

## **A Fruitful Practice: *Banana no Tataki-Uri***

Bananas arrived in Japan in 1903. The first shipments arrived in Moji from Taiwan, which had come under Japanese control eight years prior. Moji's proximity to Taiwan made it a natural gateway for large-scale imports, which began in 1908 and continued unbroken until the final years of World War II (1939–1945).

Several dozen wholesalers and warehouse owners capitalized on the surfeit of bananas and began selling the fruit in Moji. Prior to refrigerated shipping, bananas were transported while still green and unripe. The dealers stored their product in cellars, allowing the fruit to ripen naturally, and sold them once they had turned an appealing yellow.

Unavoidably, some bananas were damaged or ripened too quickly in transit and were overripe by the time they arrived. As these could not be sold, they were often made into processed foods. However, the best way to move the blemished or overripe bananas quickly was to sell them on the street at a cut rate. Banana vendors developed a unique sales patter, half auctioneering and half singing, which they delivered while beating the table to keep time and attract customers. The origins of the language, rhythms, and phrases remain obscure, though some are thought to have been inspired by old army songs. The fame of such performances quickly spread across Japan, and this “banana bargain-busking” (*banana no tataki-uri*) became associated with Moji.

### *Banana Boom and Bust*

By the early Shōwa era (1926–1989), Moji was caught up in a craze of streetside trading. During this heyday, scores of salesmen vied to be the wittiest, the loudest, and the most successful. From the waterfront to Sanbashi-dōri, vendors shouted and haggled in nonstop performances. Sales routines became ever more creative as banana traders competed to develop the catchiest, most effective sales patter. Sadly, as the country became embroiled in World War II, the banana trade disappeared, and Moji's yellow gold rush came to an end.

A memorial to the glory days of the banana trade stands near Mojikō Station, but *banana no tataki-uri* is still performed today as a tourist attraction. Starting at 1:00 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays, one or more salesmen gather in the Mojikō Retro historic district to hawk bananas until they sell out. The performances are highly interactive, and

spectators are encouraged to banter and negotiate with the salesmen to determine a satisfactory price.