Modernization and the Department Store in Early 20th Century Japan: Modern Girl and New Consumer Culture Lifestyles

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the way in which the department store became a key site for the constitution of Japanese modernity in early 20th century Japan. The first Japanese department store, Mitsukoshi not only provided new goods along with pragmatic ideas of how to use and how to evaluate them, but also sought to promote images and advice on how to integrate the 'new' into existing lifestyles and value systems. Mitsukoshi offered a new type of consumer experience to explore how 'to be modern'. This can be well tuned with the government policy, 'reform of everyday life' which encouraged people to be more efficient and rational in everyday practices. This policy was also well-fitted to new middle class who sought to new lifestyle which would be modern. To be modern was particularly important for urban working woman who was often seen as a modern girl. Department store provided them with not only a set of ideas to be modern, but also a new aestheticized urban consumer space as a stage to perform. Hence, Mitsukoshi served both as a political device to create modern citizen and as a cultural device to produce modern consumers in political and cultural transition era of Japanese modernization.

Introduction

This paper focuses on the way in which the department store became a key site for the constitution of Japanese modernity in early 20th century Japan. The department store not only provided new goods along with pragmatic ideas of how to use and how to evaluate them, but also sought to promote images and advice on how to integrate the 'new' into existing lifestyles and value systems.

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These pragmatic exercises carried particularly significant meanings for expanding new middle class and increasing urban working women to construct their new femininities. The department stores were also a new urban consumer space. They provided spectacular theatrical space, utilizing atmospheric lighting, the well-organized combination of colors, calculatedly set out commodities provoked a dream-like theatricality to create visual and sensory pleasures, which evoked a new type of aesthetic sensibility. Urban middle class, particularly female modern consumers, who were often identified as new women who sought to be modern as oppose to be traditional, enjoyed and embodied new consumer experiences.

The Japanese department store also fitted closely with the state's governmental policy, 'reform of everyday life' which educates people to be modern citizen and emphasized rationalization and efficiency in many elements of lifestyles.   In this sense, the department store played a key role as a political institution to implement the government policies into new lifestyles they provided.

Hence in the Japanese case, the emergence of modern consumer culture can be understood as one of the consequences, coupled with both a reflection of the desire to be modern with new lifestyles which department store provided, and the government led-reform of everyday life policy which department store helped to implement as part of the Japanese modernization process.

In these processes, women were responsible for organizing a range of new lifestyles practices and acted as domestic engineers. Therefore, housewives were particularly targeted as a major consumer for the department store. The department store was also one of the key sources for the new woman who sought fashionable and stylish urban lifestyles, which in many ways resembled Western

styles.

In order to better understand the complex dynamic between the burgeoning consumer culture, new lifestyles, new woman and the new urban spaces, the aim of this paper is to explore how a particular important department store, *Mitsukoshi,* contributed to the formation of modern lifestyle and provided a significant women's public sphere site in early 20th century Japan. It would be useful to address the following question as our point of departure: in what ways did department stores actually play an important role to translate, and deliver modern lifestyles and new values to people? To address this question, we will discuss the birth of the department store in general and the historical background to Japan's first department store, *Mitsukoshi*, in particular, especially focusing on its role as a forerunner, providing a new style of merchandising. The focus will also be on architectural and interior design as a new urban cultural form in order to consider how such carefully designed spaces could evoke new sensitivities, the sensory pleasure of consumer experiences.

The department store and new consumer experience

The birth of the department store

The first department stores in the West developed and became the vanguard of retail merchandising in the second half of the nineteenth century. The new type of retailing space was one of the responses to urban development, industrialization, new pattern of distribution, production and consumption. They provided a new form of women's public spheres. The definition of a department store did not emerge until 1890 in the West, but it briefly refers to two different types. One was a general shop in town which supplied commodities for the local market, the other was an urban shop which deal with specific commodities with

a narrow range of goods. As urbanization transformed towns into cities, the general shop eventually became a large-scale retailer, the forerunner of the department store. (Benson 1986 :13).

Japanese department stores also have their forerunners which came from different historical trajectories to their western counterparts. It is often argued that the original inspiration of Japanese department store as a new type of retailing space, could be linked to Japan's experience of international exhibitions.

Department stores globally developed over the same period as the rise of international exhibitions - especially the London International Exhibitions in 1851. The 19th international exhibitions were crucial in developing a global stage that displayed the western nations hierarchy via a classification system that displayed the power differences in power and values between nations. Japan soon learnt the cultural potential and political power of exhibition and started to participate in future exhibitions, such as Paris in 1869, Vienna in 1873, Philadelphia Centennial Exhibitions in 1876, the World's Columbian Expositions in Chicago in 1893, etc. Japan also started to organize domestic exhibitions, such as *Kokunai Kangyo Hakurankai* (Domestic Marketing promotion of Industry Exhibition) held in Ueno Park, Tokyo in 1878.

The exhibition displayed various goods and handicraft from all over Japan and gained massive public interest. After the exhibition, a good number of remainder goods were often sold off at the site, which was called *Kankoba*. The first *kankoba* opened in 1878 and many others followed throughout Japan. They were not just places where goods were more attractively displayed and customers invited to walk around and inspect them, they were also entertainment places with many of the similar functions found in the

department store. They usually had a coffee house and confectionary parlor and sometimes hairdressing salon, photographic studio and ornamental garden with teahouse. Although their buildings were effectively much smaller than department store, they seemed to draw on many of the architectural feature of department store, with brick construction and flat roofs with towers. The term, *Kankoba* in Japanese means 'a seeing place'. This emphasized that all the goods were designed to be displayed in front of the eyes of their customers. This new type of consumer place, consequently, captured retailers and merchants interest.   Hence, it could be argued that *Kankoba* could be seen as a forerunner of the Japanese department store (Hatsuda, 1993).

Department stores as new urban spectacular spaces

While *Kankoba* as 'a seeing place' often offered a limited space, the early department stores were usually more spectacular large buildings in cities. The large scale of building which was a distinctive feature of department stores can be traced back to the history of the western department stores. Interestingly we can find that, the burgeoning department stores have similarities with 19th century European architecture characterized by application of new technologies at that time.

It is generally accepted that the first true large-scale realization of glass and steel architecture was, as Wolfgang Schivelbusch (1986) pointed out, the Crystal Palace, which was built for the Great Exhibition in London 1851. This was 'a hothouse that has drawn inwards everything that was once on the outside' (Sloterdijk 2014:12). This extensive space with its huge glass areas was well lit and created new spatial experiences for the 19[th]century Victorians.

[Figure 1 the crystal palace]

In the following decades, in the wake of Crystal Palace, the style was adopted in the grand buildings of the Universal Expositions, which were held in many cities in Europe and the United States. This occurred at the same time as department stores developed. Department stores were amongst the first to follow the use of the new glass and cast-iron technology to make possible relatively huge, bright and airy consumption places (Williams 1982). They often had a multi-story top-lit atrium which enabled display on a massive scale in the store building. They also incorporated show-windows with large plate glass at the street level. All these aestheticized retailing space was devoted to attracting customers to visit and spend the day inside the store. It evoked an unprecedented spectacular imagining in urban space. Department stores in the 19th century Europe have been variously described using terminology such as 'cathedrals of consumption' (Crossick & Jaumain 1999) and 'panoramatic' space (Schivelbusch 1977). This terminology, which emerged contemporaneously with the birth of the stores, shows the multi-faced character of the department stores as a new cultural form.

The first Japanese department store, Mitsukoshi

We can see some similarities in the historical development of the Japanese department store. Japan's first department store, *Mitsukoshi Gofukuten*[1],

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[1]It is generally accepted that Mitsukoshi was established as the first Japanese department store in the 1900s. '*Gofukuten*' in Japanese means draper store. (Mitsukoshi Gofukuten started using the official name, 'Mitsukoshi in 1928.) Mitsukoshi was originally a draper's store, 'Echigoya', founded by Mitsui Takatoshi in 1673. He opened drapery shops in Kyoto, Osaka and Edo (Tokyo) to expand his business, which included not only a drapery shop, but also banking activities in 1683. This business provided strong financial background for Echigoya (later became Mitsui Gofukuten) to eventually become part of the Mitsui group ('*Zaibatsu*').

completed a new headquarters 'flagship' building in Nihonbashi, Tokyo in 1914. The building was applied Renaissance style with the use of white brick and the format of the building comprised of an underground floor and five stories with a total area of 13,210 square meters. This magnificent spectacular premise was well-equipped with modern technological facilities: elevators, escalators and sprinkler system for extinguishing fires. There were also an elegant western style dining room and an elaborately outfitted common-room for both staff and customers. The building expanded to contain a second basement floors and seventh story with a total area of 51,000 square meters by 1935.

[Figure 2   Mitsukoshi *Nihonbashi* headquarter in 1914]

Mitsukoshi applied a variety of design styles to decorate its interior to enhance the theatrical effect. The most impressive aspect was the central staircase and the huge glass ceiling which let in a lot of light along with the huge scale of the interior space, which helped creating an overwhelming atmosphere. The high celling main hall had a huge stained-glass roof of the type which served in the Crystal Palace International Exhibition in London in 1851.   The interior design also recalls that of the world's first department store, Bon Marché in Paris.

[Figure 3 Mitsukoshi central staircase and ceiling]

Mitsukoshi from an early point started to recognize the power of theatricality and paid attention to the details of interior design to create a spectacular space. Reflecting to this new merchandizing, Hayashi Kohei, Mitsukoshi's first chief interior designer who allegedly became the first professional interior designer in Japan, was sent to the United States in 1904 to study windows displays and then got a job in the first-class interior design shop, *Maples* in

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London for a year.

Thanks to the advent of new technologies in the West, many retailers, such as department stores could use large glass panel window displays. By using atmospheric lighting, along with the well-organized combination of colors, and the carefully calculated theatrical display of commodities, a new range of visual and sensory pleasures could be stimulated.

Window display, architecture and sensory pleasure

In the windows displays, each commodity was carefully located in relation to each other and the objects were initiated into various scenarios drawing on everyday narratives.[2] Windows superficially displayed aspects of the everyday landscape along with new consumer commodities; the displays conveyed not just separate or fragmented images from everyday practices, but rather provided a wider continuity with everyday narratives through dramaturgy.[3] Hayashi was quick to learn and implement the power of theatricality and explore its effect on the consumers' sensory apparatus and feelings by manipulating the material environment design and sense of aesthetics. He was fully aware of the importance of the 'total coordination' of retail spaces in order to enhance both dreaming imaginaries and potential realities of luxury experiences (see Tamari 2016a: 90).

Here the emphasis is on the total coordination of a range of consumer spaces, such as distinctively designed architecture, interior detail, product design,

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[2]There would seem to be some overlap with the concept of 'the frame' in cinema theory referred to by Deleuze. 'All framing determines an out-of-field' he explains (Deleuze 1986, 2017:19). He remarks that the out-of-field 'refers to what is neither seen nor understood, but it is nevertheless perfectly present' and 'the frame teaches us that the image is not just given to be seen' (Deleuze 1986, 2017: 16), rather it can encompass all the potential component or the whole world in some way.

[3] Mitsukoshi sometimes used mannequins in the window display to enhance its narratives and theatricality (Mitsukoshi, 1919 Vol. 9 issue 8).

carefully organized display. All these creates multi-sensorial stimulation. This aspect of spatial design has been discussed by Juhani Pallasmma, when he argues that architecture evokes a multitude of sensory experiences (Pallasmaa 2012: 75).[4] He is critical of ocular-centric visions of the world and emphasizes the importance of the tactile sense to understand our being-in-the-world. He also underlines the link between art and architecture stating that '(T)he spaces and places enticed by a work of art are real in the full sense of the experience' (Pallasmaa 2012:74). This can be illustrated by the way the carefully designed consumer space can be understood as a site for arousing somatic multi-sensory experiences that lure consumers into the pleasure of luxury with the sense of aesthetics. The range of sensory experiences could activate the consumer's imagination and stimulate the desire to pursue fantasies and emotional experiences.

Accordingly, the new Mitsukoshi department store changed not only the way of selling, but also provided the new form of retail space, through grandiose architecture with theatrical forms of lighting and display. The goal was to create 'spectacular space, a site not just for the provision of commodities, but for a new unban public space along with sensory and aesthetic experience. Hence for the customers, the new department store could aptly be referred to as a 'dream world' (Bowlby 1985; Williams 1982), the place of phantasmagoria where desires could play (Williams R.H., 1982; Yoshimi 1996).The place was also 'a temple in which goods were worshipped as fetishes' (Featherstone 1991:73).

Flâneur and symbolic consumption

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[4]In his explanation of the bodily sensation and architecture, he argues that there might be a dialectic unconscious communication though bodily sensation between the architect and the person who encounter the work (Pallasmaa 2013:71; Tamari 2016b).

Aestheticized consumer space and visual merchandizing can be traced back to the 18th century and become fully established in the large department stores in the mid-19th century (Parker 2003). Such new type of merchandizing was famously expounded in relation to symbolic consumption by Baudrillard (1981, 1996, 1998). He contended that commodities were not consumed because of their use-value, but because of their sign-value. Modern consumers were attracted by the symbolic attributes of an object. To transfer the semiotic features and images of goods into the judgment of value of goods, forms of promotion and advertisement, became significant. In this process, 'cultural specialist' or 'cultural intermediaries' (Bourdieu 1984; Featherstone 1991) often played a significant role. They could be seen as producers of symbolic goods and services in cultural industries (e.g. marketing, advertising and mass media). It was indeed that visual merchandizing was one of the most effective components. Department stores became sites for cultural specialists and intermediaries who applied advertising with carefully considered sales slogans and designed visual promotion in order to manipulate the signs that could be attached to the commodities.

In Simmel's account of the modern life, he explicates the metropolitan personality who is an inhabitant in abundance of the signs in the metropolis. He states that,

> 'The psychological basis of the metropolitan type of individuality consists in the *intensification of nervous stimulation* which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli' (Simmel 1950:409-10 cited in Wolff, 1985: 38. Italics in original).

Williams introduced Tarde's claim about 'social man', :

'(his) attention to the new environment is so potent and concentrated that "these stupefied and feverish beings invincibly submit to the magic *charm* of their new surroundings; they believe everything they see"(Italic in original). --- In less extreme form this trance like state is chronic among *city-dwellers. T*he abundance of models to imitate renders their minds at once overexcited and numb'.[5](Williams 1982: 348, Italic emphasis added)

Tarde tried to understand city-dwellers who were also modern consumers.[6] The city-dweller could also be seen as a *flâneur*, a central figure made famous in the writing of Benjamin on Baudelaire about the nineteenth century Paris. The *flâneur* was the stroller who enjoyed observing and being observed, loved freedom to be in the urban crowd, and 'celebrated artificiality, randomness and superficiality of the fantastic *mélange* of fictions and strange values' (Chambers, 1987; Calefato, 1998 cited in Featherstone 1991:24). They were a type of modern metropolitan character consumers who utilized a mobile gaze to

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[5] Tarde wrote, 'The movement and the noise of the streets, the store window, the frenetic and impulsive agitation of their existence, affect them like hypnotic spells. Now urban life, is it not social life concentrated and taken to an extreme? --- Society is imitation and imitation is a type of hypnotism.' (Tarde, 1900: 91,95 cited in Williams: 348).

[6] Tarde's intention was to reveal modern consumer's mobile vision and sensory experience in expositions, automobile shows, movies and perhaps department stores in the city. Williams explains Tarde's approach,:

'When he is faced with such spectacles, in the consumer's mind are mixed emotional hyperactivity and paralysis, envy and scorn, conscious choice and semiconscious obedience initiative and submission, desire and repulsion. The analogy with hypnosis emphasizes these ambiguities'. (Williams 1982 349).

Hence, Tarde concluded that social man, the city dweller, is 'a veritable somnambulist' (Williams 1982:350).

enjoy the constantly changing flow of commodities, images and new sensations in the city, including the site of hallucinogenic dream-worlds, the department stores.

The idea of the *flâneur* often focused on man's urban lifestyle and was criticized by a feminist Janet Wolff in a paper titled 'The Invisible *flâneuse*' (Wolff 1985). She drew attention to the absence of women's lives in modernity and pointed out 'the non-existent role of a *flâneuse*' in the cities (Wolff 1985:41). For Wolff, women were less paid attention to articulate their urban lives and marginalized by theorists of modernity, since it was believed that women were caretakers for families, confined to the domestic sphere of the home and had little chance to appear in public. It is also because 'the literature of modernity ignores the private sphere and to that extent is silent on the subject of women's primary domain' (Wolff 1985:44). As we will see, however, the reality was more complex in modernity. Women became more visible in the city as working women and were also active and visible in public space - such as the department store - as a consumer as well as a salesperson. Nava pointed out that women in modernity were often depicted as the prostitute or actress-entertainer and – with these featured as the major female figures in the urban landscape, and ordinary women were ignored. In fact, the middle-class women who engaged with 'the proliferation of philanthropic schemes in order to cope with the perceived crisis of the city - with threat of social disorder, disease destitution and inadequate housing' (Nava 1997:5) were 'involved on a huge scale in the process of disseminating information about morality, domestic economy, hygiene and child care to women of the working class' (Nava 1997:5). They were increasingly seen as unaccompanied women highly visible in the urban landscapes (e.g. galleries, libraries, restaurants, tearooms and department store - see Nava 1997:5).

Department store and women's public sphere

It could be argued that those who enjoyed most such new consumer spaces and experiences were the new middle-class women. They were the *flâneuse*'. At the same time, it was true that such designed and planned consumer spaces and new experimental innovations tended to be carefully calculated and accommodated to ensure that women consumers in particular could enjoy new aesthetic experiences.

The theatrical setting of the department store also offered a performing platform, 'front-stage' area (Goffman 1971), where were not just for spectators or an audience, but for those who could enjoy performing ideal persona with new commodities. The front-stage areas also offered spaces where women could enjoy 'looking' as well as 'being looked at.'

Department stores also provided 'back-stage' areas in the changing rooms and powder rooms where women could try on novel commodities and perhaps enjoy an experience and new sensations. Furthermore, women also obtained a good deal of information and advice to help enhance their presentation skills. Through all these practices, women gained a complete package of resources for new identity construction through purchasing the commodities, which were needed to 'get into role,' and participate in the front-stage drama.[7]

Berger observed women and commented on their consciousness of their

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[7] Yet, at the same time, the department store offered women the capacity to engage in relatively independent action outside the control of men. On the other hand, it reinforced the traditional stereotype of femininity with the emphasis on dressing up and making-up skills.

presence.   He remarks, :

> One might simplify this by saying: men act and women appear. Men
> look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This
> determines not only most relations between men and women, but also
> the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in
> herself is male: the surveyed female. The surveyed female. Thus, she
> turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision:
> a sight (Berger 1972: 47).

Hence department stores offered themselves as new aestheticized and sensory
spaces which allowed women not just 'looking' at others, but to be looked at; as
both subject and object. The department store thus provided women with a new
urban space to enjoy novel forms of consumer activities and to explore in relative
freedom and safety in a range of urban sites outside domestic space. Here we
can see the emergence of a women's public sphere (Tamari 2006:107 onward).

Woman as a domestic engineer

The department stores were not just a women's public sphere, but also a political
institute for the government. The period referred as 'Greater Taisho' (Garon
1998), from 1900 ~ 1930, in Japan was the era in which 'kindai seikatsu' (modern
lifestyle) suggesting a new or reformed way of life and 'bunka seikatsu"
(cultural/cultured living) suggesting a more stylish, rational and efficient way of
life were developed. The term, cultural/cultured living (bunka seikatsu) would
seem to have become prominent in the 1919 Lifestyle Improvement Exhibition
(Seikatsu Kaizen Ten) organized by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.
In the wake of the conference, the ministry established the Alliance for Lifestyle

Improvement (Seikatsu Kaizen Domenikai) in 1920, which sought to encourage improvement in all areas of everyday life in domestic space. The reform of everyday life basically encouraged thrift, saving and recycling.

This involved a redefinition of family life in the domestic spaces. Women were the arbiters of these new lifestyles. They needed to learn how to organize and order new things in ways which were deemed economic and rational.

As the department stores were always sensitive not only to women, but also to the government policies, they were affected by the governmental-led reform of everyday life movement. It can be argued that while on the surface, there would seem to be a clash between the rationalizing austerity message of the reform of everyday life and the hedonistic consumer culture - in reality they fitted together well (Garon, 1997, 1998). In fact, the reform of everyday life movement helped to generate a consumer culture with its emphasis upon changing fashions, styles, aesthetics and 'new lifestyles'. Consumer culture always sought to instill a calculating hedonism in consumers, who could plan and check, as well as succumb to the power of images and impulses.

Women as domestic enginers, had to learn the new classification systems, the placement of objects and the ordering things in domestic sphere. A constant introduction of new objects, styles and ideas required continuous update classification systems. The department stores not only provided a tremendous range of new products and large amounts of information of new styles with new meanings and values, but also offered practical advice on the techniques and technologies of everyday life. As women became drawn into the world of consumption, they were increasingly asked to acquire the capacity to switch contexts between calculation and hedonism, rationality and emotion, the new

public spaces of consumption and the domestic domain of the home, as they grappled with the new lifestyles.

Working woman as a new type of woman

The tendency for women to become a major marketing target could be also related to the increasing number of working women in the city. There are several reasons for the expansion of working women. Firstly, in the post-war reconstruction phase after the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) and during the First World War (1914-1918), there was a growth of women's job opportunities. However, the picture is more complicated, as the First World War boom led to rapid inflation and increases in wages with more favorable terms of trade for Japan, but after the war there was a sustained period of deflation and recession in the 1920s (Yamamura 1974:302).

The first three decades of the twentieth century caught the Japanese economy in a number of cycles whose effects are difficult to evaluate. Yamamura captures the tensions and difficulty of reading the Taisho (1912-1926) and early Showa (1926-1989) economy:

> The difficulties in evaluating the Taisho period and the early Showa years become obvious when we attempt to summarize significant events of these years. The effects of the First World War boom, with the strong impetus it provided for the industrialization of Japan, must be considered against the prolonged recession of the 1920s. The continued development of the heavy metal, chemical and other industries which made Japan an industrial power must be evaluated against the Rice Riots, stagnant real wages, a hard-pressed agricultural sector, the weak Factory

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Act, and other 'costs' to the Japanese people. The increased power of
the *zaibatsu* banks and the emergence of a dual structure were an
integral part of the Taisho economy (Yamamura 1974:325).

Ueno Chizuko a leading Japanese feminist argues that war causes a massive rise
in both production and consumption (Ueno 1990: 184). Given this social-
economic situation, women were seen as a ready source of cheap labor. This
meant that it was possible for capitalists to employ large number of women at
low wage levels.[8] A similar condition occurred after the major Tokyo
earthquake of 1923, which took place in an economic recession, with the
reconstruction boom generating a wave of prosperity. The same assumptions
can be used here as that used to explain the 'war boom'.[9]

The idea to become a working woman was acclaimed by some intellectuals, who
wanted to encourage women to become economically independent. For example,
the socialist Akaba Hajime (1875-1912), was critical of women's economic
reliance on men in the *Tokyo Shakai* newspaper, 5th June 1908 (Hayashi and
Nishida 1961 :262).

In the research on working women by Tokyo City[10] conducted in 1922, an earlier
Tokyo Recruitment Centre report from 1919 is cited - which shows the number

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[8]Ueno (1990:184) regards war as a necessary 'dumping ground' for an expanding economy.
[9]Women normally worked in more menial work for lower pay, and their position was more
that of unskilled or semi-skilled workers. They were not able to work in mainstream
business management, but had to be content with the role of assistant or typist. It was
very rare that women could become a manager.
[10]The 1922 data was incorporated in the 1924 report. This is the most significant early data.
Although, the increasing numbers of women's workers were noticeable, the Meiji and Taisho
government did not conduct research (Murakami 1983: 54). Therefore, it is hard to find
reasonable statistical data. In 1923, the Osaka local recruitment centre (大阪地方職業紹介事務
局) compiled data from 69 recruitment centres and made a report on wage levels. This data
could well be the first reliable data on working women (Murakami 1983:55). In his
investigation of working women, Murakami focused on the Tokyo City Research Report of
1924, which is the most reliable data on the conditions of working women.

of working women at 3,581,183 (Tokyo City Research, 1924:m65; Murakami, 1983: 55).[11]   With the total number of women in Japan at 27,000,000, working women made up 13%. With the expansion of the service sector, many new types of women's jobs become popular in the 1920s, such shop girls, bus conductresses, telephone operators and cinema ushers, meant that women had to learn the new presentational skills, which we now refer to as 'emotional labour' (Hochschild 1987; Smith 1999:115).[12]

These new occupations not only improved women's employment opportunities, but also provided ambivalent images of working women. On one hand, their image was more active, competent, modern, (and to some extent) glamorous. For example, the women's magazine, *Fujin Kurabu* in 1926 introduced women's new jobs, such as shop-girls (August), and typists (September) (Saito, 2000: 46-47).   On the other hand, there were negative images and feeling that working women had become a 'moral panic'. This negative view was derived from the traditional dominant ethical view, which saw working women as morally irresponsible and they were often criticized. (Kawashima 1996: 114-115, Saito 2000:90). The self-perception of some of the working women was, however, clearly positive.   One working woman remarked that she only went to work to support her family, and that before this she was negative and in a hopeless state. Once she started to work, her self-esteem increased rapidly (*Jogaku Sekai,* Women's World（女学世界）*1921,* cited in Konno 2000: 76).   Some women, then, gained confidence and enjoyed the challenges and difficulties of work.

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[11] Hereafter this and subsequent research by Tokyo City will be referred to as 'Tokyo City Research.' All the research cited which was conducted over a number of years between 1922 and 1938 were surveys of women's employment.   Confusingly, there were also a number of women's employment reports carried out by the Tokyo Prefecture (i.e. larger metropolitan area) which are also referred to by year.   Information for further research on women's employment for both Tokyo City and Osaka City is referred to in the same way.

[12] According to the 1924 Tokyo City research report, the increase in numbers of working women resulted from: the financial crisis of the middle classes, the effects of the women's emancipation movement, and the transformation of the economy producing new types of jobs (Tokyo City Research 1924: 63).

Hence, the increasing demand for cheap labor, especially in the service sector, along with the positive attitude of women who sought the chance for self-realization, led to the situation in which greater numbers of women workers began to flow into the city. They started to enjoy the 'new image of working women' which has much in common with the image of the 'new women'.[13]

Shop girl as a symbol of modern

Here we need to consider the department store not only as a consumption site for women, but also as a place where women worked. They were shop-girls. They tended to be identified as a type of new woman. The term, 'shop garu' (shop girl) was arguably coined by Shuichi Kitazawa in 1925. (Kitazawa, in Yoshimi 1995: 34). In his essay in the magazine *Kaizo,* he discussed about saleswomen in department stores. *Kaizo* was one of the popular magazines which regularly featured new thought, new trend and general interest topics. He wrote that saleswomen in the shop were often referred to as '*jyotenin*' which became the popular modern women's job in the 1920s. Kitazawa also asserted that saleswomen should be called 'shopp garu' (shop girls), since they were becoming a new type of woman who acquired a new sensibility and attitude. They were more tuned into modern tastes.

Kitazawa went on to remark that,

> The best way to describe these saleswomen now, is to use the English term, '*shop-garu*' (shop girls). This expression seems to best express

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[13]The Modern Girl is often described as one of the key types of New Woman. There were, however, some differences between them in the case of Japan. New woman was usually well-educated intellectually and often engaged with women's social and cultural problem. Writers, such as Hiratsuka Raicho, Yosano Akiko and Ito Noe were some of the famous figures as New Women. Unlike the New Woman, the Modern Girl often rendered as a girl who is apolitical, emotional rather than rational, and a hedonistic consumer in urban life.

the characteristics of today's saleswomen: 'modern.' (cited in Yoshimi, 1995: 34)

The use of the Western language term ('*shop garu'*) *suggested* something sophisticated and modern. Although they wore Japanese traditional kimonos into the 1930s, the image of modern could inscribed into an image of shop-girl who was seen as glamorous modern working women. They worked in the key modernizing institution for everyday living, the department store, which was full of the latest goods from the West and their Japanese imitations. It was a professed practical educational institution overtly concerned with spreading to the public the new skills and virtues of consumer culture.

As discussed earlier, Mitsukoshi was a good example in the way it prompted the flow of western goods and tastes into Japan, and established 'Mitsukoshi taste' which often compromised and bridged Japanese and western styles. In order to introduce these new hybrid commodities and consumer lifestyles, the saleswomen were then one of the key groups who operated and explained this process to customers. They were encouraged to develop knowledge of the new modern tastes and lifestyles and to be informative to customers. This was the difficult task of learning how to operate in the new world of consumption and mediate this world to department store customers and the wider public. It entailed a complex learning process in mastering the new rites of consumption and their translation and mediation for customers.[14] In this process, they became seen as fashion leaders and taste-makers for the public. Consequently, the shop girls obtained a symbolic power far outweighing their number in employment and became seen as prototypes for the new modern way of life.

[14]But they were also taught to educate/guide customers in a subtle way, which did not threaten established notions of gender roles. In effect, they not only had to successfully mediate Japanese and the modern western culture, but also had to learn to mediate between the neo-traditional 'good wife, wise mother' doctrine and the exciting style of the new modern girl.

Modern Girls and new femininity

Despite the increasing number of working women in the service sector, such as department stores, we had to wait to the advent of the new term, 'modern girl' which refers to a girl who looked modern, in a magazine. In his letter from England to his sister, it was Kitazawa Shuichi (北澤秀一) who probably first used the term, 'modern girl' (*modan garu*, モダン・ガール). The letter entitled 'The modern girl and self-expression - a letter to my younger sister in Japan' was published by *Jyosei Kaizou* （女性改造, woman's reform）in 1923. He explained about new type of women who had appeared in the West. They had become consciousness of their capacity to live out their own lives and sought the new virtue of self-expression by rebelling against traditions and conventions. Kitazawa presumably used the term, 'modern girls' to refer to 'recent girls, girls of the present moment, or today's girls'. The images and connotations of modern girls were closely associated with the term, 'modern'.[15]

In the aftermath of 1923 Great Kanto great earthquake, metropolitan Tokyo recovered rapidly not only through physically rebuilding of the city, but also via resilient psychological strength amongst the dystopian landscape. Increasing hope for the future along with the continual 'shocks of the new' enhanced the sense of intense modern life. The emergence of modern girls became seen as a part of this urban mass cultural phenomenon. A journalist, writer and anarchist Nii Itaru (新居　格) defined and fleshed out the image of *modan garu* (modern girl). He promoted modern girls who were intelligent and witty enough to practice

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[15]The term modern and its derivatives modernity, modernism and modernization derive from the Latin, meaning 'just now,' 'of today', to the new moment as seen as a departure from tradition and previous times (Buci-Glucksman 1994; Habermas 1981,1985; Hansen 1995; Miyoshi and Harootunian 1989; Harootunian 2000; see the latter especially for a discussion of the use of the term by intellectuals in Japan in the 1920s).

what they want without ulterior motives, or any specific political reasons. He explained that their lifestyle lives up to their desires and their practices were based on the individual freedom.

Both Kitazawa and Nii shared the common assumption that modern girls were liberated from conventional women's ideology and had strong principles of self-respect and individualism. They could be considered to be a new type of women that emerged as a modern cultural phenomenon.

Another person who actively circulated the term, modern girl in the 1920s, was the journalist Kiyosawa Kiyoshi（清澤　洌）(Ueda 1983：112). Kiyosawa saw the emergence of new type of women and their appearance as a clear reflection of a changing society. He argued that these women who projected the changing society should be called '*jidai no sentan*' (時代の尖端) (newest, most novel, and most modern of the time). Hence, women who have the newest styles and values were found to be the most modern of the time. We could call them modern girls.

Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke（平林初之助）also thought that emergence of the modern girl was seen as heralding the start of a new age. Yet he further developed his insights into the emergence of modern girls from the perspective of modernism.
He argued that the cult of the West, associated with the internationalization of everyday life, led to a change in the standard of aesthetics of everyday life. According to him, we were surrounded by many signs of this in the boom for western clothes and new hair-styles among women, along with western types of food in the home (Hirabayashi 1928; Hirabayashi Commentary Collection No. 2, 1975**:** 388). He concluded that the emergence of the modern girl was not just

an example of a new 'fashion' among young women, rather it could be seen as an engine to change social mores, popular culture, and tastes (Hirabayashi 1928, reprinted 1975a **:** 389). The main point of his argument we need to pay attention to, is that women were central to modernity and had the capacity to change society and to generate a new culture.

Both Kiyosawa and Hirabayashi saw modern girls as reflections of the far-reaching social changes accompanying rapid modernization. Hirabayashi, however went further and argued that modern girls should not be regarded as merely passive projections of social change, but were active 'creators' of new culture and lifestyles (Hirabayashi 1928, reprinted 1975a).

New women, the Modern Girl and consumption

Although female educators, intellectuals and writers (e.g. Yosano Okiko and Hitatsuka Raicho) also discussed the Modern Girl in both a celebratory and critical manner, the Modern Girl was generally described and analyzed by influential male intellectuals, journalists and politicians.   As discussed earlier, the Modern Girl as a new phenomenon which was paid a good deal of attention from male intellectuals in order to better understand the shift to a new type of women born in the new era – modernity. It can be said that the Modern Girl emerged through male intellectuals' gaze and their imaginations. On the one hand, she was seen as a reflection of modernity. Yet, on the other hand, the Modern Girls were widely witnessed and noted around the world in the first half of the twentieth century. The Modern Girl was a global phenomenon in the 1920s and 1930s (The Modern Girl Around the World Research Group 2008: 2). She was discovered '[i]n cities from Beijing to Bombay, Tokyo to Berlin, Johannesburg to New York, the Modern Girl made her sometimes flashy, always

fashionable appearance' (The Modern Girl Around the World Research Group 2008: 1). In this respect, we can think that she was not just an image and reflection of modernity, but a new type of woman characterized not only by their new fashionable style, but also by their spirited challenge of the conventional and normative gender image. Modern Girls have in common the quest for economic, sexual and political independence, but they have also developed distinctive characteristics in terms of the local histories and geopolitics of each region.

They were consumers. This is because they had to internalize stereotypical narratives of the Modern Girl and embody certain styles and tastes though consumption.   A set of the commodities for the Modern Girls, such as face-cream, powders, perfumes, cigarettes, cloche hats and lipstick were globally advertised and purchased. All these were important elements and tools for women to become Modern Girls. In fact, the expanding business of advertising agencies in the 1920s, played a key role in promoting representations of 'the Modern Girl as an advertising icon' along with 'global flow of Modern Girl commodities' such as cosmetics (The Modern Girl Around the World Research Group 2008 : 20). Consuming Modern Girl commodities and learning their immaterial signs and values, women were able to become active agents who could define themselves as Modern Girls though 'technologies of the self' (Foucault 1988) in consumer culture.   The modern girl was, therefore, globally visible. She was seen not only in mass media such as advertisements and magazines, but also in the new urban spaces, such as dance halls, cafés, theatres, beaches, tennis courts, streets, offices and department stores. Inhabiting such public space, becoming a gaze object was central to the nature of the Modern Girl. She also objectified herself to perform as a Modern Girl.

She also performed surrounded by a plethora of consumer goods. The real struggle arose in choosing amongst the abundant materials with their different signs and values. Here she had to discover how to fit together various goods, values and signs in a new harmonious hierarchy. This was a process of the invention of a new form of associating values and signs. Hence, she played the role of a cultural agent seeking to harmonize new cultural values and signs. In this process, she not only internalized all the traits and philosophy of the Modern Girl, but rather she became the dynamic creator of a new type of woman in modern society. Hence, according to Hirabayashi, her possibility and ability to redefine or to subvert existing dominant narratives and values in society became a matter of modernity.

Conclusion–the aestheticization of everyday life

Hence, modern girls were incorporated into the public imagination not only as exemplars of the new modern styles, but also as prominent taste makers. They established their social image as new women in a distinctive era. This era which can be characterized by the expansion of women's work opportunities, the growth of urban culture along with an increasing number of consumer sites: such as the dance hall, café, the cinema theatre, and department stores. All these offered theatrical space ('front-stage') where modern girls could enjoy performing new type of femininity. Modern Girls as modern consumers need careful guidance and advice about how to deal with all the new consumer products and new type of sensibility along with more extensive knowledge of modern in order to integrate them into the more stable meanings, knowledge and narratives of everyday life. In all these processes, the department store, like *Mitsukoshi*, as a women's public sphere, particularly played a crucial role as

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an important information source and guide for new urban lifestyles by developing a significant cultural crossroad between the new and the old, the West and Japan, modernity and tradition.   All this helped to create conditions in which the modern girl could flourish.

Mitsukoshi not only become an important cultural reference point for the modern consumers such as the modern girls, but also it played a part in the wider socio-cultural role in Japan's 20th century modernizing process. *Mitsukoshi* was a site of cultural intermediation in the formation of 'the aestheticization of everyday life' (Featherstone 1991:65).

According to Featherstone,

>   'the aestheticization of everyday life refers to the rapid flow of signs and images which saturate the fabric of everyday life in contemporary society' (Featherstone 1991: 67)[16].

The domination of signs and images over the use-value and exchange-value of commodities was conceptualized by Baudrillard, who coined the term 'sign-value'. The commodities of advertising, billboard, show-windows, various spectaculars in urban and consumer space, like the department stores, constantly produce dazzling dream-images which can stimulate people's imagination. The dream world, the department store, therefore inevitably becomes separated from consumers' fantasies. 'The consumer tries to realize fantasies through merchandise' Williams (1982: 108) remarked. Especially when the fantasy cannot be materialized in actual life, people buy commodities which are associated with their fantasies so as to pretentiously perform or to

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[16]Featherstone characterized 'the aestheticization of everyday life' by three aspects: the effacement of the boundary between art and everyday life; the project of turning life into a work of art; the rapid flow of signs and images in everyday life which is, he remarks, central to the development of consumer culture (see Featherstone 1991, Chapter 5).

compromise with their unrealizable desires. This could be a self-deception, but it enables consumers to enjoy their day-dream. Hence, 'people don't buy things to have things, but they buy things to work for them. They buy hope' (Leach 1994:298). The commodity has now a 'hope value' which could be associated to a potential future one might/might not realize.

In modernity, the more real world becomes unstable with ever-changing dominant ideas and values with saturated signs and information, the more people's psyches begin to tune to a possible positive brighter future, and at the same time, to expect negative dark uncertainty.   In this light, we can understand the emergence of the modern girl was a pure reflection of modernity. On the one hand, she was a hope. She was a new woman who cultivated herself as an independent, confident and self-determined personality. Therefore, she was a new cultural phenomenon which suggested a beginning of desirable future in a new phase of society. On the other hand, she was an uncertainty. She could be a vehicle of the moral panic and de-stabilize established cultural values. Therefore, she was an undesirable phenomenon which created a fear of the destruction of conventional society. Hence, we can see that the modern girl herself was a product of modernity. She was born in the middle of burgeoning urban consumer culture and nurtured by modern consumer institutions, such as the department stores. The modern girl as a day-dreamer in the department store, she was also a central figure in modernity. Hence, she turned herself into a 'sign' of modernity.

Hence it can be said that both development of department stores and the emergence of modern girls were understood as part of social and cultural phenomenon of the incipient period of Japanese modernization. In other words, they can be seen as a projection of social consciousness in new urban

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consumer culture. What they have in common is that the nature of department store's identity has always been changing, being a multi-faced reflection of an ever-changing society. This can also be found in the formation of female gender identity. This means that modern girls can be found in any times and perhaps in any society and culture.

Mitsukoshi's corporate advertisement in 2013 still reinforces this assumption. They ask themselves what the department store should, or would be.
Their answer is that 'the future department store, to be a real department store, should rigorously and continuously transform' and their main motto used in publicity is 'keep pursuing, keep transforming'.   Indeed, the same could be said for women.

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