

## **Chapter 11**

### **The Value of Time-consuming Efforts**

The fish market of Edo was in Nihonbashi\*, before the Great Kanto Earthquake, which forced it move to a place called Tsukiji today, in the same Tokyo region. As fish spoils more quickly in the heat than the other fresh foods, shops selling dried sea goods were the only ones that were able to maintain business as usual during summer, while wholesalers of fresh seafood were outrageously busy.

\*Nihonbashi....."Japan Bridge". The place featured a bridge of the namesake crossing over a long river in Tokyo.

They had a summer-time special food storage system called "kawa-ike" in the Edo Period, an era before refrigeration was introduced. Fish were kept alive in a water tank on the boat, then transferred into a bigger tank on the shore, until they were transported to the market early next morning, where they were sold before the temperature soared.

Such time-consuming process was used only for the kind of fish eaten as sashimi, or raw fish - Japanese seaperch, sea bass, black sea bream, and flathead- all highly expensive and in-demand sorts, not the kinds that anyone can eat at any time.

The kinds for the average one million Edo residents' diet were caught by fishermen in their rowboats in those days. In the rowboat they couldn't go further than nearby fishing points like Tokyo Bay, but occasionally went as far as Misaki Bay of Miura Peninsula in Kanagawa Prefecture and Choshi in Chiba Prefecture. The fish transported to Nihonbashi fish market were sold to respective specialty wholesalers, who sold to public administrators through middlemen, then they were sold on the streets of Edo to the residents.

Just like fisheries, the agricultural industry depended solely on the farmers' hard work. The farmers, whose number reached 80 percent of the total population in the Edo period, included those also engaged in forestry and fishery. They all cultivated plants as raw materials for the majority of essential daily tools.

In the age when no machinery, chemical fertilizers or sprays were available, there was no other way than doing everything themselves, starting with sowing seed, making fertilizer, weeding, all sorts of looking after to harvesting.

It was due to this effort of growing plants by 80 percent of the whole population, that rice, wheat, beans, potatoes, and a variety of other vegetables were produced just with the solar energy, feeding 30 millions who could lead self-sufficient lives that fostered a distinctive culture, in a country isolated from the rest of the world.

In a city like Edo, street peddlers made an enormous sales in fish and vegetables. Peddlers or small-scale vendors sang their seller's cry and covered every corner of the alleys, wearing down their straw sandals. A close look into the lives of people in Edo reveals that there was an unbelievable variety of vendors. It was those peddlers and vendors who supported a large part of the commercial circulation of other products in addition to fish and vegetables.

A record of Edo vendors shows that almost all everyday goods were available and delivered from vendors in those days.

Oil vendors sold lantern oil mainly, but cooking oil as well. As liquor store sent errands to clients' homes several times everyday, there was no need for customers to go out to make a purchase. There were also

many food vendors who served ready-to-eat items. They were, so to speak, portable restaurants. They sold endless lists of food, such as udon (rice noodles), soba (buckwheat noodles), nabeyaki udon (pot-boiled rice noodles), inari-zushi (vinegared sushi rice in pouches of fried bean-curd), amazake (brewed sweet sake). There were also many who peddled toys and luxury goods.

It was as if a queue of supermarkets was walking through the town. The operation of these mobile supermarkets was sustained totally by human power, in other words, through solar energy alone. In the age before the industrialization, when labor costs were low, people worked hard without sparing themselves and managed an unbelievably convenient urban life without refrigerators, supermarkets, or convenience stores. And they did it with zero energy consumption, which now seems impossible.

Thus, As people worked hard taking necessary time, they managed to sustain the stable environment for hundreds of years although they had not taken any special precautions, or probably because they hadn't. Once environmental contamination started, however, it costed an enormous amount of time, money and energy to restore the environment, and unfortunately, a return to its original state became virtually impossible.

We used energy to contaminate the natural environment, or I should say the pollution was created as a result of our enormous amount of energy consumption. And we need yet more energy to extricate the pollution. Nothing is more ridiculous than this. While it may sound hypocritical coming from one who is completely immersed in the comforts of the modern life, I must say that the structure of this society seems quite catastrophic.

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