

## The Gifu Restoration

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Gifu is my favorite city! I was born and raised there and I love it more than any other place in the world. But Gifu is not the same prosperous city as it was when I was a child. I recall the happiest times of my life were when my parents would take me to department stores in central Gifu to enjoy shopping and dining. Yet today, we cannot enjoy it any more as these shops have closed. It makes me sad to reflect, not only on central Gifu, but also on Apparel Street in front of Gifu Station, and Yanagase Street, because these once busy downtown areas are gone now leaving only their memories in our minds.

In the past, Apparel Street's history was strong, coming from Japan's postwar rehabilitation era. It later became a leader in the wholesale apparel industry. This attracted many distant buyers, making it a symbol of a more prosperous Gifu. Where as Yanagase Street was a busy mall and many people could enjoy their favorite pastimes, in the various kinds of shops, restaurants, taverns and movie theaters there.

Today, both of these streets are, what we call, "shutter streets." This Japanese-English phrase refers to a street where many of the stores are closed, so their shutters are down. These streets exist in central areas of local cities throughout Japan. I'm sorry to say Gifu is no exception to this.

I want my beloved Gifu to regain its former prosperity. But how can I help with this?

I am a student of Fashion Design at Ogaki Sakura High School. In our fashion business class we learn how to manage our own clothing shops. Through this challenging work we learn a lot about the real business world. It is being a fashion student that guides me to ask: what are the causes of this stagnation in Gifu and how can we solve this problem?

First, I began to consider the places where I shop. I realized I usually shop in Nagoya or big shopping centers in the suburbs, despite that Gifu has many good shops and easy access to public transportation. Then I realized that the only time I shop in Gifu is when I am just browsing on my way home from school. How can we make such passers-by stop and buy things in the shops around central Gifu?

Though the shopping area is not busy during rush hours, Gifu Station is bursting with people in  
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transit. I suggest we build shops that will attract those people in the mornings and evenings, and “Chisan-Chishou” shops could help to achieve that.

“Chisan-Chishou” literally means “Local products, local consumption,” a campaign phrase to encourage people to consume local products. This way, buyers will get safe, fresh products at a low cost, which could vitalize the industry. If we promoted these kinds of businesses near Gifu Station, I’m sure commuters would stop and use them.

Next, how can we help Apparel Street? One idea is that we replace the worn out buildings on the street, with a new wholesale center. This could be a collaboration of many companies. One facet of this center could be a place for people to knit and sew themselves, promoting an understanding of the merits in apparel production. Another facet could be that customers have the opportunity to have custom clothing made. Lastly this wholesale center could start an internet selling market.

I have an idea for the shutter shops also. Property owners could lower the leases on the vacant spaces to create opportunities for new shops to emerge. Ideally some popular shops would surface bringing back prosperity in Gifu.

I still have hope in Gifu City. Yanagase for example has a back lane in which new clothing shops and beauty salons have opened one after another and are gathering many customers. These new shops sell rare products, which creates demand and popularity, proving the point that good shops can attract many people.

I know some of these plans seem idealistic and I still have a lot to learn. But please believe that my heart is full of ambition to make Gifu better. I am going to continue my studies in fashion, and I hope to someday use my place in fashion to help Gifu regain its former life. Let me declare at last that I will open the shutters!

