

The Change of Japanese Department Stores' Cultural Facilities during One Hundred Years

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In this study, the author discussed the history of Japanese department stores by considering the changes in cultural facilities and store locations. This study was an attempt to study the economic aspect as a cultural formation.

Early department stores were located in CBDs, focusing primarily on the merchandising of high-quality shopping goods. In addition to their function as centers of commerce, department stores were also utilized as culture centers. Department stores have changed significantly with the passage of time. During the high growth and the Bubble Economy eras, department stores diversified their merchandising and expanded their store networks widely. Cultural facilities were also expanded to the suburbs. On the other hand, the span from the end of the 1990s to the present was a time of extensive restructuring of department store chains. Large numbers of unprofitable sub-urban stores were closed, with a few even going bankrupt in CBDs. Cultural facilities, however, demonstrated the opposite change. Though numerous museums and theaters in CBDs were closed, suburban facilities like recreation and sports flourished.

Culture based analysis and those of economics showed the different understandings to the department stores' activities. With regards to store locations and merchandising, recently department stores seemed to be back to their original status of the early 1900s. On the other hand, with regards to cultural facilities, department stores tended to lose cultural characteristics rather than return to their original modes. Retailing encompasses complex activities and has diverse aspects. To fully understand them, both economic and cultural viewpoints are necessary.

Key words : department store, cultural viewpoint, cultural facility, history, Japan

I Introduction

The purpose of this study is to discuss the history of Japanese department stores¹⁾ from a cultural point of view as well as an economic one. This study is an attempt to study the economic aspect as a cultural formation. As department stores are the oldest modern retailers in Japan, they have greatly influenced both Japanese society and culture. The first department store was introduced to Japan through Europe in the beginning of the 1900s (Japan

department store association 1998). In general, the retail industry and its management systems have changed rapidly. McNair and May's (1958) "wheel of retailing model" showed that such rapid development of the retail industry was largely due to the metamorphosis of its retail management methods. The Japanese retail industry has developed at a rapid pace. The end of the department store's prosperous period gave rise to a new type of retailer: the supermarket. Supermarkets made their debut in Japan in the 1950s. Moreover, during the

1990s, Japanese consumers were again deeply influenced by a boom in convenience stores. This trend also threatened existent retailers. Another modern phenomenon to enter the scene was online shopping. In addition, prominent foreign retailers such as Toys“R”Us, Tesco, and Wal-Mart, began entering Japan in the mid-1990s. A century has passed since the department store was first introduced in Japan. On this wheel of retail expansion, department stores are facing a major crises and dramatic reformations of their merchandising and operations.

In spite of the contributions to Japanese retailing, few geographers have paid attention to Japanese department stores. During their long history, department stores have changed dramatically. Sueta (2003 ; 2004a, b ; 2005) considered the department stores’ development in the dearly 1900s from historical and geographical viewpoints. Iwama (2005) analyzed the locational strategies of department stores since the 1960s from a purely economic viewpoint. It goes without saying that department stores are among the highest status of retailers. Department stores have not only evolved into places where a variety of merchandise is sold, but also into areas that have cultural functions. Although such cultural functions are an important feature of department stores, with large contributions to the modernization of Japan, Iwama (2005) did not mention them. Culture is an important view point factor in retail geography. Thrift (2000) considered the cultural turn in economic geography and pointed out the rise of the cultural dimension as a legitimate area

of economic concern. Wrigley and Lowe (2002) provided a guide on new retail geography and mentions that a subject whose central problematic and potential lay in the fact that the arbitrary categories of ‘economy’ and culture’ required constant shattering in this study. Compared with other retailers, department stores have much more cultural characteristics. For example, Rosalind (1982), Bowlby (1985) etc focused on European mass-consumer cultures at the end of the 19th century and highlighted the relationships between the mass-consumption phenomenon and the emergence of department stores. Therefore, in this paper, the author chose to make cultural features the central focus of discussion.

Early studies on the culture of Japanese department stores mostly focus on the early 1900s. Yamamoto and Nishizawa (1999) and Miyano (2002) concentrated on the cultural functions of early department stores from multiple perspectives. Hatsuda (1993) considered the relationships between department stores and urban cultures during the Meiji to early Showa Era²⁾. Kanno (1994) , Hasuike and Taniguchi (2005) commented on the cultural exhibitions that were held in early department stores and clarified their contributions to Japanese modernization. Mitsukoshi (1954), Takayanagi (1994), and Hashizume (1999) clarified the influences which the first modern European-style department stores had on Japanese architecture. According to above researches, equipment such as heating system, elevators, escalators, power generators, sprinklers, and ventilation machines are among the many

European department store innovations that influenced Japanese retail. There are many literatures on the various aspects of the cultural functions of department stores and its influence on Japanese society. They include discussions of the modern culture of fashion created by department stores (Kitayama, 1991), department stores and the gender issues (Tamari, 2000), and the contributions of department store advertising, such as magazines, posters and catch phrases to the arts, advertisement industry (Ikari, 1998; Yamamoto, 1999), and literature magazines (Tsuchiya, 1999a). Another topic of research discussed is the Japanese gift shop and department stores (Oyama, 1997).

In previous studies there is a remarkable lack of the following points; research from a longer-term perspective. As Tsuchiya (1999b) pointed out, existing studies on Japanese department stores focus only on the early 1900s and late 1990s. Few studies mention the blank period during the late 1900s to the early 1990s. The character and merchandising of department stores have been in a state constant flux due to changes in their economic and social environments. Long-term perspective research is therefore a necessity in gaining a fuller understanding of department stores.

In this paper, the author considered Japanese department store history from a cultural viewpoint and long-term perspective. Though culture is highly significant, its meaning is often ambiguous and difficult to pinpoint. In a broad sense, the department store itself can be seen as a cultural entity. Its culture is also a term that is difficult to define and a challenge

to utilize in geographical analysis. Department stores, after all, encompass numerous cultural aspects. They include everything from the sale of a variety of high-quality merchandise, to European style buildings and interiors. Other cultural aspects in department stores include facilities like in-store museums, theaters and a plethora of events like orchestra concerts and art exhibitions. The fundamental philosophies of department store companies are the contributions to their customers' rich lives in matter and mind (Takashimaya, 1982). Stores offer many kinds of products and serve for customers' richness in matter, and cultural facilities contribute to the richness of customers' minds. This paper considered the presence of cultural facilities as the visible and clear indicators of a department store's cultural features.

The locations of department stores themselves have also changed dramatically. In general, cultural facilities have been established as annexes to department stores with the locations that are strongly influenced by store locations. Iwama (2005) considered the locational strategies of Japanese department stores from the 1900s to the present. In this paper, the changes in cultural facilities and their distribution patterns were analyzed within the context of store locational strategies.

II Procedure and Study Area

To achieve the purpose of this study, the following approaches were employed. First, the author divided department stores' history. Fig. 1 shows the shift in total sales and floor space from 1938 to 2008. The history of

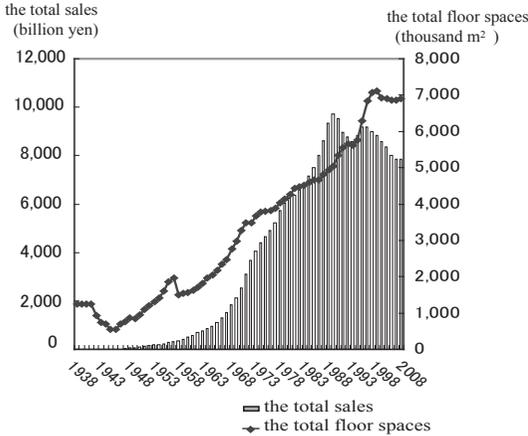


Fig.1 The shift of department stores' total sales and floor spaces in Japan

Source: Japan department store association (2009)

department stores was classified into three periods:1904-1954 (the incunabula), 1955-1998 (the golden period) , and 1999- to present (the reformation period). The history of department stores was then considered for analysis of the

locational strategies of stores and its cultural facilities for each period. Third, the shift of department stores' locations during three periods were analyzed based on economic and cultural aspects, and summarize the history of department stores a schematic diagram was constructed. And finally, the author discussed the importance of geographical research of economic phenomenon from a cultural point of view, and also showed some research agendas to feature studies.

The study area is the Tokyo metropolitan area, which is located in the Kanto Plain, the largest plain in Japan (Fig. 2). There were 91 department stores there in 2008. Topographically, the Tokyo metropolitan area includes a large hinterland of about 32,080 km² with a radius of about 100km. In 2005, its population was 31.9 million, and department stores showed the highest levels of development in the area.

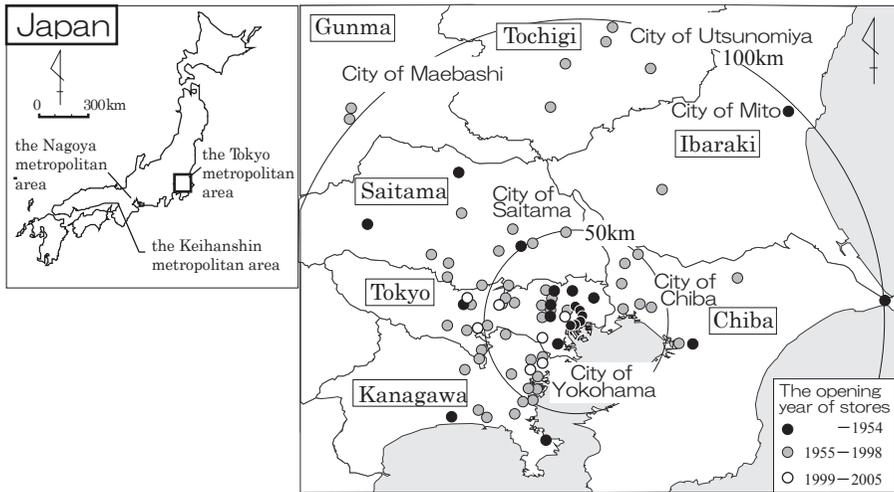


Fig.2 The opening year of department stores in the Tokyo Metropolitan area

III The First Period of Japanese Department Stores: The Incunabula (1904-1954)

As mentioned above, early department stores help to usher in Japanese modernization in the early 1900s. The Second World War, however, began in 1941 dealt a serious blow to both Japanese society and department stores development. At the outset of the war, department stores were forced to sell only the low-quality products recommended by the government. Many cultural facilities were closed, and the government utilized department stores as suppliers or advertisers. For example, the government used the department store billboards to carry messages like; “Donate gold and other metals to the government” or “Buy government bonds” (Mitsukoshi, 1990). Numerous exhibitions were held in department stores to enlighten people about the war. Moreover, department stores established small stores in Japanese colonies and battlefronts in order to supply daily goods to soldiers (Yauchibara, 1988; Lin 1999; and Mitsukoshi, 1999). In addition, the army confiscated department store floors to utilize as their offices. During the war, Mitsukoshi Theater³⁾ was also seized by the army and used as a preview room for army propaganda films (Mitsukoshi 1999). Department store total sales in 1938 totaled 6.4 hundred million yen (Japanese currency) and their total floor space was 1.25 million m² (Fig.1). However, by 1945 these figures had dropped to only 4.6 hundred million yen and 540 thousand m² (Japan Department Stores Association, 2005). A timetable for Mitsukoshi Store development is a good il-

lustration of the prominent events of the war period that meant serious setbacks for retail (Table 1).

The hostilities of the Second World War, finally, ended in 1945 after inflicting serious damage on the Japanese society and economy. Many department stores and their cultural

Table 1. Chronological table of Mitsukoshi department store company before 1945

1929	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opening of branch stores in Seoul, Korea and Dairen, China.
1933	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedication of a combat plane (Type 91 fighter) to the Army. • Participation in the army's air defense training.
1935	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exhibition for the thirtieth anniversary of the Russo-Japanese War. • Dedication of a combat plane (carrier bomber) to the army.
1937	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning of the sales of national uniforms.
1938	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exhibition of substitute products.
1940	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning of the sales of substitute products (foods, texture). • Prohibition of the sales of luxury consumption goods.
1941	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exhibition for Southeast Asian battle fields. • Exhibition of comfort articles for soldiers.
1942	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rationing of foods and apparel. • Prohibition of restaurants.
1943	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confiscation of floors by the army (6th-7th floors of the primary store). • Opening of small stores in the battlefronts of Southeast Asia. • Opening of small stores at the army base in Tachikawa, Tokyo. • Destruction of five stores, including Ginza and Shinjuku, in air raids.
1945	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The end of the war • Confiscation of overseas stores in Asia. • Confiscation of floors by GHQ.

Source: Mitsukoshi (1990)

facilities were burned down during the war. Five stores of Mitsukoshi Company, including its Ginza and Shinjuku stores, were destroyed in air raids (Mitsukoshi, 1990). In Tokyo, the Mitsukoshi Theater was one of only two theaters that escaped unscathed from the bombings. Mitsukoshi Theater restarted business operations soon after, making a significant contribution to the postwar revival of Japanese culture. In 1947, the theater remained open for operation for 312 days (Fig.3). This theater offered numerous performances by the Japanese classical performing arts such as Kabuki, the Bunraku puppet shows, comic storytelling, as well as modern dramas. The Japanese economy recovered miraculously in the next 15 years.

By the mid-1950s, the Japanese economy had returned to its pre-war levels. The total floor space of department stores had also reached pre-war levels by 1954.

IV The Second Period of Japanese Department Stores: The Golden Period (1955-1998)

1. Diversification and suburbanization of stores

Due to the high growth economy era of the 1960s, Japan was able to develop dramatically. This period of robust growth also help fuel another era of abundance known as the “bubble economy” in the 1980s. In both these prosperous eras, department stores also saw rapid development. The expansion of store networks

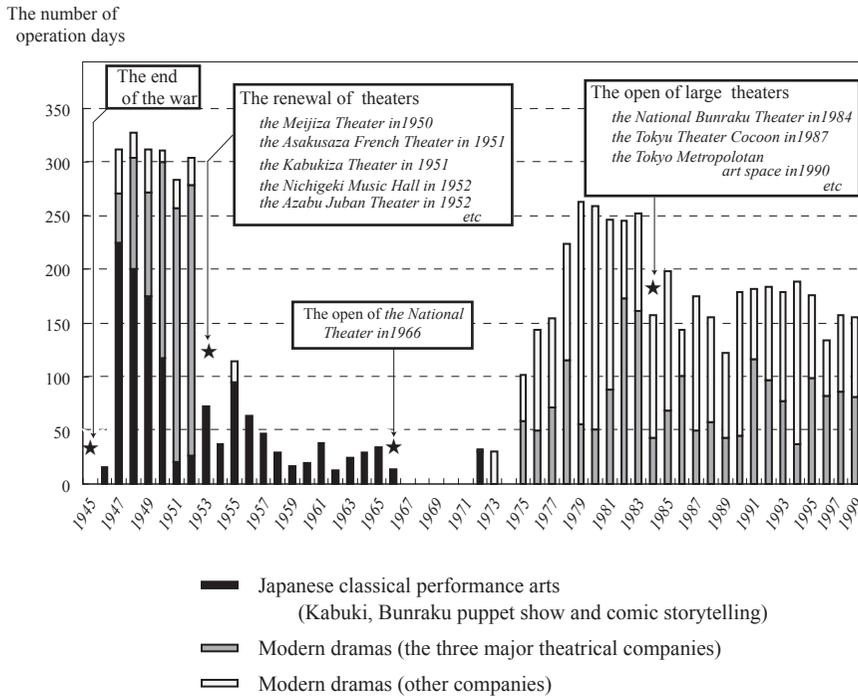


Fig.3 Mitsukoshi Theater's operation days and its programs

Source: Mitsukoshi (1999)

toward suburban residential districts was particularly remarkable. The trend of an increasing number of stores continued up until 1998. The number of stores in the Tokyo metropolitan area peaked at 105 in 1998. With regard to the Tokyo metropolitan area, Iwama (2001) analyzed the relationships between store location

and store characteristics (Fig. 4). One hundred and five stores were classified into 9 clusters using variables that represent the characteristics for each store. These clusters were then divided into 3 distinct groups: stores specializing in shopping goods (SSSGs), stores relatively specialized in convenience goods (SSCGs), and

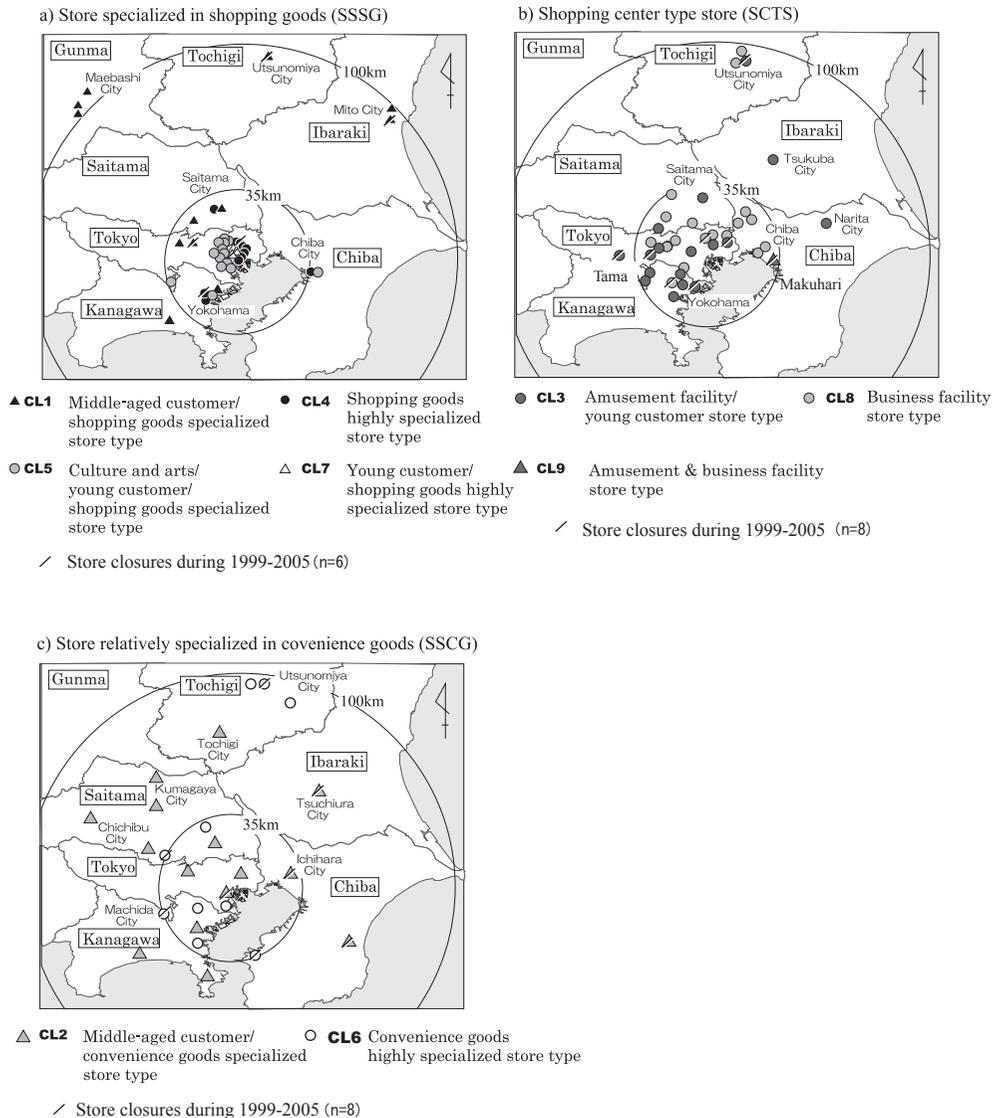


Fig.4 Distribution of department store clusters in the Tokyo metropolitan area in Japan

shopping center type stores (SCTSs). An SSSG is a typical department store with mainly formal luxury wear like kimonos, bags, and accessories. The SSSG group includes the primary stores of the so-called “elite department stores” such as Mitsukoshi and Takashimaya. The primary stores of the local department store chains were also classified into this group. The main items sold in SSCGs are daily products such as a variety of foods and sundries. Local branches of local stores and railway owned companies are also generally included in this group. The SCTS group contains stores that are equipped with numerous service facilities such as museums, movie theaters, administrative offices, and scaled-down financial institutions. This group includes Futakotamagawa Takashimaya and Lalaport Sogo. These stores have large parking facilities and tenant shops. Since they offer shopping goods and convenience store goods in equal measure, it was possible to classify such stores into the SC-style of stores. Whereas SCTSs are distributed contiguously in suburban districts, SSSGs appear mainly in high commerce retail centers such as Tokyo, Yokohama, Saitama, and Chiba. SSCGs, on the other hand, are found beyond the 36 km radius zone. Many of the SSSG stores were opened in the first period, while the other two clusters of stores were mainly established during the prosperous eras.

2. Expansion of cultural facilities

Cultural facilities also flourished during this period of prosperity. Fig. 5 shows the distribution of cultural facilities in 1998. The cultural

facilities of department stores mean the following in this study; in-store museums or theaters, recreational facilities, sports facilities, educational facilities, and gift shops. Recreational facilities include movie theaters, amusement parks, and pachinko parlors. Tennis courts, golf training facilities, and artificial ski slopes on the other hand were categorized as sports facilities. Educational facilities refer to places that offer instruction on subjects such as flower arrangement, dance, and English conversation. Gift shop refers to gift shops with 100-150 m² of floor space. Gift shops specialize in gifts for *Tsugen* and *Seibo*⁴⁾. Department store chains opened numerous gift shops in local cities in the 1980s. These shops are usually combined with offices of order-takers called “*Gaisho*”. As elite staff members with high levels of skill and experience, these order-takers visit customers’ houses regularly and take their orders directly from homes. This service is limited to select few members with significant amounts of property⁵⁾. Gift and *Gaisho* are also an important aspect of a Japanese department store’s cultural features.

The characteristics of department store’s culture in this era can be summarized as ‘popularization’ and ‘sub-urbanization’. As the highest status of cultural facilities, museums and theaters were concentrated in central Tokyo and its sub centers. On the other hand, many recreational facilities could be found in sub-urban areas. Sports facilities were located in central Tokyo, sub centers and a few local cities. Educational facilities were distributed widely throughout central Tokyo and in many local

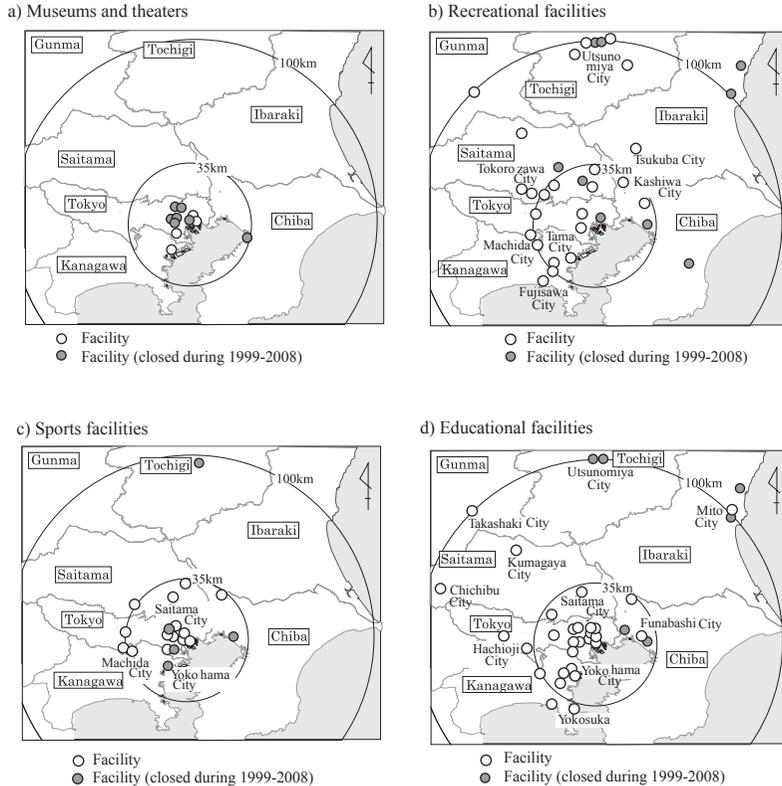


Fig.5 The distribution of department store's cultural facilities in 1998 and their closure during 1999-2008

central cities. Gift shops also developed during the second period. Fig.6 illustrates the distribution of Mitsukoshi Department Store's gift shops. Mitsukoshi had 8 department stores and 41 gift shops in the metropolitan area in 1998. Department store companies also expanded their gift shops networks to the suburbs in this era winning many local customers.

The Tokyu department store, a railway owned company, opened the extravagant "Pantheon Tokyu" in Shibuya in 1956, complete with four theaters and a planetarium. Tokyu also established the "Tokyu Cultural Village" in Shibuya in 1989 (Okada, 1991). The Tokyu Cul-

tural Village contains three cultural facilities: Orchard Hall, Theater Cocoon, and La Cinema. Orchard Hall is one of the largest concert halls for orchestra and ballet performances. Theater Cocoon is a large concert hall utilized for modern dramas, concerts, and contemporary dance. La Cinema is a movie theater that specializes in screening French cultural movies. These facilities made in this golden period differentiate themselves from traditional theaters in that they specialized in the modern pop-arts.

Moreover, the programs of theaters also show the popularization of department store's culture. Fig 3 shows the programs offered by

structed store networks and integrated them into urban stores that specialized in offering only high-quality goods and services. Indeed, many SSSGs had already recovered their management conditions in the early 2000s (Weekly Diamond, 2006). However, the recent economic crises since 2008 drive the department stores into a corner once again. The situation doesn't allow premature conclusions.

2. The closure of cultural facilities

Cultural facilities also became targets for cost cutbacks. Fig.5 shows the facilities closed between 1999 and 2008. The closure of museums and theaters is noteworthy. Six museums and one theater including the Pantheon Tokyu were closed. The entertainment and art fare offered of museums and theaters have undergone drastic changes.

The distribution of gift shops has also changed rapidly (see Fig.6). Gift shops in central Tokyo were closed during the period from 1999 to 2008. In Tokyo, gift shops are typically established in hotels such as the Imperial Hotel and the Sheraton Tokyo Bay Hotel. Since numerous hotels have opened and closed in rapid succession, the distribution of gift shops is in a constant state of change. Large numbers of new shops have been opened in Chiba prefecture. The central and southern parts of Chiba districts, on the other hand, represent a blank area for department store development. Mitsukoshi also has a store in Chiba City and has widely expanded its gift shop network. These shops are managed by its store in Chiba. As gift shops do not require large start up cooperating

costs, department store chains have frequently established new shops, withdrawing them just as quickly.

VI Modeling

In order to summarize the history of Japanese department stores from cultural and economic viewpoints, a schematic diagram was created based on store locations and their cultural facilities (Fig.7). Department store showed different movements in each stage. The first stages (1904-1954) can be summarized as the symbols of Japanese modernization period, the second stage (1955-1998) as the suburbanization and diversification period, and the third stage (1999-to present) as the decline and reconstruction period.

This model clearly shows the differences between department stores' economic activities and cultural ones. From an economic viewpoint, many suburban SCTSs and SSCGs had been closed and the characteristics of department stores integrated themselves to the SSSGs type with their distributions tending to return to CBDs in the third stage. This change in department stores can be seen as a return to their original state of the early 1900s when department stores were the symbol of modernization and mass-consumption. On the other hand, with regard to cultural facilities, lots of high status museums and theaters in CBDs were closed in the third stage. Cultural facilities required high operating costs. Contemporary department store companies emphasizing economic efficiency ultimately cut back their cultural facilities to reduce these excess costs.

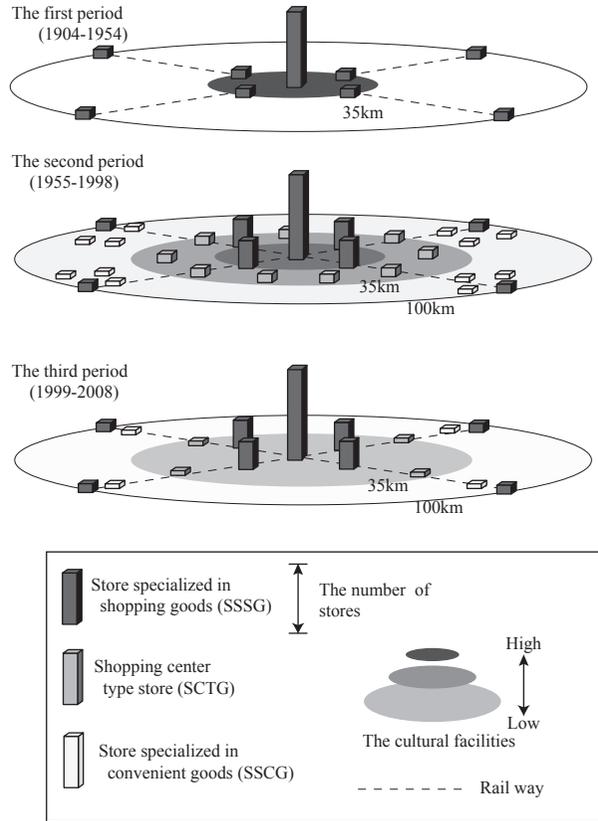


Fig.7 The model of department stores' distribution pattern in the Tokyo metropolitan area

From a cultural viewpoint, current department stores are much different from their counterparts in the early 1900s.

Two different viewpoints show the different understandings on Japanese department stores' activities. Retailing encompasses complex activities and has diverse aspects. To fully understand them, both economic and cultural viewpoints are necessary.

VII Conclusion

The purpose of this study is a discussion of the history of Japanese department stores from

a cultural point of view as well as an economic one. This study was an attempt to study the economic aspect as a cultural formation. In short, the author discussed the shift in retail cultural facilities and clarified the change of such features from a long term perspective. Department store activities are typically categorized with a narrow focus on economic concerns. Although department stores are the highest status retailers possessing many cultural characteristics, most studies neglect discussion of their cultural aspects. Among the many cultural features of Japanese depart-

ment stores, cultural facilities such as in-store museums, theaters, gift shops were chosen as the variables for comprehensive analysis. Since cultural facilities are the most visible cultural formations, research and analysis from a long term perspective becomes much clearer.

Early department stores were located only in the metropolitan CBDs, focusing primarily on the merchandising of high-quality shopping goods. In addition to their function as centers of commerce, department stores were also utilized as culture centers complete with modern buildings, expositions, and events which made significant contributions to Japanese modernization. Characteristics of department stores have changed significantly with the passage of time. During the high growth and the Bubble Economy eras, department stores diversified their merchandising and expanded their store networks widely. During such periods, many new stores specializing in convenience goods were also opened in suburban residential districts. Cultural facilities were also expanded to the suburbs and offered a plethora of services to its suburban residents. Gift shops were also developed in suburban areas, drawing a huge number of customers from local areas. On the other hand, the span from the end of the 1990s to the present was a time of extensive restructuring of department store chains. Large numbers of unprofitable sub-urban stores were closed, with a few even going bankrupt in CBDs. Cultural facilities, however, demonstrated changes which were the opposite. Though numerous museums and theaters in CBDs, which required expensive running costs, were

closed between 1998 to 2005, suburban facilities like recreation, sports, and education or gift shops flourished.

In analyzing department store history from both economic and cultural viewpoints, the following facts were clarified. With regards to store locations and merchandising, department stores changed their locational strategies from expansion to reduction in the late 1990s and integrated them into urban high-status stores. This change seems to be the retrogression of department stores back to their original status of the early 1900s. On the other hand, with regards to cultural facilities, historical museums and theaters were closed. Department stores tended to lose cultural characteristics rather return to their original modes. Although the store trends and cultural facilities were almost uniform up until the early 1990s, they started differing by the late 1990s. Economic based research available is not enough to fully understand department stores. It is necessary to pay much attention to the cultural dimensions in a legitimate area of economic concern.

Thrift (2000) mentioned the cultural shifts in economic geography and pointed out the importance of the cultural dimension as a legitimate arena of economic concern. The culture based approaches can offer new insight into economic issues. Although traditional economic scientists analyzed shopping malls as “simply temples to a slavish semiotic consumerism that reduced consumers to robots in one case pre-programmed by their own on-board economic computer”, cultural studies clarified that “customers are a highly diverse set of actors who

react in grounded and contextual ways and consumption in malls is similarly heterogeneous (Thrift, 2000: p.697)”. This study is also an attempt to understand economic issues from cultural viewpoints and demonstrated the difference between an economic based understanding and cultural based understanding in the history of Japanese department stores.

Discussing cultural shifts in economic geography is a very important topic, but the problem is “how to study the economic as a cultural formation (Thrift, 2000: p.689)”. This study analyzed cultural facilities without covering other cultural aspects. It is difficult to say whether or not it covered a significant portion of the cultural features present in Japanese department stores. Though the subject of how to analyze department stores as cultural formations is a challenging one, it is nevertheless central to improving upon our overall understanding of department stores. It is hoped that this research will be a step forward in attaining this understanding.

Note

- 1) With regard to the definition of Japanese department stores, please see Iwama (2001).
- 2) Meiji Era (1868-1912), Taisho era (1912-1926), Showa Era (1926-1989), and Heisei era (1989-the present).
- 3) Mitsukoshi Theater, the first in-store theater in Japan, was established in 1924 in the Mitsukoshi Nihonbashi store. This theater is located on the 6th and 7th floor of the store. The theater has a floor area of 542 m², 678 seats, and the most modern sound system. This theater was mainly of used to stage performances of Japanese classical performances.
- 4) Tsugen and Seibo are Japanese cultural gifts to someone’s boss, teacher, customer, and so on. Former is usually during July - August and latter in December. These gifts show acknowledgment. The store’s logo on the wrapping of gifts is very important, because Japanese persist in honor and logo is the measure of acknowledgment. These gifts are usually purchased at famous department stores.
- 5) The Gaisho sale of Isetan department store chain in 1988 was 2.8 billion yen. It was 8.2% of their total sales.
- 6) The Kabuki Theater, for example, specialized in Kabuki performances. It has a floor area of 3,195m² and 1,956 seats, which is almost six times the size of Mitsukoshi Theater. The rise of these large-scale independent theaters provided in-store theaters their cultural performances.
- 7) The Mitsukoshi Kichijoji store opened in 2001, but already closed in May 2006.

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