

The Fashion Industry Prehistory of Mode City Paris

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Charles-Frederick Worth, the “father of haute couture,” is considered to have built a new apparel business style where designs were created in advance and customers were invited to designate their choices among them, thus streamlining women’s high-class custom-made clothing production and retailing. However, we should not rush to attribute all these achievements to Worth, because the background conditions and foundations that enabled the birth of Worth’s new business style, haute couture, had already been established.

During the era of absolute monarchy, the Palace of Versailles was where new fashion modes originated, while the apparel consumption behaviors of women in Paris became influential. Their apparel consumption came to be regarded as new mode. In reviewing the apparel production industry in Paris, the importance of the guild of *arts et métiers* cannot be ignored. In 1776, the elimination and consolidation of guilds were conducted, and the guild of the tailors of men’s apparel, or *tailleurs*, and that of second-hand clothes stores, or *fripiers*, were consolidated. The fripiers were licensed to repair and process second-hand clothes with new textiles, so this consolidation enabled tailleurs to carry textiles in addition to completed clothes in the stores. Later in 1791, the guild system was eliminated, and some tailleurs started to sell speedily producible semi-custom-made clothes and completed clothes. This marked the start of the ready-made clothing business in Paris.

On the other hand, *marchands de modes*, or “merchants of mode” who sold mode in the form of goods, appeared. They retailed textiles and parts of clothes while custom-making dresses. They proposed new designs to customers when receiving orders, thus creating newer mode.

Thus tailleurs and *marchands de modes* built the base of production of ready-made clothing in Paris.

In the period from the early 19th century to the 1820s, “merchants of new things,” or *marchands de nouveautés*, appeared. The conventional *marchands de modes* sold expensive items and did not have contact with ordinary people, but the *marchands de nouveautés* attracted customers of various classes, by displaying products in their stores, introducing the system of fixed prices, attaching price tags, handling same-day cash payments, procuring goods directly at the place of production, and placing advertisements to attract customers. The *marchands de nouveautés*, who replaced the *marchands de modes*, founded what became department stores. In 1824, La Belle

Jardinière store opened and started to sell inexpensive ready-made clothes. It became popular as a place where new town clothes could be bought at prices equivalent to those of second-hand clothes. The expanding ready-made clothing business thus first took over the market share of second-hand clothing of commoners, then the share of custom-made clothing for middle-class people.

Under these conditions, Worth, who opened a store, described his business as a house of ready-made novelties, or *nouveautés confectionnées*. The expression, *nouveautés confectionnées*, symbolized the conditions of apparel production and distribution business in the 1820s and 1840s in Paris, where ready-made clothing manufacturers and marchands de nouveautés succeeded in business together.