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# The Department Store in Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Japan: Luxury, Aestheticization and Modern Life

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to shed light on the innovative luxury marketing strategies of the early Japanese department store, *Mitsukoshi*, which created a new type of spectacular and sensual consumer space with the western style building and interior design. Mitsukoshi was also a new attractive urban public space in which Japanese women began to enjoy luxury settings, enact new types of personae and learn to enjoy new aesthetic sensibilities and experiences. This paper also considers Mitsukoshi's contribution made in providing new ideas about western lifestyles in line with Japanese government-led policies, such as the reform of everyday life movements, as well as the store's own attempts to educate customers into the minutiae of westernized home and interior design. This promoted a new idea of 'being modern' and led to the combining of new forms of aesthetic experience with a greater democratization of luxury, which gradually permeated everyday life. Finally the paper analyses the *Ryukokai*, the Mitsukoshi think tank, which brought together a powerful set of cultural specialists and intermediaries to create a distinctive 'Mitsukoshi taste' with its associated the brand image.

## **Keywords**

Department store, consumer culture, new middle class, aestheticization, modernization, luxury, cultural intermediaries, interior design, Japan

## **Introduction**

Western style luxury goods were imported into Japan as part of the modernization drive in which Japan sought to incorporate many aspects of western life and institutions in the wake of the 1868 Meiji Restoration.<sup>1</sup> The process of modernization involved far-reaching economic and political institutional changes which have been well documented as Japan sought become a 'rich nation with a strong army' in order to compete alongside the western powers (Gluck 1985; Tanaka 1993). But it also involved a series of more diffuse changes to everyday life, consumption habits, dress, home decoration and style of life. It opened up a new world of images and material goods, settings and forms of presentation of self, and dreams of the good life. The Japanese department store played a key role in this process, especially in its capacity to not only display new luxuries and Western exotica, but to teach people how to appreciate, handle and incorporate them into the new consumer culture lifestyles.<sup>2</sup>

The leading Japanese department store, Mitsukoshi established in 1904,<sup>3</sup> provided an impressive new type of consumer space and interior design, which went beyond conventional forms of retailing to create a highly aestheticized and luxurious environment in which to display new western lifestyles, products and information. In this context, department stores have often been referred to as ‘dream worlds’ (R. H. Williams, 1982), which provided highly spectacular and sensory spaces with stunning luxury interiors and carefully displayed commodities in modern grandiose architecture. Department stores primarily catered for women and developed innovative marketing strategies, such as the creation of theatrical settings along with the display of bourgeois and aristocratic styles to attract female consumers into a dream world where women could enjoy trying on new types of personae in luxurious settings along with the promise of learning new lifestyles. Hence, consumer practices became redefined as a pleasurable and not merely functional activities permitting ‘impulse buying,’ but also providing luxury experiences with new aesthetic sensibilities and offering a learning process through the cultivation of taste. They also provided resources for the creation of new identities. In effect consumer culture offered the promise of hedonism, luxury and expressivity along with careful planning and instrumental calculation. It required people to develop a more flexible habitus with the capacity to become interested in a more open dynamic life, a life replete with new possibilities to be modern.

The construction of a positive image of ‘becoming modern’ entailed various learning processes involving the adaptation of new lifestyles, the familiarity with new items which were to be put on the body (western clothes and adornments) as well as objects which constituted the living space that surrounded the person in the space of the home (western interior design, furniture and housing). The wish to ‘become modern’ was closely bounded to the emergence of a new type of emotional pleasure and satisfaction via consumer experiences. In the context of Japanese modernization, these new types of consumer experiences also entailed the sense of luxuriousness, which brought pleasurable sensations through exotica, foreignness, non-ordinariness and something ‘new’. The need to ‘become modern’ promoted by consumer culture also resonated with Japan’s national educational policies and the reform of everyday life, which encouraged people to embrace austerity to improve their lifestyles in more efficient, rational and scientific ways that become noticeable in the 1900s. These ideas strongly influenced almost every element of everyday practices, such as diet, clothing and housing. This governmental policy with its emphasis upon austerity and discipline could be seen as opposed to the ethos of consumer culture, especially the emphasis upon luxury and expressivity. This potential conflict was however, a contradiction that Mitsukoshi could handle. This is because the government policy of reform of everyday life promoted a new simpler disciplined ‘rational’ lifestyle, which shared the

common feature with consumer culture of being critical of existing conventions and traditional practices. This meant that the movement for the reform of everyday life emphasis on rational disciplined management of bodies and homes could be readily integrated with the critique of tradition and the creation of the desire to consume something new or modern. While Mitsukoshi, as a major institution of consumer culture, necessarily provided people with numerous lures of consumption, it always tried to keep in step with government policies and help with their implementation.

The aim of this paper is to explore the innovative marketing strategies of Mitsukoshi and its investment in high-value well-designed surroundings that acted as a new urban public space for female consumers that encouraged them to develop aesthetic and luxury sensibilities. In addition, the paper also considers how Mitsukoshi, as the leading Japanese department store, sought to not only follow the notion of becoming modern in line with government-led policies (reform of everyday life movement), but also developed its own agenda to become identified as a luxury brand though hybridising Japanese styles with the more general processes of westernization of home and interior designs.<sup>4</sup> In order to elaborate the latter process, the paper also explores the *Ryukokai*, Mitsukoshi's think tank that was a powerful engine for the invention and implementation of the range of consumer culture reforms related to becoming modern. The *Ryukokai* drew on an array of cultural specialists and intermediaries who were brought together to create a distinctive and notable 'Mitsukoshi taste,' and 'brand image' along with design innovations and a more general aestheticization of everyday life. As a consequence, Mitsukoshi prompted new ideas of becoming modern along with the wider availability of a new range of prestige goods that furthered the democratization of luxury.

### **Becoming Modern and the Taste for Luxury**

Becoming modern has always been understood as something advanced, sophisticated and novel. It has often been noted that many of the resources for becoming modern in Japan were imported from the outside. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the origin of the term, 'import' is from the Latin verb *importare*, understood as a combination of 'in' (in) and 'portare' (carry). *Importare* is also the root for important. The meaning of 'import' refers to 'bring (goods or services) into a country from abroad' or 'introducing (ideas) from a different place or context'. Interestingly, the meaning of 'imported' in Japanese is often expressed by the word, '*hakurai* (舶来),' which literally means that 'something comes from abroad by a ship'. Since the early Meiji period, *hakurai*, however, means not only 'something imported from the West', but also carried the feeling of 'something novel, important and refined'. Hence, the term, '*hakurai*' still today to some extent carries the sense of becoming

modern along with a feeling of something sophisticated, prestigious, and luxurious.

After the Meiji Restoration of 1868<sup>5</sup>, a much larger volume of western goods began to be imported as a result of the determined policy of the Japanese government to learn from the West and to reform social life in order to become a competitive modern nation-state. This entailed following the new slogans to ‘search for new knowledge throughout the world’ and ‘reject old customs’ in order to bring Japan up the international hierarchy and gain respect and prestige. All these plans and practices related to the prime aim of establishing the modern Japanese state. Yet, this was an inherently contradictory process. On the one hand, Japan needed to avoid being colonized by the West. On the other hand, Japan also needed to be westernized in order to become a modern nation state. This is because ‘the best defence against the Western nation-states was the construction of a modern, legal state of its own’ (Najita and Harrotunian 1990:716). The notion of ‘the modern’ employed here was strongly associated with civilizing processes in Meiji Japan and it connoted a range of things that were associated with the Western system, values and cultural forms – the modern economy, state, military – involved the destabilization of conventional classifications, values and even the sense of aesthetics. Yet, there was another side to modernity, which sought not only to reform everyday life in the image of modern efficiency for state purposes, but involved the sphere of women, consumption, needs and desires and opened up a space for sumptuousness and the sense of luxury. In this, the growth of a new consumer culture with its department stores, played an important role. In other words, the development of department stores, consumer culture and luxury aesthetics can be seen as one of the outcomes of the uneven expansion of Japanese modernization.

### **The Department Store as a Spectacular Space**

Japan’s first department store, Mitsukoshi *Gofukuten*<sup>6</sup>, built a new headquarters ‘flagship’ building in central Tokyo in 1914 using many of the new architectural technologies of the period. The building was designed in 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 metres. The building 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.

[Figure 1 Mitsukoshi *Nihonbashi* headquarter (1914) by courtesy of Isetan Mitsukoshi Holdings the General Affairs Department, Corporate Communication Section]

Mitsukoshi applied a variety of styles to decorate its interior and enhance its theatricality. One striking aspect was the feeling of overwhelming ‘interiority’ (Sloterdijk 2013) resulting from the huge scale of the space generated by the central staircase with its huge glass ceiling.

[Figure 2 Mitsukoshi central staircase (1914) by courtesy of Isetan Mitsukoshi Holdings the General Affairs Department, Corporate Communication Section]

The huge stained-glass roof reminiscent of the 1851 Crystal Palace International Exhibition, had also been taken up in what is generally described as the world’s first department store, Bon Marché in Paris (Williams, 1982). Hence, the new Mitsukoshi department store closely followed the grandiose architecture and theatrical lighting and display of the western department stores, but it also drew on well-established Japanese ways of retailing (such as fixed prices and absence of haggling which goes back to 1683) which were only taken up in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (see Koyama 1970; Jinno 1994). The aim was to make a ‘spectacular space’, a site not just for the provision of commodities, but for entertainment along with sensory and aesthetic experiences.<sup>7</sup> Hence for the Japanese customers, the new store could aptly be referred to as a ‘dream world’ (Williams, 1982; Yoshimi, 1996).<sup>8</sup>

### **Theatricality, Performativity and Embodiment**

Mitsukoshi from an early point started to use the power of theatricality and paid attentions to the details of interior design to create a spectacular space. 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 window display and subsequently gained a job in the first class interior design shop, *Maples* in London for a year. In the West, thanks to the advent of new technologies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many retailers, such as department stores could produce large glass panels for window displays facilitating the use of stage-setting techniques. Utilizing atmospheric lighting and colour coordination, commodities were carefully placed in a themed setting designed to invoke a dream-like theatricality that created visual and sensory pleasures. This innovative setting had the potential to generate new forms of aesthetic sensibility. The window displays not only provided an aesthetic space, they also offered a carefully arranged setting and context for the display of commodities. Each commodity was located in relation to each other and the background setting contributed to the overall harmony of the theme and its display context. The essential thing to recognize here is that all objects were contextualized and initiated into the scenario of everyday narratives. Hayashi was quick to learn and

implement the power of theatricality and explore its effect on consumers' sensory and aesthetic feelings by encouraging a sense of luxury and opulence. 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.

The theatrical setting of the department store also offered a 'front-stage' area (Goffman, 1971) with women not just spectators or audience, but able to perform and enjoy presenting new personae. The front-stage areas 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 things on and experiment with their face, body and experience new sensations. Furthermore, women also obtained a good deal of information and advice to help enhance their presentation skills. More importantly, women could not only get information, but also gain access to a range of resources for identity construction and appearance maintenance through purchasing the commodities, which were needed to 'get into role,' and participate in the front-stage drama. Hence department stores offered themselves as new aestheticized spaces which allowed women to enjoy new forms of leisure activities and to move around and interact in relative freedom and safety in a range of urban sites outside the home. Here we can see the emergence of a women's public sphere (Tamari 2006:107 onward).

### **Reform of Everyday Life and The New Middle Class**

The women who were most likely to enjoy shopping in the department stores were generally from the new middle classes.<sup>9</sup> The Japanese department store in particular became not only a key site of mass consumption, but also a site for inculcating new consumer pedagogies, for looking, observing and gleaning information for women in the new middle class.<sup>10</sup> Department stores such as Mitsukoshi provided learning zones and resources, to facilitate women to cultivate lifestyles distinct from those of the old middle class. The department stores along with the expanding secondary education, white collar sector and rapidly growing print media (including women's magazines) in the context of the short Japanese economic boom after the First World War, helped produce a broader reading public among middle class women. This was the time the Japanese government sought to mobilise the population in a biopolitical manner, by combining a general drive for efficient living with the new consumer lifestyle, through its policy of 'the reform of everyday life'. The new middle class woman was a key vehicle and outcome of this process.

‘The very idea of reform (*Kairyō*) and improvement (*kaizen*) were themselves seen as expressions of the new and modern, and overlapped with the idea of ‘modernity’ and then ‘fashion’ (Kashiwagi 2000: 62). The increasing concern with reform and improvement can be imputed to two major social factors: Firstly, the great success of the Russian Revolution which evoked positive images of the transformation of the social: society can be changed. Secondly, the expansion of new industrial concepts such as Ford’s system with its claims of rationalization and efficiency (see Kashiwagi 2000:62). These social stimuli could feed through into non-work activities and could help spread the importance of efficiency and rational thinking in everyday practices. This was also closely related to the national political project, with Japan seeking to become a global power by establish a strong economy and creating healthy good citizens as workers and as soldiers (cf. Foucault 2005 on biopolitics). As department stores were always sensitive to government policy, they were willing to help promote the reform of everyday life. They began to provide practical advice on the techniques and technologies of everyday life, which basically emphasised efficacy, rationality and to some degree, austerity. At the same time, department stores also sought to educate people to enjoy the pleasure of the new living environments. Department stores particularly helped the transformation from Japanese to Western fashion, and more importantly, they invented new household styles and the refashioning of the home. The main message was to encourage people to enjoy creating a cosy home, to dress up more stylishly, to go on holiday, in effect to imitate a quasi-bourgeois lifestyle with the sense of luxury. In other words, people were encouraged to start to enjoy what we now call ‘consumer culture’.

Department stores not only provided a tremendous range of new products, and large amounts of information on leisure and hobbies, they also introduced the emotional pleasures of luxury experiences. On the surface there could seem to be a clash between the rationalizing austerity messages of the reform of everyday life and the thrift campaigns, and hedonistic consumer culture, but in reality they fitted together well (see Gluck, 1997, Garon, 1998). This is because the reform of everyday life movement encouraged people to cultivate an efficient and disciplined ‘rational’ lifestyle and this had much common with the consumer culture ethos. Both sought to transform existing conventions and traditional everyday practices and this was something Mitsukoshi was acutely aware of. A good example is the prize contests Mitsukoshi held for new kitchen designs in 1925. The aim was to make cooking ergonomically more efficient as well as creating a more hygienic environment. The two winning designs were both from women (selected from over 600 entries; *The Record of Mitsukoshi*, 1990:93). The contest provided a good opportunity for women to become not just active consumers, but skilled designers as well, concerned to produce a more efficient domestic life. This suggests that the modernizing impulse, with its emphasis upon rational efficiency and ‘the new’ was a central



principle of both the reform of everyday life and the burgeoning consumer culture found in the department stores. Furthermore, consumer culture invariably sought to instil a ‘calculating hedonism’ (Featherstone 2007) in consumers, who could plan and check, as well as succumb to the power of images and impulses. As they became drawn into the world of consumption, middle class women 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 private domain of the home, as they grappled with ‘modern’ lifestyles and learned how to handle luxury experiences. As a major institution of consumer culture, Mitsukoshi necessarily provided people with numerous lures of consumption, it always tried to keep in step with government policies and help with their implementation.

### **New Lifestyles and Mitsukoshi Model Rooms**

The idea of modernizing the home in the reform of everyday life policy was one of the most significant issues in Japanese modernizing processes. The government sponsored Alliance for Lifestyle Improvement (*Seikatsu Kaizen Dômeikai*) established in 1920, was designed to stimulate improvement in every aspects of everyday life – housing, food, clothing, etiquette and sociability. The Alliance organized a number of committees to focus on particular areas, which included the *Jûtaku Kaizen Chôsa* (Research Committee for Improved Housing). The Committee produced a research report in 1924 in the Reform of Domestic Furniture (*Jûtaku Kagu no Kaizen*) which set out policies for the westernization of everyday life and the creation of a family-oriented lifestyle centred around the functional design of housing, interiors and furniture (e.g. ‘chair-style’) (Kashiwagi, 2000:67). The various images of new lifestyles and the designs for modern houses materialized in 1922 at the Peace Memorial Exposition (*Heiwa kinen hakurankai*) in a group of fourteen model houses, the so-called ‘culture houses’ (*bunka jyutaku*) in a ‘Cultural Village’. The culture houses offered: ‘the use of chairs over the traditional practice of floor-sitting (on *tatami* mats) and the removal of the long surrounding corridors (*engawa*) and sliding doors characteristic of detached houses in Japan at the time, in favour of fixed walls and windows’ (Sand 2000:100). The cultural house also promoted an idea of a family-oriented room layout which was designed to give more importance to family activities as opposed to rooms for entertaining guests (Sand, 1998: 202). This shift suggests that consumers started to enjoy comfortable and decorated spaces for the sake of their own pleasure. Domestic space became a site for creating a luxurious and stylish setting, to generate the emotional atmosphere for the satisfactory display and use of the new consumer goods.

In line with one of the key features of Japanese department stores, Mitsukoshi always tried to be sympathetic to governmental policies and would offer to help with the implementation of campaigns and hence attempted to contribute to the reform of everyday life movement. This meant that Mitsukoshi was one of the foremost innovators in promoting the new ideas of lifestyle by not only their commercial strategy and by becoming a luxury brand, but also their cultural activities contributed to establishing Japan's new national interior style.<sup>1</sup> Mitsukoshi started selling furniture in 1909 and they set up their original furniture assembly division in the following year. Mitsukoshi often used their 'model house' to carefully display their own brand of furniture alongside other commodities which had to be coordinated to harmonize in the aestheticized everyday context and also create a new sense of modern house lifestyle.

Sand suggests that,

Model rooms and special exhibits at Mitsukoshi department store provided a general education in interior style classified by nation and period. The simulation of a global catalogue of historic styles, each with its own forms, motifs, and internal rules, added nuance to the existing dyadic view of thing Japanese and Western and provided a setting for imagining Japan's national style ... Mitsukoshi's early model rooms were literally museum display, whose objects were not intended for sale. (2000:118).

This did not mean that the new imagined national style of interior design was at all affordable to Japanese people, rather it should only be understood as a set of ideal furnishings for the culture home (*bunka jutaku*) which inspired people to consider how to be modern. Yet, what Mitsukoshi's innovative display technique provided was a setting for all the various new commodities in the faux-actual of everyday lifestyle. Following this logic, Mitsukoshi started to use model rooms and displayed a western style room with Japanese women 'mannequins', which had traditional clothes (*kimono*) and hairstyle (*nihon-gami*) at the Exhibition of Memorial Peace of the Family (*Heiwa kinen katei hakurankai*), 1919 (Jinno 1994:93-94). In this way, Mitsukoshi endeavoured to intertwine modern luxurious images into everyday narratives.

[Figure 3 Japanese women 'mannequins' ('Mitsukoshi' 1919, Vol.9 Issue 8) by courtesy of Isetan Mitsukoshi Holdings the General Affairs Department, Corporate Communication Section]

In other words, Mitsukoshi offered a comprehensive setting for the new lifestyle which systematically

incorporated a set of elements into an everyday context. Also of great interest is the idea of ‘a complete set’, (there were sets of not only tableware, but ready-made furniture), which was one of Mitsukoshi’s new merchandising ploys. Jinno (1999: 171-172) remarks that Mitsukoshi started to offer a ‘Mitsukoshi western furniture set’ (1926) for customers who were not yet familiar with the western style of furniture and its aesthetic. The set included not just the table and chairs, but a whole ready-made set of items for the western-style room, including carpet, curtains, lighting apparatus, table centrepieces etc. (Jinno 1999: 172). Yet, what we should recognise here is that the Mitsukoshi model rooms not only familiarised customers with western-style interior design, but also, more importantly, changed the conventional meanings of middle class living space. The living space was no longer just a practical space, but can be viewed as a space that offered to create a new kind of sensory pleasure. In this respect, we can understand Mitsukoshi helped to construct an aestheticized space offering sensory pleasures which could be transported from the public sphere (department store) to the private domain (living room). This can be seen as a proto-luxury space, which enables modern consumers to simulate new environments and sensations.

[Image 4 Mitsukoshi western furniture set (*Mitsukoshi* 1926 Vol. 19 Issue 12) by courtesy of Isetan Mitsukoshi Holdings the General Affairs Department, Corporate Communication Section.]

Hence we can see that Mitsukoshi stood as 'an icon of the modern world', a point of security in a confusing world of appearances, which were constantly changing. In effect its brand image stood for a trusted standard, enlisting the power of an intermediary to stand between the familiar and the new, to filter out the trivia, dangers and embarrassments, yet retain the excitement, stimulation and promise of the modern. This offered much more, then, than an opulent and enjoyable dream world to retreat into, it also offered an education in practical aesthetics and taste management.

### **The Luxury Sensibility**

Mitsukoshi provided a new sensitivity to practical aesthetics through new objects, new ideas, and forgotten traditional designs. All new things Mitsukoshi provided were ‘exotica’. At the same time, Mitsukoshi promised to supply ‘modernity’, which was seen as a more sophisticated, futuristic, and idealistic world. Also more importantly, Mitsukoshi sought to deliver the sensory pleasures of luxury, in terms of the aesthetic object and its value – luxury experiences. The sensory pleasure of luxury and aesthetic experience has been discussed in the context of spatial aesthetics (Maclaran and Brown 2005; Penaloza 1999) and ‘brandscape’ (Sherry 1998). Here the emphasis is on the total coordination of a

range of consumer spaces, such as distinctively designed architecture, interior detail, product design, carefully organised display, and multi-sensorial stimulation. The range of sensory experiences could activate the consumer's imagination and stimulate the desire to pursue fantasies and emotional experiences.

This aspect of spatial design has been addressed by Juhani Pallasmaa, when he emphasises that architecture evokes a multitude of sensory experiences. (Pallasmaa 2012: 75).<sup>1 2</sup> 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 sensory pleasure of luxury – the luxury sensibility.

'Luxuries are things which have power over us. They engage the senses and have the capacity to affect us by offering a range of pleasures.' (Featherstone 2014: 48)

Featherstone accentuates the way that luxury goods do not just offer symbolic value as signs of social exclusiveness and social status, but also notes 'the image they have of providing sensory fulfilment: the prospect of experiencing new sensations and pleasures' (Featherstone 2014:48). He also points out that 'for many people the pleasures luxuries afford cannot be experienced directly, but only simulated via the work of the imagination' (Featherstone 2014:48). Luxuries are not only to be found in luxury goods or luxury spaces per se, but in the dynamic and development of the luxury sensibility. The luxury sensibility can be evoked by the ability of the creative imagination to be stimulated by multi-sensory experiences in aesthetic settings.

### **Mitsukoshi *Ryukokai* and Cultural Intermediation**

As the range of luxury experiences and sensibilities expand, the obsession with luxury can be found throughout the fabric of consumer society through the reproduction of images of luxuries that proliferates via advertisements in a wide range of media forms along with invented narratives and stories of luxuries. This suggests the need for more careful guidance about how to handle experiences via more complex luxury sensitivities. It became necessary to develop and learn luxury sensitivities; how to appreciate, how to collect, how to re-organize, how to reflect on the images and rhetoric of luxuries. This dynamic entails the way consumers can enjoy gathering past meanings and experiences, negotiating anticipated meanings and assembling possible meanings and knowledge of luxury

experiences. This points more towards the valuing of immaterial luxuries: ‘to experience the pleasures of the manipulation of concepts and categories. This is the game cultural specialists play. A game played by those who create, handle, interpret and disseminate culture: artists, intellectuals, bohemians, mystics, shamans, priests’ (Featherstone 2014:49). This is also the game, which never ends, since the luxury sensitivities are always influenced by ever-shifting preferences. It occurs not only by changing the image and value of luxury, but also through the various performances of cultural specialists and intermediaries who played a key role as trend setters/tastemakers in consumer society.

Mitsukoshi gained significance as a purveyor of modern culture that acted as a mediating institution able to interface between the new western consumer culture and more traditional Japanese habits, customs and beliefs. The term, cultural intermediaries was developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1984) and refers to people in the media, design, fashion, advertising, and ‘para’ intellectual information occupations, whose jobs entail performing services and the production, marketing and dissemination of symbolic goods. They not only seek ‘to produce new symbolic goods, and in addition provide the necessary interpretations on their use’ (Featherstone, 1991:19). Although Bourdieu’s cultural intermediaries concept was useful to understand people who are ‘intellectual located at the unstable edge of the intelligentsia, selling his (or her) own lifestyle to the rising petit bourgeoisie’ (Sand 2000: 101), we need to consider a wider categories of those who actually worked as cultural intermediaries as cultural interpreters in the modernization of the home in the process of the reform of everyday life.<sup>1 3</sup>

Sand focused on the cultural intermediaries who were involved in the reform of the home in this period.

The diverse group of experts (so-called cultural intermediaries) who contributed to the reform of everyday life and public discourse on the shape of the middle-class house included bureaucrats in several branches of government, politicians, members of the medical profession, educators, novelists, artists, and journalists, in addition to the professions whose primary occupation was designing or marketing things for the home. (Sand 2003: 363)

One response of Mitsukoshi to the need for cultural intermediation and to the reform of everyday life was to establish in 1905 the *Ryukokai* (trend analysis research group), which was in effect a think tank. The *Ryukokai* was comprised of journalists, novelists, artists, intellectuals, *geisha*, and politicians who were highly valued for their cultural intermediary capacities. Its remit was to discuss how to develop appropriate ‘modern fashions’ and ‘modern lifestyles’ and integrate these into a viable business cultural

policy for the whole store. Although they did not always directly influence Mitsukoshi's own brand model house and furniture, they were fully aware of the powerful influence of westernization along with the pleasurable feelings to be modern. They sought to develop a new Japanese taste which was based on a careful combination of Japanese form of design with western style. Hence a new syncretic or hybrid taste, 'a new Japanese taste' became the established practice and it is interesting to note that it became known as 'Mitsukoshi taste' (*Mitsukoshi gonomi*). Given this significant role as a tastemaker, it can be said that Mitsukoshi taste created the 'Mitsukoshi brand' image. This was the brand image which often overlapped with images of luxuriousness and exclusivity. Hence, Mitsukoshi become an iconic luxury brand. Mitsukoshi's luxurious image started to create new consumer desires for sensory satisfaction, which were often fulfilled by performing 'being modern' through the luxury experiences it provided.

### **Conclusion - The Democratization of Luxury**

Mitsukoshi taste in common with that of other department stores can be seen to have encouraged a 'trickle-down effect' by which higher cultural tastes gave way to a greater 'democratization of luxury' (R H Williams, 1982:14; Featherstone 2010) in which cheaper versions of luxuries began to proliferate. At the same time, the achievement of a scaled-down version of luxury was within the horizon of possibilities of some groups more than others, and as we have emphasised above the new middle class were particularly important aspirants and carriers here. For those who were relatively well-educated white-collar professionals, 'the most conspicuous markers of bourgeois status related to the home' (Sand 2003:12). Although there was often a major disparity between the desire for the latest house and interior, and the financial capacity of the majority of new middle class, who endeavoured to fill their cultural home with carefully arranged western style of objects in order to display their modern taste and identifications. Yet, the luxury experiences, which Mitsukoshi provided, required not only the mere immediacy of objects and the desire for possession of luxury objects, but also entails more diffuse multi-sensorial perceptions – luxury sensibilities. The coordination of theatrically designed consumer space with its distinctive architecture design, elaborated interior design and carefully organized display, helped to stimulate aesthetic awareness and the desire for fantasies, excitement and emotional satisfaction. Here, cultural specialists and intermediaries who worked for Mitsukoshi and its *Ryukokai* sought to provide a new inventory and classification, an encyclopaedia of new objects for modern lifestyle that helped people integrate luxuries into everyday life. At the same time they sought to highlight and promote a particular set of tastes as 'Mitsukoshi taste', which stressed the aestheticization, and stylization of life. In this sense, Mitsukoshi not only developed as a significant

cultural crossroad between the west and Japan, modernity and tradition, the new and the old, but also acted as a key cultural intersection between cultural intermediaries and consumer practices.

Ever since the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the reform of everyday life had become a priority of Japanese reformers. Yet, there was always some uncertainty about how to instil practical knowledge, good taste and a new aesthetic. As a conduit for the myriad of new ideas about interior design and dwelling form influenced by the western ways of life and the movements for the reform of everyday life, Mitsukoshi became an important cultural reference point and site of cultural intermediation for the construction of new canons of architectural and interior design which helped foster the process of the aestheticization of everyday life. In this process, Mitsukoshi also promoted the expansion of luxury experiences and their integration with various non-ordinary, ordinary objects and scaled-down luxury objects, along with the sense of luxury imagery into the fabric of everyday life – offering a greater democratization of luxury.

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<sup>1</sup> Luxury in Japanese has a long history: 'zeitaku' consists of two Chinese characters: 'zei' (贅) and 'taku' (沢) Zei often refers to something that is an extravagance or indulgence rather than a necessity. Taku describes abundant of water and glossiness, which can also suggest an image of the fertile land, therefore it also carries a meaning of plentitude and wealth. The etymology of *Zeitaku*, then, can originally be related to quantity, which is understood as something extra or additional. However, its meaning was gradually expanded to emphasize more quality, with resonances of elegance and sumptuous, which fitted in with the notions of luxury and aestheticization that developed alongside the modern consumer society (see Featherstone 2007).

<sup>2</sup> The term 'lifestyle' was often taken to mean a relatively fixed set of characteristic which indicates a specific social class or group. With the development of consumer culture, the meaning has tended to shift to the sense that lifestyle is more of a project and it can be seen as 'a stylistic self-consciousness' (see Featherstone 20007 and 2013a; Chaney, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Mitsukoshi was originally a drapery store, 'Echigoya' founded by Mitsui Takatoshi in 1673. *Echigoya* become unlimited company *Mitsui Gofukuten* in 1893. *Mitsui Gofukuten* announced 'Department Store Declaration' which was featured in newspapers, the *Tokyo Nichinichi Shinbun* in 1904 and *Jiji Shinpo* in 1905. After the headquarter, the new building *Nihonbashi* Mitsukoshi opened in 1914, following by the *Shinjyuku* branch in 1929 and the Ginza branch. After World War II, Mitsukoshi opened a number of branches outside Japan, such as in Paris (1971), Rome (1975), London (1979), Orlando (1982) and some parts of Asia (China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore etc.). Yet this paper exclusively focuses on the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when Mitsukoshi became the most prominent Japanese department store.

<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that the establishment of Mitsukoshi brand was not only in terms of their innovative merchandising in creating their own original designs for home interiors, furnishings, but also entailed a wider array of socio-cultural activities; organizing cultural exhibitions, fashion shows and producing original textile designs for clothes.

<sup>5</sup> In the Tokugawa or Edo Era, prior to the Meiji Restoration, Japan was closed off from the West. With the Dutch being the only Europeans allowed to trade with Japan and provided with Western and Chinese ideas, technologies and commerce through *Nagasaki* in *Kyushu*.

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<sup>6</sup> Mitsukoshi department store had changed their company name several times in their history, but I used Mitsukoshi from here on in this article.

<sup>7</sup> DeJean illustrates the shopping revolution of late-seventeenth century, exploring two significant elements which led to the creation of a new type of emporium, the prototype of the up-scale boutiques: the invention of modern advertising techniques and elaborated shops' décor and display techniques. Her research emphasises that the image of the modern shop was created by carefully designed display and luxurious decoration. The new marketing and merchandising in the late seventeenth century clearly is retained in that of the nineteenth century emporium 'where consumers expected to find everything they wanted, as well as the unexpected' (DeJean 2014:40) under the one roof: the department store.

<sup>8</sup> The term 'dream world,' was used by Walter Benjamin (1999) in his discussion of department stores as one of the key aestheticized spaces which came into being with the development of the modern city, such as Paris in the mid-19th century (Buck-Morss, 1989: Ch 8). Department stores in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe have been also variously described using terminology such as 'cathedrals of consumption' (Crossick & Jaumain, 1999); 'dream worlds' (Bowlby, 1985; Williams, R.H., 1982) and 'panoramic' space (Schivelbusch 1977). This terminology, which emerged contemporaneously with the birth of the stores, draws attention to the struggle to describe a new cultural form, which stretched the imagination in a number of ways.

<sup>9</sup> According to Kon Wajiro (1986:206) who carried out research on the gender composition of the customer base of Mitsukoshi in 1920, unlike some of the descriptions of department stores in Europe and the United States which emphasised the predominance of women, the Japanese stores, at least in the first two decades of the 20th century had a more even gender balance. Although the number of men and women customers were almost the same, women stayed in the store twice as long as men, which led to an overestimation of the number of women (Kon, 1986; original research 25<sup>th</sup> November 1928).

<sup>10</sup> The number of salarymen was 58,000 in 1919 and increased to 96,000 by 1925 (Minami, 1965:193). These new middle class company men were seen as providing a new ideal of the successful life. The terms 'middle class-society' (*churyu shakai*) and 'salaryman' (*sarariiman* or *gekkyu tori*) first appeared in the 1900s.

<sup>11</sup> Mitsukoshi's first chief interior decorator, Hayashi wrote about the interior of a house which he decorated in the Mitsukoshi's house magazine, *Mitsukoshi* in 1912. He applied an eclectic Japanese-western style and provided illustrations of the house which had: a ladies' lounge, guest room, smoking room, dining room and study. Mitsukoshi participated in the Taisho Exhibition (20<sup>th</sup> March to 31<sup>st</sup> July) organized by Tokyo city government in 1914 and displayed a western style model room with western style furniture (The Record of Mitsukoshi, 1990:63); the Mitsukoshi original 'chair' started to sell in 1918 (The Record of Mitsukoshi, 1990: 73).

<sup>12</sup> 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. (see Pallasmaa, 2013:71).

<sup>13</sup> The term, cultural intermediaries are often taken to categorize people who can explain and translate new cultural codes and values to consumers. Yet there has been considerable discussion about the definition of cultural intermediaries (Moor 2012; Smith Maguire and Matthews 2012). This suggests there could well be a number of different levels and categories of cultural intermediation. There has also been a recent debate about the boundaries between cultural intermediaries and contemporary knowledgeable and creative consumers, which some see as beginning to blur.