

Hataori Machi: The Weaving City

The city of Fujiyoshida embraces its heritage as a *hataori machi*, or “weaving city,” having been a center for textile production for over a thousand years. The *Engishiki*, a tenth-century compilation of laws and rituals, notes that the region had to pay its taxes in silk, as production of rice—the usual tax currency—was difficult given the climate and altitude.

The Edo Boom

The Edo period (1603–1868) brought peace to Japan after centuries of strife, and saw the rise of a prosperous middle class of merchants and artisans in the capital of Edo. This middle class expressed its wealth in extravagant ways, including flamboyant fashions, until sumptuary laws were put into effect in the mid-seventeenth century. While the laws restricted clothing to drab colors like brown and gray, Edo people found a loophole: Linings were not covered by the restrictions. The demand for colorful, elegant linings for garments soared. Fujiyoshida silk was particularly prized for the vivid colors that dyers produced with the pure spring water from Mt. Fuji, and the town’s weaving industry flourished.

Fujiyoshida remained a textile center long after the Edo period was over. From the 1950s to the 1970s, Japan’s “economic miracle” pushed demand to unprecedented levels. This period gave rise to the jocularly named “*gachaman* prosperity,” with every clack of a loom’s shuttle (*gacha*) said to bring in another ¥10,000 (*ichi-man*).

A Brand Powerhouse

Fujiyoshida is making the transition from a respected supplier of raw materials to a consumer brand powerhouse. Many weaving companies hold “open factories” every third Saturday, when visitors can see the looms in action. Collaborations with designers and students have produced a wide range of exclusive local products, from book covers to bedding.

In 2016, the city held the first **Hataori Machi Festival**. At what has become an annual autumn event, artisans and merchants come together to promote Fujiyoshida textiles through exhibitions, musical performances, and panel discussions with special guests. The main venues are Omuro Sengen-jinja Shrine and Honcho Street, but factories and stores all over the city participate in the event.