

“SAITAMANIZED” JAPAN?

The place where is made fun of, the place where is called “Dasaitama,” and the place where I live in now. Guess where it is? Saitama prefecture. Some TV shows or movies often say Saitama has no uniqueness. It is a pity but true. Hey, ladies and gentlemen, did you know that these days it is said that the whole of Japan is becoming “Saitamanized”?

In the first place, what is "Saitamanization"? According to Akiko Nakazawa, the journalist and the author of “Saitamanized Japan,” "Saitamanization" is a phenomenon that a bunch of convenience stores, fast-food restaurants, and so on are overflowing in the city. Thus, we can say that “Saitamanization” allows you to reach most of products or services wherever you live. However, it isn’t such a sweet deal. Actually, when “Saitamanization” happens, due to the customers flow, local shops are shut down and replaced by chain shops. This is the serious problem of “Saitamanization.” Today, I’m here to tell you the problems of “Saitamanization,” and I want you to help me to encourage dying local shops.

I’m sure for most of you here today, it is your first time to hear the word “Saitamanization,” and I’m also sure that some of you may think “So, the problem is that local shops VS chain shops, what’s a cheap story!” However, it is not that simple.

“Saitamanization” is just the tip of the huge iceberg. That is, the problem that how should we keep the balance between business and culture.

Sell products! Earn money! Efficiency! In the era of modern society, our lives are always with business. Lots of companies try to gain their profit and develop the city. They change shops, blocks, even the community in the city. In most cases our local cultures are endangered because of the invasion of business. “Saitamanization” is one of the typical examples of this.

However, I guess most of you may say “I don’t care because I’ve never experienced such situation!” Then what it’s like to lose local shops? When I was a high schooler, I often went to a cafe. I really liked there. The coffee tasted nice, and the owner was kind. However, one day, he sadly said to me. “I will close my cafe.” I was shocked but couldn’t do anything. Even if I went there every day, drank 10 cups of coffee, it wouldn’t help him. A single person’s act was too small and too powerless to save the shop. A few months later, when I visited the café again, there was a convenience store. I felt like I lost something precious. However hard I wish to go there again, I cannot anymore. I couldn’t do anything. A feeling of regret never disappeared. Even a few years has passed, I sometimes remember the memory of the cafe. What should I have done to save the cafe? I couldn’t find the answer. However, one day, I was stunned when I read one article.

2 years ago, In Hongo, there was a Russian restaurant named “Kaien,” which is about to close. One day, the regular customer advised the owner to start advertising on SNS. Then, one shop clerk girl started tweeting. *Our restaurant is about to close. The owner seems to be sad because of the sales. I want him to laugh again.* Not only the regular customers, but people who were impressed by these tweets shared the post. No sooner, it was shared more than 34000 times. Then people got to know Kaien, be interested in, and finally they began to visit! Since then, Kaien has become one of the most famous Russian restaurants in Japan.

Yes, this is it. The answer already lies in our hand. Sharing on SNS. Why didn't I notice such an easy way? All of us here can do it with in a second, right? By using SNS, a single person's act becomes big enough and strong enough to save the shop!

As I introduce the example of Kaien, SNS, especially Twitter is one of the strongest tools to share the information of local shops, due to its easiness to share. However, besides that, other kinds of SNS, such as LINE or Instagram are also effective. It is true that in these SNS, you are just connected to your closer friends, so the range you can share would be limited. Then, why don't you ask your friends to go there together? The hand you hold out might not as strong as tweet, but your one “share” will surely be a step forward to the future with local shops.

Oh, I think I also have to mention about how should we treat chain shops. I'm not going to exclude all chain shops. The key is "variety." In this perspective, even chain shops can be one of the components of the "variety." I just want to make the city where both local shops and chain shops sustain and can be chosen by people. Nobody wants to live a life without "convenience," like a primitive age, right? The only problem is that the number of chain shops is not proper compared to local shops, so I insist that we should encourage local shops and coexist with chain shops.

Now you may understand the power of sharing. Everything started from just a piece of advice, just a tweet, and only one share. Even a small step in your daily life might be the trigger of big change. Fortunately, we still have time before Japan will be completely "Saitamanized," but if we don't deal with it, then "Saitamanization" will begin. Do not be a bystander. That is each of OUR problem.

Ladies and Gentlemen, please save your hometown by sharing, before it will be
—"Saitamanized."