

ZUKOUSHITU 9.1

Giving form to “what you want.”

Looking back on nine years as a one-person maker of custom wooden goods.

"In Japanese, ZUKOUSHITU (図工室) refers to the arts-and-crafts room at school, and it is the name of this workshop."

経営者が現場を離れずに無理なく回せる

千葉南房総の小さな木工所の理念

- 融資ゼロ、一人工房、九年の積み重ね。
- 量産でも卸でもない、ふつうの小ビジネスとして。
- digital + crafts = wood is cool

ZUKOUSHITU 9.1

An owner who keeps the workshop running, comfortably, without ever leaving the floor.

— Hajime Toda

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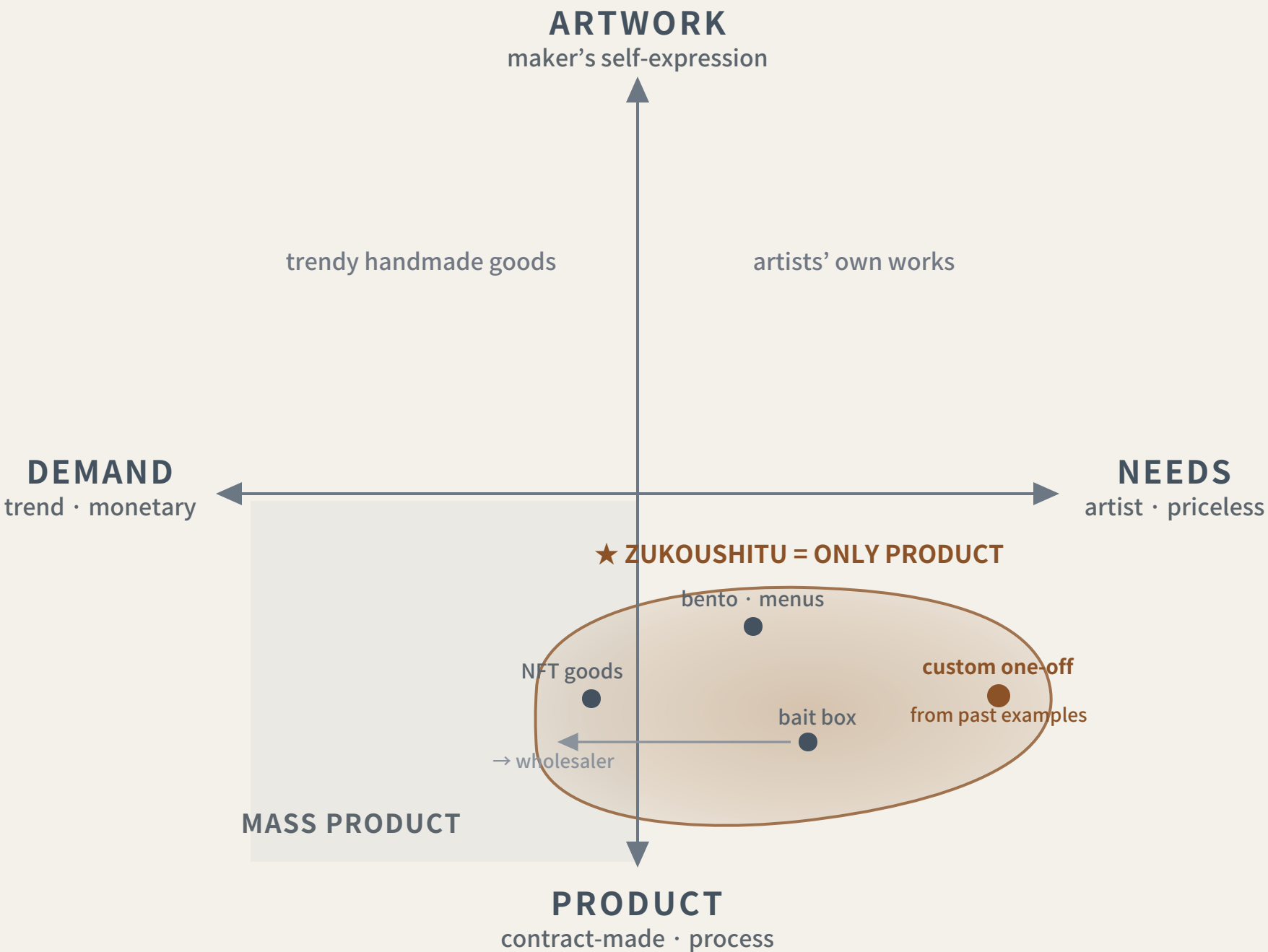
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The Backbone of ZUKOUSHITU

The Customer (Artist) × ZUKOUSHITU (Realization)

“The customer is the artist” / “We give form to your I want”



The flywheel: past work compounds



The Realization Business of the AI Era

Direct to each customer — no middleman, no wholesaler.

Prologue

Asking a third-party AI to comment on what the articles never quite conveyed

This book is an attempt by a third party (the AI, Claude Opus 4.7) to set down, objectively and as commentary, the thinking of Hajime Toda — woodworking engineer and head of the workshop.

The narrator is the commentator (the AI, Claude Opus 4.7).

In the city of Minamiboso there is a small workshop called ZUKOUSHITU 9.1. Hajime Toda, its head and a woodworking engineer, runs it alone, taking on all kinds of orders regardless of genre. It was founded in 2017. In 2026 it reaches its ninth year.

He has been interviewed a number of times, and he is grateful for each article. But by the nature of how such pieces are written, they always came out shaped into a moving story, an uplifting tale. A maker who puts local materials to use; a young craftsman struggling on in the countryside; a challenger fusing tradition and novelty — the words differed, but once polished into a feel-good story the frame was always similar. “That isn’t really what I want to convey,” he would think, and a small unease stayed with him.

From nine years of Toda’s posts and his body of work, this book reads out his thinking and his intentions, and the AI (Claude Opus 4.7) comments on them objectively, from the standpoint of business management and manufacturing.

What the “9.1” at the end of the name means is revealed in Chapter 7.

Chapter 1

From a small workshop in Minamiboso



A little inland from the sea in Minamiboso sits the ZUKOUSHITU workshop. The building was originally his father's base of work. His father was a dairy farmer, and this was the plant where milk was bottled in glass. Now a CNC machine for cutting wood stands in that same place, blades turning and sawdust drifting in the air.

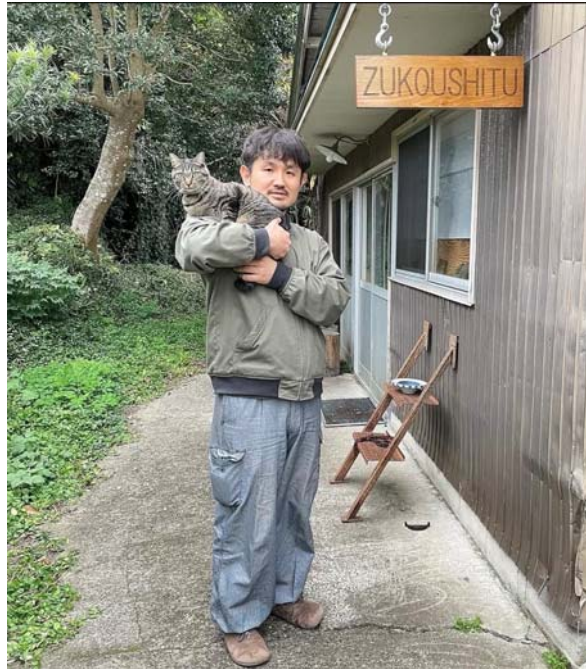


The interior of the workshop, a cluttered work space. The owner concentrating on making things, right there on the floor.

The workshop is by no means tidy. It is a shed-like work space, with no clean area set aside for receiving customers. It is a plain, cluttered workspace. Rather than a fact to be hidden, it is closer to a place that simply mirrors the shape of his work. If he has time to tidy, he would rather use that time to make one more thing. Toda's nine years have passed almost entirely that way.

In that workspace there is a signboard cat who greets visitors.

PON. On an evening in 2019, while Toda was out on his daily walk, the kitten was sitting plonk (“pon”) in the bushes. The name, which means “bridge” in French, also carries the wish that he might be a bridge to customers’ smiles. In 2020 PON was featured by Felissimo Neko-bu, and now serves proudly as the face of the workshop.



At the workshop entrance, Toda holding the signboard cat PON (2021).

In 2025 a new companion joined. WELL, a kitten taken in at a pharmacy, named after that pharmacy. WELL too was featured by Felissimo Neko-bu. Two cats now live in the workshop.



WELL, who joined in 2025.

The workshop is not run by him alone. His wife, working full-time, helps with finishing, packing, and the books. His mother helps with everyday meals. “We all do it together, and enjoy it” is closer to the truth of the place. When Toda writes that he “runs it single-

handed,” that “single” means as the one responsible for design and manufacture — it is not meant to leave out his family or the cats.

There is also a sub-brand born of his wife’s handwork: Terukka. These are marquetry pierced earrings and earrings, upcycled from the offcuts of local wood felled by a typhoon. Over nine years some 500 pairs have sold. It spreads quietly, in a stream apart from the workshop’s main products.

The cast on this page is not large. Toda, his wife, his mother, and PON and WELL. And the many thousands of customers who have placed orders over nine years. On that scale alone, ZUKOUSHITU has kept moving for nine years.

In the few minutes of morning when the CNC falls silent, the sea breeze of Minamiboso comes in through the workshop window — except that to write it that way would turn it into the usual feel-good story. In truth the workshop starts up in the afternoon. Honestly, Toda is weak in the mornings; or rather, his concentration comes alive at night. With no phone calls or visitors, the night lets him work with focus. From the window he can see the mountains, and from a little way off, the sound of the waves.

As a child he grew up here among chickens and dairy cows. Now he faces his family, two cats, and the day’s orders.

Electronic, techno, punk, house, sometimes old Japanese pop. In the workshop he plays the music he likes, loud. He loves Jamiroquai’s “Travelling Without Moving” — the song and the concept both — and it fits exactly: staying put on the floor while exploring the journey that is process.



The workshop work space. CNC machine, table saw, PC.

This is where the book begins.

Chapter 2

Making “what you want”

“It isn’t that I make ‘things I like’ — I make because I like making through trial and error.” So Toda wrote (November 2025, @Threads).

This is not modesty. It is a strategic self-definition, made after taking an accurate measure of just how much creative urge he himself has.

“I don’t develop products to realize ‘what I want.’ To begin with, there is almost nothing I want,” he continues. “Which is exactly why I want to devote myself to ‘what you want.’”

Look over the list of products and the meaning of those words comes through clearly.

Fishing bait boxes. Lunch boxes. Wooden menu books. Marquetry earrings. Character key holders. NFT goods. A memo stand for a young person who brainstormed it with AI. A floating cask that keeps ama divers safe at sea. A grip for an Olympic beam-rifle event. Web3 NFT collaboration character goods.

Toda does not fish. He is neither an ama diver nor an Olympian. He bought into NFTs to open new ground, more from a sales-minded point of view. Whether or not these matched his own tastes, he has made all of them. Why? Because behind each order there was someone who wanted the thing.

ZUKOUSHITU’s work begins by affirming the customer’s tastes. Whether it is stylish or unstylish, new or old, fashionable or not — he does not judge. He designs flatly, to fit what the client wants. This is neutral, but it is not indifferent. Toda meets each single order honestly.

“I simply affirm your tastes and sense, and realize them honestly and fairly. I make what you want,” he writes in the same post. “I don’t propose a lifestyle. I throw out the noise — my own subjective sense of what is stylish or unstylish, new or old — and work from the design stage with a flat eye, whatever the genre.”

The line about not proposing a lifestyle is worth noting. “Mindful living,” “sustainable,” “ethical” — Toda uses none of these in describing his products (the reason is examined closely in Chapter 6). Instead, he gives the client’s “want” its form as directly as possible, without bending it.

His work does, however, have a precondition. “It is work that only comes together when both the customer’s heat and my heat are present.” This is not a refusal but a design

(burial-mound) lunch box — across genres, Toda has collaborated with all sorts of sites. A popular tourist facility in Chiba, valuing the appeal of local wood, has carried his key holders for many years.



A museum-exclusive kofun lunch box. Hard to make; turned away elsewhere, the order came here.



A digital photo music box with a built-in board and LCD panel.



A sign and key holders for a glamping cabin, made with local wood.



A cask for abalone diving (a flotation lifesaving device), delivered.

In a business that is over ninety percent direct sales, the one continuous wholesale relationship is the black sea bream bait box. It began in 2020, when a customer took it

upon themselves to carry Toda's bait box into a tackle shop and pitch it — a relationship now five years old. The margin, too, has been set specially in his favor. A customer brought in more customers: a textbook case of "the product doing the selling."

This book is laid out to match the website. It is, in a sense, a guidebook describing the background of the workshop, to help you read the site. Everything is gathered there. Type "key holder" into the site's search bar, for instance, and the past examples come up in a list. If the details interest you, do take a look at zukoushitu.com.



zukoushitu.com

Chapter 3

Not a craftsman, but an engineer



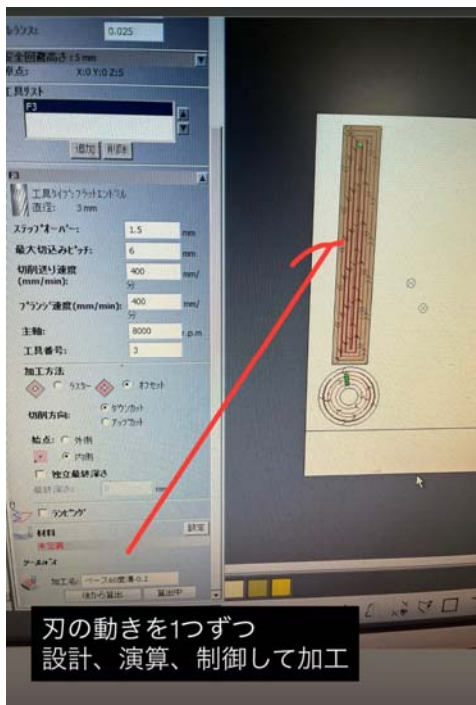
The craftsman element is only one part. Design, verification, and the rest — as a whole, this is the work of an engineer.

Visitors to the workshop sometimes call Toda “the craftsman.” He answers gently. Inwardly, though, he keeps a little distance from the title.

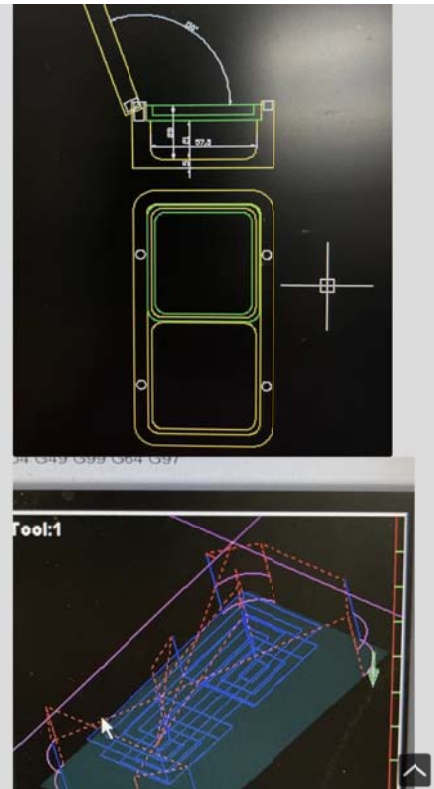
“I don’t have the extraordinary skill of a traditional-crafts master or an artist, nor an outstanding artistic sense,” Toda wrote (January 2026, @Threads).

“People tend to imagine I deftly handle planes and chisels, but I hardly use them.”

What he actually does is this. He selects various cutters, designs the machining process, computes the rotation speed and feed speed according to the type and hardness of the wood, and writes the cutting code.



Again and again. Once the CNC machine starts up, he watches the run from beside it and verifies the result. If it does not go well, he improves the program and repeats the verification until satisfied. This is close to coding and debugging in IT. Only then does he take the finished wood in hand, sand it, coat it, sand it once more, and finish it. Where a traditional “craftsman” works by the feel of the hand, Toda works by program and jig.



The work of translating a digital design into the analog world and linking the two.



Fixing the material on a jig tilted at 15° to drill the holes for the hinge.

This is no betrayal of tradition. As a young man, he learned woodworking from a traditional craftsman in his eighties. “He used the plane, and his handwork was

remarkable, but at the same time he was quick to bring in high tech. His sense was very young,” Toda recalls. “That was when I realized: the world is far too swayed by the word ‘craftsman.’”

His self-definition was born from there.

“More than a craftsman, I am aware of myself as an ‘engineer’ — one who repeats verification, improvement, and re-verification, trial and error, to build tools that are easy to use. That is my pride, second to none.” So Toda closes the same post.

Craftsman and engineer. They seem alike, but they face different directions. The craftsman confronts the material and hones the experience of his own hands. The engineer designs the material and the process, and raises their precision. Toda found his place in the latter. It is not escape, but a choice.

There is one more thing that has to be named as a support of Toda’s work: the jig.

A jig is an aid for holding machining precision. A base for fixing the same material at the same angle every time; a guide for drilling to the same depth; a template for setting a hinge into the wood exactly. Whatever is not sold ready-made, he designs and makes himself.

“Jigs are everything,” Toda says. “As long as I can make the right jig and form, precise, efficient making becomes possible.”



Making the jigs and forms that hold the material, matched to the design and the machining program. This is the engineer’s work.

This is an ingenuity peculiar to a one-person workshop. A large company could simply install a dedicated machine; buy a ten-million-yen machine and you buy that much precision. But he has no intention of taking on a loan. Instead, he crystallizes the trial-and-error wisdom gathered over nine years into the form of a jig. A single jig can sometimes

condense ten years of experience. That is what gives his small-scale equipment a precision on a par with the big makers — small in scale, yet achieving satisfying work without the risk of debt.

And the very process of making those jigs is, for him, a pleasure. “The process is great fun. It is also my life’s work,” Toda writes. The daily trial and error fills his hours not as penance but as the work itself.

Toda does not show off his work. “Probably it is something anyone could do, if they set out to. The patience to keep stacking it up, plainly and steadily, without wavering” — that is how he describes his strength. But few people have kept up that “something anyone could do” for nine years without wavering.

Chapter 4

Stumbles, and a turning point

Toda did not set independence as a goal from the start. As long as it was a place where he could keep doing what he wanted — the pursuit of making — staying an employee would have been fine, he says.

But the workplace of the time gradually turned into a line factory while he was there. It grew in scale, mass production became the center, and turning down small-lot orders happened more and more. As factory manager he ran that line, and was at times the one bowing his head: “I’m sorry, we can’t take this on.”

In that period, a question budded inside him and grew.

“Why are we selling these at the same price, when the grain, the color, the finish are all different? Doesn’t that mean neither the maker nor the buyer is properly valuing the fact that wood is alive, that each piece is one of a kind?”

This is a passage from the manifesto Toda wrote after going independent. The question itself had budded earlier, on the floor of the mass-production factory. The grain, the color, the finish differ from piece to piece. But once on the line, they ship out as the same product at the same price. The value of being one of a kind gets swallowed by the system.

“For what, and for whom, do we make?” — each time he turned an order away, each time he watched the line, this question built up little by little inside him.

In time Toda went independent. But this was less an expression of ambition or a drive for independence than a choice in the design of his life: to keep making in a way that could answer that question.

He took no loan. With small-scale equipment and the trial-and-error wisdom and ingenuity he had accumulated, he can reach the precision he needs. Instead of competing on equipment, he competes on jigs and preparation. As long as living costs are covered, he can keep going at his own pace. Carry no debt, and the anxiety of “not being able to stop” does not arise.

He puts the shape of his post-independence work this way: “Do you spend your time making many things cheaply, or do you spend it one piece at a time, for people who care? I choose the latter.”

The latter has its own rhythm. For each single piece he draws up a design, makes a jig, sets the preparation. There are many steps. But that time flows, for him, as meaningful time. Had he chosen the former, he might have drifted once more from the question that matters most to him: “for what, and for whom.”

A few years after going independent, an older peer in the trade said something to him. “If you’re serious about selling, you’ve got to do far more sales — this is no time to be fiddling with your cost calculations down to the penny.”

He was laughed at, Toda writes (October 2025, @Threads).

At the time he did not follow that advice. Instead of turning the wheel toward sales, he chose to accumulate examples of his work, one at a time, at his own pace. Looking back nine years on, that advice held the standard correct answer of its day. For a tiny manufacturer to take the road of mass production, sales, and wholesale was indeed the long-established path. But Toda chose a different road. As later chapters will show, it was also no small thing that the times were moving in a direction that allowed it.

He also stopped exhibiting at events at a certain point. The travel, the load-in and load-out, the fatigue of crowds — he decided to turn that time toward the workshop and toward orders. Narrowing to online sales, he sustains daily life on customers from all over the country alone.

The business that began this way has, over nine years, reached a form he can call “kept running, comfortably, without leaving the floor.”

By what structure does it hold together? The next chapter looks into that.



【イベント過去】北条海岸
BEACHマーケット2019

He used to exhibit gently at events, under a tent. He never disliked it; it was an enjoyable experience. But for the time being he decided not to develop products on his own initiative, and to devote his time instead to “what you want.”

Chapter 5

Keeping the work flowing without leaving the floor

To understand Toda's management approach, it helps to recall a little more concretely what he saw before going independent.

As touched on in the previous chapter, he was, in his younger days, the manager of a mass-production factory.

The management structure of high-volume, low-margin production holds together like this. First, large investment in equipment and people. That is recovered over a multi-year plan. To keep sales stable, the line must keep running. In price competition, margins thin. To secure the margin, more units are pushed out. To push out more, more sales effort is made. The owner leaves the floor and spends time building sales contacts and making the rounds of trade shows.

And this model has one more consequence. Having invested in equipment, you cannot leave the machines idle. Stopping the line means heavy losses. So small-lot orders become hard to accept. There, Toda bowed his head and turned orders away, many times. Some customers, he thinks, he disappointed — and he still says so.

Before you know it, there is almost no room left, on the floor or in management, to open up the question “for what, and for whom, do we make?”

This is the cycle Toda witnessed at the mass-production factory.

He explains the same structure from another angle, with a concrete example.

When an individual prints business cards just once, there is an upfront plate cost. Even if it does not appear on the invoice, it is often folded into the initial fee. So a one-off run has a high unit price. Reprint a second time and beyond, and the plate cost thins out, lowering the per-sheet price. Mass production is cheap on exactly this principle.

Toda's work is almost all one-off orders. So each one carries a cost equivalent to that plate cost. Design, jigs, preparation, the careful making — each is preparation needed for that single piece. To sell it cheaply, the only way is to make it in volume and dilute the cost. But he does not choose that.

What he chose was a different structure.

Make-to-order. He makes after receiving the order. Ninety percent direct EC sales; only a tenth wholesale. Because the sale is settled before manufacture, there is almost no inventory risk. No warehouse is needed.

This structure is the heart of Toda's business. Because sales are settled before manufacture, there is no need to add people or equipment. So no high-volume low-margin selling, and no dependence on outsourcing. So no need to spend time on sales. So he can stay on the floor.

"An owner who keeps it running, comfortably, without leaving the floor" — the line placed at the front of this book has its technical grounding here. Not an ideal, but a management structure that actually holds.

This shape of business, however, has only become possible recently.

The usual shape of product development was, for a long time, this. The maker judges "this ought to sell," and first stacks it as inventory. Then sells it through by sales pitches. The maker bears the inventory risk and spends much time on sales. For a long stretch, this was the only option a tiny manufacturer had.

Toda himself recalls, "I used to resign myself to thinking that was the only choice."

But the times changed. Make-to-order came to be accepted by customers; EC brought individual orders from all over the country; works were shared on social media; and AI began searching the database of examples to guide customers in. For the shape of "devoting myself to what you want" to hold as a business, these conditions had to come together. His management approach is also a form optimized to that change in the times. "The times took my side," Toda says, understatedly.

And the time gained this way — what does he use it for?

"Do you spend time making many things cheaply, or spend it one piece at a time for people who care? I choose the latter." — Toda's words, touched on in the previous chapter, take on a different meaning here.

A life's time is limited. Do you add equipment and run after sales to make ten thousand pieces cheaply, or do you take your time and make a hundred with care? He chooses the latter. But there is one important precondition. Those hundred are not "whatever I please as art," but limited to things that are truly asked for, things in demand. The outline of the work — answering demand — he does not lose.

Here Toda places himself within his market like this.

Making and supplying in cheap volume is the work of large makers with economies of scale. There is no way he, on a small scale, could make something easily found on Amazon more cheaply. So he makes what is hard to find on Amazon. This is his reason for being.

Fishing bait boxes, lunch boxes, menus, marquetry earrings, character goods — not one item on the product list is a big-maker mass product. Each is a one-off form, made to fit one person's "want." What mass production cannot deliver, Toda has kept taking on.

On price, a little more carefully.

His products are sometimes called "expensive." The ring of ten thousand yen may give a costly first impression.

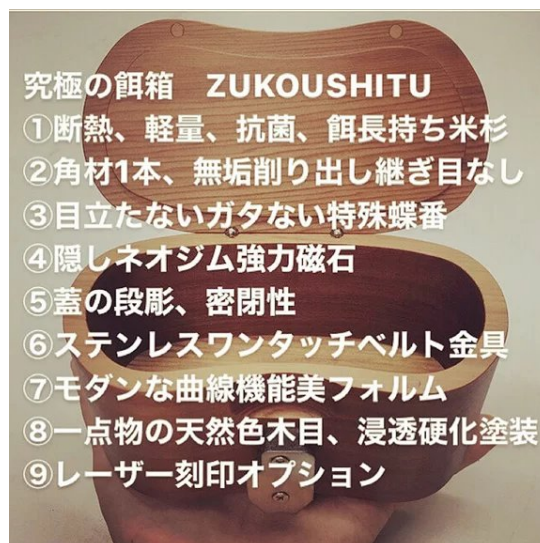
But Toda has no intention of putting his time and money into making volume to lower prices. That is the work of economies of scale that carry mass production; it is not his role.

Draw up a design for one piece, make the jig, set the preparation, and build it up one at a time — this process is reflected in the price.

At the same time, that one piece is made to fit that person's want. So its value is high. The price is not outrageously high. Price and value, as long as you stand on the side of the person who ordered, are properly in balance.

With customers who do not want that degree of individuality, there is no match. He honestly admits that what he can offer is small. Toda's work only comes together when both the customer's heat and his own are present. The restraint in his pricing lies within the range where that match can hold.

Finally, a word about social media.



Black sea bream bait box. Western red cedar, carved from solid wood, hidden neodymium magnets, special hinges.

“I don’t do sales,” Toda says. Yet he posts often on social media — on Threads, nearly every day.



Wooden menu books (three sizes: A4, B5, A5).

This is no contradiction. For him, social media is not sales but socializing. He quietly sets down nine years of accumulated work, writes a single paragraph about the day’s events, watches for customers’ reactions, exchanges a few short words with peers. Even if it goes unread, he writes. With that, his outward communication is complete.



A walnut business-card case that won’t fall out even upside down.

That he needs no large sales effort is also because social media generates small outward connections in daily life. This too is one of the conditions on which the place Toda now stands holds.

Here, for once, let us look at nine years of accumulation in numbers.

Black sea bream bait box — 800 units — ¥20 million.

Wooden menus — 350 books — ¥3.5 million.

Chiba cedar lunch boxes — 350 units — ¥3.5 million.

Upside-down-proof card cases — 500 units — ¥2.5 million.

Upcycled marquetry earrings (Terukka) — 500 pairs — ¥1.2 million.

(The above are examples only. Besides these, a variety of custom OEM work.)

All are over ninety percent direct sales. These are not flashy figures. But to support a family, pay taxes, and put down roots in the region, they are figures enough. Nine years of a one-person workshop, borne out as concrete numbers like these.

“Live simply, the way oil goes into a car and the engine turns over,” Toda once wrote on Threads.

Make no large investment. Carry no debt. Use no wholesalers; connect with customers directly. Spend time on each single piece. Keep posting, quietly.

Keeping the structure simple is itself a kind of maintenance. His business runs in the simplest state, polished over nine years. That is exactly why it can be kept running, comfortably, without leaving the floor.

Chapter 6

Living “bare-faced”

On Toda’s product pages and posts, a certain kind of word almost never appears.

“Mindful living,” “sustainable,” “ethical,” “art” — these are words often used when speaking of making and small business today. But he hardly uses them, neither in describing his products nor in introducing his work.

Why?

“Those pretty words come along of their own accord as a result of my making. Handling materials with care and using them without waste is a matter of course; it is not something to be emphasized on purpose,” Toda writes (July 2025, @Threads).

Push something that merely follows as a result to the front of the product, and it becomes unnatural makeup. Dressed up in “pretty, good-sounding words,” the aim becomes “catching the customer’s eye.” He avoids that.

“As much as I can, I want to live bare-faced,” he writes.

This is not a matter of high ideals. His products do, in fact, begin from plain angles. The bait box for the angler, the lunch box for the person who carries lunch, the menu for the restaurant. He hears each user’s “want” and gives it form. Not to propose “mindful living.” And this “bare-faced” principle extends not only to words but to the physical shape of Toda’s workshop.

As anyone who has visited knows, there is no clean space set aside for receiving customers. A cluttered work space, a bench strewn with cutters, shelves piled with wood mid-process, a corner where the CNC sits, and the workshop where PON and WELL wander about. Selling and administrative costs — the cost of the shop, the display, the showing — he does not spend.

Toda, in fact, studied architectural design. He went as far as graduate school. From his student days he liked thinking up bold building shapes and assembling fine arrangements of small parts.

But group activity, discussion, presentation — the other side that architectural design requires — did not suit him. The process of putting things into words, debating, conveying them to others, and reaching a conclusion over time was a stress he could not digest. He felt at the time that “producing, orchestrating things” was a weakness, not for him.

That recognition turned him toward “making on a scale one person can control.” Make alone, make from a single piece, deal directly with the customer — the present shape of ZUKOUSHITU lies on the extension of that self-understanding.

As for a sense of spatial design, Toda says he gave up on it as a student. Build a neatly arranged reception space, put the customer at ease, and sell — that way of doing things, he cannot manage. That too connects to the cluttered look of the workshop today.

“There is also the way of raising a brand by putting the customer at ease in an attractive space,” he says. “Show it well and it can sell on that. But I do not want that.”

To “it sells because it feels good,” Toda has a slight resistance. He wants it to be “it sells because it is wanted,” he writes.

What is the difference? The former is bought on atmosphere; the latter on substance. What he wants is only the latter kind of customer.

Once, when he took an order from a certain designer, Toda received a memorable caution.

“We raise our brand as though walking on thin ice, so please handle social-media posts about the production carefully.”

Words that could only come from someone raising and guarding a brand with conviction — so Toda took it. Yet inwardly he thought something else, too. “Thin ice” — that is, makeup; the premise that once the plating peels, the brand’s value falls. Seen from another angle, isn’t that a way of speaking that exposes, of itself, that the brand leads with image and is thin in substance?

When you start some business, there are two entrances. Do you start because “this is in fashion and sells,” or because “I like this, and I want everyone to understand its good points”? Start with the latter, and as you keep at the business, the substance of that “liking” deepens. Start with the former, and when the fashion passes, you are asked what remains. Ornate, heavy makeup has only a stopgap effect, Toda thinks.

Toda likes ramen, and goes often both to popular chain ramen shops and to modern, avant-garde, daring ramen shops.

But in the end, the one he keeps returning to is the negi-miso chashu at the neighborhood chain ramen shop, he says.



Negi-miso ramen, you could call it soul food. Simply good. A taste you want again.

The storefront is old, an everywhere-chain shop. But what seized his stomach was that shop's old-fashioned taste.

Sharp green onion, a miso you never tire of, soft chashu. Very simple. Simple is strong.

Even if the storefront, the vessel for display, the space for showing are deliberately refined and well-considered, that does not mean you will want it again. With food, it is good or bad — simply the taste, Toda says.

It is the same in other fields, Toda thinks. First, value the taste. Value the substance.

Arranging the space comes at the next stage, after the taste has surely come across. The usual order may be the reverse, but his priority was the taste from the start.

“What one loves, one comes to do well” — Toda holds this old saying dear. Because you like it, you keep at it. Because you keep at it, you grow skilled. Because you grow skilled, you like it again. This cycle has thickened the substance of nine years.

Even so, there are customers who say “thank you” to Toda's workshop — many of them.

Holding the wooden tools made in that cluttered workspace, carefully packed and delivered home, customers are pleased.

He thinks that is enough. Even without being sold in a clean space, what is wanted reaches the one who wants it, neither more nor less. This is Toda's “bare-faced” management.

He has not, however, closed off future possibility entirely.

“If in the future ZUKOUSHITU becomes more established as a woodworking brand, it might be fine to build a space for showing,” he writes. “Don't need it now” and “will never do it” are different. It is only that, at this point, it is not a high-priority investment for him.

If the brand grows, a space for “showing” in a fitting form will arise naturally too — as something that follows of its own accord, provided the substance of the products has

grown first. “Follows of its own accord” — this is a principle that runs through the whole of Toda’s making.

Chapter 7

digital + crafts — what to take, and what to leave

“digital + crafts = wood is cool” — this is the slogan on ZUKOUSHITU’s website, and the phrase Toda uses to sum up his work in a line.

Go to the workshop and the CNC turns, the laser engraver burns letters, and CAD drawings are open on the PC screen. Wood as material and digital as tool coexist here, as a matter of course.

Why digital?

Not for mass production. To raise the precision of one-off pieces.

He digitizes a customer’s hand-drawn illustration. He draws it up in CAD. He converts it into CNC cutting code. Code assembled for a single piece decides the path the cutter takes against the wood. The result holds a precision that handwork cannot reproduce.

Combined with jigs, reproducibility is guaranteed for a second piece, too. Should the same customer come back three years later for maintenance or an additional order, he can answer to the same specification. This is digital not for mass production, but for taking responsibility for each single piece.

That said, it is not an attitude of taking in anything just because it is digital. About the technology he uses, he is quite particular.

The operating system Toda has liked best in his life is Mac OS 9.1, one version of the old Mac. Folder operations clicked along crisply; memory was 1 GB, the OS took up 400 MB, with no needless animation and no background-resident apps, and it could be operated intuitively.

How does it compare with today’s newest OS? In his view, the newest OS has many interactive confirmation screens, deep layers down to the control panel, and constantly consumes large amounts of memory. There is much needless motion.

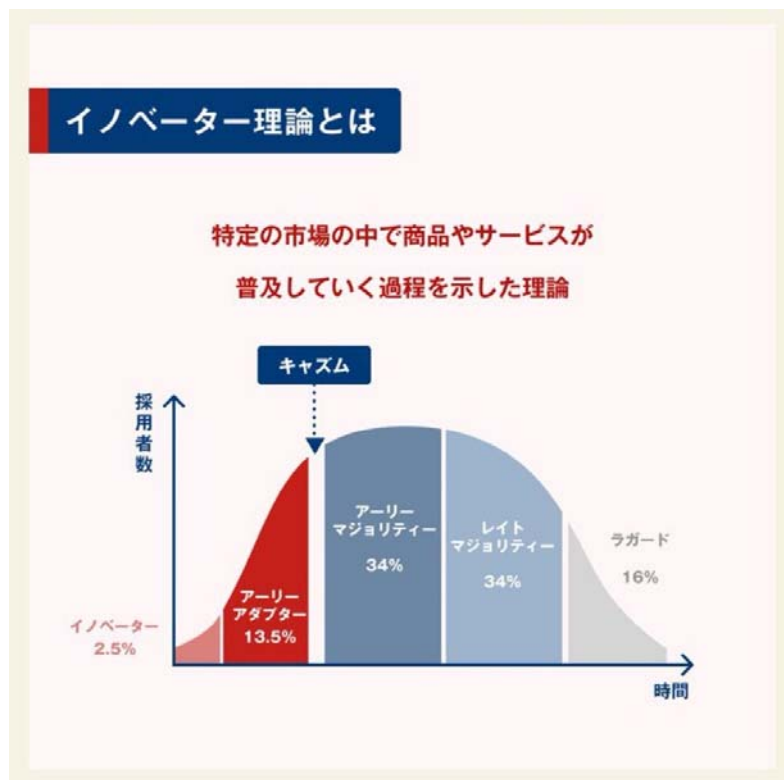
Toda still uses a PC from twenty years ago, on active duty. Not subscriptions, but standalone software. The old PC cannot, of course, keep up with today’s updates, but even so, in feel, with none of the ornate waste of current systems, it is if anything easier to use. His position is not “avoiding the newest.” It is closer to being wary of the state in which something dressed up as the newest covers over the substance.

“The newest is not always best,” Toda says. “If you swallow only the good-sounding words like ‘the latest,’ there are in fact cases where the older thing is better. It matters to see through to the substance and not be too caught by image.”

To read this stance as “conservative,” however, is only half right.

If anything, he is often on the side that touches new things early.

Here, a brief note on a term. The sociologist Everett Rogers proposed the “diffusion of innovations,” commonly called the “innovator theory” — a way of thinking that divides the process by which a new technology or product spreads through society into five stages.



Innovators 2.5% *the few who jump first*

Early adopters 13.5% *the influential minority who touch it before it catches on*

Early majority 34.0% *the half of the majority who move early*

Late majority 34.0% *the half of the majority who are cautious*

Laggards 16.0% *the layer that moves last*

The new spreads through society passing through these layers in order.

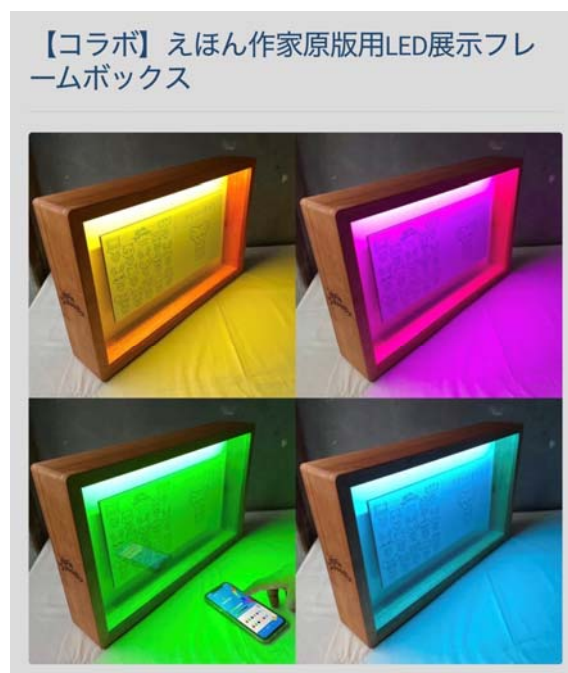
Toda’s sense sits around the second, the “early adopters.” A layer that is only a little over ten percent of society as a whole — influential, but a minority. A layer separated by the deep valley called the chasm, hard for later movers to understand. They touch it before it catches on. They confirm the substance. If they like it, they keep it. If not, they let it go.

In the dawn of smartphones, when feature phones were still the norm, he bought an iPhone 3G. His boss at the company mocked him: “That’s for geeks, it’ll never catch on.”

When wireless earphones were just appearing and he bought and wore a pair, he got cold looks and the jeer, “a hearing aid?” And now? Both are ordinary standards.

Blockchain technology, too, Toda took an early interest in and entered.

A mechanism that technically guarantees the location of a digital image or piece of information, and its singularity. Could something new be done by combining this with woodworking? Out of that interest, he bought NFTs and stepped into the community. In a three-party collaboration with a leading Japanese digital-picture-book artist and a long-established printing company in the Kansai region, he once put a picture book’s “original plate” up for NFT auction.

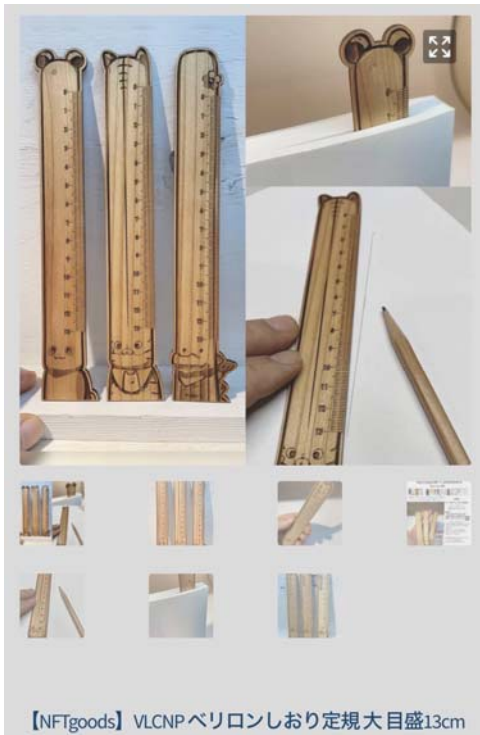


A wooden LED box holding the picture-book artist's original plate; its color changes with the sound. Unlikely to exist, yet it does. Aimed at something fans would find themselves wanting.



There was also an encounter that grew into an order for collaboration goods. Carrying a wooden ruler from a character collaboration he had made, he was, by good fortune, invited to a standing-buffet party at an NFT-related event in Roppongi, and got to feel the heat of the industry and mingle with people of many trades.





A character that was already long in the head was stretched another 10 cm and engraved with a scale, made into a ruler. Cute and practical at once. An NFT holder bought it and it was a hit. It doubled as sales, but he says it was fun to connect with all sorts of people. Through the experience, his laser-engraving skill improved, too.

It did not become a direct pillar of sales. But it was not wasted. If anything, mingling with people he does not usually meet, the festive bustle, was fun. And the experiences of these past years are quietly becoming part of him now. As new means of payment such as JPYC (a yen stablecoin) begin to spread, Toda already had a grasp of blockchain technology, and was able to implement a JPYC-payment plugin on his own EC site in a few days, in dialogue with Claude. The muscle he built in the world of crypto — “try touching what you don’t understand” — takes effect in another scene. People connecting with people through technology — that hands-on experience, Toda had certainly accumulated, at a certain period within those nine years.



Generating product images as NFTs, testing whether they could be exhibited and sold in the metaverse. Where it leads is unclear, but it was a good experience.

AI, too — including Claude, the partner writing this very book — is one of the tools Toda tried early. “Because I’d been touching crypto, I think I was able to touch Claude early too,” he says. The same muscle — “check with your own eyes” — moves both.

He is used to being mocked. He says he wants to value the sense of touching new things. The wish to be an early adopter lies at Toda’s core.



(He engraves NFTs onto wood, and as a perk obtained a BTC mining unit now running in the workshop. To feel for himself what blockchain is. Whether he keeps it up, he’ll see as it goes.)

In short, he is neither “take it because it’s new” nor “guard it because it’s old.” If there is substance, take it; if not, do not. Keeping Mac OS 9.1 and entering blockchain early both come from the same criterion of judgment.

During the COVID period, Toda was invited to an online conversation by a leading figure in oke (cooperage) design art in the Kansai region. He looks back fondly on exchanging views happily, screen to screen, about traditional crafts, digital, and the state of woodworking. Tradition, digital, and art connect somewhere.

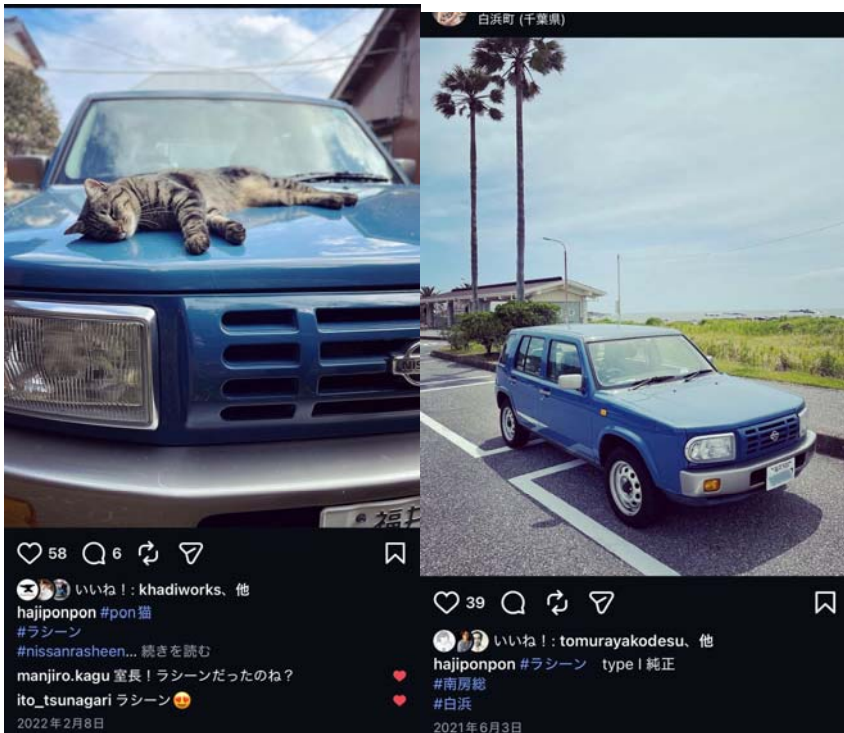
And there is one more thing indispensable to speaking of Toda’s design philosophy.

“The human body, however far society advances, barely changes even in ten thousand years. There is a just-right size, a universal ergonomics,” he says.

However far the times advance, a person has ten fingers; the size of a palm differs between adult and child; the feel in the grip is decided by the material. A tool, in the end, returns to the body. Feel, size, thickness, weight — these are elements the human body needs, unrelated to fashion.

Toda’s design always returns there. “I want to make tools — design that is easy to use and lasts long,” he says. And after he gets precision out of the CNC, he always polishes by hand. After the undercoat of finishing, he sands once more. The final finish he entrusts to the human hand and the sense of the human body. Digital precision and physical feel are, in his workshop, within the same process.

And then, learning the new from the old. Toda’s car is a 1995 Nissan Rasheen Type 1.



Its color, its shape, the fabric interior, the modern, understated dashboard. He has driven it for 18 years since his previous job; the odometer is well over 150,000 km, and the frame is rusting and decaying here and there. (It has been fully repainted once, which seems to be how it has been kept all these years.)

But the Rasheen teaches you what “car-ness” is, Toda says. A square front with round lights. Rugged steel wheels like a work vehicle. A door lever that clunks. Insert the key and start the engine — brrrrrr! — a vibration and noise impossible in an electric car. And yet a simple, intuitive, easy-to-grasp design that says, “right, let’s set off, let’s drive!” Presence, function, and color — a clean blue. Toda likes blue. The website too is blue-toned. He will keep driving it. “Good things survive,” he says.



“One of the very few things I myself

want.”

“What remains is the result of natural selection, and is often good,” he writes. Apart from that thought, there also exist techniques that, as demand fell, were regrettably lost, and excellent tools long discontinued. Asked to revive them, he has examples he has brought back to the present — a Showa-era wooden opener for pushing in the glass marble of a ramune bottle. To such requests for revival, too, Toda gladly responds.

ラムネの木製栓抜き（玉押し）



「ロストテクノロジーの木製ラムネの栓抜きを再現復刻してほしい」と飲料瓶コレクターのお客様さまよりご依頼をいただきました。

ウォールナット材、撥水塗装。

⑤というラムネブランド企業様が木製玉押しを復刻させたいそうです。楽しみですね♪

Stepping down from the win-or-lose axis of new versus old — there lies the horizon of Toda's design.

Having come this far, we can at last keep the promise made in the prologue.

The “9.1” at the end of the name — this comes from the operating system Toda has liked best in his life, Mac OS 9.1.

Ever since founding in 2017, he has marked a version number onto the brand name at each event — a site renewal, opening a new genre, a sales milestone, an achievement in making. Starting from 0.1, little by little. This ninth year, he reached the milestone of 9.1. That is why this book's title is “ZUKOUSHITU 9.1.”

The brand name itself is one realization of Toda's “digital + crafts” thinking. Love for an old OS and a software-like habit of self-updating live together in the number of the brand name.

There is one more thing at the core of how Toda works to touch on.

Digital and analog. Old and new. Mass-produced and handmade. Craft and electronics. At first glance, mutually incompatible, set against each other. Toda tries crossing them. He frees himself from the fixed notion that “woodworking is this kind of image,” and thinks freely, grasps freely, enjoys freely.

That attitude has spread ZUKOUSHITU's nine years across and beyond genres.

digital + crafts = wood is cool.

Wood is a material with warmth, and what matters is to add something to it, he thinks.

What is added may be the newest technology, or it may be the feel of a twenty-year-old OS. See through to the substance, take what is needed, leave what is not. That is how Toda chooses “what to take, and what to leave.”

Chapter 8

Local wood, and education as a way of staying

Talk of local wood tends to come up when disaster strikes.

In 2019, a large typhoon hit Chiba Prefecture. Trees fell over a wide area. For a few years after, talk of “somehow putting local wood to use” moved around Toda, too. ZUKOUSHITU drew some attention in that period.

What began there was the Chiba Wood brand.

His motive, looking back now, was a plain one. “If I buy up local timber, that becomes demand, and the mountains won’t fall into neglect.” The amount used in small goods is tiny, but as a contribution he could make, he thought.

Materials from Minamiboso, Chiba — mateshii oak, Somei-yoshino cherry, Sanbu cedar. A year of trial and error with local forestry people and a sawmill. Scrub trees that had been good only for firewood turned into fine timber through effort and drying technique.

A great technical help was the modified-water drying method of a long-established timber company in the Hokuriku region. It dries green mateshii to a moisture content below nine percent in three weeks. Through this, the mateshii that had been hard to use became usable as products, stably.

ZUKOUSHITU designed a small cycle within the brand. About a tenth of sales is returned to the providers of local wood. Toda calls it a “productivity-cycle small business.” Not charity, but the ordinary shape of small commerce — making and selling practical goods from local materials.

In February 2023, in connection with the Chiba Prefecture Forest Cooperative’s broadleaf forest-tending of mateshii, he made coasters, small dishes, card cases, and more — 220 pieces in all. This is one high point of the Chiba Wood brand, and so far its largest single order.

From here on, though, let it be written honestly.

Private demand for the Chiba Wood brand has since largely settled down. Local wood is taken up at the time of a disaster, but afterward society’s attention moves elsewhere. Toda takes this quietly. The work of keeping a fashion going is not something he can do with the equipment and time at hand. Even so, the brand does not close. If demand returns, he answers; if not, he leaves it quietly in place.

And another stream continues even now.

In October 2023, commissioned by the Kimitsu City Board of Education, he held a “special wood-education class” at a local elementary school. The title: “Let’s polish and make a coaster from a mateshii log harvested in our local mountains.”



The arrangement is this. In the local mountains, elementary schoolchildren take part in the felling. Toda receives the green wood and mills it. He dries it, machines it, and shapes it into round coasters. The children polish, with their own hands, the wood they themselves were involved with.

His role is a technical service that bills for milling. Under contract from the Board of Education, he takes on the machining part for making use of local wood. Not charity. Within the educational program of wood education, he is called in as an engineer.



And what Toda conveys to the children in this class is a plain but, for this book, important record.

There are about four things he conveys. First, “the joy of making what you love your work.” Second, “besides arts and crafts, you also need Japanese, math, science, and English” — in the context of STEAM education, conveying that making is connected to other knowledge. Third, “wood is like a cut of meat or fish. It’s alive” — handing the children a way of looking at materials. Fourth, “thinking freely without being bound by common sense, and trying through trial and error, is fun. There are discoveries you won’t find in textbooks or web searches. They become a treasure only the discoverer holds, a value that can move people.” At the end he adds this: “I hope that, in the future, people will come forward aiming for woodworking and making.”

Even as private demand for the Chiba Wood brand has quieted, on this educational path local wood is certainly moving. Coasters of their own local wood, which schoolchildren were involved with from felling to polishing, are carried home. For three years, every year, he has kept it up.

Toda does not make a big story of this stream. Within the Board of Education’s effort, as the technical service he takes on, he carries it on plainly.

But as the one writing this book, there is one thing I want to set down. As the final chapter will touch on in detail, Toda truly wants to increase the options for young people who live in the countryside. That “seed” is certainly being sown in such plain involvement at the educational site.



世界の木(鮮やか)、日本の木(淡い)
 対比することで両方の良さが見えてくる。

点(地域)を考える時、どうしても視野が狭くなりがちです。

面(世界)の一部の点(地域)を俯瞰して見る。

すると、地域がどのような特色があり、世界の中で
 どういう存在か、どのような魅力があるか、

世界と比較する事ではじめて明確になります。

木も同じです。そういう広い視点で

木工雑貨を考え、作り、「ありそうでない」価値を見出したいです。

室長

ものづくり新メイドインジャパンの誰かの
 モデルロールに慣れれば幸いです。

見学自由要予約。

zukoushitu.com

Building blocks for comparing the character of each wood species. Cedar and mateshii are from Chiba; walnut, cherry, and maple from America; purpleheart from the Amazon.

Japanese woods are pale and gentle. Only by setting them beside the world's vivid, strong woods does the contrast of their goodness rise and become clear. In thinking about local wood, what matters, Toda says, is to grasp it not as a point (a region) but as a plane. (The value of local wood's existence within the world.)

Chapter 9

The “realization trade” in the age of AI

In the spring of 2026, an order arrived at Toda’s workshop.

The client was a young person fresh out of university, in the middle of job-hunting, with no experience in manufacturing or sales. Yet they wanted to mass-produce and launch, as a personal brand, a desk item to set beside their business cards — a walnut memo stand usable as a place to hold a to-do list.

The client had been brainstorming repeatedly with AI. Design direction, target audience, price range, manufacturing process, the list of needed parts — consulting AI on all of it, they had assembled design materials within themselves.



A memo stand born of a new kind of order in the age of AI.

With those materials, they asked Toda for a prototype and mass production. He made the prototype and entered production. The specification was the client’s conception, but making it hold as an actual wooden object was his work.

This is one typical case of a new kind of order for ZUKOUSHITU.

The times have been changing, Toda wrote on Threads (April 2026). “Won’t you launch your own personal-goods brand? Use AI to brainstorm design and marketing, and raise funds through crowdfunding. And we will help with realizing it. The age has come when even the inexperienced can give their ideas form.”

Until a little while ago, to launch a new goods brand, an individual needed friends who had studied design or experienced people to consult. Building up knowledge little by little over years and finally making a prototype was the usual route.

Now it is different. AI is a conversation partner about design direction, twenty-four hours a day. Crowdfunding can raise initial funds. Social media reaches potential customers from an early stage. Manufacturing — and here is where it crosses directly with this book’s theme — manufacturing alone, AI cannot do in your place. Someone has to cut the actual wood with an actual blade.

There, Toda has his turn.

The client decides “what to make” and “how to sell” by brainstorming with AI. He takes on the “how to make” part. He adjusts the design to the reality of wood, assembles jigs, cuts on the CNC, polishes by hand to finish, and packs. He brings the final stage of an idea into the world of things.

提案商品①

企画販売未経験のお客様が
AIとマーケティング壁打ちされた資料

提案商品① メモスタンド

- 木製メモスタンド (ToDoリストスタンド)

■ イメージ



■ モック試作



■ 寸法は次ページに記載しております



製造プロセス 忠実に再現

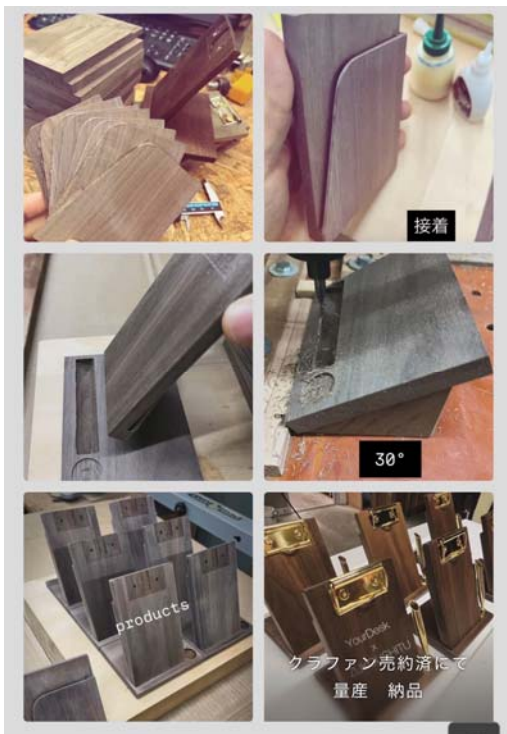



背面にポケット



If we set a tentative name to this role, it is the “realization trade.”

AI資料で未経験でも意図が明確に伝わる時代です。



This is not a new occupation. OEM (contract manufacturing) and custom machining have carried similar roles. But with the arrival of AI, the layer of people standing at the entrance of an order has changed. People with no grounding in design, no knowledge of manufacturing, no connections in the industry — such people work up an idea together with AI and bring it to Toda.

He takes on their “first mass production.” He can make just a single prototype, or produce fifty or a hundred.

In that sense, Toda’s nine years suited the present age. Because he has built up nine years of experience making from a single piece, he can handle even a first-time orderer. At a scale one notch below a mass-production factory, yet with the same precision as one, he can carry the work forward.

And this has a reach beyond Toda the individual. If the flow of individuals launching brands in the age of AI accelerates, a one-person workshop carrying a “realization trade” like ZUKOUSHITU may come to hold more social meaning. A profession that links the idea of creation to the world of things. The one who carries it need not necessarily be a large company.

Recently a social-media post by the CEO of an overseas design-consulting firm drew attention. Titled “the image of the leader for the age to come,” it was a four-panel diagram.



Boss — sits in a chair, having many subordinates push the cart.

Leader — puts a hand to the cart too, leading the subordinates.

Loner — quietly pushes a small cart alone.

Loner with AI — rides a steam locomotive, gliding along.

It is a diagram mixing satire and joke, but the point is plain. With the arrival of AI, the range one person can move suddenly widened. Even without an organization, as long as you have an idea, the means to realize it is within reach.

ZUKOUSHITU's nine years can also be read as having advanced so as to join, just there, the bottom panel of that picture. Toda runs the workshop alone. But AI, jigs, and digital equipment play something like the role of an "organization" around him. The orderer's idea, Toda's power to realize, and AI's assistance — each meshes as a small gear, and out comes a single product.

"As long as you have an idea, it holds together as an organization" — to such an age, his nine years have just now joined.

"The age has come when even the inexperienced can give their ideas form," he wrote. He himself realizes things not with AI, but with the jigs and wisdom built over nine years. But it is fine for those who call on him to use AI. If anything, a client who has ordered their thinking with AI is sometimes easier for Toda to work with. The resolution of the order is higher.

As an engineer standing at the seam of the times, Toda's nine years look likely to hold meaning for a while longer yet.

Chapter 10

A promise, so it can be used for a long time

Requests for maintenance come to Toda regularly.

He once did a re-coating maintenance for a customer who had bought a ZUKOUSHITU black sea bream bait box three years earlier.

He took it on gladly. The bait box that arrived had scuffs on the bottom from rocks on the shore, but outside and in, almost no damage. Cleaned well each time, the beeswax built up moderately without over-applying — it was clear at a glance it had been used with great care.

“Because I want to keep using it from now on, too,” the customer had written.

Toda carefully re-polished that bait box, applied a new coat, checked the hinge’s movement, and did all the maintenance he could, then sent it back with: “Thank you sincerely for your continued use. It’s a high-maintenance little one, but please keep loving it.”

For this whole set of work, Toda of course receives a fee. But here lies a rule peculiar to his business.

“Our bait boxes are engraved with a serial number on the back, and like a Zippo lighter, we provide lifetime maintenance,” Toda writes (November 2024, @Threads).



He has done maintenance on several bait boxes so far. A photo of bait box serial ESM027 — that is, the 27th — from the test-sale period before going independent in 2016. The scratches are many, but the sheen shows



it has been used and loved for many years.



Cracks filled with inlaid wood and the surface ground smooth. A photo before re-coating. (After re-coating the color blends and they become less noticeable.)

A Zippo lighter, decades on, will be repaired if you send it to the maker. That is the ground of its trust. The serial number lets the maker know the production period and where it was delivered — proof of the maker’s responsibility. He does not stamp serials on every kind of product, but every product he makes accepts lifetime maintenance, in principle. Ten years on, twenty years on, if you send it, he responds as far as he can.

“I don’t do making that ends at the sale,” Toda says.

As commerce, this is not efficient. For a single bait box, he commits not once, at the time of manufacture, but permanently.

Why can he do it? Because it is a one-person workshop — that is one answer.

At a large company, lifetime maintenance is hard. Staff change. Records of product specifications are lost. The cost of an after-service department mounts.

In Toda’s workshop, the one who made it is also the one who maintains it. The specification is stored in his head and in his jigs. New model numbers and spec changes, too, he keeps a grasp of. For a single bait box, even nine years on, he can respond without handing it off to anyone.

This is a form of responsibility he can take on precisely because it is a one-person workshop. At the same time, it is, precisely because it is a one-person workshop, also a choice not to grow large. Double the scale while still taking on lifetime maintenance, and the maintenance would stop turning over. So he does not seek scale.

Taking on long-term responsibility and not leaving the floor connect here.

And one more thing. Lifetime maintenance is also, for Toda, a statement of his “product philosophy.”

He wants to make products a customer can feel they “want to keep using from now on.”

For that, they must be designed to last long, and a push toward long use — the service of maintenance — must be offered.

That a product lives long is one of the meanings of his work.

On top of that, the joy when a product used for nine years comes back to him is, for him, beyond anything else. A bait box used for three years of rock fishing on the coast. A lunch box delivered five years ago. Each comes back having gathered its own scratches and sheen within the user’s life. He works on it. He sends it out again. This is another side of the work Toda has carried on for nine years.

Chapter 11

Making in order to live

Toda does not consider his way of working anything special.

“By placing hobby and work on the same line, rice-work (the day job) and life-work (the meaningful thing one loves) become one; living itself becomes work, and I aim for a style without strain,” he wrote on the website during an interview in 2021 (September 2021, @website).

The merging of rice-work and life-work. This is the outline of a way of working he had dimly drawn even before going independent. Nine years on, it is mostly realized.

The trial and error in the workshop is no penance to Toda. It is hobby and work both. The process of making jigs is his life-work, he writes. That is not an exaggeration but the literal meaning. Much of his waking time is taken up by work he likes.

This is not simply a matter of good luck.

It is also a choice of design. Take no loan. Use no wholesale. Hold no inventory. Make one at a time. These choices, as a result, left “what to do with one’s waking hours” in Toda’s own hands. A business chased by debt repayment leaves no room to spend time on the work one likes. A business holding inventory must spend time on the sales to sell it through. A business that brings in wholesale has time shaved from the work it really wanted to do, in order to maintain that relationship.

By not taking those on, he built for himself a way of living that continues the work he likes, as work.

And there is one more important thing.

Toda admits that connecting with society through direct contact with people is not his strength. Group activity, discussion, presentation — the area, touched on in Chapter 6, that he realized as a student did not suit him. In daily life, too, face-to-face socializing is an act that uses energy.

His way of connecting with society. That is making.

The wooden tools that come out of Toda’s workshop pass into customers’ hands.

Customers use them in daily life. They write on Threads, “it’s good to use, I use it every day.” A re-coating request arrives three years later. A new order arrives again, by word of mouth.

All of this is, for him, a connection with society. He rarely meets anyone directly. But through things, he is surely connected to society.

When he writes, “I’m a person who can only connect with society through things,” it is not a confession of weakness. They are the words of someone who, having fully grasped himself as a material, decided how to design his life and work. In place of direct dealings with people, he connects with people through things. The figure who keeps posting nearly every day on social media lies on the extension of that circuit.

Prioritizing health and daily life, he keeps making without stopping.

As he writes this, he also says “health first.” He has kept it up for nine years, but to keep it up the same way for the next ten or twenty, not overdoing it matters. A business without loans, a choice not to seek scale — these are also for protecting health.

That rice-work and life-work are one means, in a sense, concentrating life’s risk. If he cannot work, the foundation of living crumbles. That is exactly why Toda values health. He does not overwork. He sleeps. He plays with the cats. He talks with his wife. He takes his daily walk — as he was doing when he found PON.

“Making in order to live” is, here, no metaphor.

For him, making is a means of income, a point of connection with society, work he likes, and an act that supports the rhythm of a healthy day. The nine years called ZUKOUSHITU gathered all of these into a single line.

Final Chapter

On being a medium for “what you want”

From a small workshop in Minamiboso, this book has come this far.

It has set down, over eleven chapters, the nine years of one engineer named Hajime Toda. Place, family, self-definition, the motive for independence, management structure, the choosing of words, the manner of handling both digital and old things, local wood and education, the role in the age of AI, lifetime maintenance, work in order to live — every chapter cast light, from its own angle, on the single line of ZUKOUSHITU: “kept running, comfortably, without leaving the floor.”

Finally, stepping one pace further out, let us consider what this means now.

Toda lets slip, here and there, that he wants to set down his nine years in the hope they might become a model of something.

“For the countryside where a U-turn is hard, for regions without work, in the age to come — there is also this way of living.” These are his words.

In an age when options for young people in the provinces keep shrinking, the road of making a living alone through making exists as one reference case. Toda is, among them, a peculiar case — but precisely because it is peculiar, it may be worth referring to. You can start without a loan. The equipment can be small. Give it nine years, and it becomes a business that can support a family.

And he voices, understatedly, a slightly bolder ambition too.

“Woodworking manufacturing could stand alongside YouTuber or baseball player as a popular profession,” Toda wrote.

This is a provocative line. That woodworking manufacturing might stand alongside the jobs children admire, like YouTuber or baseball player — it is a statement of ambition that such a future could be fine. Not charity, not the preservation of traditional crafts, but as a model role for an ordinary small business, there could be an age in which making is chosen. The special wood-education class at the Kimitsu elementary school, touched on in Chapter 8. The words Toda spoke to the children there — “I hope that, in the future, people will come forward aiming for woodworking and making” — connect directly to this ambition. But here, as this book, let me add just one word from the commentator’s side.

Not all of Toda's nine years is reproducible. There was his parent's building. There was his experience, as a factory manager at his former workplace, of seeing the structure of mass production from the inside. There was his grounding in architectural design. There were the jigs and examples built over nine years. There were his wife, his mother, and two cats. With all of these together, ZUKOUSHITU's nine years held.

No one can imitate all of it. The same place, the same family makeup, the same grounding — no one else has.

But what Toda showed is not “a template to imitate,” but “a direction of thinking.”

A business that carries no loan is possible. A business that does not make sales its main work is possible. A business continued alone is possible. A business that makes one at a time is possible. A design of life that places hobby and work on the same line is possible. Different in form though they may be, in another place, with other materials, with another family makeup, each might be translated and realized.

As “one real example for translation,” Toda has left nine years of work and posts on the website. This book is no more than a retelling of that work and those posts.

“ZUKOUSHITU 9.1” — the small number at the end of the name layers Toda's love for the Mac OS 9.1 he liked with the meaning of the ninth-year milestone. A brand that began at 0.1 has come this far. At 9.1 the book closes, for now. 10.0 is still a long way off.

Tomorrow too, in the workshop, Toda will cut wood with his right hand and photograph his work with his left. The sound of the CNC, the bells of PON and WELL, the sound of his wife's finishing polish, in the quiet of the mountains — plainly but surely, he keeps giving form to “what you want.”

That is what it means to be a medium for “what you want.”

The End



Thank you for reading. — PON, signboard cat

ZUKOUSHITU 9.1: Giving form to “what you want.” Looking back on nine years as a one-person maker of custom wooden goods.

Prologue + Chapters 1–11 + Final Chapter — written May 23, 2026.

Author: Hajime Toda

To the customers across the country who placed orders, and to all those at the companies who lent their cooperation: I am deeply grateful to be able to present this book at last.

Thank you sincerely.

Please read it with your family, too, and let me hear your thoughts.

From now on, too, I will make “what you want.”



Room Director Hajime Toda



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