MAKING EAST ASIAN CONSUMERS: MARKET FORMATION AND EVOLUTION OF DEMAND IN JAPAN, SOUTH KOREA, TAIWAN, AND CHINA


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This dissertation examines the rise of organized retailing in East Asia. It pays attention to the roles of market makers as intermediary market players who act between the producers and consumers, especially in the contexts of national retail organization and expansion activities of multinational retailers. Theoretically, the dissertation combines the national business systems literature with a market power perspective to examine the contexts in which different national economies organize their retail sectors and incorporate retail innovations. Empirically, it asks what roles the domestic and global retailers played in building contemporary consumer markets in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, and mainland China. It also asks, to what extent the development of consumer markets in Asia and the activities of multinational retailers have brought convergence or continued divergence between the different national markets, retail structures, and cultures of consumption. To answer these questions, the dissertation first pays attention to the links between national and global firms and retail markets, and second, to the links between national firms and products, and lastly, how the structure of global and regional production and national cultures of consumption are mediated by a set of intermediaries. Comparative case studies of standardized retailing, entertainment and fashion industries, and individual consumption are included to illustrate the roles of market makers.

The dissertation finds support for the idea of increasing convergence in retail technologies and formats during the course of the Asian retail revolution, but also identifies how locally specific characteristics have mattered in three crucial ways; first, historical trajectories of business development and nationally institutionalized ways of conducting business led to different capacities of the newly appeared domestic retailers, and resulted in divergent patterns of competition against, or coordination with, the expanding multinationals; second, local organizational logics crucially shaped business strategies adopted for product development; finally, locally formed meaning systems and methods of making status claims play crucial roles informing individual consumption as well as the activities of intermediaries that actively monitor and strategize based upon local-demand.

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