Shijō 1985: 9).

By the late 1930s, however, with Japan's domestic economy increasingly under quasi-military control, the hard-won institutional arrangements of the new marketplace were modified while still in their infancy. Japan's aggression in China grew year by year, and the national government increasingly put the domestic Japanese economy on a war footing. In July 1937—the month that the Marco Polo Bridge incident ignited undeclared war with China—the national government imposed price controls, and the following month it sought to regulate excess profits. In March 1940 the cabinet issued emergency policies for rationing foodstuffs. Price levels were fixed in August and September for both produce and fresh seafood, and actual rationing of seafood began in April 1941. In October 1941, less than seven years after the marketplace had begun operations, the system of *nakagainin* was abolished. In July 1944 all activities of the seafood division of Tsukiji were amalgamated into a single corporation, the Tokyo Marine Products Control Corporation (Tōkyō Suisanbutsu Tōsei K.K.). The *ton'ya* and *nakagai* of Nihonbashi reunited institutionally, this time as employees of a corporation whose goals were simply to distribute what little seafood could reach Tokyo's civilian population.

Allied naval operations during World War II, which Japanese often refer to as the "Pacific War," destroyed the Japanese fishing industry, particularly the distant-water fishing fleets, as well as shipping capacity for foodstuffs—whether agricultural products or seafood—reaching Japan's home islands from its colonial empire: Taiwan, Korea, Manchuria, parts of Southeast Asia, and the Pacific islands (Tsutsui 2002; Bourgeois 1950). On the home front, military requisitions of foodstuffs took precedence over civilian consumption. And American air raids destroyed much of the nation's rail network, so civilian distribution of foodstuffs of any sort was extremely limited. Seafood was available only to the extent that local coastal fishing—not relying on gasoline-powered vessels—could supply nearby consumers. Civilian evacuations from Tokyo and other major cities in the last years of World War II—first of schoolchildren, later of adults—were at least implicitly intended to move the urban population to areas where food might be available.

During the war, American air raids destroyed most of central Tokyo through relentless bombing, most horrifically in the incendiary raids of March 9–10, 1945, over the *shitamachi* districts of Tokyo. That night at least 80,000 residents died (Daniels 1975). The Tsukiji area escaped major damage. Some residents say the Americans were careful not to bomb Tsukiji

because St. Luke's Hospital still remained on the site of the old foreign settlement; others simply thank St. Luke directly.

The market facilities were largely intact when the Allied Occupation began in September 1945, but food supplies were extremely scarce. That fall, in the first flush of reformist zeal to eliminate all vestiges of the wartime regime, the Occupation authorities initially eliminated food rationing and price controls. Almost immediately, realizing that the Japanese population faced a very real threat of mass starvation, the authorities reversed themselves and restored stringent controls over food distribution. Food controls continued until 1950, and the wartime institutions of the marketplace remained largely unchanged until then. The marketplace continued to operate simply as a distribution hub. American forces took over large sections of the Tsukiji marketplace, in which they housed a motor pool and a laundry for nearby Occupation offices and billets in the Ginza and Marunouchi districts. The Occupation left Tsukiji's seafood division largely untouched, but commandeered much of what is now the vegetable division. Civilian control over all Tsukiji facilities resumed in the summer of 1955.

The postwar recovery of Japanese fishing was a priority for Occupation policy makers, for several reasons. One goal was that Japan should become self-sufficient in food production as rapidly as possible. Another was to dismantle Japan's prewar colonial empire and ensure that Japan could not reestablish control over East Asia. Japan's possessions (e.g., Korea, Taiwan, Manchuria, and various territories in the South Pacific)<sup>21</sup> had helped to supply the home islands with foodstuffs—including seafood, grains, and processed foods—before the war. These colonial sources of food supply were disrupted, and then, of course, entirely severed by the end of the war. Reviving Japan's production and distribution of foodstuffs—and putting markets like Tsukiji back into operation—therefore required efforts not merely to restore food supply channels that had existed previously, but to restructure Japan's food supply in light of the country's new position in the world. Protein and calories would have to come to Japan through its own efforts.

An unexpected environmental benefit of naval warfare among humans is a breathing spell for fish (Tsutsui 2002). When Japanese fishing resumed, it found unusually abundant fisheries resources in the Western Pacific. Traditional, small-scale coastal fisheries had been the least affected by the war and were able to resume relatively easily. Larger fishing vessels capable of deep-water and distant-water fishing had been largely destroyed, and although the Occupation encouraged construction of modern trawlers, it established strict limits on the extent of the Western Pacific in which

Japanese vessels could fish. After 1952, the end of the Occupation, Japanese firms began to expand much more, both in terms of the size of the vessels and the areas in which they fished. However, conflicts with Korea, China, and the Soviet Union over claims to various fishing grounds pushed Japanese vessels further and further into the North and Central Pacific (Borgstrom 1964: 22–33).

On another front, the Occupation authorities encouraged the early resumption of whaling. Small-scale coastal whaling resumed immediately. Japan's fleet of whaling factory ships had been lost during the war, but in 1946 new factory ships started whaling around the Bonin Islands and in Antarctic waters. In 1952, factory ship whaling resumed in the North Pacific.<sup>22</sup> Well into the 1950s, in school lunches and factory cafeterias, whale meat was a major source of Japanese protein—today remembered by some with nostalgia for their youth, by others as an unpalatable reminder of hard times.

Companies in the whaling industry were also deeply involved in the slightly later expansion of the deep-water fishing industry. As these firms developed into full-range fisheries companies, they profoundly shaped Japan's food supply—a phenomenon that I will look more closely in chapter 5—and of course affected markets like Tsukiji.

In the late 1940s, however, as economic conditions began to improve and the food supply became more stable, traders began to anticipate the eventual decontrol of the marketplace, and private businesses that had operated in the marketplace before the wartime mobilization reincorporated themselves. Tsukiji's traders organized politically to press for the restoration of a "free" market; eventually, in the summer of 1950, the system of competitive auctions among clearly defined and separable levels of actors, licensed accordingly by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries or by the TMG, was reinstated. The restored market regime followed the lines laid down in the 1923 Central Wholesale Market Law, which remained in force. But when wartime mobilization began to erode—and then demolish—the system, Tsukiji had operated under this regime for only a couple of years; thus the postwar restoration in fact did not return the market to its old ways but set it on an almost unfamiliar course.

### **TSUKIJI FROM POSTWAR TO POST-BUBBLE**

Tsukiji dates its renewal from the relicensing of the intermediate wholesalers. Between June 1950 and October 1951, the TMG issued 1,647 licenses for intermediate wholesalers to operate in Tsukiji's seafood division. Under

the principle of “democratizing the marketplace,” all intermediate wholesalers who had had licenses when the nakagainin system was abolished in 1941 regained them almost automatically. Of the 1,647 intermediate wholesalers licensed in 1951, 1,238 (or 75 percent) had held licenses in 1941; viewed another way, 89 percent of license holders in 1941 got their licenses back when the system resumed a decade later.<sup>23</sup> The times were tough and unstable, however, and by 1954 the number of license holders had dropped to 1,579. These included 1,194 traders who specialized in fresh fish and 385 in dried and processed seafood (Tōkyō-to Chūō Oroshiuri Shijō 1958–63: 2.695–97). In the late 1950s an extension to the market’s stalls was built and a few additional licenses were granted, bringing the total up to 1,678.<sup>24</sup> Today there are 1,677 valid licenses for the Tsukiji seafood division.

Across the auction blocks, more than thirty firms acquired licenses in the immediate postwar years to operate as auction houses supplying the market. Many of these new oroshi gyōsha arose from the splintering of the Tokyo Marine Products Control Corporation, the wartime company created to administer the seafood rationing system. The dominant prewar corporation, Tōkyō Uoichiba K.K., reincorporated as Tōto Suisan K.K. The new company’s supremacy was challenged by the economic purges initiated by the Occupation authorities against individuals who had played significant roles in the militarization of the economy, as well as the antitrust policies of the early Occupation years that encouraged competition. Some Tsukiji auction houses were established at least in part with capital provided by major Japanese fisheries corporations, the most notable example being Daito Gyorui K.K., one of Tsukiji’s four major full-line seafood auction houses, which was capitalized entirely by what was then the Taiyō group—now the Maruha group—of fisheries companies. Most of the newly formed auction houses—almost two dozen—were small, highly specialized, and short-lived. By the early 1960s, through bankruptcies, mergers, and acquisitions, Tsukiji’s seafood auctions were conducted by the currently existing seven firms, five of them full-range, two of them specialized.

This consolidation of auction houses took place alongside the growing industrialization of the Japanese fishing industry, as large-scale, well-capitalized corporations began to develop deep-water fishing fleets and factory ships (see Borgstrom 1964). The British fishing vessel the *Fairtry*, launched in 1954 to exploit the Grand Banks, was the world’s first large-scale trawler and processing vessel—a factory ship of 2600 gross tons. The basic design was quickly copied and adapted by the fishing industries of, notably, Japan, the Soviet Union, and Poland (Woodard 2000: 74–76). Japanese firms like Taiyō Gyogyō, which had pioneered pelagic whaling in the 1920s and 1930s,

quickly embraced the new technology. By the 1970s Japanese firms operated about 125 such large-scale trawler factories. These vessels and the development of new technologies for freezing or chilling fish on board propelled the Japanese fishing industry to a position as a global fishing power, operating fleets in most major fishing regions of the world's oceans. As production changed, so did the profile of supply to Tsukiji and other Japanese markets. An increasing proportion of seafood came from large fisheries corporations like Taiyō Gyogyō, Nippon Suisan, and Kyokuyō, and increasingly it was seafood from very distant waters (often in frozen form). Traditional coastal fisheries—often quite local and small-scale—declined steadily from the 1950s, and their products became less and less central to Tsukiji's business.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the fishing industry in Tokyo Bay almost completely disappeared. Industrial pollution wiped out many fishing grounds, and many areas of shallow water were filled in as large-scale land reclamation projects created tracts for still further industrial development. One such reclamation zone included the waters and mud flats off Urayasu, an old fishing village on the border between Tokyo and Chiba prefectures at the northern end of Tokyo Bay, long important for shellfish harvesting.

As both the national government and Chiba's prefectural administration pushed forward with land reclamation schemes for the Urayasu tidal flats, negotiations began over payment to the fishers for the loss of their ancestral fishing grounds and their contemporary livelihoods. In customary law and (since the nineteenth century) administrative law as well, Japanese fishing communities have held collective rights of sea tenure (*gyogyōken*) over specified fishing grounds (Ruddle and Akimichi 1984; Marra 1986; Ruddle 1989; Kalland 1995). Nowadays the rights belong to and are administered by local fisheries cooperatives (*gyogyō kyōdō kumiai*). The Urayasu cooperative negotiated skillfully for compensation for the community's loss of ancestral fishing grounds, and they finally reached agreements with developers and the prefectural government for substantial cash settlements as well as rights to some of the land that would be reclaimed.<sup>25</sup>

For generations, Urayasu fishers—as harvesters of clams and other shellfish—maintained extensive connections to the wholesale and retail seafood trade in Tokyo. Peddlers from Urayasu sold shellfish door-to-door in Tokyo, retail fishmongers in Tokyo bought some shellfish directly from Urayasu traders, and some Urayasu shellfish went to Tsukiji's auctions. Land reclamation ended the shellfish business, but left the Urayasu fishers with strong ties to Tsukiji and with the newfound capital to pursue these connections further. Many of the fishers ended up at Tsukiji, first as employees of intermediate wholesalers and then, after they acquired experience in the whole-

sale trade, as the purchasers of wholesale licenses. Today, roughly 10 or 15 percent of the intermediate wholesaling firms at Tsukiji are regarded as “Urayasu firms.” These firms form an influential network marked by informal cooperation and common interest (which I discuss in more detail in chapter 6). Typically, they are in the shellfish business or in related specialties (such as supplying sushi chefs), but firms owned by Urayasu traders also include some of Tsukiji’s largest and most prosperous, high-profile tuna wholesalers.

In the late 1960s, at about the same time that the Urayasu *renchū*—the “Urayasu crowd”—was beginning to become prominent in the market, the issue of market relocation surfaced once again. The arguments were familiar. Tsukiji traders, officials of the marketplace, and bureaucrats from the national government agreed that the marketplace wedged into the center of Tokyo was inconveniently situated and too cramped to handle the needs of the enormous metropolis. The market’s wastes added to the pollution of the Sumida River. And transportation was growing ever more difficult, as trucks replaced boats and rail in supplying the market. But resistance to relocation arose in familiar ways, echoing the opposition voiced in earlier generations. Who would compensate Tsukiji traders for losses they might suffer if the micro-advantages bestowed by the present system and their present location were upset? What would happen to all the businesses in the outer marketplace whose trade depended on proximity to the Tsukiji marketplace?

The administration of the TMG was at the time in the hands of Governor Minobe Ryōkichi (who held office for three terms from 1967 to 1979), elected by a center-left coalition. With strong progressive, populist, and consumerist leanings, his administration was considered—by people at Tsukiji, at least—to be antagonistic to business, and particularly to businesses such as theirs, businesses perceived to profit from adding margins between producer and consumer. Minobe’s administration, his Tsukiji critics argue, simply never understood the marketplace and the real work performed by auction houses and intermediate wholesalers, and hence was unsympathetic to traders’ protests over the proposed relocation. The TMG went ahead with its planning, putting all efforts into creating a new marketplace rather than into renovating or reconstructing the existing one. The site for the new market was on landfill being extended at Ōta just to the north of Haneda Airport, in the southern fringe of the city. As the landfill gradually took shape, the TMG administration changed; moreover, the fiscal climate of public works projects shifted when, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, “deficit-ridden” and “public finance” became practically a single term. The project languished; with the landfill complete and plans drawn up, no funds

for construction were appropriated. Tsukiji traders continued their resistance to an uncertain future.

As the financial climate for public works projects revived during the Bubble years, Tsukiji's traders found support—another serendipity—in unsuspected quarters. Over the years that the landfill had stood unused, wild birds had taken up the marshy ground as a refuge, and during the same years the incipient Japanese conservation and environmental movements had gained strength, opposing the despoliation of the environment that had characterized the high-growth years of industrial expansion in the 1950s and 1960s. As construction plans were dusted off, environmentalists demanded the creation of a wild bird sanctuary. Faced with this outcry, with the opposition of the Tsukiji merchants, with the unavailability of any other large parcel of land, and with the fiscal consequences of delay in an era of ever-increasing construction costs, the Tokyo government compromised. The birds got their sanctuary on part of the land; the plans were scaled down to create a market primarily for produce (with less environmental impact in terms of water use and sanitation); and Tsukiji traders were given the option of voluntarily relocating into the much smaller than originally intended seafood division of the Ōta Market, an option that few accepted. When the seafood division of the Ōta Market opened for business in the fall of 1990, only about three dozen Tsukiji traders had moved there—some only after exacting major financial concessions from the TMG—and about one-third of the stalls stood vacant.

The Tsukiji marketplace remained intact and in place. But the problems the marketplace faced—location, crowding, ancient facilities—also remained, exacerbated perhaps by the TMG's inattention while it pursued the Ōta project. During the long period while the Ōta Market was being planned, debated, and delayed, the physical infrastructure of the Tsukiji marketplace was frozen in bureaucratic limbo. At the same time, the context of Tsukiji's business was changing dramatically (as I will discuss in greater detail in the next chapter). In the 1970s, the Japanese fishing industry began to withdraw from distant-water fisheries, excluded by new 200-mile fishing limits in many parts of the world; at roughly the same time Japanese economic power began to enable direct imports of seafood from ever-widening regions of the globe, and the international seafood supply began to move away from fisheries companies and into the hands of general trading companies (*sōgō shōsha*). As global supply channels shifted, domestic distribution began to change as well. Supermarkets became increasingly commonplace, and Tsukiji faced a new customer mix with fewer small-scale retailers and more large chain stores. Frozen seafood came to occupy an increasingly



large share of the market's sales, but sales of the finest fresh fish also flourished as Japan's prosperity fostered gourmet consumption. Coastal fishing declined; seafood arrived at Tsukiji more and more often by truck (and air freight) and less and less by rail or fishing vessel. None of these trends originated in the marketplace, as they reflected wider social and economic factors of Japanese growth, but their impacts were all felt in Tsukiji's trade and in the ability to carry on with the existing infrastructure of the aging marketplace.

At long last, plans were drawn up to reconstruct the Tsukiji marketplace, a particularly complex and delicate process since the market would remain in operation throughout the construction. Preliminary reconstruction started in 1990, with the clearing away of some minor buildings and the construction of some temporary ones. When the project began, TMG planners projected that the new complex would be finished by 2003. Construction of new permanent buildings began in 1992; by 1995 work on many of the ancillary buildings such as parking garages was well under way. In the 1995 gubernatorial election, a political outsider, Aoshima Yukio, a television personality running on a platform of fiscal austerity, unexpectedly beat the incumbent Suzuki Shin'ichi (who had been in office for four terms from 1979 to 1995). Among Aoshima's first moves was to cancel an ambitious waterfront reconstruction and world's fair. Less publicly dramatic measures included shelving plans to rebuild Tsukiji, with construction actually suspended in 1996. Most of the auction arenas and the wholesalers' stalls had not yet been touched when construction was halted. Nothing further happened during the remainder of Governor Aoshima's single term, and when Ishihara Shintarō, a well-known conservative politician and best-selling author, became governor in 1999, the issue was still on hold, with the expectation that plans for either a move or reconstruction would be announced sometime in 2000. As it turned out, not until late 2001 did the TMG announce its decision to begin planning an entirely new market complex for construction in Toyosu, on the eastern side of the Sumida delta, with a completion date first projected for 2012 or 2013.

Left suspended in 1996, with the existing marketplace torn up and no clear idea of whether, when, or even where new buildings might be started, Tsukiji traders worried—and continue to worry even after a new planning process was announced in 2001—about how trade would be affected by construction or relocation. Now they worry whether a new marketplace will function differently from the present one, whether their own businesses will survive to see that new market, and, if or when the new market actually opens, how some of them might (or might not) be compensated for

any loss of rights and privileges they suffer in the transition. Some groups of traders strongly supported the idea of moving to Toyosu well before it became official; others were equally adamant in opposing *any* move. Everyone wants new, state-of-the-art facilities, but beyond that, the economic interests at stake vary enormously; auction houses and supermarket chains want the best possible transportation access, and see a new location as preferable to remaining in Tsukiji's awkward surroundings. Larger, more prosperous stallholders who see their businesses as dependent on solid market infrastructure also favor the construction of state-of-the-art facilities at a new location. Smaller stallholders, who are often dependent on walk-in trade, and many of their customers—chefs and independent retailers—prefer Tsukiji for its convenient accessibility from central Tokyo, and simply worry that given the economic troubles that began in the 1990s, they will not be able to afford the costs of a move in any event.

### PAST PRESENT

In this chapter I have outlined Tsukiji's past, less to technically reconstruct the market's social or economic history than to illustrate the present-day understandings, the cultural accounts of the past known by, shared among, and elaborated by contemporary participants who situate themselves, their jobs, and their identities against this backdrop. In chapter 2, I sketched the physical and temporal structure of activities in the contemporary marketplace. These two perspectives are intertwined in complex ways. Time and space significantly shape social relationships and institutions. The time and space of present-day activity as well as the sense of place-and-identity are constructed out of accounts of the past. Such accounts fit the present into a trajectory of culturally coherent causality; they cloak the spatial and temporal patterns of here and now with a particular historical identity and a sense of direction.

The distinctiveness of place is not simply a product of Tsukiji's cultural boundaries in the time and space of the here and now. The past is fertile ground, and Tsukiji's legacy and the vast accumulation of market lore also serve to firmly establish the marketplace's distinctive identity as a distant and impenetrable place. As I have argued elsewhere, "traditionalism" is a device of cultural ideology that wraps the present in a mantle of venerable antiquity, thereby legitimating the social present by calling attention to its presumed antecedents and origins in the culturally sacrosanct past (T. Bestor 1989, 1992).

These are critical tasks at Tsukiji in part because sharp institutional

breaks mark the history of the marketplace. Time and time again, the entire fabric of market relationships and their institutional framework have been torn apart and rewoven. Culture reassembles the pieces, reshaping the past to maintain the present's insistence on venerable continuity. The present clumsily unfolds itself from the past in particular and idiosyncratic ways. Traditionalism reconfigures this unfolding into a sequence of inevitability. It constructs time and space to establish the significance of place—of being *here* by virtue of having been *there*. If the past is a foreign country, traditionalism is the agency that issues tourist visas to some, even as it grants permanent citizenship to others.