

# SO LONG

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## GLOBAL NEWS READING: One of Japan's great institutions makes way for a car park

*In the name of Olympic **efficiency**, the **Tsukiji** fish market has been moved to a **soulless** new site*

Oct 11th 2018

*Last Saturday at six in the morning the **handbells** rang and **auctioneers** launched with **chanting** into the last auction of **bluefin tuna** at Tokyo's Tsukiji market. The next day the market closed for ever. A **procession** of its **distinctive** "turret trucks"—**miniature flat-beds** driven by standing drivers—made their way *from* Tsukiji, on the edge of the **earthy** Shitamachi (下町) or Lower Town, a historically working-class area, to Toyosu (豊洲), a joyless **landfill** in Tokyo Bay. Tsukiji, the greatest fish market on Earth, is gone.*

*Built in the 1930s*, it was a model of modernism. But city officials had long claimed that the market was no longer fit for purpose. The buildings were old. A big earthquake posed risks, *not least* of the release of **asbestos** from **crumbling** walls.



And the site was **unhygienic**. Tokyoites are **on alert** for an **exodus** of **sashimi**-starved rats from the **disused** buildings.

But there is no getting around it. To close Tsukiji is to kill something **vital**. Tsukiji is “not just Tokyo’s best known brand. It’s the people’s market.” Its 23 **hectares** sat at the heart of the world’s seafood trade, *dealing on a typical day with 1,500 tons of fish and seafood—450 species in all*.

The human connections were many and **varied**, too. The economy of the marketplace was **etched** across the neighborhood in complex social, cultural and **ritual** patterns. Over 60,000 people made a living in or around Tsukiji as auctioneers, **stevedores**, clerks, grocers, **restaurateurs** and knifemakers. To close Tsukiji is to **sever** Tokyo’s remaining link to its **vibrant, mercantile** past. It was a natural target for **bureaucrats tidying up** the world.

In the end, the **inexorable logic** of Tokyo’s **hosting** of the Olympic games in 2020 **spelled** Tsukiji’s **demise**. The site, after all, is needed as a car park for Olympic vehicles.

What is it about the Olympics? In preparation for its previous hosting of the games, in 1964, Tokyo **disfigured** itself by filling in the **canals** that made the city the Venice of the East, and built ugly expressways on top of them. And *in Beijing, when its bid for the 2008 games was accepted*, a corrupt Communist **elite**, *on the pretext of preparing Beijing for its global debut*, **displaced** hundreds of thousands of people

and **razed** the **hutong**, *the network of alleyways laid out in the 13th century*. The destruction of Beijing's ancient **fabric** was a tragedy.

Sydney's site for the games in 2000, *14km out of town*, is ageing well as its trees mature. But a **predicted** post-Olympic tourist **bonanza** never **materialized**. Sydneysiders *stuck in traffic jams* still **grumble** that all that money would have been better spent improving the city's **creaking infrastructure**.

And don't forget the 1988 games in Seoul. They helped end dictatorship and bring in democracy. *On the games' eve*, students and others **took to the streets** *demanding constitutional government*. *In the full glare of the world's media* the strongman, Chun Doo-hwan (全斗焕), could hardly beat them all up *as past practice would have demanded*. Soon he was gone, and elections took place. Today South Korea is a **beacon** of democracy.

Many predicted that the Beijing games would move China in the same direction. But *instead of acting as a spur for openness*, they were presented as the world coming to China. The Olympics **presaged** the imperial **pomp** of President Xi Jinping.

In Sydney in 2000, teams from North and South Korea **marched** together at the opening ceremony. Now, the two countries want to jointly **host** the 2032 Olympics. *If it nudged North Korea towards democracy*, that would be something to celebrate. Luckily there's no fish market in Pyongyang to get **nostalgic** about.