

Fashion Lovers Have a Go at National Competition!

Shoko and Akane

(Second-year high school students from Kanagawa prefecture)

In this issue, we interview two students in the fashion club at the same high school. These two girls, who are crazy about making clothes, recently competed in the "Fashion Koshien 2009," a national competition where high school students put their design and technical skills to the test.

(*For the term "Koshien," see Japanese Culture Now.)

What is the Fashion Koshien?

The official name of the Fashion Koshien is Japan Fashion Design Competition for High School Students. Run by the Hirosaki Chamber of Commerce and Industry and three other organizations in Aomori prefecture, the competition has been held every year since 2001 as an attempt to develop the fashion industry in the prefecture and revitalize the city of Hirosaki.

Participation in the competition is by teams of two or three persons from the same high school, which must first submit design sketches for the preliminary screening. If their designs pass that first screening, the teams create the actual outfits and accessories to be judged at the final screening in Hirosaki. The final screening is a fashion show, and one member from each team models the clothes on stage. The jury, which is made up chiefly of fashion designers and fashion journalists, examines the outfits and the teams with the best designs and techniques receive awards.



The opening ceremony for the final screening. Of the 234 schools from which teams applied, 40 were chosen in the final screening. The teams are allowed to come up with their own themes. Some contestants decided to design apparel on themes reflecting current social issues, like the environment and the H1N1 influenza epidemic, while others experimented with new materials such as wood shavings.

Q: Please tell us what made you want to compete in the Fashion Koshien.

Shoko: Our school fashion club holds four shows each year at school and one show in the community. We make clothes according to themes or motifs decided for each time. If, for example, the theme is ribbons, we would use fabric with patterns of ribbons and use ribbons for



Shoko

I've always loved making clothes—not just for myself, but also as gifts for friends.



Akane

I love making and collecting accessories.



You can listen to their voices.

accessories or decoration of the clothes. As a second-year student, I have gotten pretty comfortable making clothes, so I thought I could participate in a Fashion Koshien team. I had seen a program about the Fashion Koshien on television a few years ago, and I was kind of interested in it. I want to work in the fashion industry in the future, so I wanted to try my hand at a national competition like this one.



Here is Shoko modeling her team's outfit, entitled "She has . . ."

Akane: Shoko asked me if I wanted to apply to Fashion Koshien with her. I had also been interested in the competition, so I was pretty excited when she asked me.

Shoko: When we heard that our designs had passed the preliminary screening, I was so happy I burst out crying and my hands were trembling! I had been simply satisfied at having applied, and it didn't even occur to me that our team might pass the first screening.

Q: What was it like working on your outfit for the final screening? What kinds of difficulties did you face?

Shoko: We didn't like feeling rushed, so we decided to have our outfit ready a few days before the final screening. To meet our deadline, we set up a schedule and divided the work up between the two of us. But in the end, it took much longer than expected to make the flowers that went on the outfit. I felt a bit panicky that we were behind schedule, but Akane stayed cool and good-tempered and helped me with the sewing on my part of the work.

In our club, we generally work on our clothes individually, but having Akane working with me gave me a lot of strength and courage.

Akane: When I'd be working on the sewing machine late at night, my family would complain that the noise was keeping them up. When you speed up the sewing

machine, it makes a lot of noise. So I had to sew very slowly to keep the noise down—the last two nights before the deadline, I ended up staying up all night to finish the project.

Q: What impressed you the most at the final examination?

Shoko: The contestants, who had been selected from all over Japan, had an amazing sense of design and seemed very highly motivated. They were good at coordinating the makeup with the clothes, and the way they walked on stage and posed in their outfits was very skilled. I was impressed at the level of work that high school students can achieve.

Akane: In the fashion shows I have participated in up until now, it was all about making whatever outfits I wanted and showing them. All that really mattered was for the designer and the model to be satisfied. However, at the Fashion Koshien, it's not just about presenting the clothes; our work is also examined and the prizes depend on what the judges decide about it. It was my first time participating in anything like this, so the experience came as kind of a shock. Unfortunately, we didn't win any awards, but entering the Fashion Koshien made me want to make clothes that will make people sit up and take notice.

Q: What career do you want to pursue?

Shoko: I would like to be a patternmaker. A patternmaker's job is to transform designer sketches into patterns that are used to make the actual clothing.

At the final screening, one of the judges pointed out that our design drawings were very good, so that it was a shame that the size of the flowers and colors of the actual outfit were different from those in the sketch. From this, I learned the importance of staying faithful to the original design when making patterns.

Akane: I want to be a fashion designer. I'd love to see my clothes on the catwalk at Paris Fashion Week* or in famous magazines one day!

Before I joined the fashion club, I had never made clothes. I learned little by little by asking people around me and reading books. When I first started, I had no idea



Preparing the outfit. Cutting the fabric and painting a camouflage pattern on it. The pieces are then sewn together and the finishing touches added!

how to make sleeves. I remember using toilet paper cylinders to try to make the fabric roll into a sleeve shape. (laughter) But through trial and error, I learned how exciting it is to design and make clothes. This experience at Fashion Koshien has also given me new confidence. I would very much like to continue working with apparel making in the future.

*It is one of the biannual Paris shows of the big brand new fashions.

Fashion Koshien is supported not only by the participants and organizers, but also by local citizens as staff members and spectators. Here are the voices of different people who are involved in the Fashion Koshien event.



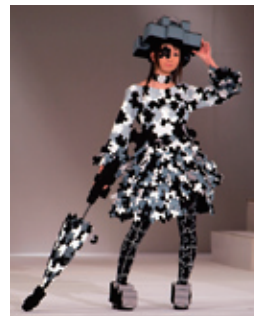
I am always amazed at the wide variety of ideas of the participants and their energetic pursuit of their dreams. It's hard to believe that they are my age and that they can compete in a big competition like this one.

Volunteer (Female, third-year high school student)



I look forward to this event every year—I never miss it! I'm always impressed by these young competitors' designs, colors, and ideas. I try to keep a youthful outlook by coming to see their inspiring projects.

Local spectator (Female, 50s)



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First prize: Nan Piece ["How many pieces . . ."] All the puzzle pieces that make up this design are different from one another, but they are somehow all connected, expressing an image of the relationships that bind people together.



View this and other entries at "Click Japan."

My favorites



好きなことば (favorite phrase)

Shoko: 仕事が楽しけりゃ人生の半分は楽しいんだぜ

"Hey! If you enjoy your work, you enjoy half your life!"

This is a line from the Japanese television drama "Real Clothes." I really want a life in which I can enjoy my work.

Akane: 素敵に無敵

"Suteki ni muteki," which means "a generally attractive person can overcome all difficulties."

That's what I always tell myself to aspire to.

好きな色 (favorite color)

Shoko: 紫色。特にこれといった理由はないですが、紫と黄色の組み合わせが好きなので。

Purple. I don't have any special reason, but I really like combinations of purple and yellow.

Akane: 全部の色! カラフルだと幸せな気分になるからです。

I love all colors! The combination of many colors makes me feel happy.