

# Japan's Fashion Industry: Its Potentials & Policy Initiatives

By Fashion Policy Office, Textile & Clothing Division, Manufacturing Industries Bureau,  
Ministry of Economy, Trade & Industry

## Japan's Fashion Industry

Japan has so far turned out numerous world-renowned designers such as Mori Hanae, Miyake Issey, Kawakubo Rei and Yamamoto Yohji. In Tokyo alone, there are close to 40 dressmaking schools sending out as many as 5,000 graduates or so every year. There is high hope that the next generation of world-famous designers will emerge from among them.

Tokyo boasts a broad scope of economic and cultural activities, and thus can help sharpen the sensibilities of fashion designers. Cultural industries of diverse types have converged on Tokyo, a mammoth economic hub with a huge population of 13 million and an economic scale of more than ¥90 trillion (\$750 billion) in terms of gross regional product.

Many top designers from abroad visit Tokyo's *Urahara* streets lined with stores showcasing street fashion brands popular among young people, while creations of designers emerging from *Urahara* adorn the windows of renowned select shops in Paris and Milan. Certainly, Tokyo may well be called a town with full growth potential as a place sending out fashion,

along with the pop culture of *Shibuya* and *Akihabara* thronged with young people. It may thus be said that Tokyo is not only a consuming center of fashion, but also a major source of fashion.

On the other hand, in the sphere of "manufacturing" goods that underpin such fashion, Japan also has great strength in the aspects of both tradition (sensibilities) and quality (techniques). There are as many as 130 textile-producing centers scattered all over the country, even though their number has declined compared with peak years. Various textile techniques are inherited in these areas, ranging from traditional weaving and dyeing skills, such as Kyoto's *Nishijin-ori* weave, to the Hokuriku region's super-texture fabrics featuring a fine and diaphanous texture made of synthetic fibers. Japan's textile industry, featuring elaborate and high-grade production with sophisticated techniques and sensibilities, has also won a high reputation abroad, prompting numerous overseas stores of famous brands to source fabrics from many Japanese textile manufacturers.

The characteristics of Japanese fashion stem from the fusion of textile manufac-

turers' "techniques" with "sensibilities" fostered in the vast consuming center Tokyo. We hope that consumers with discerning tastes around the globe will enjoy Japanese fashion and that it in turn will enrich their lifestyles.

## "Japan Fashion Week in Tokyo": What It Aims for

Against that background, the "Japan Fashion Week (JFW) in Tokyo" was inaugurated in the autumn of 2005 through the combined effort of the government and the private sector with a view to revitalizing the Japanese fashion industry and having Tokyo serve as a fashion center in Asia.

During the JFW, not only collection shows for announcing new creations of various brands, but also fashion-related events, such as a textile exhibition and consumer-oriented programs, are staged intensively within a short span of time. It represents a drastic reform of the Tokyo Collection Week which was started in 1985 by the Council of Fashion Designers (CFD), a voluntary organization of designers. At that time, leading designers got together to stage a business-conscious fashion show in a tent put up in Tokyo's *Harajuku* area, an iconic location in the fashion and entertainment world. However, the timing of the Tokyo Collection Week before the start of the JFW was fairly late compared to the Milan and Paris Collections. Moreover, many designers started to hold their shows ignoring the official schedule and eventually the whole collections took as long as one month and a half. Consequently, many complained that the Tokyo Collection Week's schedules made it difficult to attract adequate attention among Japanese mass media and buyers, let alone their foreign counterparts. Thus, an increasing number of Japan's noted designers announced their new collections in Paris and other foreign fashion centers.



The Japan Fashion Week in Tokyo is a big crowd drawer. Here is the main venue of both the 1st and 2nd Japan Fashion Week, outside the Meiji Memorial Picture Gallery.

Under these circumstances, moves for reform arose among the Japanese quarters concerned with designers on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the CFD's founding. In response, fashion-related industries such as apparel makers and material manufacturers got together and inaugurated the Fashion Strategy Forum in June 2005 with the aim of mapping out comprehensive strategies for the development of Japanese fashion. At the same time, it was decided to stage the JFW, including the renewed Tokyo Collection Week, under this forum.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, for its part, has decided to extend positive support to Japanese fashion, which combines Japan's manufacturing techniques and excellent sensibilities, from the standpoint that intellectual industries with high values added will have strategic importance for Japan in the 21st century.

## ■ JFW – Developments So Far

The JFW, inaugurated in the autumn of 2005, will be held for the fourth time in March this year. Its activities to date as well as the program of the fourth JFW are outlined below:

### 1st JFW (Oct. 31-Nov. 9, 2005)

– Let's have a try!

<Main Venue> Tents pitched in front of the Meiji Memorial Picture Gallery in the Outer Garden of Meiji Shrine

#### <Outline>

A main venue was set up to stage the JFW intensively within a short span of time for the convenience of fashion journalists and buyers. Despite a limited preparatory period, it was held without a hitch, enabling the JFW to take a concrete form for the first time. Problems involved were made clear by having a try in the first place. Moreover, the importance of the JFW was better put across to a broad range of the quarters concerned.

### 2nd JFW (March 17- 24, 2006)

– Wider recognition, improved management

<Main Venue> Tents pitched in front of the Meiji Memorial Picture Gallery in the Outer Garden of Meiji Shrine



Designers taking part in the 2nd Japan Fashion Week in Tokyo pay a courtesy call on then Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro (3rd from right).

#### <Outline>

The JFW's duration was shortened further, while a proper system was readied to accept participants from abroad. Noted fashion journalists also came to Japan to take part in a symposium. Also, representatives of the participating designers paid a courtesy call on then Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro. The news that the prime minister wished the event well contributed to making the JFW better known among the public.

### 3rd JFW (Sept. 4-8, 2006)

– Enhancing international propagation

<Main Venue> Tokyo International Forum

#### <Outline>

The JFW used an existing facility – the Tokyo International Forum – as a main venue for the first time instead of tents. As the Tokyo Collection Week was held ahead of other major collections abroad, there was concern that it would not attract enough designers. As it turned out, however, an unexpectedly large number of participants came, leading to a decision to stage the JFW toward the beginning of September from now on.

In the process of these three JFWs, the duration and venues of the Tokyo Collection Week have been reduced to ensure greater concentration, bringing about a marked increase in fashion journalists and buyers visiting the event from Japan. Foreign visitors have also increased sharply as an overseas publicity drive has been intensified from the third JFW with the cooperation of the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO). As a

result, the JFW has become better known in other countries as well as in Japan.

Consequently, Japanese designers who have so far participated in overseas collections as well as Japanese fashion journalists who have covered them welcomed the emergence of home ground comparable to major collections abroad.

Furthermore, various other events such as the "New Designer Fashion Grand Prix" and the "Best Jeanist Award," previously staged on other occasions, have been incorporated into the JFW, while the timing of joint exhibitions such as "Ambiance," "rooms" and "Frontier" has been changed to coincide with the JFW. Thus, voluntary moves are arising to make effective and efficient appeals regarding Japanese fashion with the JFW as a core.

## ■ Future Challenges

Henceforth, we would like to further reinforce the JFW's function of promoting fashion from Tokyo to the world. At present, the JFW's participants are mostly Japanese designers, but in the future, we hope the world's up-and-coming designers interested in the Asian markets will participate in the JFW to test their talent in Tokyo.

At the same time, we aim to improve and expand our overseas public information service so that fashion-related people all over the world will feel the JFW is more familiar to them. We also plan to stage an exhibition of excellent clothing fabrics so that the excellent quality of Japanese fabrics is recognized even more extensively.

In the future, moreover, we would like to go beyond the realm of fashion and



From the album of the 3rd JFW "Tokyo Collection Week": (left) DRESS CAMP by Iwatani Toshikazu, a brand popular among the young trend-setters; (middle) Mercibeaucoup by Utsugi Eri, a creation that won international acclaim; (right) SOMARTA by Hirokawa Tamae, who made her debut at the 3rd JFW.

cooperate with other fields to generate a groundswell for the propagation of all manner of Japanese lifestyles throughout the world.

### Next JFW Due March 2007

"The 4th Japan Fashion Week in Tokyo" is scheduled for March 12-20 this year.

#### 4th JFW (March 12-20, 2007)

<Main Venue> Special tents to be put up in Nihonbashi, a Tokyo downtown neighboring the Ginza shopping area

#### <Outline>

##### (1) Tokyo Collection Week

The Tokyo Collection Week, the JFW's main event, will be held for five days from March 12 (Monday) through March 16 (Friday). A total of 39 brands are slated to participate and present new autumn and winter dresses during the five-day event.

##### (2) Joint JFW Designers Business Exhibition

After the Tokyo Collection Week, a joint business exhibition will be held for two days, on March 19 (Monday) and 20 (Tuesday). A total of 11 designer brands are scheduled to take part.

##### (3) Creation Business Forum

The Creation Business Forum was commenced in June 2005. This is a semiannual exhibition for business deals aimed to encourage material producers to manufacture in cooperation with designers and make direct appeals to apparel makers and retailers who seek excellent materials, thereby improving material makers' planning ability and helping them identify potential sales channels. The idea is to build up new business through the closely knit trinity of "craftsmanship" (material makers), "creation" (designers) and "commerce" (retailers).

This year's 5th Creation Business Forum is slated to take place for three days – March 13 (Tuesday) through 15 (Thursday) – at the Tokyo International Forum.

##### (4) Special Events

Various events also open to participation by consumers are planned mainly for the weekend of March 17 (Saturday) and 18 (Sunday) in order to induce the general public to take a greater interest in fashion. Among them is an exhibition of works by students of dressmaking schools who will shoulder the next age of fashion creation, as well as a show of brands enjoying great popularity among consumers.

##### (5) Cooperation with Local Shopping Streets

The JFW will be further livened up in close cooperation with the shopping streets of Nihonbashi where the main venue will be located. A large-sized screen will be set up beside the tents of the main venue to display the proceedings of the fashion shows, enabling casual visitors to the area to enjoy the atmosphere of the shows.

### Conclusion

The mention of fashion usually reminds people of renowned fashion centers such as Paris, Milan and New York. Nonetheless, fashion enterprises in China and other Asian countries are also improving their techniques and designs rapidly in an attempt to extricate themselves from the position of sewing centers for foreign apparel makers. In response to their positive effort, the governments of Asian countries have also embarked on a national drive for the promotion of their fashion industries.

In China, for instance, the municipal governments of such cities as Shanghai, Beijing and Dalian are lending vigorous support to the local fashion industries, bringing about an intercity competition in this sector. Meanwhile, fashion weeks are staged in Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur) and India (New Delhi and Mumbai).

On the other hand, Japan's fashion industry, thus far favored by an animated domestic market, has not actively promoted its high-grade fashion products to the world. Nevertheless, we are convinced that Japan possesses immense potential as a fashion center as evidenced by the tradition of excellent sensibilities and techniques that support fashion.

The Japanese government is set to continue extending positive support to the JFW in the hope of making Tokyo even more attractive as a center of fashion business not only for Japan, but for other Asian countries as well so that people around the globe will better understand and enjoy the excellence of Asian fashion. **JS**

All photos by courtesy of Fashion Strategy Forum