

Why was Meisen, Japan's traditional working clothe, accepted well in the market as everyday clothes and stylish garments between 1900 to 1930?

Yuki Yamauchi

INTRODUCTION

In this historical case study, the main focus is on the creation of fashion design in a category of clothes known as *meisen*. *Meisen* is a type of silk *kimono* worn as traditional Japanese clothing. It was commonly regarded as a durable housedress until the 1910s. However, the attitude toward *meisen* changed in the 1920s and people began to regard it as a fashionable daytime dress. This change resulted from the growing emphasis on design of producers, distributors, and retailers of *meisen*. In other words, a new practice of stressing design in a particular type of clothing, *meisen*, was created through the following three factors. Firstly, an established figure, whose belief was based in the *bushido* ethos, adopted *meisen* for school uniforms at a prestigious school in Tokyo. His intention was to introduce an unpretentious style of living at school. *Meisen* was soon adopted by other schools. It could be argued that *meisen* school uniforms contributed to associating *meisen* with fashionable daytime, even though in the early stage, the *meisen* fabric for school uniforms did not have a complex design. Secondly, department stores were the dominant distribution channel at that time, and they tended to affect the behaviour of *kimono* producers. Following its growing acceptance of this clothing style, department stores sought to promote *meisen*. Consequently, the production output of *meisen* increased. However, at this point a third factor emerged. *Wool muslin*, another kind of *kimono*, came the attention by department stores because of its durability and cheaper production cost. Department stores started to foster competition between *wool muslin* and *meisen* producers. In response, *meisen* producers began to distinguish their *meisen* by adding complex designs to it.

The findings of this paper make three distinctive contributions. Firstly and theoretically, the findings of this paper highlighted the importance of a sequence of actors' involvement in creating a new practice. Importantly, the findings highlight the intention of multiple actors. Actors other than institutional entrepreneurs created the foundation for the new practice and

institutional entrepreneurs launched the creation itself. Without this sequence, creation of a new practice would not have been enabled. Secondly, because a new practice has the characteristic of unintended consequence, in the sequence of actors, each actor had his or her own particular interest, but did not necessarily intend to create a new practice. However, the sequence resulted in the creation of a new practice. Finally, the findings have implications for historians as well as organizational theorists. The expansion of the *meisen* market accompanied a contraction of the upmarket and an expansion of the downmarket. The example of the expansion of the *meisen* market is significant given the present worldwide economic downturn because innovative attempts in the current downmarket may result in the stimulation of a new demand. However, we believe, this case study would be better suited to historical context. That is, multiple actors with various interests acted based on their belief and resulted in the creation of fashionable *meisen*.

METHOD AND DATA

In order to explain the institutional transition, we focused on the fashion diffusion process of Japanese silk dress called *meisen*, which was popular circa 1920s amongst Japanese women. Paying attention to *meisen* provided an appropriate research setting for the examination of the fashion diffusion process for two basic reasons. First, *meisen* was one of the earliest walking clothes accepted by Japan's women although people had worn it as a working clothes before the transition. By focusing on this changing process, we can consider the reason why *meisen* was accepted among women. Second, the diffusion process of *meisen* provides the kind of variation required by the research questions. That is, the shift from working clothes to walking ones makes possible to examine what changed among agencies (e. g. merchant drapers or department stores, weavers, consumer).

Our methodological approach was an interpretive historical case analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This approach would be suitable for deeply understanding the social dynamics and institutional transition (Hergadon and Douglas, 2001 ; Kieser, 1994 ; Pajunen, 2006). Further, we expect to find a way to debate in between history and organization studies, reflecting archival research and continuing efforts to produce theoretically informed historical accounts of organizations (Clark and Rowlinson, 2004). We draw on data collected for a larger historical case study of *meisen*.

There is, however, a problem specific to this approach. There may be no data available for research purpose, or the data may be inadequate to adopt it. Ideally speaking, we should

have collected more-credible sources including interviewing or some firm documentation. Those sources were, however, nothing left. Therefore, we strived for explaining the diffusion process by organizing several kinds of sources. We believe this second best plan still could have guaranteed the historical reliabilities through the strict source criticism (Ventresca and Mohr, 2002).

The wide range of secondary sources made it possible to analyze the qualities and structures of relationships from different perspectives by increasing the reliability and validity of the analysis (McCullagh, 2000 ; Pajunen, 2006). First we collected articles referring to *meisen* from five daily newspapers in between 1910 to 1930 and further utilized some reminiscences where authors refer to *meisen* in the period, and then constructed time-series tables to find out the changing process. Second we made use of two monthly magazines published by a merchant draper who was the leader in the *meisen* field. One, published mainly for the *meisen* weavers, includes some opinions from the division chiefs of department stores. The other, published for academia, provides several interpretations about a market condition or the latest fashion trend from the division chiefs and researchers. Those provide detailed information on their decisions or suggestions. We understand these are not sufficient to cite solely as a historical fact. We believe, however, associating those materials would allow us to examine the robustness of our research.

HISTORICAL CASE STUDY

(1) What was *meisen*?

In what follows, we will show the detailed story of *kimono* fashion in the 1920s, focusing on the silk *kimono* known as *meisen*, which had been produced in a rural area north of Tokyo. Originally, *meisen* was just one of approximately ten different kinds of silk *kimonos* such as *fushi-ito-ori* or *futo-ori*², which were used as working clothes until the middle of the nineteenth century. Because these names evoked an unfavorable image, drapers or distributors hesitated to adopt them, but *meisen* was an exception. For example, retailers disliked the name of *futo-ori* because *futo* means ‘fat’ in Japanese. They were also reluctant to use the name *fushi-ito* because it means ‘wasted yarn’ in Japanese. On the other hand, *meisen* gives a positive impression. It literally means ‘noble enchanted land’. Therefore, retailers were fond of using the name *meisen*. Moreover, in the early twentieth century, weavers and other

¹ *Kimono* is traditional Japanese clothing, and most Japanese women wore it before World War II.

² These names were shared among weavers to indicate how to weave.

stakeholders also began to label other *kimonos* woven in the area north of Tokyo as *meisen*.

It is well known that *meisen* captured women's attention in 1920s (Fujii, 2003 ; Arai, 2004). One survey also suggested that more than half of the women walking down the street in the Ginza, located in the central part of Tokyo, were wearing *meisen* at around the same time (Kon & Yoshida, 1930). Furthermore, a growing number of women wore *meisen* downtown to go shopping. Similarly, waitresses and telephone operators, who were called career women at that time, wore it to commute in the 1920s (Koyama, 2003 ; Fujii, 2004). It is well known that the 1920s was decade of stagnation for Japan, and thus personal consumer expenditure remained static for a decade (Yamamura, 1972 ; Nakamura, 2003). Due to stagnation during this decade, the production of most textiles did not increase. However, the production of several kinds of silk textiles grew exceptionally. The unique growth of silk textiles resulted from the increasing popularity of *meisen*. Table 1 shows the output of silk textiles in the late 1920s and a significant increase in the output of *meisen*.

Table 1 Comparison of silk textiles unit : one million yen

Name	Year	Price (Yen)	The average between 1926 to 1928	1929	1930
Meisen		3~10	8,448	12,386	14,190
Union cloth (wool and silk)		5~20	1,150	1,321	898
Crape		10~20	5,229	5,236	7,980
White Silk		20~30	2,407	2,307	N/A
Habutae (※)		28~35	3,582	3,077	4,687
Others			2,557	2,743	789
Sum			23,373	27,070	28,544

Source : Osaka-Mainichi-Shimbun, Ekonomisuto, 25.

※ : Smooth, glossy and tight silk textiles.

Regarding the anomalous expansion of *meisen*, it is necessary to point out that this *kimono* originally was used not for daytime dress but for housedress. The phrases “home wear or not bad looking street clothes” (Izumi, 1922 : 87), “cheap but rugged clothes (Osaka Mainichi Shimbun, 1922) or “home wear with washing fastness” (Katei Zasshi, 1919 : 178) showed the typical image of *meisen* among Japanese people until the 1910s. Here, a question arises regarding the change in attitude toward *meisen* in the 1920s. To answer this question, the following three factors are examined.

3 Osaka Mainichi Shimbun. 13 August 1922.

(2) The samurai ethos and modern fashion

It all began in 1906, when *Maresuke Nogi*, an established charismatic figure, was appointed principal of Gakushūin, Japan's Peers School for young women of the noble class. *Maresuke Nogi* was a well-known general in the Russo-Japanese War and had gained much respect throughout the country. Therefore, he was also looked upon as a mentor of the young Hirohito, who would ascend to the Chrysanthemum Throne. Most importantly, *Nogi* was known for his unique way of life, which demonstrated samurai ethics, avoiding a luxurious life style. A well-known episode illustrates his ethos—he served guests a very simple meal, which he called a 'big feast'. However, the guests were not surprised and ate the meal because they had already known that he ate plain food everyday. People respected his simple samurai-inspired life style even after Japan moved towards westernization.

In addition to the samurai ethos, *Nogi* proposed some new ideas for the school as soon as assumed the position of principal. He had a firm belief that even daughters from noble class families should not exhibit their affluence in public. Therefore, he first launched a restriction to the wearing of expensive clothes by students. On the other hand, he thought that affluent female students did not need to wear cheap clothing such as that made of cotton or linen. He set his sights on *meisen* as appropriate clothing because although it was relatively cheaper, it was not crude. The *Gakushūin* prescript for school uniforms in those days show that it recommended *meisen* in its detailed rules and regulations (Joshi Gakūshuin, 1935 : 278). Owing to *Nogi's* nationwide fame, parents of Gakushuin students did not complain about his decision.

Furthermore, *Nogi's* well-known ritual suicide, which was performed in accordance with the samurai practice of following his master to death, enhanced his good name and reputation. Shortly after the Meiji Emperor's funeral cortege left the palace in 1912, *Nogi* committed *seppuku*, the *bushido* way of suicide (Noss, 1980 : 319). *Nogi's seppuku* immediately created a sensation and caused intense debates about its pros and cons. However, the public generally honored his achievements with deep respect but at the same time felt that his suicide marked the end of the samurai ethos.

After his death, *Gakushūin* continued to use *meisen* as school uniform as *Nogi's* legacy. Other women's schools also embarked on introducing *meisen* as uniform. For example, Tokyo Jogakkan and Tokyo Joshi Shihan, Yamawaki, Miwata, Touyō Kasei, the Sixth school, located near *Gakushūin*, one after another adopted *meisen* as uniform (Tokyo Jogakkan, 1991 : 384). We assume that they did this because they deeply respected *Nogi*. However, it must be noted that the adoption of *meisen* was typically seen at first in urban regions. Some schools in the

countryside delayed adopting *meisen*. Only a handful of fashion-conscious students in the countryside imitated urban style at that time (Morita, 1954 : 25). According to the life story of an alumnus who attended the rural Kushiro high school, about half of female students wore *meisen* in 1926 (Sasaki, 1986 : 61). Nevertheless, the number of female students who wore *meisen* as a street costume increased in the 1910s in urban areas. A fashion report in 1920 said that high school girls in downtown Tokyo wore *meisen* on the street (*Senshoku no Ryūkō*, 1920 : 38–9). People who saw them gradually came to recognize *meisen* as acceptable daytime dress for walking in public.

(3) The department stores response

Adoption of *meisen* as a school uniform was followed by the appearance of the *kimono* in the retail business. Department stores decided to expand their customer base because they suffered from the serious recession after the Great War. In late 1919, they decided to plan for an assortment of many reasonable items on the store shelves. They especially promoted clothing that would attract a mass of female customers they had not yet targeted.⁴ For example, the sales manager of the Takashimaya Department Store officially announced in magazines that they carried clothing such as *meisen* that were widely available at low prices (Ozawa, 1920 : 20). They also inserted nearly identical information in advertisements of their new collection in 1920 (Shinkatei, 1920 : 57). However, in reality, a report of the vice president of Takashimaya, one of the largest department stores at that time, showed that no other clothes appeared more popular than *meisen* (Katsuta, 1921 : 14).

As department stores increased the transaction volume of *meisen*, they provided them at a much lower price point than drapers' shops. The shop price of *meisen* fluctuated often between 1921 and 1922. While a department store's sales manager said that shop prices were expensive in 1921 (Himeno, 1921 : 16), in the next year, another department store's chief buyer pointed out the price war among drapers (Fukuda, 1922 : 21). As a result, *meisen kimonos* were often sold at a fifty-percent discount (*Senshoku no Ryūko*, 1922 : 24). In addition, according to another department store's merchandise manager, some drapers occasionally placed an unprofitable reserve price on *meisen* (Ogasawara, 1922 : 19).

Department stores continued this way of promoting *meisen* through the 1920s. The chief buyers of department stores pointed out that the fashion highly valued the unique design of *meisen* (Matsuzawa, 1924 : 17 ; Wakamori, 1924 : 21). Other buyers said that the designs of

4 It is well known that Japanese department stores, originally, had expanded businesses as drapers, so they had expertise in selling clothes.

meisen were surpassing other high-grade *kimonos*, and thus they could promote them for each generation (Tsuchiya, 1924 : 138 ; Tsuchiya, 1925 : 231). Furthermore, advertisements in 1925 indicate similar recognition of the *meisen* (Ruriko, 1925 : 284–285). In 1926, department stores began to create their own *meisen* designs and sell them as walking dress via a mail-order service (Ruriko, 1926 : 267). In 1923, a well-known fashion specialist, *Hanamura Izumi*, pointed out the drastic shift caused by *meisen*'s emphasis on fashion during the previous ten years (Izumi, 1923 : 27).

Furthermore, other department stores contributed to the market expansion of fashionable *meisen*. Mitsukoshi in Osaka organized a *meisen* fair, which highlighted printed colorful patterns, for ten days starting on 21 January 1925 (Matsuzawa, 1925 : 16). Although in the beginning, a few hundred *meisen* had been produced in the area north of Tokyo, since then the amount of sales was increasing drastically in Osaka. By the late 1920s, hundreds of thousands of *meisen* were woven in that area (Matsuzawa, 1927 : 15). In addition, Mitsukoshi gave the *kimono* originally called *hogushi-ori*, which was traditional in the Osaka area, the name of *meisen* (Matsuzawa, 1926 : 13). In the 1920s, other department stores also had succeeded in attracting large numbers of customers to buy *meisen*. They placed mannequins wearing *meisen* in store windows as a marketing tool (Koyama, 2003 : 71–71). This way of displaying *meisen* was highly a novel practice at that time.

(4) *Wool Muslin*

As we mentioned above, *meisen* dominated the Japan's clothing market in the early 1920s. However, in addition to *meisen*, department stores needed to sell other reasonable-priced clothing. It appears that once they began selling other kinds of clothing they began a price-cutting war involving *meisen* and other clothing. That is, in the early 1920s, department stores used *wool muslin* in order to create competition with *meisen* but this tactic was not successful. There are many reasons for this failure.

In the early 1920s, *wool muslin* was thought to be similar to *meisen* in terms of price and design. Some department store chief buyers indicated that *wool muslin* was comparable to *meisen* (Tagai, 1922 : 25 ; Nishizawa, 1924 : 19–20). One of them also argued that the demand for *meisen* had been decreasing since winter of 1922 because of the adoption of *wool muslin* at department stores (Tagai, 1923 : 18). For instance, Isesaki, which produced *meisen*, was bewildered by the attitude of department stores toward *wool muslin*. This producer had to face the requests of department stores, however, and accordingly changed its marketing concept around 1924.

However, *wool muslin* did not totally replace *meisen*. On the contrary, in the late 1920s, muslin lost its popularity among consumers. The reason why *wool muslin* failed to get market evaluations was the change in social environment and the recovery of the European wool market. Shortly after the Great Kanto Earthquake struck in 1923, the Japanese government under took a campaign to encourage the sale and purchase of Japanese products on a nationwide scale to help recovery (Kobe Yushin Nippou, 1924)⁵. Through this project, the government planned to recover the international competitiveness of Japanese products (Kobe Yushin Nippou, 1924)⁶. Furthermore, as a part of the project, the government imposed taxes on some imported goods to encourage Japan's economic recovery.

Meisen was recommended because it was produced completely in Japan from raw materials to production to sales (Hirose, 1929 : 11). For example, in 1924, a newspaper reported that the alumni reunion of *Atomi* female high school set up a league to encourage the wearing of *meisen* (Tagaya, 1924 : 306). Furthermore, in the same year, *meisen* was given an award as a good domestic product in the cloth category at the Domestic Products Exhibition in Tokyo and Osaka hosted by Japan Women's University (*Nihon Joshi Daigaku*, 1924 : 16).

In contrast, as inferred from the previous discussion, *wool muslin* was not featured favourably in this public campaign . Wool was an imported product, so the special tax for luxurious products was applied (Yamaguchi, 1924 : 325). Moreover, the anti-Japanese movement in California in 1924 caused a great deal of animosity toward America in Japan. In turn, this animosity created an attitude that derided the products of foreign countries. Therefore, department stores, drapers, and other retailers hesitated to sell *wool muslin* since it was commonly regarded as a foreign product. Furthermore, the price of raw wool was drastically increasing as European countries began to import it once economic recovery was underway (*Osaka Jiji Shimpo*, 1923)⁷.

The *wool muslin* firms could not adjust to the changing market situation and had no choice but to consolidate. In April 1924, some companies decided to reduce operations in (*Osaka Mainichi Shimbun*, 1924)⁸. In 1926, one of the biggest firms went into liquidation (*Osaka Mainichi Shimbun*, 1926)⁹. Two market leaders agreed to form a merger in 1927, but were forced to close in 1929 (*Osaka Mainichi Shimbun*, 1930)¹⁰. Even surviving firms were

5 *Kobe Yushin Nippou*, 21 July 1924

6 *Kobe Yushin Nippou*, 19 June 1924.

7 *Osaka Jiji Shimpo*, 8 November 1923.

8 *Osaka Mainichi Shimbun*, 19 April 1924.

9 *Osaka Mainichi Shimbun*, 31 December 1926.

10 *Osaka Mainishi Shimbun*, 6 February 1930.

suffered from a prolonged and exhausting labour dispute (Shiraishi, 1994 : 172–173). Due to these changes, *wool muslin* completely lost its market position. However, while the demand for *wool muslin* was severely decreasing, the demand for *meisen* was increasing (Tagaya, 1925 : 6 ; Murata, 1925 : 38). The vice president of a draper company said, “*wool muslin* sold well briefly, but it was just a dream, and we can see *meisen*” (Sakamizu, 1927 : 11).

(5) The hegemony of *meisen*

Due to the failure *wool muslin*, *meisen* gained economic supremacy in the Japanese home wear market. It was confirmed that *meisen* was more widely accepted in the mass market than cheap cotton (Miyako Shimbun, 1925)¹¹. *Meisen* increasingly established its status as fashionable public walking dress. For example, *meisen* became an acceptable substitute for ceremonial *kimono*, which was high-end and luxurious clothing in the middle of the 1920s (Syufu no Tomo, 1926 : 292). Rather than home wear or somewhat fashionable walking dress, *meisen* was regarded as perfect for both walking dress and casual clothes (Tokyo Nichi Nichi Shimbun, 1928)¹². In addition to establishing status as walking dress, *meisen* gradually expanded its usage in terms of the appropriate season (Ruriko, 1927 : 259–260). Moreover, even very fashionable people in the 1920s, known as ‘modern girls’, appreciated each seasonal design of *meisen* (Tokyo Nichi Nichi Shimbun, 1928)¹³. The producers of *meisen* also came to be conscious about new trends in design patterns (Itagaki, 1926 : 23). In summary, both consumers and producers in the 1920s came to recognize that design played a crucial role with respect to *meisen*.

Other indirect evidence for the increasing orientation of *meisen* towards design stems from a decreasing number of historical documents that associate *meisen* with its durability. Furthermore, in 1929, *Aikoku Fujinkai* (Federation of Patriot Housewives, Osaka Branch) passed a resolution regarding *meisen* (Hirose, 1929 : 13). According to the resolution, it was pointed out that some *meisen* were not durable and thus not necessarily suitable for housedresses. It appears that in the 1920s, more emphasis was put on the design of *meisen* than on its durability.

The change in the use of *meisen* can be confirmed by magazine articles. *Meisen* was featured in special issues on walking dress in a special issue of *Shinkatei* (1916 : 98–102) (New Home) in 1916 and in *Fujokai* (1927 : 249–253) (Female World) in 1927. However, in

11 Miyako Shimbun, 29 November 1925.

12 Tokyo Nichi Nichi Shimbun, 4 June 1928.

13 Tokyo Nichi Nichi Shimbun, 7 September 1927.

the former special issue, *meisen* was not regarded as walking dress. In a feature article, five pages (216 lines) were devoted to the newest walking dress in Osaka. *Meisen* was included with clothing in the housedress section. Since the special issue featured mainly walking dress, home wear was assigned 22 lines, and only 16 were on *meisen* in the article, “*meisen* is the most popular casual clothing.” As indicated above, *meisen* was obviously not regarded as trendy at that time. Although the magazine title is different, a special issue on walking dress in *Shinsekai* (New World) shows that *meisen* was regarded as walking dress. This time, the special issue assigned 46 lines out of 173 to *meisen*. Furthermore, there were 10 *meisen* pictures out of 17 in the magazine. The description of *meisen* in this special issue was associated with fashionable female designations such as ‘miss’, ‘office girls’ and ‘young housewives’, all of whom were considered to be on the cutting edge of fashion.

We can see the same trend in other women’s magazines. *Meisen* pictures appeared in other magazines as main products for their mail order service. For example, *Syufu-no-tomo* (Associates for housewives) inserted an advertisement of eight pages about the round-table talk with respect to *meisen*, in which they had invited seven celebrities such as famous movie or *kabuki* stars. There were a list of 38 special selections of *meisen* in the advertisement and readers could order all selections (Endo, 1929 : 258–265). Furthermore, *Fujin-Kouron* (the forum for public opinion by women) presented 21 different *meisen* with some ad copies referring to designs for the mail order service (*Fujin-Kouron*, 1929 : 209–211).

Meisen was no longer just home wear but had become trendy walking dress. According to the results of the participant observation taken by *Wajiro Kon*, who was Japan’s leading authority in anthropology at the time, women picked up a few *meisen* in the *meisen* section, and then they walked to some place where they could compare them (Kon & Yoshida, 1930 : 208). *Meisen* had become typical shopping goods, which people decided to buy after comparison.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Importantly, this study addressed the actors’ intention who involved the new practice creation. That is, the first insight highlighted the interdependent sequence of actors as seen in table 1. In the historical case study, *Maresuke Nogi* initiated an opportunity for creating a new practice. His ethics, which were underscored by the *bushido* ethos, encouraged him to adopt inexpensive clothing, namely *meisen*, for the school uniform. This adoption was imitated by other female schools. These actors could be called opportunity creators (Delbridge & Edwards,

Table 2 Sequence of multiple actors

Opportunity creators	<i>Maresuke Nogi</i> and female schools (<i>Nogi's</i> bushido ethos encouraged the adoption of inexpensive <i>meisen</i> cloths as school uniform in many schools) & Department stores (Utilising wool muslin, which was cheaper than <i>meisen</i>)
Institutional entrepreneurs	<i>Meisen</i> producers (differentiate <i>meisen</i> from wool muslin)
Change consumers	Females (wearing <i>meisen</i> with complex design became gradually recognised as fashionable) and Government (consequently promote <i>meisen</i> , NOT intentionally)

2008). However, this opportunity was not directly utilized by the department stores. After the adoption of *meisen* in schools located in urban regions, department stores started to promote wool *muslin* in the market. This is because wool *muslin* was cheaper than *meisen*. In turn, *meisen* producers started to emphasize complex designs for *meisen* clothing in order to differentiate them from wool *muslin* clothing. These fashionable *meisen* was consumed firstly by females. Furthermore, government promoted national production of clothes and supported *meisen* against muslin. These are sequences that have enabled fashionable *meisen* which is summarised in table 2.

Therefore, as institutional entrepreneurs, *meisen* producers started a new practice putting complex designs on their clothing. Due to the change in social situation, the production of wool *muslin* became impossible in the middle of the 1920s. This, inevitably encouraged the department stores to concentrate on promotion of *meisen*. It could be considered that department stores encouraged the producers to create a new practice. Thus, department stores, by letting the *meisen* and wool *muslin* producers compete, can be called opportunity creators. However, this was not the only role of the department stores. While they created an opportunity for creating a new practice, at the same time they provided a market for the outcome of change, namely *meisen* with complex designs. The latter role of providing a market became salient especially after wool *muslin* producers faced difficulty in continuing their operation in the 1920s. Rather than heroic institutional entrepreneurs, the sequence of multiple actors as a whole brought about the creation of a new practice.

The second insight is closely related to the first insight. Taking a closer look at each type of actors' interest enabled us to realize the unintended consequence of a new practice creation. Although *meisen* producers' interests were, as a result of sequence of actors, achieved through the creation of a new practice, their interests were largely determined by the actions of department stores. That is, *meisen* producers' revenues came from department store sales. The department stores had the initiative in the transaction in the sense that they could seek other producers such as those of wool *muslin* but not vice versa. Interestingly, the department

stores' interests were not directly reflected in the creation of a new practice. Department stores did not have the clear intention to create a new practice of putting complex designs on *meisen* until the early 1920s. On the contrary, the department stores emphasized the cheap price of clothes and therefore utilized wool *muslin* together with *meisen* until the importation of wool, which was the material of wool *muslin*, was banned in the 1920s. The department stores' actions settled the direction of *meisen* producers to a great extent. In responding to department stores' growing reliance on wool *muslin*, *meisen* producers tried to differentiate their products from wool *muslin* producers and launched the novel practice of putting complex designs on clothing.

Furthermore, originally, *Nogi's* and other female schools adopted *meisen* as their uniform because the inexpensive *meisen* was congruent with their values. In particular, *Nogi* was well known for his 'saving mind', putting emphasis on unpretentious style of living. It could be reasonably argued that fashionable design, which *meisen* later achieved, is far from unpretentious. Similarly, other schools adopted *meisen* school uniforms influenced by *Nogi's* ethos.

Finally, we suggest that the findings have implications for historians as well as organizational scholars. Considering the current world-wide economic downturn, the findings indicate that innovative endeavours may result from cost reduction. As indicated above, the department stores were the dominant players in the organizational field in the sense that they determined the competition scheme among other actors. The department stores were keen on promoting cheaper clothes. The department stores' orientation for cost reduction created competition between wool *muslin* producers and *meisen* producers. As a result of this competition, *meisen* producers gradually came to emphasize complex fabric designs. This novel practice resulted in expansion of the downmarket, enabling the masses to enjoy fashionable clothes. We do not argue that history is repeated, however, we argue that learning from insights provided by historical case study into the current issues need to be repeated. Moreover, new institutional theoretical perspective has, as long as we know, rarely been utilized in historical research. However, we argue that the explanation presented here would be more valid than those perspective drawing on rational choice perspective or transaction economics perspective.

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