

## **The Glove Industry of Higashi-Kagawa**

The city of Higashi-Kagawa in eastern Kagawa Prefecture is the center of the Japanese glove industry. It hosts most of the country's major manufacturers, which together produce approximately 90 percent of the gloves made in Japan. The history of the industry here can be traced back to 1888, when Futago Shunrei (1853–1891), a former Buddhist priest who was born in the area, started a glove-making business in Osaka to support his newlywed wife, with whom he had moved to the city. After Shunrei's untimely death at the age of 39, his cousin Tanatsugu Tatsukichi (1874–1958) took over the business.

The region around Higashi-Kagawa had traditionally subsisted on salt production, but by the late 1800s this industry was in decline. The people fell on hard times, and the mayor of a local village decided to ask the Osaka-based Tanatsugu for help. The glove-maker agreed to move his business to his home region, and in 1899 established a new factory in what is now Higashi-Kagawa together with Futago Shunrei's widow. Their enterprise proved a success, and Tanatsugu actively expanded it by introducing Western technology and advanced machinery, obtaining some 24 international patents in the process.

World War I provided a significant spark for the Japanese glove industry. While the United Kingdom and Germany, the two largest glove-producing countries at the time, were busy waging war, Japanese factories were inundated with military orders from around the world. The glove industry of Higashi-Kagawa prospered, and was later able to endure hardships such as the Great Depression and World War II. From the 1950s onward, boosted by the Korean War and high economic growth in the postwar period, Japan became the world's largest glove producer. While those glory days are far behind it, the glove industry of Higashi-Kagawa remains vibrant. Its products range from regular mittens to wedding gloves and baseball, golf, ski, and other sports gloves, and some producers have recently expanded into related fields such as bags and leather accessories.

The Higashi-Kagawa Glove Museum, opened in 2008, informs visitors about the history and craftsmanship of gloves. Its displays include antique tools and equipment, gloves from around the world, materials, and explanations of the artisanship involved in making the perfect glove. After viewing the exhibits, visitors can try on a wide variety of locally made gloves at the outlet store next door.