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Séminaire collectif du Centre de  
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Histoire du Japon moderne et contemporain : permanences et ruptures

« Minakai: An Ōmi Merchant's Emporium at the Nexus of Imperial Asia and  
Immigrant America »

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Abstract

This talk examines the role of the so-called Ōmi shōnin (merchants) as forerunners of modern retail in the Japanese colonial empire. Historically known for their success as entrepreneurial peddlers, Ōmi merchants and their descendants began expanding their activities abroad in the Meiji period, when Japan fully entered the world of global commerce. Using the case of Minakai Store, I will trace how one Ōmi merchant family transformed its century-old clothier into a modern department store, with its business base in colonial Korea and Manchuria. Minakai's metamorphosis was inspired by the company president's tour of North America, which was punctuated by visits to local Japanese immigrant communities. By probing the impact of such transpacific encounters on an Ōmi merchant family, I will unpack the dynamic interplay between local and global in the emergent world of mass retail in the early twentieth century.