The development of Japanese ready-made clothes market, 1950s-1970s

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The Japanese economy grew significantly between 1954 and 1973 and the Gross National Product had a year-on-year increase of over 10%. During this time, Japanese consumers increased their income and changed their lifestyle to be more Western. A typical Western-style product was ready-made clothing, and both clothing company and department stores developed with the growth of this product. Before the Second World War most middle-class people wore kimonos in Japan, while some upper-class people wore tailored Western-style clothes; ready-made clothes did not exist in Japan at that time. However, with the introduction of Western weaving machines and the Western production system, clothing companies were able to produce ready-made clothes in Japan, and therefore expanded and increased their sales in the late 1950s.

The Japanese ready-made clothes market expanded in parallel with the development of department stores. As department stores were crucial sales outlets for clothing companies, they removed the risk for the stores by introducing consignment sales, providing them with stock on a sale or return basis; the clothing companies also provided the shop-floor staff for every store. With these new arrangements in place, department stores easily and rapidly expanded their merchandise and their business, without any risk from purchasing large quantities of stock that may or may not sell, or from growing their own workforces. Clothing companies were also able to increase their sales rapidly and could communicate with customers directly at the point of sale through their staff members, thereby gaining valuable feedback. This study examines in detail this successful relationship between department stores and clothing companies along with the increasing ready-made clothes market between the 1950s and the 1970s in Japan.