

City & Lifestyle Related Research: An Overview of Traditional Japanese Shopping Streets “Shoten-gai”

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The decade between 1955 and 1965 was the golden age of *Shoten-gai* in Japan and during this period they were overflowing with vigor and vitality. The streets were full of people, the shops overflowing with goods, and the hope that “today would be better than yesterday” was prevalent in the air.

In this age when the number of young people is decreasing and the number of older people is increasing, the *Shoten-gai* plays a vital role in assuring seniors a sense of solace and recourse. We compiled this report with the belief that *shoten-gai*, commercial districts packed with shops running along certain streets which are an integral and attractive part of Japanese towns and found nowhere else in the world, play a part in connecting modern society. We strongly desire to introduce these vibrant streets to overseas guests visiting Tokyo and have them come and experience the ambience of the *Shoten-gai* for themselves. We will turn “*Shoten-gai*” into an English word and introduce these fascinating shopping streets to the world.

The Shoten-gai = Japanese Traditional Shopping Street

A commercial area comprising a great number of businesses and visited by people from neighboring residential districts who come either by foot or bicycle. The shops consist primarily of those catering to everyday needs such as retailers carrying daily necessities and low-priced restaurants.

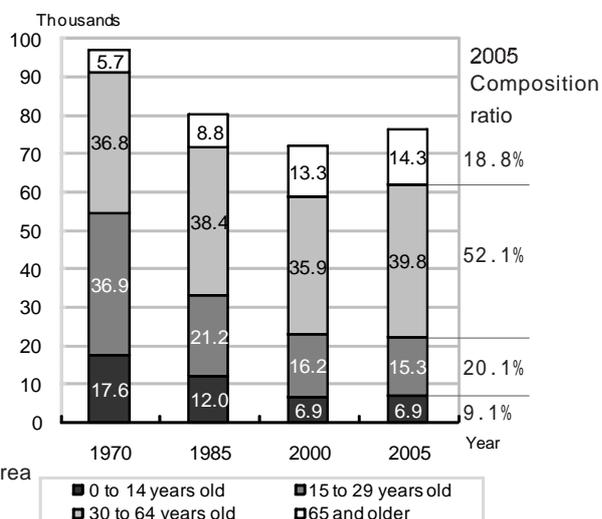
The appearance of supermarkets and large-scale one-stop shopping centers, changing dining habits

- Supermarkets made their appearance in the 1960s, and in the 70s a variety of shopping centers that provided car parking were being put up in all areas, making the *shoten-gai*, a place where people walk the street while carrying their purchases, increasingly less attractive.
- In the 25 year period spanning 1981 to 2006, individual retail shops in Tokyo’s 23 ward district decreased to two thirds of their original number.
- Purchasing styles changed with people shopping later at night and importance being placed on having a wide variety of goods in one store. Meanwhile, there is a tendency among seniors to purchase on a daily basis only the amounts they need for that day.
- People were increasingly dining out, however, in recent years that trend has been in decline, the purchase of prepared meals (boxed lunches, side dishes, pastries and sandwiches, etc) is increasing.

A Fact-finding Survey of Shoten-gai and Nearby Residents

Five bustling *shoten-gai* were selected from Tokyo’s 23 ward district and an investigation into the actual state of the shopping streets and their nearby residents was conducted. For reference purposes surveys of a large-scale shopping center and of a *shoten-gai* in a state of decline were also carried out. Since 1970 the populations of the urban areas around the vibrant *shoten-gai* have been declining, however, this decline has recently started to reverse course. Aging of the populations is progressing.

Population shifts according to age in the area surrounding Musashikoyama *Shoten-gai*



1. Musashikoyama Palm *Shoten-gai*

- Of the surveyed *shoten-gai* this one had the largest number of shops. This is a large shopping street that has many apparel related stores. Many of its customers come from not only a walking distance but also a long distance.
- There is parking for over 100 cars. Many of its customers come in groups and elderly shoppers are few. It displays characteristics similar to shopping centers.
- In the past 10 years almost half of the shops have been replaced. Apparel related stores are in decline and being replaced by service businesses, eateries, and such.



Musashikoyama Palm *Shoten-gai*

2. Asagaya Pearl Center

- Of the surveyed *shoten-gai* this saw the greatest change in residents living nearby.
- Following the Shimotaka-ido area, this *shoten-gai* experienced the next greatest replacement of shops over the previous ten years.



Asagaya Pearl Center

3. Sunamachi-ginza *Shoten-gai*

- This shopping street is known for its extremely cheap fish mongers, its store composition is strongly focused on food stuffs which draw in neighborhood customers.
- Compared to other surveyed *shoten-gai* its shop composition has remained relatively unchanged since 1995, referring to the next page.
- It's a bustling shopping street with very close ties to the community and there is lots of communication between shop keepers and the customers. A very large portion of visitors are elderly, and many people also use bicycles to visit this shopping street.



Sunamachi-ginza *Shoten-gai*

4. Higashi-jujo *Shoten-gai*

- Amongst the surveyed *shoten-gai* it has a typical composition of shops, and has fewer stores.
- The neighboring area is transforming from an industrial one into a residential one. Fashion-related stores are in decline, real estate agents, prepared-meal shops, and eateries such as noodle shops and Chinese restaurants are increasing.



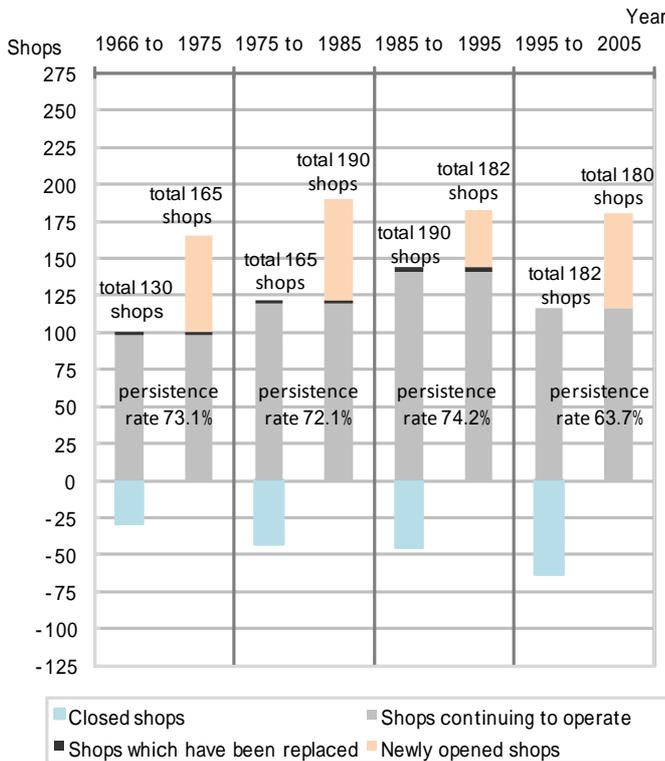
Higashi-jujo *Shoten-gai*

5. Shimotaka-ido *Shoten-gai*

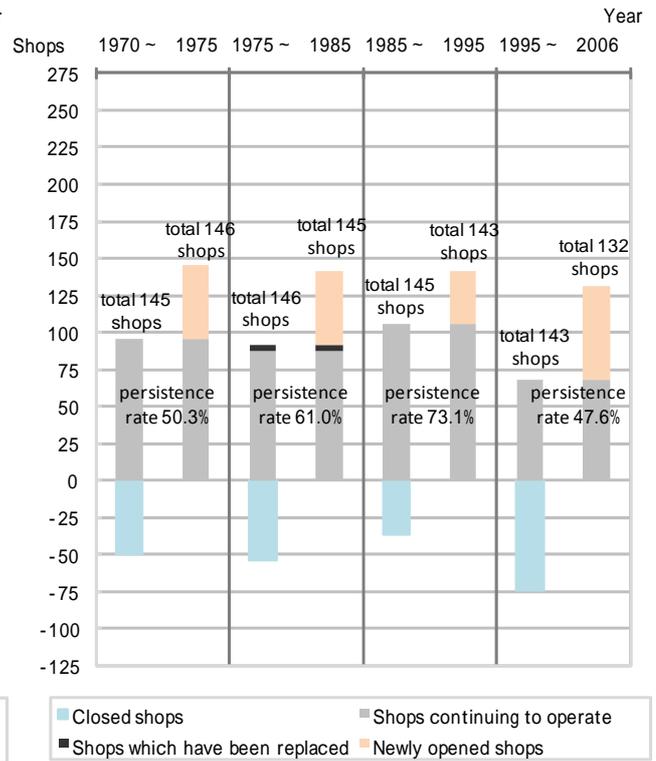
- This *shoten-gai* is representative of a market set in front of train stations. Its over-the-counter shops focusing on food stuffs are well-known.
- Among *shoten-gai* it ranks highly for communication between customers and shopkeepers. The replacement of shops here is also high, referring to the next page.
- Its popular for its old-time market atmosphere, attention is paid to the various services employed to sell this *shoten-gai* (Customer Service Center called *Shimotaka-Station*, etc).



Shimotaka-ido *Shoten-gai*



Status of opened and closed shops
Sunamachi-ginza Shoten-gai



Status of opened and closed shops
Shimotaka-ido Shoten-gai

The Appeal of the Shoten-gai: "Reachable on Foot"

- The greatest appeal of the *shoten-gai* is its proximity, it can be reached on foot from one's home
- Its legacy function, a continuance of history and culture
- Its mixed ambience which make one feel comfortable
- Its existence as a community supporting the elderly



Higashi-jujo Shoten-gai



Sunamachi-ginza Shoten-gai



Musashikoyama Palm Shoten-gai



The Tanabata Festival in Asagaya Pearl Center