

# Waterscape and Water Transportation in Nihombashi River

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**ABSTRACT:** Nihombashi district, which is located in a heart of Tokyo Metropolitan area, has been flourished as a Japanese economic and cultural center since Tokyo was developed as a capital. Nihombashi district has still remained the Edo idea of stylishness since the government of Edo was established in 1603.

During Edo period, population of Edo (former name of Tokyo) reached one million. Edo became one of big city around the world. Nihombashi district has been transformed as economical, financial and cultural center, along with modern transformation of Tokyo.

During high economic growth (1955-1975), Nihombashi Bridge and River, which used to a symbol of Tokyo, have been covered with elevated highways. The river was polluted whereas the river does not have any relationship with people's daily activities. Since Japan has focused on environment concern in 80's, people and companies in Nihombashi district and Nihombashi River also requested to restore Nihombashi district and Nihombashi River. There are a lot of projects going on related to regenerate the river and the community, such as to remove highways covered with the river, restore river environment and run water navigation.

This article mentioned to introduce the project of Nihombashi River and Nihombashi district that regenerate the community to capitalize history and geographic characteristics in Nihombashi district, to run water navigation through the river, and to review outcomes through various projects.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The period of Edo was started in March 1603, when Ieyasu Tokunaga, the founder of Edo Shogunate, moved into Edo to organize fundamental political function.

When the government of Edo was established, Edo, now called Tokyo, was surrounded ocean. The plateau where the Edo Castle was build was nestled along the shoreline of Tokyo Bay.

Ieyasu Tokunaga constructed the city to reclaim land from estuary and to stretch canals in finely meshed pattern for improving transportation system.

There were about 73 river front markets in Edo. Some river front markets were used for as to land stone materials to construct Edo Castle, such as Hunairibori, now called Momiji River. Some of river front markets were used for as to transport fish (Uogashi), lumber (Kamakuragashi), or products (Asarigashi, Daikongashi, Gohukugashi) from all area in Japan. Each river front market was named after products which were mainly transported.

When Edo Castle was constructed, Edo became to be flourished that many supplies, businesses and people flowed into Edo from around the country. A lot of businesses which deal in those supplies around the country was opened their businesses in Nihombashi district.

One of succeeded businesses was Echigoya (Mitsukoshi Department Store now), dealer in kimono fabrics, which Takatoshi Mitsui, who was from Ise-matsuzaka, Matsuzaka-city, Mie Prefecture, was established in 1673 in Nihombashi district.

The way of Echigoya succeeded the business was to change a business style. Almost all businesses in Edo used to sell their products door-to-door sales and to allow credit to customers which usually customers paid all payments at the end of year but their business style was similar to a modern business style. Their new business style was to hand out ads, to open own store, to retail their products with fixed prices in cash, to bring in counter services to counsel customers' demands and needs, to sell their products by pieces by customers' requests, and to expand various businesses, such as money-lending business. Echigoya became one of succeeded business in Edo and built a foundation for future expanding growth of Mitsukoshi Department Store.

Almost all canals was reclaimed and lost their functions because of population concentration and economic growth. Today, those canals such as Nihombashi River, Kanda River and Meguro River remain as to prevent flooding and to drain discharge water.

All river front markets which were used to transport various products were reclaimed. Today, there is no river front market in Tokyo.

There are various large urban redevelopment projects going on Tokyo, such as in Roppongi, Yurakucho, Marunouchi and Yaesu. Those projects produce attractive and fashionable towns to attract many customers.

On the other hand, Nihombashi district, where has been major business area since Edo period, is no longer to attract people. The community is needed to regenerate to be attractive and active.

This paper mentions to analyze issues and actual condition of Nihombashi district for revitalizing the community and to make renaissance plans to utilize Nihombashi River and water navigation system as sightseeing resources.

## 2 HISTORY OF NIHOMBASHI RIVER

Nihombashi district, major business area in Edo period, has distinguished sightseeing resources which are historical buildings and traditional commercial businesses and open spaces in an urban area along Nihombashi River.

The current state of Nihombashi district faces various difficulties; the community is divided by highways to disturb community networking system development, and the river which adds color to the community is covered with elevated highways and loses a function to connect communities.

The history of Nihombashi district related with Nihombashi River, are as follows.

### 2.1 Before 1600's

Capital of Japan was in Kyoto. Most part of Nihombashi district was located in under water of Tokyo Bay. Nihombashi River did not exist as a river.

### 2.2 1600-1610

The government of Tokunaga Shogunate established Edo, a commercial capital where flowed into various products and people around the country, to reclaim estuaries and build channels around Edo Castle. Nihombashi River was excavated as a part of channels for cargo shipment.

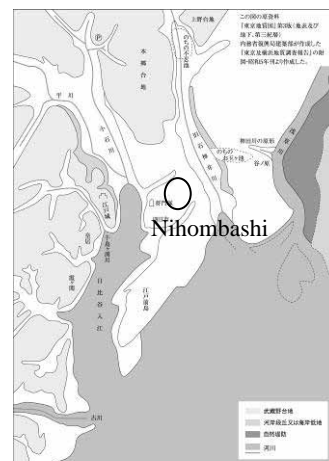


Fig.1 Nihombashi Area Before 1590

### 2.3 1620-1700

When Edo was developed, about 60 river front markets were built to ship rice, fish, vegetables and other special local products into Edo. Nihombashi River, which consisted of channels from Ookawa, now called Sumida River, to Tokiwa Bridge and a part of moats, was developed as one of channels to transport products into Edo Castle.

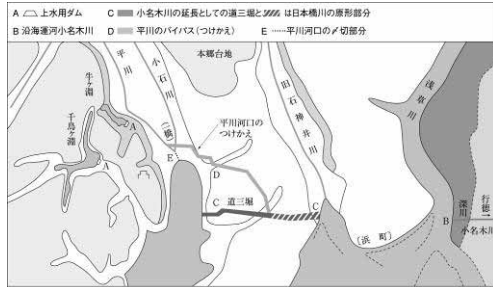


Fig.2 Nihombashi 1590's

### 2.4 1700-1868

This period of time was from the best time of Edo to the beginning of modern society. River front markets along channels became major trade routes to exchange various products. A lot of merchants from all over the country came to Edo to start numerous businesses along with the river. There were about 30 river front markets along with Nihombashi River.

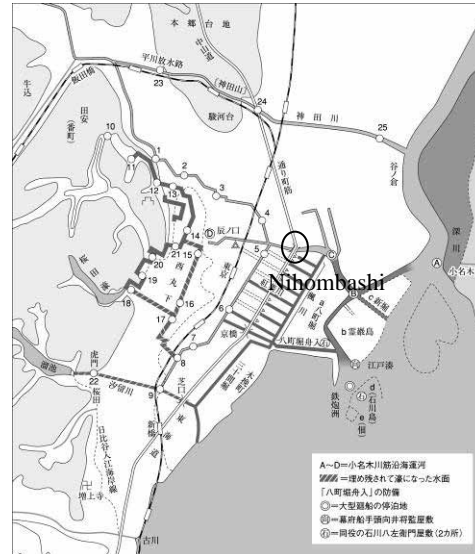


Fig.3 Nihombashi 1610's

### 2.5 1868-1970

This time of period was that Edo changed its name to Tokyo, and then Tokyo started the first step for modern city. Many of channels and moats were reclaimed to build paved roads for motorization. Approximately 50 % of channels had been excavated by 1965.

Tributaries of Nihombashi River, such as Momiji River, Kaede River, Nishi-horidome River, Higashi-horidome River and Hamacho River were reclaimed. There remains only Nihombashi River and Kamejima River. Even though Nihombashi River is remained, most parts of the river are covered with highways.



Fig.4 Nihombashi after 1700's

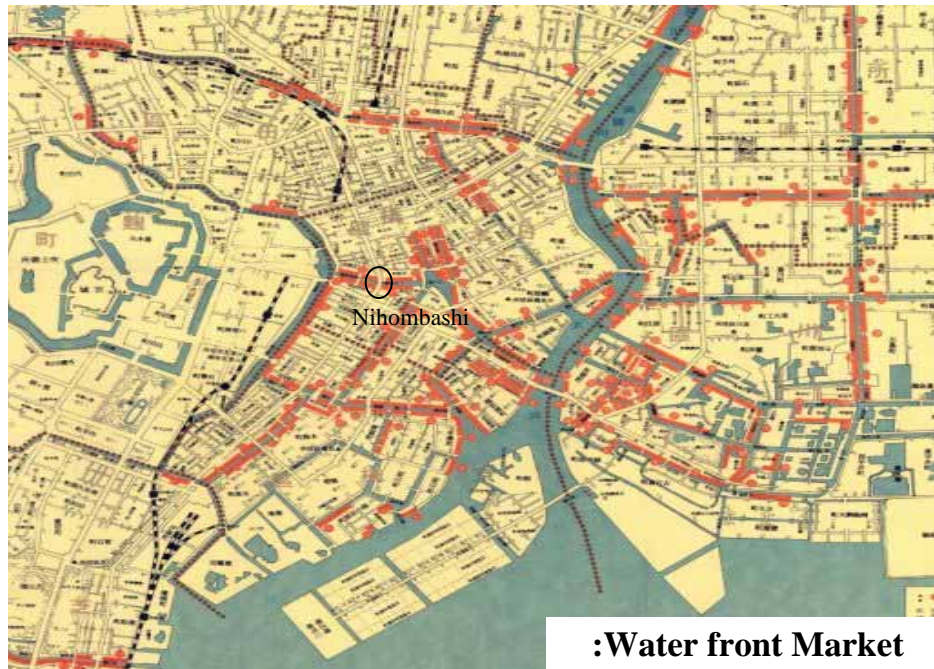


Fig.5 Nihombashi Area in 1860's

2.6 1970's- now

Those remaining rivers, such as Nihombashi River and Kanda River, were also covered with highways along with rapid economic growth and road construction for the Tokyo Olympic Games. Rivers in urban area were separated from people's daily lives.

River restoration has been focused on the end of 1990's, therefore rivers in Tokyo, such as Sumida River also started projects to develop sewerage system for improving quality of water.



Fig.6 Nihombashi Area 2000's

### 3 RESTORATION APPROACHES FOR NIHOMBASHI DISTRICT

Nihombashi district has culture of more than 400 years. There are a lot of traditional merchants established in Edo period and historical architecture buildings which are more than 100 years old.

Even though Nihombashi district was a heart of Edo, it should not become a center of Tokyo metropolitan area and excluded from prosperity compared with prosperous towns, such as Ginza, Akihabara and Roppongi. The district did not take advantage of its characteristics and was no longer to have the ability to attract more people.

Approaches for community restoration in Nihombashi district has been started by community-centered from the end of 1990's.

Various activities are supported by Nihombashi Renaissance Committee, Nihombashi Women's Club, which is a lower organization of Nihombashi Renaissance Committee, and Tokyo Chuo Net.

One of major activities organizes committees and councils to seek for the future resolution, such as Nihombashi Renaissance Promotion Council and Nihombashi River Restoration Committee to produce a community based plan for urban redevelopment.

Tokyo Chuo Net organizes a sightseeing tour to look around sightseeing sites in Nihombashi district which mainly provides variable information for visitors and encourages people to come over.

The sightseeing tour starts to introduce history, culture, and tradition of Edo for residents in Tokyo, people in Japan and foreigners.

#### *3.1 Nihombashi Restoration Project*

The project that collaborates with the community and public administration organizes renaissance plans to regain prosperity of the community, build new community and revitalize sightseeing and navigation.

#### *3.2 The outline of Nihombashi sightseeing tour*

The tour project offers activities to enrich the community which develops sightseeing resources in Nihombashi district and provides information of Nihombashi district. The project is planning followings.

##### *3.2.1 Sightseeing resources development*

The project researches historical information, such as historical architect buildings in Nihombashi district, history of long-established businesses, cultural tradition in Nihombashi district, history of cultural exchange between Japan and foreign countries, lifestyle and social cultural transition in Edo period.

The outcomes of the project will provide visitors to increase a number of visitors.

##### *3.2.2 Visitor information*

Nihombashi sightseeing information providing project focuses on promoting the community by providing information for not only visitors but also the public regard to sightseeing resources, historical heritages, characteristics of the community.

The project opens a broadcasting station to provide information for visitors and to collaborate with visitor information system.

Sightseeing brochures or booklets will publish to provide more information.

##### *3.2.3 Discover Nihombashi River*

The purpose of the project is to restore water navigation through the river as a sightseeing resource to attract visitors.

When main transportation system was water navigation system in Edo period, there were a lot of river front markets where various products around the country were discharged.



Fig.6 Water Navigation Tour in Nihombashi (2008.Jan)

### 3.3 The outline of sightseeing tour

The sightseeing tour has organized guided tour for visitors collaborating with long-established businesses that explain about not only their histories and traditions but also historical sites and events related to Nihombashi district since October, 2007.

Approximately 200 visitors have enjoyed the tour for 4 months.



Fig. 7 A part of tour (Eitaro Honpo)



Fig.8 A part of tour (historical site)

## 4 CONCLUSION

The project in Nihombashi district charges into new phase, after established Visitor information committee in 2007 called as “Edo-Nihombashi Sightseeing Committee”. Tourism and sightseeing have become new keywords for the project

There are large-scale urban redevelopment project going on in Roppongi, Akihabara and Ginza. The redevelopment project in Nihombashi district has moved into a next step by producing community-based redevelopment plan.

The project collaborating with community, government and businesses has just launched to reconsider the value of water navigation, history and culture of Edo.

There are various projects going on which are to restore water environment of Nihombashi River, to rebuild riverfront community by constructing river walks and to run water navigation system used for transportation.

Hints of success of the project will be to find out value of assets of the community, such as historical heritage, culture of Edo and water navigation and to collaborate with community, public administration and businesses to organize community-centered projects.



Fig.9 Nihombashi River Water Navigation (future design)



Fig.10 Nihombashi Area Today



Fig.11 Nihombashi Area Future