

●Shinagawa Historical Museum Explanatory Sheet

Shinagawa Laver

The Origin of Asakusa-Nori Laver

The name of Asakusa-Nori began appearing at the end of the 16th century. Mass production was made possible by the transmission of laver cultivation methods throughout the various regions of Japan. Initially, each region sold laver under its own name, but the sales of Asakusa-Nori overwhelmed all the others, causing many types of laver to be sold under the name Asakusa-Nori.

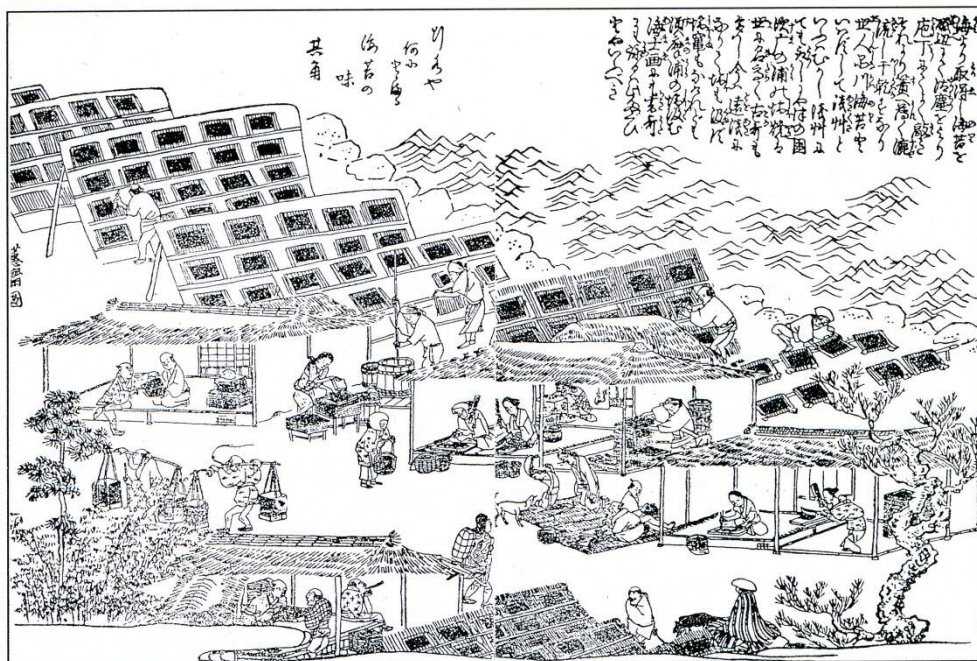
There are multiple views on the origin of the Asakusa-Nori name: from laver harvested in Shinagawa and Omori (Ota Ward, Tokyo) and processed in Asakusa; from laver harvested from the Asakusa River (today, the Sumida River); or from Noguchi Rokurozaemon, who took hints from the Asakusa-gami paper making techniques.

Cultivating Laver

There are many views on the origin of laver cultivation by using wooden stakes in the sea. One states that towards the end of the 17th century, fishermen discovered seaweed growing on a wooden fish pen. Another suggests that after a storm fishermen discovered seaweed growing on a broken wooden fish pen.

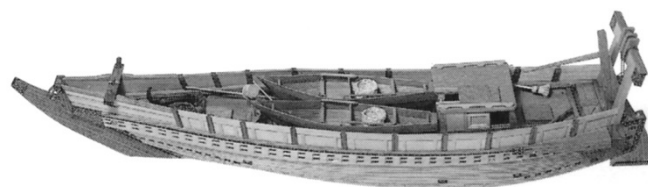
The technique of growing seaweed on wooden stakes was popular up through the start of the 20th century. As demand for seaweed grew, fast-growing bamboo replaced wooden stakes in the 1920s. By the 1930s almost all seaweed cultivation was done using bamboo.

In 1927, a palm net for cultivating seaweed was invented, and it was first put into use in Chiba Prefecture.



▲Laver Making (From "Topography of Famous Sites of the Tokaido Highway")

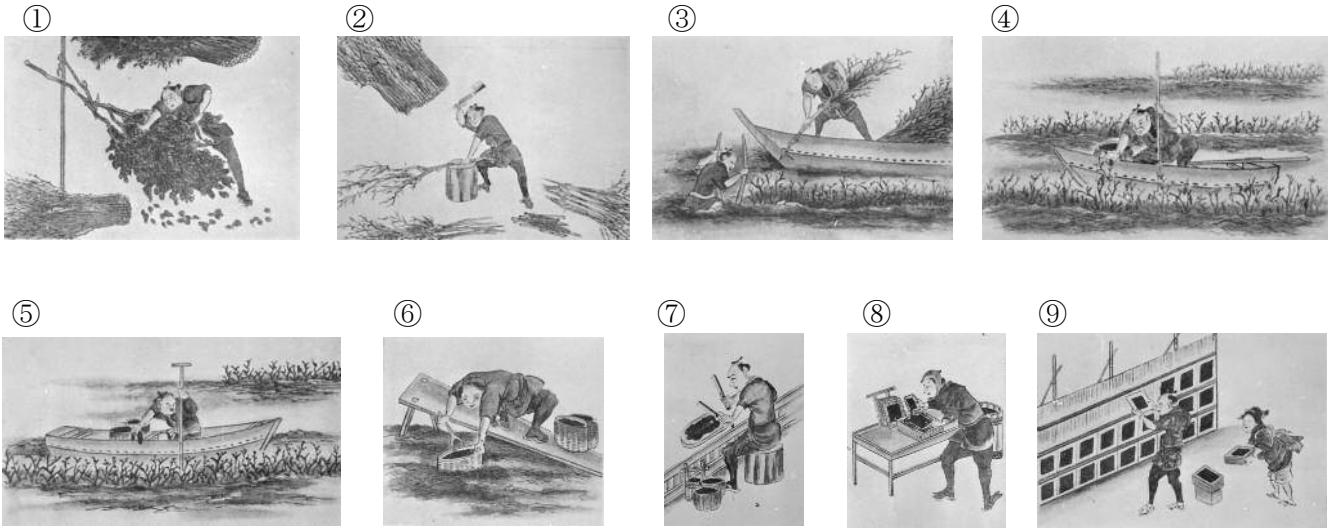
The practice was slowly adopted in Tokyo, and came into common use from around 1937 to 1950. Thereafter, artificial fiber nets appeared, which improved seaweed cultivation drastically. As these nets were durable and easy to move, it became popular for seaweed farmers to adhere seaweed spores to the nets in open water and bring them close to the shore to raise the seaweed.



▲ Laver Boat (model)

Small boats called *beka-bune* for picking laver are loaded.

▼ Cultivating Laver



The Tools and Techniques of Cultivating Laver

This technique was used in Shinagawa and Omori up until around 1937.

1. The leaves of many small branches are removed, such as of Evergreen Oak or Japanese Zelkova.

2. The lower part of tree is sharpened and branches are tied to make it easy to drive into the seabed.

3. Holes are made in the seabed into which the trees, prepared in 2, will be driven. When the tide is high, farmers use elevated *geta* sandals, and in deep water they use boats.

4. and 5. A small boat is loaded onto the laver boat. Approaching to the cultivation area, the farmer uses the small boat and pulls the seaweed off the branches of the stakes.

6. The harvested seaweed is heaped into a bamboo

basket and washed in the sea water until the sliminess and bubbles are removed.

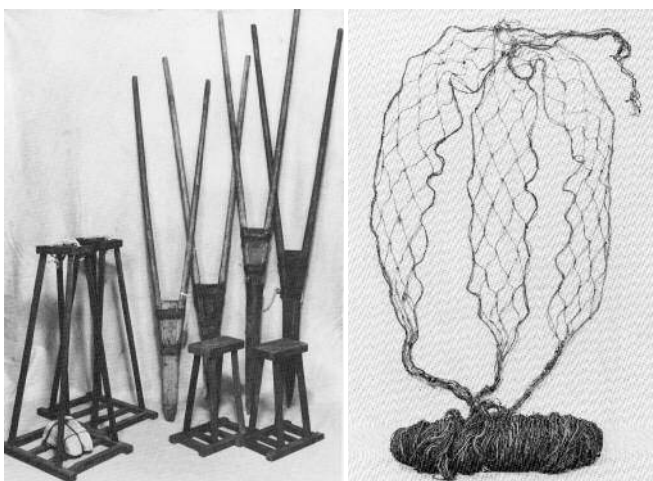
7. The seaweed is placed on a cutting board made of Japanese zelkova. The worker chops it up with thin-bladed knives in both hands.

8. A frame is placed on the nori mat. The cut seaweed is scooped out of a tub and quickly spread evenly across the mat in the frame.

9. A 1.8-meter-high and 36-meter-long straw lattice is hung. The nori sheets are pinned to the lattice with bamboo skewers to be dried for a day.

The Decline of Laver Cultivation

The fishing rights to cultivate seaweed in Shinagawa were revoked in 1962 to make way for the expansion of Tokyo Bay. The practice died out in the following year.



▲ Left: Geta sandals and the tools for creating holes in the seabed Right: Laver baskets



▲ The final laver harvest in Shinagawa, February 9, 1963