A Study of Fountain Pens from the End of the Meiji Era to the Beginning of the Taishō Era in Japan: A Paradigm Shift in Their Marketing and Its Meaning

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This paper examines fountain pens to reveal the modernization of writing instruments and the changes of consumption culture. First, this paper analyzes the position of fountain pens in marketing strategies in Japan in the Meiji era (1868-1912) by examining the advertisements of Maruzen, Yo to Mannenhitsu (A Fountain Pen and I) by Sōseki Natsume (published in 1912), and other essays and writings regarding fountain pens. Moreover, this paper traces the marketing of fountain pens at Mitsukoshi Department Store and analyzes their characteristics by examining its booklets named Mitsukoshi and The Mitsukoshi Times. The results of the analysis indicate that fountain pens became very popular as a symbol of modernization in the writing universe from the end of the Meiji era to the beginning of the Taishō era (at the beginning of the 20th century). In particular, Mitsukoshi Department Store actively promoted the sale of imported fountain pens. In addition to sales promotions, it shared related knowledge, including how to use a fountain pen, to create cross-selling opportunities. In order to fully reveal the history of fountain pens and the modernization of writing instruments in Japan, further studies from different angles will be needed, including the research of the process of promoting the domestic production of fountain pens.

Key words: Maruzen, Roan Uchida, Sōseki Natsume, Mitsukoshi, Waterman