

Ōmi Merchants in the Colonial World of Retail

In the long history of textile production in Kansai, as we have seen, merchants of Ōmi circulated locally woven fabrics to the farthest reaches of the archipelago, a role they inhabited across the Tokugawa-Meiji divide to shore up Japan's cotton industrialization and empire. If the dominance of Ōmi-born capitalists in wholesaling built on the foundation laid by their Tokugawa predecessors, so did their edge in retail. Many contemporary department stores in Japan evolved out of dry-goods stores opened by provincial merchants and peddlers in the early modern era. Their American counterparts charted a similar trajectory from "peddlers to grand emporiums," according to one classic study. Rudimentary forms of mass retailing were first "erected on the hunched backs of the all-purpose itinerant peddlers," before being perfected by world expos and emporia in the mid-nineteenth century. Having hawked their wares in the countryside, traveling salesmen harnessed their knowledge of merchandising to launch many of America's iconic stores, from Gimbels to Macy's.¹

Peddlers from Ōmi were part of this global history of mass retail. Three of Japan's major department store chains were founded by or descended from families of Ōmi lineage: Takashimaya, Shirokiya (now Tōkyū), and Seibu. Although launched by a rival Ise merchant, a fourth chain, Mitsukoshi, claimed distant Ōmi ancestry in the paternal line of the founder's family, and a fifth, Daimaru, since its beginning as a dry-goods store in Kyoto, has also absorbed much influence of Ōmi merchants.² But of all the Japanese retailers active before 1945, none rivaled the success of a sixth Ōmi firm, Minakai.

Minakai was founded by the Nakae family from Kondō of the Kanzaki district, home to many prominent merchants, nestled behind the low mountains in the Eastern Ōmi Basin. Around the turn of the century, these East Lake merchants (chapter 1) began plying their wares across Japan's emergent diaspora, from

colonial Taiwan to Vancouver.³ The majority set up shop in Manchuria and especially in Korea's expatriate Japanese community. The Nakae family specialized in textile goods, as did many fellow merchants from Ōmi. But the Nakae distinguished themselves by transforming their ancestral trade into a department store within a single generation—indeed, the largest in scale of all Japanese emporia by the 1930s.

Provincial merchants from Ōmi played a dominant, though rarely acknowledged, role in making this global retail form part of the fabric of urban life. To illustrate their leadership that extended to the continent, I will also bring into discussion a cognate enterprise, Chōjiya, whose founder descended from an Ōmi family and whose retail trajectory paralleled that of Minakai.⁴ Both stores ascended to the apex of retail economy in colonial Korea, where politics and business were tightly bound. Their family and corporate archives offer portraits of Ōmi shōnin, who led transnational careers to serve as much their nation's empire as their own ancestors. In upscaling their family concerns into department stores, Minakai and Chōjiya helped extend the hegemonic reach of Japan's imperium, while simultaneously deepening their regional identities as expeditionary traders. Their retail evolution illuminates further the spatiotemporal dynamic explored in the foregoing chapters: how the diasporic practices and ethos of Ōmi merchants were repackaged to advance Japan's project of capitalist and imperial expansion.

Their foray into mass retail, in turn, sheds light on the role of consumption, often eclipsed by a Marxian focus on production, in colonial governance.⁵ The activities of department stores in Korea demonstrate the manifold ways their owners buttressed the Government-General's policies of capitalist development and cultural assimilation, which remained closely meshed as a strategy to counter the growth of local nationalism.⁶ Following new historians of capitalism who conceptualize businesspeople as "political, ideological, and cultural agents," I will show how Minakai and Chōjiya, through the sales of mass consumer goods and other services rendered, helped to shape and drive the colonial political economy.⁷

In keeping with Ōmi tradition, both merchant families remained moored in their places of origin but relocated much of their business abroad. For expanding their scale and scope of operation, Minakai and Chōjiya, like other Japanese dry-goods stores, sought inspiration in the global world of mass retail. What motivated the president of Minakai, in particular, was his 1924 inspection tour of America, which coincided with the peak of anti-immigrant fervor. He kept a detailed log from the time of departure. Later circulated as *A Record of an Ōmi Merchant's Travel to the West*, it offers us a rare personal and provincial lens through which to reconstruct a global microhistory of retail that spanned the Pacific world. His travel journal and Minakai's subsequent metamorphosis into a department store reveal a complex dialogue unrolling across the gulf of time and space, between the teachings of Ōmi forebears and new lessons offered by modern retail pioneers

in the United States. By the end of the 1930s, Minakai had reached the zenith of success with its business extending into Manchuria and North China—a moment of glory that, nonetheless, would prove as short-lived as the wartime empire it serviced.

THE BEGINNINGS

Having for generations lived in Kondō, situated at the geographical heart of Ōmi, the Nakae family traced its ancestry to warlord Oda Nobunaga, one of Japan's national unifiers who built a castle in Azuchi (just west of Kondō) in the 1570s. Since the late seventeenth century, the Nakae had traded in kimono fabrics and accessories, a part-time business that became the mainstay of family income under Katsujirō I in 1824. It was the eldest of his four grandsons, Katsujirō III (born in 1872; hereafter Katsujirō), who would move this business abroad.⁸ No sooner had he graduated from primary school than the young Katsujirō began his career as a peddler, going into service with a cloth wholesaler that his older sister had married into. He traveled to the neighboring provinces of Mino, Ise, and Owari to undertake *mochikudari akinai* (chapter 1), hawking products of Ōmi, shipped ahead of time, by toting them on a balance pole. He was soon joined by his younger brother, Tomijūrō, who would act as Katsujirō's second-in-command in managing Minakai. Katsujirō inherited the family business upon his father's death in 1897.⁹

When the Russo-Japanese War erupted, the four Nakae brothers decided to stake their family fortunes on the Korean peninsula. In the midst of the conflict in early 1905, they opened a sundry-goods store named Minakai in Taegu, one of the satellite cities that developed along the newly laid military railway lines. After catering to Korean residents for a few years (and opening a branch in Chinju, where a relative owned a business), the Nakae changed their focus to the sale of kimono to align with their ancestral business, targeting the city's growing Japanese expatriate population. Following Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910, Katsujirō moved the head store to Seoul (Keijō), where the new colonial government established its seat of authority.¹⁰

Meanwhile, a few months into the war, another merchant family of Ōmi pedigree arrived to set up its first overseas store in Pusan. Chōjiya was founded by Kobayashi Genemon, born into a family of East Lake merchants from the Echi district, whose progenitors included Toyotomi Hideyoshi's loyal vassal, Ishida Mitsunari. Having helped his older brother open a dry-goods business in 1831 in Edo—which later became the renowned Chōgin (chapter 2)—Genemon launched his own store in Kuwana in Ise Province, a location he had eyed while peddling along the Tōkaidō and Nakasendō. Chōjiya purveyed armor, swords, and clothing to the domainal authorities in Ise, Owari, and Minō but switched to Western guns and Western clothes on the eve of the Restoration. This new venture was expanded by Genemon's adopted son, who incorporated the use of sewing machines, and

subsequently by his grandson, Genroku (1867–1940), who would take the family enterprise across the sea.¹¹

Genroku displayed his talent for commerce early on, beginning his career at the age of fifteen like Katsujirō. He was trained directly by his grandfather from Ōmi, Gen'emon. A man with a sturdy frame, Gen'emon was, even in his seventies, apparently fit enough to take the young Genroku on peddling trips and “hoist me on his shoulders while hauling a load of merchandise,” he later recalled.¹² Genroku became the head of Chōjiya in 1900, when he turned twenty-four,¹³ more or less the same age at which Katsujirō inherited his family business. Genroku's decision to move to Korea was inspired by a meeting with another Ōmi merchant, Takase Seitarō. The first East Lake merchant to open a grocery business in Pusan in 1887, Takase later entrusted his store to his nephew, Fukunaga Seijirō (chapter 5), a distant relation of the Kobayashi family.¹⁴ With the help of Fukunaga, Genroku opened a Pusan branch in 1904 and, like the Nakae brothers, later moved his business base to Seoul.

While catering primarily to local Japanese settlers and sojourners (who numbered over 170,000 by 1910), both Minakai and Chōjiya cultivated ties of patronage to the new officials and staff of the protectorate government (1905) and its successor, the Government-General of Korea (1910). For Chōjiya that had been purveying Western goods to Mie Prefecture (formerly Ise Province), it signified a rescaling of service from the home turf to the new colonial frontier,¹⁵ and, for Minakai, new proximity to state power reminiscent of “political merchants” tied to the Meiji oligarchs (chapter 1). The paradoxical impact of this relationship, felt across the service industry, was to constrain the merchants' autonomy but also expand their mobility, as would become apparent in the course of the Governor-General's rule.

In the case of Minakai and Chōjiya, shortly after they opened for business, supplying clothing to bureaucrats, soldiers, and Korean aristocrats became their main occupation.¹⁶ In 1907, when Emperor Kojong, under Japanese pressure, abdicated to the crown prince Sunjong, Chōjiya “alone received all the orders for manufacturing Western dress to be worn by the staff of the Korean Royal Household Office” (apparel that was modeled after the official attire of the Japanese Imperial Household Agency). By outfitting the Korean court in the garb of the Japanese monarchy, Chōjiya lent a symbolic hand in transferring power to the new colonial overlord. With the establishment of the Government-General in 1910, Chōjiya was flooded with official orders for uniforms (as was Mitsukoshi, which had opened a sub-branch in Seoul in 1906)¹⁷; a purveyor's department was created to meet the state's sartorial demand, which averaged a hundred thousand pieces of clothing per year.¹⁸ Minakai, too, developed a dual clientele, catering to Japanese residents and serving the needs of official patrons, including the Seoul Municipal Government and the Chōsen Army.¹⁹

Emblematic of the classic pattern of trade following the flag, the business fortunes of Minakai and Chōjiya continually expanded as the machinery of the

colonial state grew. Once establishing themselves in the colonial capital, both stores actively set out to build a network of branches, concentrating on major Japanese enclaves such as Pusan, Wönsan, and P'yöngyang. During the 1910s, Minakai created a new branch every few years, with a purchasing department (*yötatsu-bu*) in Kyoto and the head store in Seoul to oversee its entire Korea operations.²⁰ Chöjiya's pace of expansion was equally impressive. By the time it became a joint stock corporation in 1921, Chöjiya had extended its business to Manchuria (Dalian and Harbin), while keeping a sales office in the home city of Tsu as well as a store in Wakayama and creating a purchasing department in Osaka.²¹ Its marketing network even stretched to Far Eastern Siberia, where Chöjiya began supplying woolen fabrics to local retailers when World War I interrupted imports from Europe. In the decades that followed, stores bearing the names of Minakai and Chöjiya continued to ramify over the continent, where farmers, soldiers, and capitalists together plotted pathways for Japanese expansion.

STORE MANAGEMENT

As the family businesses of Minakai and Chöjiya expanded overseas in parallel, their merchandise, too, began to intersect. Minakai advanced into the sale of Western dress and Chöjiya into kimono, eventually converging on the path to a full-service department store by the late 1920s. But while extending the frontiers of modern retail, their methods of store management stayed grounded in Ōmi traditions. Simultaneously localized and splayed across the continent, their retail expansion in Korea demonstrated a spatiotemporal dynamic similar to the operations of the Gōshū zaibatsu, which powered Japan's cotton empire from the old merchant capital of Kansai (chapter 5).

Minakai, in particular, cast itself as a faithful heir to the Ōmi shōnin in all aspects of its business. The stem family's residence, which functioned as the headquarters of Minakai, remained in the birthplace of Kondō, where Katsujirō ensconced himself as the president from around 1916. His three younger brothers also built their family homes in Kondō, while managing overseas branches in Korea and later in Manchuria and North China.²² Even after settling back in Kondō, Katsujirō made the annual rounds of branches on the continent; during each visit, he stayed with the local manager to inspect the store and offer advice to individual employees, an important traditional duty of an Ōmi business owner.²³ Many other diasporic practices devised before the Meiji period continued to bolster the family business. Minakai's method of central purchasing (*tairyō shiire*), a task entrusted to Tomijūrō, for instance, derived from the age-old logic governing Ōmi peddlers' wholesale activity to generate profit by taking advantage of the time lapse between the purchase of raw materials and the sale of finished goods: to increase the value-added for retail, after acquiring rolls of cloth in Kyoto, the store would wait for the prices to go up, when the fabrics would be "manufactured

into order-made kimono.”²⁴ Likewise, Minakai’s method of management accounting inherited a long-standing custom from the Tokugawa era to charge about 10 percent interest on one’s own operating capital, which effectively became the target profit for each branch store to meet every year.²⁵

Kinship ties, so critical to the operation of Ōmi shōnin and diasporic traders elsewhere, proved equally or more crucial to their successors in the colony. In a pattern shared by mercantile migrants from southeastern China, Ōmi business-owners continued to rely on both patrilineal and affinal relatives and native-place connections in running their stores and branches at home and abroad.²⁶ From managers down to clerks and apprentices, Minakai’s corporate hierarchy was dominated by Shiga natives. Its executive board was cemented by consanguinity—the four founding brothers, their sons, and close family relations, who also preferred to recruit employees from the home prefecture, especially from the native district of Kanzaki.²⁷ Much like the case of Itōchū discussed in the previous chapter, Minakai operated according to the principles of family capitalism. The patriarchal head of a family firm, Katsujirō was described in and outside the company as an “affectionate as well as a strict father” to his employees, who were subordinated to the role of “maintaining his fortunes forever.”²⁸ The logic of family control was reflected, above all, in how Katsujirō and his brothers conceived of their ancestral business and values as the heirs to Ōmi merchants.

Minakai remained true to its Ōmi heritage by maintaining the apprenticeship system even as most large retail stores in Japan abandoned the custom in favor of recruiting higher-school graduates.²⁹ Both Minakai and Chōjiya also hired women (fig. 7)—who moved increasingly after World War I into traditionally masculine spaces of labor—but treated them as temporary and supplementary to the androcentric workplace. Every year the stores trained a stable of young male clerks—in the case of Minakai, at its headquarters in Kondō for a period of about one month.³⁰ They were housed, fed, and clothed in the company’s tailor-made uniform (which doubled as store advertisement) and were rigorously instilled with a sense of loyalty to the company. Minakai trained about forty fresh recruits every year at the individual homes of the four Nakae brothers in Kondō. Under close supervision of the Nakae matrons, young clerks studied math and proper attitudes in addition to learning about Minakai before they were dispatched to branches.³¹ As had been true during the Tokugawa years, one could be discharged if deemed unfit for the job anytime during the apprenticeship.

Once training was completed, the lives of employees and their families were closely tethered to the company. Commuting was allowed only for those who brought their wife to the branch location or obtained the manager’s consent; all other employees, especially single ones, were expected to live in the company compound, as required by merchant houses since the Tokugawa era. In accord with the Ōmi custom of *zaisho nobori* (chapter 1), employees were permitted to go home for a ten-day vacation after the first four years of work, then after three years,



FIGURE 7. Minakai's clerks. *Source:* Undated photograph stored at Minakai Co., Hikone, Shiga. Courtesy of the Archival Museum of the Faculty of Economics, Shiga University, Japan.

and subsequently every other year. In the living-in system akin to the “mercantile monastery” for shop assistants in Britain, the daily behavior of clerks was monitored through an intricate web of regulations, including a curfew and a ban on the use of cash. In addition to the use of honorifics to address seniors, their decorum was ensured by an elaborate dress code that stipulated what to wear literally from head to toe: haircut, hat, clothes and shoes. Even marriages and adoptions required the company president's approval.³²

Minakai's overall principles of management were laid down in the company's “Rules” (*Kensoku*).³³ A neo-traditional text modeled after Tokugawa-era house codes, “Rules” embodied Minakai's aspiration to pursue its “ancestral tradition” on an empire-wide scale. It begins by outlining the “Minakai spirit” in its first five articles,³⁴ each with an authoritarian bark, accompanied by an explication of its meaning to be internalized by all store employees:

1. Revere the state, respect the humanity, and have honesty as purpose:

Loyalty and patriotism, worshipping one's ancestors, and discharging one's filial duties are our country's time-honored customs. . . . We Minakai, reflecting on our ancestors' achievements, must dedicate all our energy to our calling, embrace honesty

as the most important purpose of merchants, and cooperate and unite to achieve the respectable mission based on the policy of commercial service to the state.

2. Respect the elder and love the junior colleagues:

We Minakai respect the order of old and young, and take pride in living as one large harmonious family.

3. Promote bodily health as well as perseverance:

We Minakai should be seen as a training ground for nurturing a healthy mind and body and cultivating perseverance and patience, in order to aspire to the status of a winner.

4. Always pursue the good habits of thrift and hard work:

Ikkaku senkin [get-rich-quick] behavior must be absolutely shunned by entrepreneurs. Instead, modest living, industry, hard work, and savings must be followed in order to create future capital, raise a family, and obtain prestige [*na o ageru*]. We Minakai aspire to master and pursue the respectable custom of daily thrift.

5. Daily make efforts to cultivate creativity to improve and develop further, and avoid lagging behind the trends of the times:

Particularly those who engage in commerce must make sure to keep abreast of the trends of society and internal and external circumstances, in order to expand one's business. We Minakai pay careful attention to this point to provide appropriate facilities and ample guidance, and try at all times to take the initiative and secure dominance.

The core maxims of Ōmi shōnin are invoked by every clause in the canons of Minakai, which combine old and new loyalties to the family and the state into a single mission of “commercial service” to Japan's empire. These five articles were paired with the “Instructions of the President,” which preached perseverance, self-restraint, and frugality, as well as positivity and enterprise. By making all clerks recite these “precepts passed on from our Ōmi merchant forebears” every morning, Minakai owners underscored their shared patrimony and duty of carrying forward their diasporic legacy on the new “business frontiers of Korea, Manchuria, and China.”³⁵ Many Ōmi merchants in the colony, even after attaining a fortune, we are told, continued to abide by these ancestral dictates. Katsujirō and Genroku each reportedly set an example by refraining from smoking and drinking entirely. Fukunaga Seijirō, the “founding father of the cotton trade” in Korea, was well known for polishing the shoes of his employees on a daily basis.³⁶

As the practices and maxims of Minakai illustrate, expanding family business overseas entailed more than a flow of Ōmi merchant capital from Kansai to the continent. To borrow from Doreen Massey, it also involved “the stretching out over space of relations of power” (constituted by ties of kinship and native place, trust, and customs) that emanated from the home village—and these spatially

extended relations themselves constituted Ōmi as a place.³⁷ Business expansion led to a spatial reconfiguration of economic functions—including ownership, management of branches, and supervisory control over labor—but all of them continued to reside in the hands of family. Nor did future expansion result in a loss of attachment to Ōmi. As with the case of other Ōmi-lineage stores, the management of Minakai remained strategically “localized”; its overseas competitiveness derived from social relations rooted in the ancestral home of Kondō, the business headquarters since the Tokugawa era.

In paying homage to their ancestors, however, Minakai managers also gave regional tradition a modern rendering. Viewing business as an analogue of war, they turned their store into what they dubbed “a commercial army” (*shōsengun*). Minakai referred to all male employees as “commercial warriors,” vested with “a mission” to contribute to the family’s fortune and “render patriotic service to the nation”³⁸—intertwined loyalties also stressed by the paterfamilias of Itōchū. Their salaries and work assignments were determined according to “ranks” assigned to all posts in the company, which corresponded with the army ranking system. Thus, Katsujirō was the company president as well as a “marshal.” Tomijūrō, who oversaw all of Korea’s branches, was a “general,” as was Jungorō, who managed the Seoul store. The head of a purchasing department was a “major general,” and other division chiefs were “lieutenant colonels.” Below these officers were rank-and-file clerks, with “privates” at the bottom, where most new male recruits began their career. According to the testimony of a former employee who joined Minakai in 1928, “Someone like me who had only graduated from primary school started as a ‘commercial warrior private,’ and advanced in rank after each year to a ‘private first-class,’ and then to a ‘lance corporal.’” As they moved up the ladder, the color of the badge on their livery changed. This was an updated practice of merchant households, where sartorial distinctions traditionally reflected differences in status and stages of manhood among shop employees.³⁹ Periodically, the company newsletter posted in ranking order the names of all Minakai employees stationed across the empire. Knowing this, “we all used to work hard, looking forward to advancing through this system.”⁴⁰

The color-coded scheme, a modern military hierarchy grafted onto old master-servant relations, apparently worked as designed. One newspaper in the mid-1930s attributed Minakai’s success to this incentive system through which the store “maintains a good chain of command and control over five hundred employees in perfect order.”⁴¹ Minakai’s invention partly reflected the political milieu of interwar Japan with rising army dominance, but a military structure for clerk training had been a long-standing feature of Western retail as well. Since the late nineteenth century, many business leaders in the United States had adopted army-style organization for training clerks and instilling what they regarded as white, Protestant, middle-class values of discipline, obedience, and esprit de corps.⁴² The attendant practices of racial exclusion, as integral as class differentiation to

the operation of a capitalist economy,⁴³ also existed on both sides of the Pacific. Just as African-American clerks were excluded from promotion at most retail establishments, Koreans, who came to represent as much as a third of Minakai's employees, were treated as "quasi-commercial warriors" (*jun shō senshi*), a status they shared with clerks without a school diploma, and were kept off the managerial track. But consigned to the lowest status were women of both ethnicities, simply called "female clerks" (*onna ten'in*), who were placed outside of the corporate hierarchy.⁴⁴ Under the patriarchal regime of Minakai, gender evidently trumped race, which otherwise governed its multiethnic labor force. Managers limited personal freedom and possessions of all, but the ranking system worked to reassure Japanese male clerks their place above Korean colleagues by offering a way to accumulate "masculine capital." As for female clerks, ethnic differences were elided into a single body for exclusion: positioned at the rear of the commercial army, they were enjoined to give of themselves to the corporate family but relegated to a role of assisting the male vanguard, as expected of women in an Ōmi merchant household (chapter 4).

In another parallel with American retailers and in a nod to their Tokugawa ancestors, Minakai and other stores of Ōmi lineage blended business with religion as a unified pursuit and object of devotion. The archetypal merchant, Itō Chübē, as noted earlier, taught his employees that "commerce is the work of Bodhisattva."⁴⁵ Scarcely less pious, his counterparts in Korea—from Fukunaga Seijirō to Kobayashi Genroku and Nakae Katsujirō—lived by the same mantra, chanting a prayer to Amida Buddha with their employees day and night.⁴⁶ "Every morning before opening the store," a former Minakai clerk recalled, "all employees, after cleaning one's assigned work space and the entire store, would sit in front of the Buddhist altar and recite a sutra, before having breakfast."⁴⁷ Clerks at Chōjiya were assembled by Genroku daily to conduct what amounted to a Buddhist ceremony in its solemnity and the use of a *mokugyo* (a wooden drum used in a temple), observed one impressed monk in Kyoto.⁴⁸ Minakai and Fukunaga's store also closed for a day in November to pay gratitude to ancestors (*hōonkō*) by inviting monks from a local temple.⁴⁹

In welding faith and business, Genroku stood out even among his devout peers by embracing what he called "the Buddhist commercial way." Chōjiya, he explained, operated on the basis of the spirit of *butsuon hōsha*, literally "transferring Buddha's compassion directly to customer service."⁵⁰ After it made a fresh start as a department store in 1929, all employees, who took an "oath" of loyalty, were handed a copy of Genroku's instructions compiled in a self-edited booklet, *The Light of the Mind* (*Shinkō*). It expounded Chōjiya's "generational commitment" to spreading "great and virtuous deeds" in society while seeking "salvation." Emphasizing mutually beneficial relationships among the store, suppliers, and customers, the text articulated Chōjiya's version of *sanpō yoshi*, the Ōmi merchant ethos of three-way satisfaction for the seller, the buyer, and the community at large (chapter 1).

Like Itō Chūbē, Genroku managed his store as “a cooperative,” making all employees shareholders with common stakes in maintaining the family business.⁵¹ His personal capitalism also translated into paternalistic devotion to clerks, who were provided with shelter (dorms), vocational training, and spots in the company cemetery. This commitment took on additional political salience in the colonial context. In the policy and public discourse on assimilation, the Buddhist concept of *kyōson kyōei* (coexistence, co-prosperity) became virtually synonymous with *naisen yūwa* (harmony between Japanese and Koreans), a central trope of “cultural rule” in the 1920s. No doubt alive to this resonance between his commercial creed and the Government-General’s policy of accommodation, Genroku hired a substantial number of Koreans at Chōjiya’s factory. In a practice atypical of Japanese storeowners, he even placed a Korean manager, Hwang Chōng-ha, in charge of the department of silk brocades.⁵² At a time when the level of native education and employment remained low, some observers extolled, Chōjiya’s “dedication to young Korean employees went beyond the level of a mere business,” “fostering assimilation” between the otherwise divided ethnic communities.⁵³

Genroku also enjoined his clerks to “value Korean customers” and “take care not to hurt their feelings because of [our] differences in languages and customs.” His directives betrayed a pragmatic concern for Chōjiya’s customer portfolio, with Koreans “who have patronized our store since its foundation” making up a third to half of its clientele.⁵⁴ But more seemed to be at stake, when considering his social standing as a colonial settler and his upbringing as an Ōmi shōnin—and their overlapping sensibilities as “entrepreneurial outsiders.” Such a diasporic mindset was emphasized not least by Genroku’s own ancestor, the founder of the Kobayashi family, Ginemon I (1777–1854). In his last words, passed on to his progeny, Ginemon I articulated the importance of appreciating the broader public amid which itinerant peddlers built their career and trust with strangers.⁵⁵ Even a mere peddler could establish himself and attain recognition, the seventy-eight-year-old Ginemon is said to have told a young head of another Ōmi merchant family, if he worked hard as a member of the society, being mindful of the people around him at all times.⁵⁶

Ginemon was but one of many Ōmi merchants who had, since their Tokugawa heyday, emphasized harmonizing with locals. Showing gratitude through contributions to charities, temples, and public works projects was an imperative shared by diasporic traders wherever they conducted business (chapter 1).⁵⁷ In extending this ancestors’ wisdom to Korea, Genroku and his Ōmi merchant mentor, Fukunaga Seijirō, both earned distinction as devout men of commerce who made a religion of social service.⁵⁸ Through a “cultural corridor” forged between their home and business locales, they not only supported an array of community programs in their birthplaces,⁵⁹ but they performed various “hidden” acts of charity in Korea, from distributing rice to the city’s poor to funding vocational schools and lodging houses for day laborers.⁶⁰ So committed to philanthropy was Genroku—who also

created the Korean Buddhist Association to “spread religiosity” perceived to be lacking in Koreans—that some wondered if Chōjiya’s dispensation of largesse was higher than its dividends.⁶¹

Koreans were hardly the only ones designed to benefit from these deeds. Perpetually in need of legitimacy, Japanese expatriate businesses themselves stood to gain from these calculated acts of beneficence—the same way that the Government-General expected of its efforts to win over Koreans through social and economic investments in the colony. The 1919 March First demonstrations for independence raised the stakes of these efforts—what may be called the colonial dyad of accumulation and assimilation—when settler concern about business security merged with the state imperative of Korean accommodation. In their aftermath, for example, Genroku and Fukunaga joined other prominent settlers in launching two Buddhist institutions, Wakō Academy (Wakō Kyōen) and Self-improvement Hall (Kōjō Kaikan). Their ostensible aim was to “promote moral cultivation of Koreans” through a combination of education and enterprise.⁶² Genroku became personally involved in the latter’s youth worker training program, which offered courses on manufacturing Western dress and shoes. In addition to drafting its curriculum and selecting and remunerating teachers, Genroku placed himself in charge of the marketing and sales of woolen products made by Korean students, even creating a sister company to Chōjiya for this purpose.⁶³ Though “sewn with care,” their clothes were “sold for about half the regular prices of made-to-order articles.”⁶⁴ Vaguely reminiscent of Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute, Self-Improvement Hall tacitly embraced a paternalistic vision of racial uplift while disavowing politics. And Genroku presumably gained as much from its worker training program: the opportunities to make additional profit on cheap labor while instilling his Buddhist values in Korean youth and to advertise his commitment to spreading the gospel of inter-ethnic harmony. Wrapped in the mantle of Pan-Asian unity, the inner workings of this program did not seem to stray far from the logic of racial capitalism to extract surplus value from a subjugated population in the name of native welfare.

Abiding by the Ōmi ethos of doing good by stealth, Fukunaga and Genroku also categorically refrained from serving on the chamber of commerce, the school board, or any other public office of import. These were central institutions through which local Japanese leaders governed settler affairs and advanced their interests in the colony. As successful business owners, the two merchants often worked with other leaders in the community, but they stayed away from the kind of political activism that could place them at odds with the colonial state, their important clientele.⁶⁵ More often, Ōmi merchants in Korea, as in the Tokugawa era, tried to stay in the good graces of the authority, which meant cooperating with its policies. Much as they kept a low political profile, indeed, their extensive acts of philanthropy did not escape notice.⁶⁶ In 1935, Genroku was recognized alongside other settlers by the Government-General as “a civilian man of merit” who “contributed

to Korean development.”⁶⁷ By then, he had already received numerous other accolades, including a blue medal of merit bestowed by the emperor⁶⁸—which Nakae Katsujirō of Minakai also earned in 1932 for a large-scale donation he made for “the public good.”⁶⁹ Just as such recognition assuredly helped to enhance the store’s business prospects, so too did it testify to the portability of a time-tested tactic of Ōmi shōnin: using philanthropy to curtail the risks accompanying a foreign venture and to ensure its long-term future, one that no Japanese could wager in post-1919 Korea.

AN ŌMI MERCHANT GOES TO AMERICA

If the border-crossing commerce of Ōmi shōnin in the Tokugawa era anticipated the workings of modern trading firms, their wholesale activities did as much to lay the rudiments of department stores. As is widely known, the department store as a global form of mass retail traced its institutional origins to fairs and expositions in Europe and America in the mid-nineteenth century. But the concept of mass marketing and distribution itself was not entirely novel to Ōmi merchants, who had developed the technique of *shokoku sanbutsu mawashi*: circulating bulk consumer goods such as kimono fabrics en route to and from commercial destinations across the country.⁷⁰ Rather than a radical break with tradition, to advance into mass retail for them was to build on the Ōmi custom of selling “in high volume, at low margin”—a practice consonant with the sales principle of department stores.

Chōjiya moved a step or two ahead of its Ōmi rival in this direction, making inroads into Western sundries, groceries, and photographs, as well as laundry business from the Meiji era.⁷¹ For the core merchandise of textiles, the store also adopted a strategy of vertical integration early to begin manufacturing its own clothes, hiring “a renowned dressmaker, Miyazaki Eitarō,” who had mastered sewing in the United States.⁷² Chōjiya offered the latest fashions at lower prices than in Japan, explained its store ads in a Korean daily, importing raw materials directly from Europe and America to avoid “consumer taxes” in the metropole.⁷³ By the early 1920s, the store commanded an empire-wide reputation as “a leader in the industry,” catering to “multiracial” customers in Korea and Manchuria. Chōjiya’s factory, operated by over two hundred Korean and Japanese workers with some fifty sewing machines, churned out several hundred suits per day. Boasting economies of scale few factories could match, Chōjiya pioneered the method of mass manufacturing and the sale of ready-made apparel, observers in and out of Korea noted with praise.⁷⁴

Minakai, by contrast, was slow to move beyond the sale of kimono. A turning point came only in the summer of 1924, when Katsujirō, in his dual capacity as president of Minakai and mayor of Minami Gokashō Village, set out on an investigative mission to America, as many other business leaders had done since the Meiji era.⁷⁵ Katsujirō voyaged across the Pacific, accompanied by Koizumi Seizō (a close

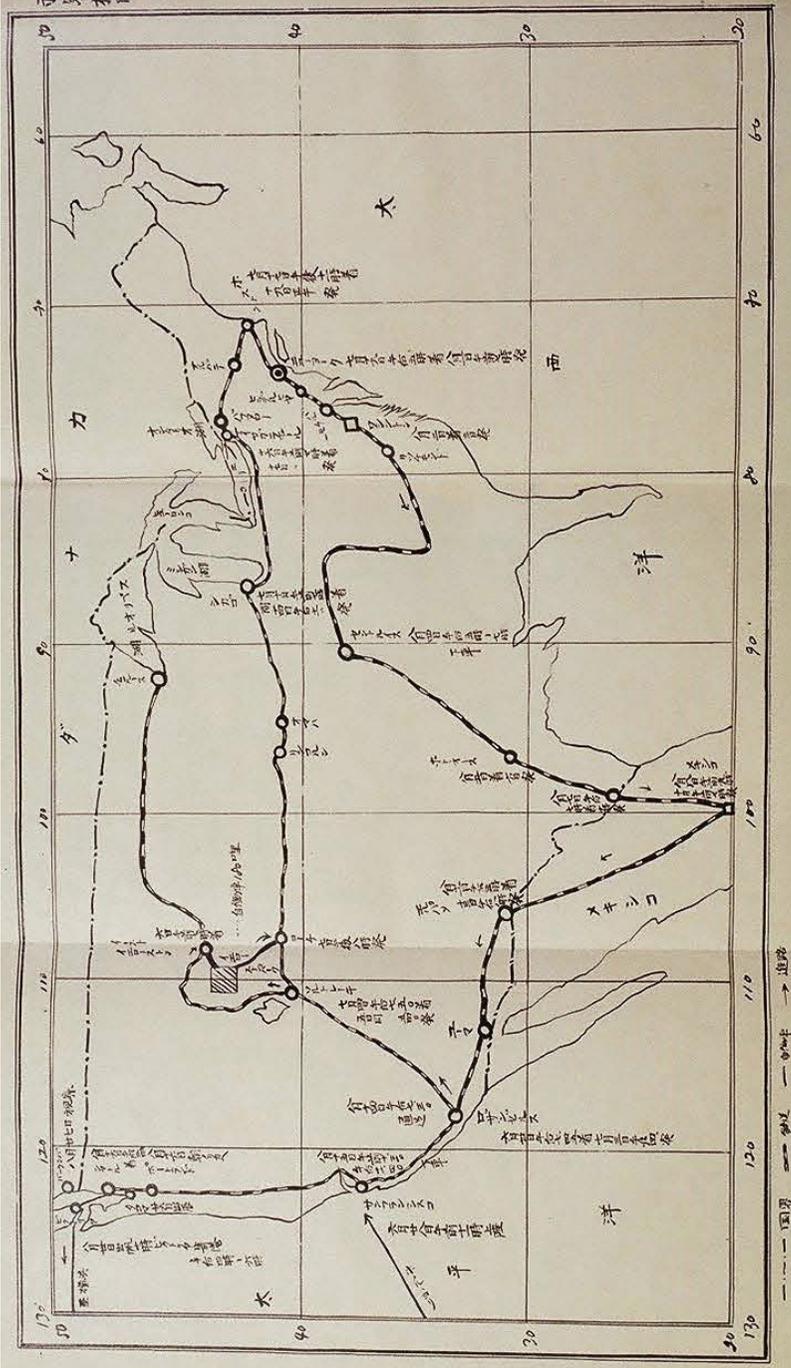
friend of Tomijūrō's), who served as a guide and interpreter, and Seizō's relative, Koizumi Jūsuke III (1879–1945),⁷⁶ an Ōmi-born draper in Osaka. They left the port of Kōbe in early June and returned in late August, after a total of one month on the ship and eighty-one days of cross-continental travel in America, as shown on the itinerary (map 7).⁷⁷

For his “posterity,” Katsujirō left a meticulous account of what he saw and experienced in *A Record of an Ōmi Merchant's Travel to the West* (fig. 8).⁷⁸ This travel diary invites us into the mind of a provincial merchant, anxious to grasp the advanced state of Western retail and “contribute to Minakai's progress and to our nation's commerce,” a twinned determination he penned at departure.⁷⁹ It also offers a window into larger geopolitical issues of the time. His trip happened to coincide with the passage of the Immigration Act in April 1924, which went into effect on July 1, barring the entry of Japanese and other Asian immigrants into the United States. Its impact on his fellow countrymen and its implications for Japan's empire occupy some entries in his journal, otherwise filled with granular observations of American cities and their retail landscape. These documented moments of transpacific contact between imperial Asia and immigrant America, as mediated by his personal encounters on the ground, would supply a key motivation for Katsujirō to transform Minakai into a department store.

Redolent of Meiji-era travelogues such as Fukuzawa Yukichi's best-seller *Conditions in the West* (1870), Katsujirō's narrative of discovery enumerated a roster of Western cultural and social institutions, from parks, libraries, museums, and “grand and magnificent hotels” to factories, speeding automobiles, and high-rises that marked each city's skyline. But what gripped him most were department stores, which stood in all their “splendor” as towering icons of American wealth and power. Since the turn of the century, the country had undergone the first major wave of retail innovations in exterior and interior design as well as merchandising. His excursions to retail stores of all sizes bore witness to their success.

Shortly after landing in San Francisco (June 28), Katsujirō made his first visit, to the Emporium. Filled with wonder, he could only “gawk at the full assortment of goods” on display. As he walked down bustling Market Street at night, he was dazzled again by the brightness of stores “one would mistake for daytime” and the boldness of signboards and advertisements carefully calculated to lure every passerby.⁸⁰ At every retail establishment he entered, Katsujirō trained his eyes on the store layout and architecture. He sketched a map of the sales floor and recorded rough measurements (of the entrance, passageway, and in-store people's movement), seeing a spark of genius behind every design (fig. 8). A particularly important lesson in store design was driven home by a visit to one local variety store, its entrance “engineered in such a clever way that one drifts into the store totally unaware, with eyes fixed on the showcase.”⁸¹ This experience, repeated elsewhere, underscored the role and power of a store's physiognomy, alongside the visual

視察概圖



MAP 7. Nakae Katsujirō's travel itinerary. Source: Nakae, Ōmi Shōnin yokō no ki, 1924.

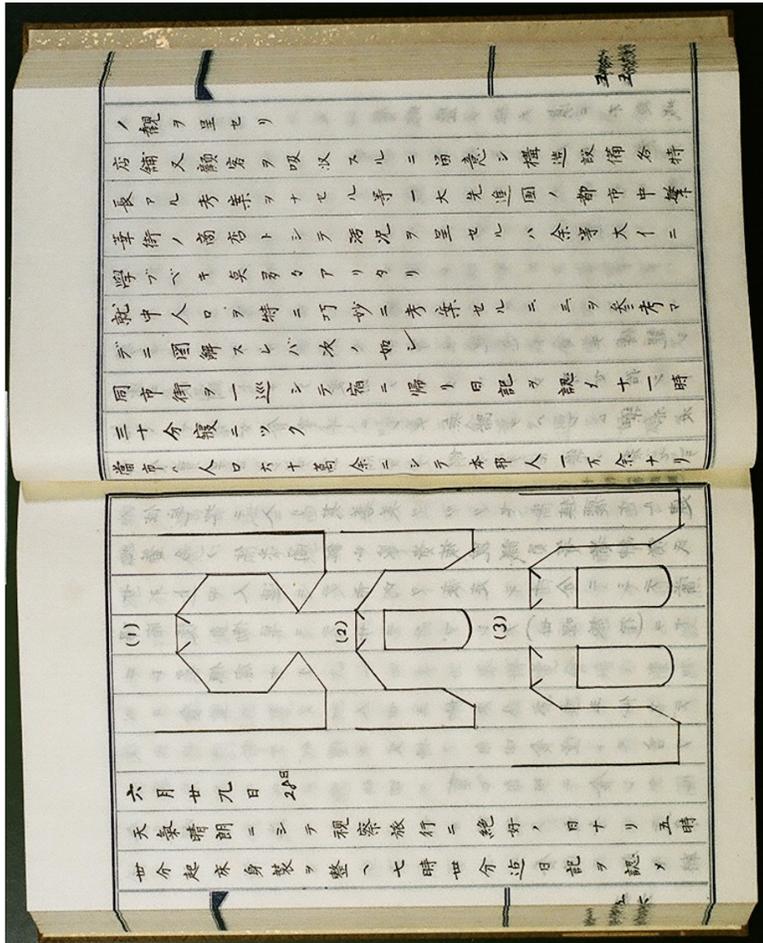
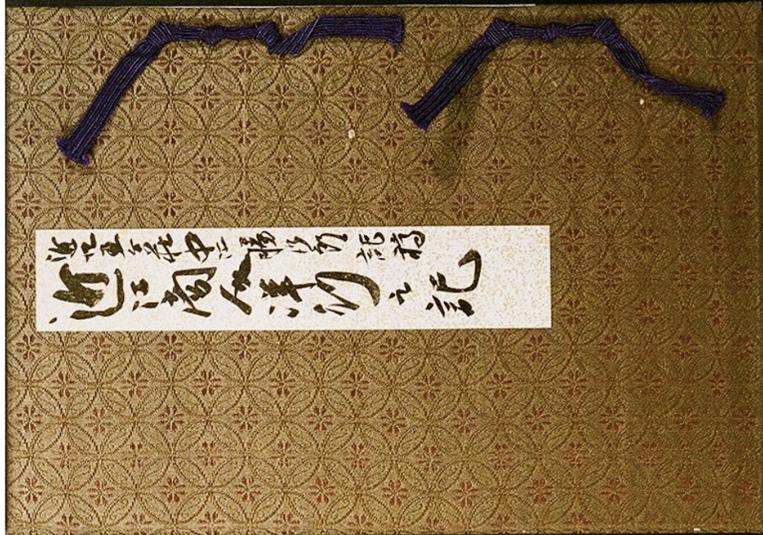


FIGURE 8. Nakae Katsujirō's travel diary. Pages show sketches of a retail store he visited in San Francisco. Source: Nakae, *Ōmi Shōnin yōkō no ki*, 1924.

plethora of goods, in enticing people to spend—indeed, lending an invisible hand to the growth of consumer capitalism.

In Chicago, Katsujirō visited a higher-class department store, Marshall Field (July 10). Again he studied each floor with a laser-like focus, noting the visually scintillating techniques of merchandise display by the use of lighting, mirrors, and glass cases that Minakai might emulate.⁸² He also took note of the twenty elevators, “marveling” not so much at the technology but “at the fact that women operated them.”⁸³ More surprises awaited him when he visited a mail-order business, Sears, Roebuck & Co. He toured its nine-story brick warehouse, where some thirteen thousand workers maneuvered several hundred wagons to prepare merchandise for delivery. And Katsujirō was “flabbergasted” by the sheer inventory of goods. Its massive sales catalogue, itself a virtual emporium for the low-income and rural households the store targeted nationwide, featured everything from apparel to home appliances and automobiles, a total of three million items, according to the manager.⁸⁴

By the time Katsujirō arrived at Macy’s in New York (on July 22), the novelty of American department stores appears to have slightly worn off. But his excitement was reignited by the grandeur of Philadelphia’s Wanamaker’s (“America’s no. 1 or 2 department store”), which he visited on August 1. Katsujirō gazed at “the beautiful and stately exterior of [its] ten-storied structure, complete with the marble interior.” Dressed in the Italian Renaissance style, the palatial landmark inspired awe in this visitor among many thousands of others, exactly as the building’s designer had intended.⁸⁵

But what ultimately accounted for the popularity of retail stores “everywhere,” he wrote, was the “care, kindness, and politeness with which sales assistants attended to their customers.” To demonstrate this point, Katsujirō referred to his own experience of buying a “color box” in San Francisco. Neatly wrapped and properly delivered to the hotel room before he came back from sightseeing, the purchased box encapsulated the superiority of American retail in his view. The epitome of customer service was the saleswoman who handled his request with alacrity and patience, despite the seemingly insurmountable language barriers. He identified in the figure of such shop assistants the reason for “the [recent] success of American merchants in expanding their activities around the world,” providing “an example we [Japanese] must ardently follow.”⁸⁶

A similar encounter with saleswomen at Wanamaker’s had already inspired a director of Mitsukoshi to begin hiring women around the turn of the century. Katsujirō’s visit to America in the mid-1920s coincided with further systematization of retail training programs; they were now implemented by store managers across the country, with a new recognition of “selling as skilled work” that could make or break a sale over the counter.⁸⁷ These programs encouraged sales assistants to apply what were considered special abilities of women: interpersonal skills, empathy, and responsiveness to the needs of others. This strategic feminization

of the sales force was intended to make the store resemble a home where customers would be treated as guests. In Taishō Japan, department stores also joined hands with the popular press to “commodify female sexuality,” making “shop girls” alongside the merchandise dual objects of voyeuristic desire and their services within easy reach for the masses.⁸⁸

Yet what Katsujirō experienced at these stores—the rise of modern consumer capitalism—was informed as well by the more long-standing notion of Christian stewardship. Since the 1880s, according to one study, many American merchants exposed to “a new wave of evangelical Protestant revivalism” renewed their sense of moral obligation to “cater to the needs of others.” The resulting idea of service as a “profitless ideal” translated into an expanded range of services offered by major retail stores: “returned-goods privileges, easy credit, and free delivery,” which soon became global retail conventions. This service ideology also spurred American managers to devise elaborate employee welfare programs or contribute to charities. Through such acts of benefit to the local community, they sought to reconcile the Christian injunction against wealth with the capitalist pursuit of profit: to burnish their public image as Christian businessmen “committed foremost to the people’s welfare.”⁸⁹

One of these retailers was John Wanamaker, a liberal evangelist whose namesake stores captivated Katsujirō in Philadelphia and New York, only two years after the founder’s passing. Writing against a declensionist view of American Protestantism in thrall to capitalism, Nicole C. Kirk has shown how Wanamaker actively married his faith and business to turn his flagship store into “an instrument for moral reform.”⁹⁰ Harnessing the aesthetic power of its steepled architecture, art, and displays of goods to its fullest effect, Wanamaker operated the store, which he likened to “a cathedral” in both building design and moral authority, to infuse middle-class Protestant values and taste into his employees and customers.⁹¹

The notion of Christian stewardship and service resonated deeply with the commercial ethos of Ōmi merchants, who, like Wanamaker, took their religion and its transformative power seriously. Thus, Katsujirō, while taking note of the ingenious techniques of display or the mechanics of customer service, also plumbed their deeper moral foundations. And he must have found echoes of his own training as an Ōmi shōnin, whose iconic image of steadfastly applying himself to trade mirrored the figure of “diligent and devoted workers, regardless of gender” that he encountered throughout the land of plenty. What he identified as the engine of American capitalism, “hard work” and “enterprise,” were central canons of Minakai recited by its employees daily as “the teachings passed on from our Ōmi merchant forebears.” Attention to customer service, too, approximated their ethos of *sanpō yoshi*, the motto of low-margin sales, and the care they devoted to maintaining the trust of the clientele. Diligence was their *métier*. Katsujirō must have found in the American service workers a Protestant equivalent of the Buddhist ethic of Ōmi shōnin, who regarded devotion to worldly work as their calling and a path to

salvation.⁹² And merchants of America and Ōmi alike sought a moral affirmation in religion, rendering business as an altruistic concern, even an ethical obligation to elevate people's welfare. In short, what were considered Protestant middle-class values aligned with those that Ōmi merchants held most dear. Katsujirō's diary is suffused with such a dialogue, if never explicitly stated, between his regional heritage and retail norms in the Western capitalist economy.

His narrative of admiration for Protestant America, however, veered off to more sobering discoveries. Katsujirō's tour of the Pacific coast region was punctuated by visits to local Japanese immigrant communities en route from San Francisco to Los Angeles and in Mexico City. His travel coincided with the peak of anti-Japanese exclusion drives in the American West, the passage of the Alien Land Laws of 1920 and 1923 leading to a complete ban on Japanese immigration in 1924. While in California, Katsujirō encountered to his dismay the "feeble" status of his fellow countrymen, especially merchants. Local consular officials and Issei leaders, including the secretary of the Japanese Association in Los Angeles, filled him in on the severity of anti-Japanese agitation, explaining how "racial subordination" to whites had become an "inescapable reality" of immigrant life.⁹³

Reflecting on the recent measures to "deprive the Japanese of their right to own land," Katsujirō wrote he was "filled with horror" by the "highhandedness" of American lawmakers, reprising what they had done to the Chinese. Initially welcomed and then expelled, Asians drew the continual ire of white workers, out-competed by the diligence and low wages of immigrants—or labor flows spawned by globalization of capitalism.⁹⁴ Having witnessed the looming realities of exclusion "with my own eyes," Katsujirō scribed a Pan-Asian solution as he "silently shed tears of indignation." Juxtaposing their staggered experiences of exclusion as racial minorities, he called on the diasporic Chinese and Japanese to "join hands in elevating their lives and character." This, he suggested, was the most effective way "to forbid easy justification for discriminating against Asian immigrants,"⁹⁵ enmeshed as they were in the U.S. "geopolitics of mobility."⁹⁶

Katsujirō's proposal here leaves us wondering to what extent he had absorbed the contemporary thinking among Issei leaders and their understanding of racial exclusion. The educated Issei tended to lump together seasonal laborers from rural Japan and the excluded Chinese in the same category of uncivilized people, a perception ironically shared by white exclusionists. Combating the charges of "Oriental unassimilability" was foremost on their agenda. Yet the Issei leaders worried more about "Sinification" of working-class Japanese immigrants (afflicted with gambling) than uniting with the Chinese, as evident in their recent movement for moral reform, informed by white Progressive ideas of "racial uplift."⁹⁷ Katsujirō in his diary displayed a similarly measured assessment of the American rationale for exclusion. Its fundamental cause lay not in simple racial prejudice, he wrote, but in more deep-seated fear of unassimilated immigrants whose "low living standards prevent them from blending with the Americans." Nevertheless, his vague idea of

racial cooperation with the Chinese betrayed at best a superficial grasp of the Issei elite's concern: to negotiate their own terms of inclusion through "claims to their imperial Japanese heritage."⁹⁸ And few Issei elites approved of wholesale assimilation to America, as advocated by some second-generation immigrants, or Nisei; one Issei leader in New York spoke plainly to Katsujirō, saying the Nisei he knew "all act rashly and are frivolous," having "lost the Yamato spirit" on foreign soil.⁹⁹

More contextual reading of Katsujirō's call for immigrant reform yields a glimpse of his core values as a merchant of Ōmi. Just as generations of Ōmi shōnin had cautioned against preoccupation with profit, disciplining their successors to be mindful of the broader public and their "foreign origins," so did Katsujirō as a business owner with vested interests in the empire. This diasporic mindset, one would imagine, informed the way he viewed the predicament of fellow immigrants in America, with particular attention to how they lived and comported themselves in the host society. Besides reopening access to jobs, he reckoned, immigrant reform promised improved social status, trust, and local acceptance, which would, in turn, restore Japan's national prestige.

Public-mindedness was, in fact, a central metric Katsujirō used to gauge the modernity of American society at large. Abhorrence of a backlash against immigrants aside, his diary was full of praise for the high level of "public morality" displayed by ordinary Americans on the trains ("keeping oneself calm and orderly"), on the streets ("treating others with extreme kindness," such as when asked for directions, "regardless of race"), and on the highways ("driving with a spirit of mutual concession"). These mundane examples of discipline, order, charity, and obedience—values shared by Protestant Christians and Shin Buddhists alike—were listed along with "equality between men and women" as among the "strongest impressions" the United States had left on Katsujirō. They were what in his view made "an advanced nation," a "highly enviable" status the Japanese had yet to reach.¹⁰⁰

While he hoped immigrants would aspire to these standards of public morals, Katsujirō also accused the Japanese government of leaving them in the lurch. Policy makers in Tokyo, he bewailed, had pursued a diplomacy both "inept" and "short-sighted," "submitting to the United States to the point of abandoning its fifty years of [effort in] immigration." Although he did not elaborate, Katsujirō appeared to be criticizing the official policy taken since 1908 to discourage labor migration to the Americas, in response to anti-Asian agitation that swept along the Pacific coast. Prompted by concern for amity and national prestige, Japan's "voluntary" retreat, as the historian Paul A. Kramer has observed, simultaneously signaled the ability of United States to instrumentalize its immigration policy to project its national power outward.¹⁰¹ Now that Korea and Manchuria, an alternative focus of immigration, had become an integral part of Japan's empire, Katsujirō argued, "the government must provide support and protection to traders for overseas expansion" outside its sovereign spheres of influence. He especially

stressed the need to rekindle the transpacific flow by exporting “not only manual laborers but also merchants from the capitalist class” to America as state policy. Echoing the mercantilist argument of Issei leaders and anti-exclusion rallies at home, he proposed using commerce as a lever to dispel white prejudice against Japanese immigrants.¹⁰²

Viewed as a whole, Katsujirō’s encounter with white America was Janus-faced, shaped as much by his racial and class identities as by his upbringing in Ōmi, a provincial filter through which he diagnosed its virtues and ills. On the one hand, he reaffirmed the core maxims of Ōmi shōnin through Protestant values implicit in the American culture of capitalism, while recording new lessons in mass retail for his posterity. On the other hand, he condemned its racist mechanism of exclusion and pondered remedies for labor immigrants from the intertwined perspectives of an Ōmi merchant and a member of the colonial bourgeoisie. Katsujirō’s trenchant critique of government policy also represented one of many moments in his diary that bridged the seemingly disconnected migrant frontiers of American West and colonial Asia. One slated for decline, the other in the ascendant, these communities were, nonetheless, viewed as part of the same diaspora: members of a “colored empire,” to borrow from Robert Tierney and Eiichirō Azuma, “entangled in their respective quests for racial survival in white America and for imperial expansion in Japanese Asia.”¹⁰³ Katsujirō’s idea of cooperation between Chinese and Japanese immigrants was born of this entanglement. Though elusive, his Pan-Asian vision in fact augured a larger turning point, wherein a shared sense of victimization by Anglo-American racism would bolster Japan’s claim to leadership as an empire of “colored people” in Asia in the decades to follow.¹⁰⁴

NEW DEPARTURE AS A DEPARTMENT STORE

Katsujirō’s travel diary sketched a vista of entrepreneurial possibility. As he pushed on from one megastore to another, he gleaned more insights and ideas, which were passed on to brother Tomijūrō in his letters home. By the end of the three-month journey, his diary had become a virtual blueprint for refashioning Minakai into a modern emporium. His heartrending encounter with fellow emigrants on the other side of the Pacific added fuel to this ambition. “The department store is the way of our future,” he wagered to his family, who would devote the next five years to making this a reality.

Minakai’s debut as a department store inaugurated a new era in the colonial world of retail. Downtown Seoul came to be occupied by a remarkable five emporia, each dressed in lavish Western architecture. A fierce competition unfolded along the Japanese retail corridor of Honmachi Street among Minakai, Mitsu-koshi, Hirata, and Chōjiya,¹⁰⁵ while Hwasin held its ground as the only Korean-owned department store located in Chongno.¹⁰⁶ Minutes of board meetings reveal how the Nakae brothers and branch managers kept a close watch on their rivals,

especially Chōjiya and Mitsukoshi, studying their prices and monitoring dates of their seasonal sales, which were often timed to coincide with Minakai's own.¹⁰⁷ The same was true for store renovation. In late 1929, Minakai's main store—originally launched in “a wooden hut with a mere 18 feet of frontage”—moved into a six-storied edifice of reinforced concrete in “Renaissance style,” complete with a basement and a rooftop, and equipped with an elevator.¹⁰⁸ A year later, Chōjiya reopened in a multistoried building outfitted with “Korea's first escalator,” the same month Mitsukoshi unveiled its own renewal. In 1937, Hwasin broke the record by installing “the largest elevator” in the Japanese empire, in addition to an “electric news” billboard “far ahead of Mitsukoshi and Chōjiya.”¹⁰⁹ Each store carried on incessant renovation and expansion deploying technological marvels, each grander than the last, into the late 1930s.¹¹⁰

While giving its exterior a complete makeover, Minakai significantly enlarged the scope of its business. The store began selling a wider assortment of goods organized into multiple departments: from kimono and Western dress for men and women of all ages, to Western sundries, travel goods, and household articles for daily use. New services and entertainments—a restaurant, an exhibition space, a “children's land”—were also offered all under a single roof (see fig. 9). This pattern of expansion was replicated by Chōjiya and others.¹¹¹ By the late 1930s, Mitsukoshi and Hwasin each had a cinema, a mini zoo, and a rooftop garden with a fountain. By introducing new forms of recreation for both adults and children, department stores shaped the contours of family life among the emerging middle class.¹¹²

The pace of branch expansion, too, accelerated in the 1930s. By mid-decade, Minakai had become “comparable to a first-class department store in the metropole” (a reputation already attained by Chōjiya a decade earlier); its network of branches not only traversed the Korean peninsula but extended into Manchuria, where Minakai existed in many provincial cities as the sole department store.¹¹³ A company guidebook entitled *Korea-Manchuria and Minakai (1935)*¹¹⁴ captured its continental drive in progress, proudly showcasing its branches as thriving nodes of Minakai's retail empire. Starting in Kyoto, where the local staff “handle bulk purchasing for all stores,” the booklet takes the reader on a pictorial journey through Korean cities, blending introductions to Minakai branches with descriptions of the local terrain and historic sites in Pusan, Taegu, Taejŏn, Seoul, Wŏnsan, Hamhŭng, Hŭngnam,¹¹⁵ Kunsan, Mokp'ŏ, Kwangju, Chinju, and P'yŏngyang. Minakai Store, a “multistoried edifice with a white-stuccoed exterior,” occupies the heart of each city, dominated by the state, metropolitan capital, and settlers—an alliance that reshaped the peninsula into a modernizing grid of railways, ports, markets, and sites of production. The narrative further tracks the moving boundaries of Minakai's expansion across the border into Manchukuo. The journey ends in the “cosmopolitan capital” of Shinkyō, a “paradise” born of the Imperial Army's valiant response to “China's unlawful conduct.” Readers learn that Minakai secured “2,000 hectares of land” in the commercial hub of

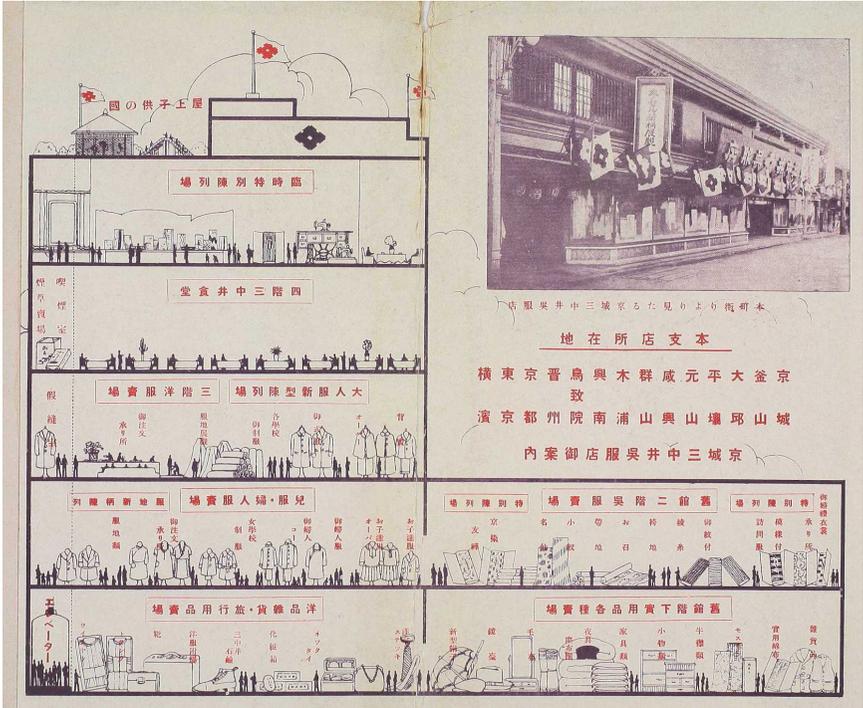


FIGURE 9. A floor guide of Minakai’s main store in Seoul. Items depicted on each floor: miscellaneous articles for daily use, Western sundries, travel goods (first floor); kimono fabrics, children’s and women’s wear (second floor); new-style adult and Western clothes (third floor); restaurant (fourth floor); special exhibition hall (fifth floor); children’s land (rooftop). Source: Kabushiki Kaisha Minakai (Gofukuten), *Minakai Gofukuten goanmai*, 1929.

Taitung Street, where its factory “dedicates day and night to manufacturing clothes to meet official orders,” and a brand new four-storied store is slated to fill the rest of the grounds (fig. 10).¹¹⁶

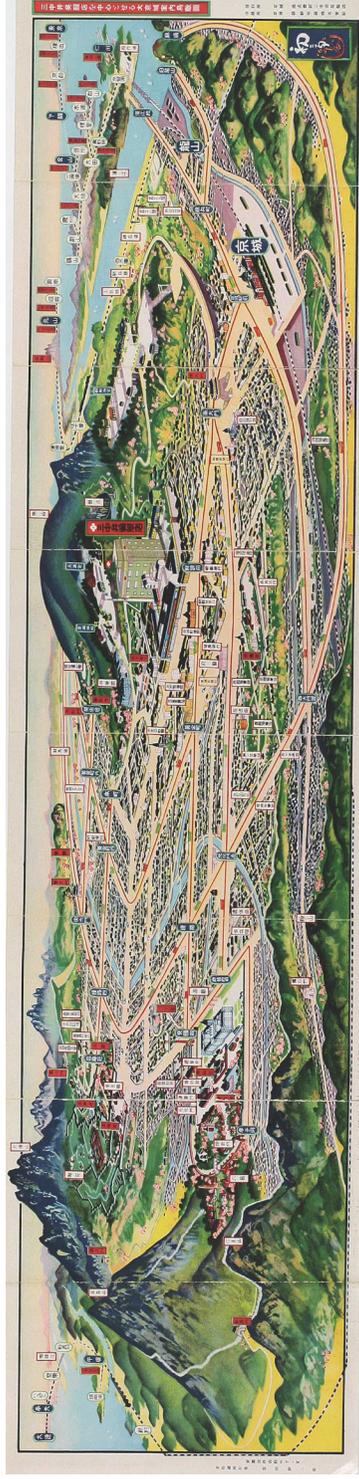
The tour of branches staking out the boundaries of Minakai’s retail empire was also rendered visually in the *Bird’s-Eye View of Greater Keijō*, enclosed in another store guide published on the twentieth anniversary of Japanese rule in Korea. Minakai commissioned a renowned artist, Yoshida Hatsusaburō (1884–1955), to create this map of colonial Seoul centered on Minakai’s flagship store, whose greatly enlarged size dwarfs even the new Government-General headquarters (standing opposite on the converted Kyōngbok Palace Grounds, on the lower left) (map 8).¹¹⁷ It is an iconography of power with two heads—the colonial state and the Ōmi merchant store—forming a north-south axis to encompass the space in between, but the towering structure of Minakai leaves little doubt about who is in command of the modernizing landscape underneath. Positioning it as the fulcrum of empire, with influence stretching into the Manchurian cities of Hōten



FIGURE 10. Minakai Department Store, on Taitung Street, Shinkyō (Changchun) (1930). Minakai is the building in front. Source: Main Library of Kyoto University, Rare Materials Digital Archive.

and Dairen (train stops in the upper-left corner) and back to the Tokyo metropolis (in the upper-right corner), the panoramic map of Seoul embodied Minakai's spatial politics, designed simultaneously to inscribe the store's new prominence and to legitimize Japan's cultural authority over the continent. Its sprawling expanse implied that Minakai had brought the colonial capital, as well as the rest of cities along the railway tracks, into the hegemonic embrace of consumer capitalism—and stood ready to expand its reach still further.¹¹⁸

The new operations of Minakai as a department store demonstrated how lessons from Katsujirō's trip to America were woven into the structure of a family firm in Seoul and its branches. Having learned that visibility was a key component of "sensory shopping experience," Minakai managers overhauled the interiors by making maximum use of display cases and show windows, the essential accoutrements of merchandising that had already begun to transform the retail landscape across Japan.¹¹⁹ Novel techniques of retailing were incorporated as well. To attract customers of all classes, for example, the Seoul store held an "all ten-*sen* sale,"¹²⁰ Minakai's answer to the "ten-cent store" Katsujirō had visited in San Francisco. To "remedy the inconveniences" for rural residents, moreover, Minakai began a sales trip to the provinces (*shucchō hanbai*). Redolent of the mail-order service of Sears, Roebuck & Co., it may also be seen as a modern analogue of itinerant peddling.¹²¹



MAP 8. *Bird's-Eye View of Greater Keijō*, by Yoshida Hatsusaburō. *Source*: Kabushiki Kaisha Minakai (Gofukuten), *Minakai Gofukuten goanmai*, 1929. Courtesy of the Archival Museum of the Faculty of Economics, Shiga University, Japan.

At the same time, new technology was adopted to better apply the commercial wisdom of Ōmi forebears. For instance, wireless communication between the stores in Kyoto and in Seoul and between branch managers in Korea and in Manchukuo replaced the traditional function of peddling as a means of gathering market information and conducting product research. In any capitalist economy, geographers have noted, “space-transcending technologies” are pivotal to “ensuring that commodities are delivered to spatially separated markets, to recoup investments in the shortest time possible.”¹²² This marriage of technology with tradition allowed Minakai to reduce transaction costs between stores and to import a full line of Japanese merchandise, especially kimono, directly from its mecca in Kyoto, unmatched in range by its rivals.¹²³

Hiring educated women became as crucial to managing the day-to-day operation of Minakai as it was to maintaining the store’s progressive image.¹²⁴ Undoubtedly inspired by what Katsujirō had seen at American emporiums, Minakai actively recruited female clerks, Japanese and Korean, who outnumbered male employees in its three largest branches in Taegu, Seoul, and P’yōngyang.¹²⁵ Mostly single women from elite and middle-class families, these “shop girls” represented an emergent category of “professional working women” in the empire. Their growing presence and visibility on one level signaled “a fragmentation of dry-goods business as a masculine space.” Nevertheless, the clerical labor of women continued to be viewed, in accord with the bourgeois ideal, as part of their “training in homemaking before marriage.” Seeking independence from the shackles of “the family” (*ie*), female clerks at Minakai found themselves in but another form of patriarchy, underpinned by the same capitalist logic that prioritized their reproductive over productive labor.¹²⁶

Underneath its modern façade, Minakai continued to operate on the traditional platform built by its Ōmi merchant predecessors. The store motto, recited daily by employees, enshrined their dictums of “trust, reliability, and selling widely at low margin.”¹²⁷ And its provincial identity hardly faded with time. Even as Minakai appeared in a Western architectural form, the stamp of Ōmi remained indelible in its corporate organization (based on kinship and native-place ties), in its supply chains of textile products, and in its internal systems of management, accounting, and employee training.¹²⁸ While reaping economies of scale in marketing and distribution, the old principle of central purchasing—entrusted to the relevant departments in Kyoto, Tokyo, and Osaka—also worked to ensure consistent quality of merchandise across Minakai’s branches in Korea and Manchuria, which were prohibited (by Article 34 of *Rules*) from replenishing their stock on their own.¹²⁹

Inside the store, the relations between management and labor stayed within the framework of family capitalism. Working under the grasp of Shiga-born managers, store clerks of both genders continued to toe the line of discipline and decorum set by Katsujirō, with the Shin Buddhist faith lending a moral buffer to the excess of material life. The result was a widening gulf between the frugality of low-wage

employees and the middle-class lifestyle they promoted and “performed” on the floor, between Minakai’s operation as an extended family and the ideal of the *hōmu* (home) centered on a nuclear family of a *sarariiman* purveyed by its sale of cultural commodities.¹³⁰ Perhaps this paradox itself represented another legacy of the Tokugawa era, when Ōmi merchants operated at the nexus of consumption and saving in the early modern market economy, preaching thrift for their family while propping up the lifestyle of prodigal samurai.

Hewing closely to the teachings of Ōmi shōnin, Minakai also began extending them to local youth in colonial Korea. From 1929, the Seoul store annually hosted vocational school pupils, both Japanese and Korean, male and female, for a period of commercial training in the summer or winter.¹³¹ So did other department stores, many of which hired Korean graduates of elite higher schools as sales clerks.¹³² In the mid-1930s, Koreans accounted for more than a third of Chōjiya’s clerks (136 out of 387), including thirty women, and a quarter of Mitsukoshi’s. Although Minakai continued to prefer hiring Shiga natives, it began recruiting Koreans as well. This followed a growing trend among Japanese-run department stores to target Korean urbanites, beyond their core market of predominantly Japanese salaried white-collar employees.¹³³ As noted, Chōjiya had from early on catered to Koreans, who were known to have adopted Western dress “far more enthusiastically than the Japanese,” who were attached to their kimono.¹³⁴ Minakai too, after its reincarnation as a department store, sought to capture the rising purchasing power of Koreans, retooling its marketing strategy by placing ads in the *Tonga ilbo* and other vernacular papers.¹³⁵ Meanwhile, Hwasin not only employed educated Korean women¹³⁶ but also actively scouted for model clerks trained by Minakai and Chōjiya according to the Ōmi tradition.¹³⁷ Their hiring practices suggest that a growing number of Koreans who entered the service economy were influenced by or at least exposed to Ōmi merchant values and precepts.

DEPARTMENT STORES AS AGENTS OF ASSIMILATION

Operating within a diverse hierarchy of clientele, the two Ōmi merchant stores joined their rivals to play a central role in linking the empire and its multiethnic inhabitants to a global culture of consumption. Their collective social impact was nothing short of revolutionary. In a story repeated the world over, department stores transformed society by leaving not a single facet of local life untouched, explained Date Masao, a Japanese manager of Hwasin.¹³⁸ Not only were they “trend setters” in fashion, but by leveraging “the power of advertising” and spectacle, they also created a fetish for consumption, which moved from the sidelines to the center stage of capitalism—“the enthronement of the commodity” that “glorif[ied]” its “exchange value,” in the words of the cultural theorist Walter Benjamin.¹³⁹

Along with affluence, department stores offered a promise of democratic access to cosmopolitan or “mass-mediated modernity.”¹⁴⁰ In creating entirely new spaces

of consumption, they created novel modes of social interaction. As the work of Se-Mi Oh and others has shown, Koreans from all walks of life, not just Japanese settlers, patronized department stores as customers, onlookers, strollers, and tourists from out of town.¹⁴¹ Students of elite-track higher schools, styling themselves as *Moga* (Modern Girl) and *Mobo* (Modern Boy), frequented local emporia after school to sample the latest fashions or to sip a cup of coffee.¹⁴² Dining at a restaurant in the department store became a weekend ritual for many middle-class families. Even without any intention or means to buy, visitors could freely browse a variety of household goods and curated products on display and ride an escalator in Chōjiya or the giant elevator in Hwasin. The dual appeal of affluence and access created a swelling “pilgrimage” to “the phantasmagoria of capitalist culture,”¹⁴³ selling fantasies of losing oneself in “reveries of consumption,” as the iconoclastic writer Yi Sang (1910–1937) described his own experience wandering to the rooftop of Mitsukoshi.¹⁴⁴

If department stores helped spread a new middle-class lifestyle across differences in ethnicity, class, and gender, however, their seductive allure exposed the colonial society’s fault lines as well. On more than a few occasions, Korean papers warned their readers against the consumer culture centered on Honmachi and its decadent effect on people.¹⁴⁵ Hwasin endured an unflattering portrayal by some critics as “Japanese capitalism painted in Korean colors” for “oversupplying metropolitan goods.”¹⁴⁶ But the most vociferous resistance to department stores came from small and mid-sized retailers, a conflict that also played out in Japan and Manchuria. In late 1929, with all four Japanese department stores poised to expand into the provinces, the *Tonga ilbo* raised the alarm that they would do “grave damage” to local merchants and the indigenous Korean economy.¹⁴⁷ Worried that they might lose their customers to Minakai, Japanese merchants in Taegu, too, mounted a protracted campaign against its “grand new opening,” which they reckoned as an “invasion” of predatory capital into their business turf.¹⁴⁸

In self-defense, managers of department stores often appealed to the notion of co-prosperity and coexistence (*kyōson kyōei*)¹⁴⁹ and, like their Tokugawa fore-runners, broadly portrayed their business as a public good. Having spent decades mastering the techniques of mass production, asserted the president of Chōjiya, his store contributed to “improving people’s clothing,” which “benefits the national economy as a whole.”¹⁵⁰ The “public nature” of the department store, concurred a manager of Hwasin, lay not only in supplying daily needs and offering amusements to anyone who ventured in off the street but also in the variety of services it rendered to local communities. Among them was utilizing its open floor space to hold art exhibits, which doubled “as second schools to artists” and even “outclass[ed] real museums” in their curatorial quality. Serving many public roles rolled into one, the department store operated for a broader social purpose. This spirit of charity evidently extended to store employees, who were among the first to make

donations in times of distress or natural disaster.¹⁵¹ Minakai also tried wherever possible to source local labor and raw materials for refurbishing its branches, just as Ōmi merchants had renovated their stores during downturns to help reboot the local economy.¹⁵² From the perspective of Ōmi-born managers, department stores reified the Buddhist ideal of social service championed by their ancestors. Like Christian businessmen, they seldom treated religion as a mere ploy to increase profit. Nevertheless, if enhancing the store's image as a purveyor of public good was also good publicity, so much the better.

Across the empire, department stores carried the added political charge of helping the state reinforce the hitherto tenuous equation of “modern” and “Japanese” in the eyes of the colonized. If the nebulous policy of assimilation entailed spreading Japanese capital, goods, and culture through which to shape local people's values and attitudes regarding the metropole, the department store was a perfect vessel for that project. For its effort to “reform the Taiwanese aborigines and secure their allegiance,” the Government-General of Taiwan enlisted the edifying power of Shirokiya—its cornucopia of goods and displays of art, technology, and modern living—during their sightseeing tour of Japan, much in the way John Wanamaker used his store to shape people's morality through taste and decorum.¹⁵³ Shirokiya's distant Ōmi cousin, Takashimaya employed prominent *Nihonga* artists to create store designs that telegraphed Japan's cultural uniqueness and strength as a modern nation-empire to both foreign and domestic markets.¹⁵⁴ Their retail counterparts in Seoul viewed their business no less as a vital extension of Japan's imperial mission. Department stores combined a patriotic duty to sell made-in-Japan goods and a political goal to “elevate the level of Korean culture,” mused a manager of Mitsukoshi.¹⁵⁵ Above all, they spread a new understanding of what it meant to lead “a modern cultured life” (*bunka seikatsu*).¹⁵⁶ Among mass consumers in Korea, one paper reported in excitement, Chōjiya's spectacular sales had “overturned the old disdain for ready-made clothes” by demonstrating that, instead, they were “inseparable from the daily life of modern cultured men.”¹⁵⁷ No doubt Chōjiya and Minakai also regarded their hosting of local students for commercial training and the hiring of Korean clerks as advancing this colonial dyad of accumulation and assimilation.

By this time, the faith Wanamaker had invested in the transformative power of mass retail was plain to see across the Pacific. One school student in Shiga, in a 1934 essay, reported on great strides made by “our policy of assimilation” in “narrowing a gap in customs” between Japanese and native inhabitants in the colonies, “laying the groundwork for the expansion of department stores.”¹⁵⁸ The on-the-ground managers, however, viewed causality as running the other way, seeing their stores as doing the work of bridging colonial difference on the state's behalf. Department stores had the power to transform society, a manager of Hwasin ventured, far more than the colonial government: “Everything today pivots on department stores.”¹⁵⁹ For owners and patrons alike, department stores were their empire.

PARTNERS OF THE STATE IN CONTINENTAL
EXPANSION AND WAR

Yet even the giant retailers were far from autonomous agents of change. As new historians of capitalism remind us, businesspeople were always embedded within “shifting power relations” and “rules of exchange . . . set politically,”¹⁶⁰ and nowhere more so than in colonial Korea, ruled by the Governor-General’s decree. The boundaries between private and public spheres in the colonial political economy blurred further as Japan’s military drive intensified on the continent. As seen in the evolution of Itōchū, the partnership of capital with state power—what Katsujirō had advocated in his diary—increasingly took on the characteristics of military contracting, which was all but mandated by war from 1937.

Following the Manchurian invasion of 1931, Minakai and Chōjiya strove to cement their relations with colonial authority as a new focus of business policy. Both consolidated their role as purveyor of clothing to various branches of the colonial government and consumer cooperatives for their employees, amid voices of protest from local retailers.¹⁶¹ The store managers also cultivated direct ties with officialdom. In September 1933, Minakai invited three hundred Government-General bureaucrats to celebrate the grand opening of its new building in Seoul.¹⁶² When Chōjiya completed yet another round of renovation years later, its inauguration was attended by over five hundred local dignitaries, including the mayor and the governor of Kyōnggi.¹⁶³ Each occasion displayed the store’s fortune as inextricably bound up with that of Japan’s continental empire. Both stores in Seoul, too, received visits from the colonial governor himself.¹⁶⁴ Minakai’s company records indicate that Katsujirō and his deputy, Tomijūrō, each developed a personal relationship with Governor-General Ugaki Kazushige (1931–1936), whose term of office not by chance overlapped with the store’s brisk expansion into the Chinese interior.¹⁶⁵

Minakai extended various gestures of support, tangible and symbolic, to the Japanese military. In October 1930, for instance, Minakai donated towels and bars of soap to the eighty-odd soldiers from the two army divisions staying in Seoul, while its clerks sported a special badge to pay obeisance to the Imperial Navy at its twenty-fifth anniversary.¹⁶⁶ Attendance at state and military ceremonies likewise became routine. In 1932, the founding year of Manchukuo alone, managers of the Seoul store joined high-ranking colonial bureaucrats at multiple official venues, celebrating the emperor’s birthday, welcoming “the victorious troops returning” from Manchuria, and commemorating the war dead.¹⁶⁷

At the same time, clerk training became interpenetrated by the military. All “commercial warriors” under twenty-three years of age were required to enroll in Minakai’s own youth training center, which focused on conducting military drills.¹⁶⁸ Chōjiya instituted a similar program for its male clerks,¹⁶⁹ and mobilized its female employees to participate in a variety of war-support activities. A few

months following the Manchurian takeover, these Chōjiya clerks stood on the platform of the Seoul train station to greet members of the Greater Japan Young Women's Association, who had completed their *imon* (comfort) visit with troops of the Kwantung Army, and gave them a patriotic send-off back to the metropole.¹⁷⁰

The onset of the Sino-Japanese War made cooperation with the state as indispensable as it was ineluctable. By then, the alliance of business with colonial power had ripened. Minakai and Chōjiya joined department stores across the empire to spearhead donation drives in support of Japan's imperial cause. Minakai donated nearly 3,000 yen to the national defense fund, while Chōjiya's factory hands contributed a sum of 200 yen out of their modest salaries to "Korea's air defense."¹⁷¹ A few months later, Chōjiya raised the ante by gifting one whole airplane, which was christened "Chōjiya-gō" at an official ceremony held at the airfield in Yōuidō.¹⁷²

Like department stores and schools in the metropole, Minakai and Chōjiya offered their ample exhibit spaces to connect the home front to ongoing battles on the continent and, after December 1941, in the wider theater of the Asia-Pacific War. Along with sales events, they hosted a series of public displays to promote the central goals of the National Spiritual Mobilization Campaign, from "youth guidance" to "prevention of espionage."¹⁷³ Sponsored by the Government-General, Chōjiya was also accorded the honor of hosting an exhibition on "the 2,600th anniversary of Imperial Japan" in February 1940.¹⁷⁴ When the infamous name-changing campaign commenced that month, both Chōjiya and Minakai "encouraged" their Korean employees to adopt Japanese names, their paternalistic devotion to clerks now subsumed under the wartime policy of "uniting Japan and Korea as one" (*naisen ittai*).¹⁷⁵

These acts of collaboration expanded in tandem with the business of Minakai and Chōjiya. No sooner had the Imperial Army begun pushing into the Chinese interior than managers of both stores vowed to "assist the state" in developing Korea as a "military supply base"; each created an independent corporation in Shinkyō for meeting the daily needs of officials and soldiers stationed in Manchuria and North China.¹⁷⁶ Among the first Japanese emporia to appear in the central retail district of Taitung, East Asia Minakai launched its own drive into the Chinese market from its satellite base in Beijing, following the army's advance to open branches in Nanjing and other occupied cities.¹⁷⁷ The two stores were quickly joined by other department stores of Ōmi lineage in Japan. As part of the military policy in 1938, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry encouraged retail leaders to expand their operations into specific regions, assigning Takashimaya to Nanjing, Daimaru to Suzhou, and Shirokiya to Hangzhou.¹⁷⁸ Eager to recoup losses caused by the shrinking domestic demand, Takashimaya launched a network of branches in some twenty-five cities in China and Korea. Supplying food, apparel, furnishings, and other needs of the army, the South Manchurian Railway Company, and military companies, its business flourished quickly to reach a pre-war peak in 1944.¹⁷⁹

For Minakai, as for its metropolitan cousins, the outbreak of the war proved a bonanza. Nakae Shūgo—Katsujirō's eldest son who had taken charge of the Seoul store in 1939—attributed Minakai's business success, despite rising prices, to two main factors.¹⁸⁰ One was the "imperfect nature of [wartime economic] control." For example, the Department Store Law of 1937, passed in response to small retailers' demand for bureaucratic supervision of giant emporia in Japan,¹⁸¹ was never enforced in colonial Korea, where department stores remained in close liaison with the state.¹⁸² To be sure, wartime restrictions on the sales of high-end kimono and textiles in general put downward pressure on revenues at Minakai as well as Mitsukoshi. Yet in spite of military control on production and distribution, price regulations, looming shortages of raw materials, and introduction of low-quality substitutes, Minakai's business records indicate a steady rise in its fortunes.¹⁸³ State reliance on department stores for supplying the army and rationing goods also conferred on them a certain measure of business security.¹⁸⁴

Another, more compelling reason offered by Nakae Shūgo was "the improved living standards of workers, especially in Korea's rapidly expanding mining sector, which has boosted their consumption of household articles, furniture, and apparel."¹⁸⁵ Not unlike Sears and Roebuck, which had launched its chain stores in 1925 to sell commodities its own employees could afford, wartime Minakai came to target low-wage workers as its new clientele.¹⁸⁶ More broadly, Minakai's success owed to a recent "trend toward Japanization of the Korean lifestyle," one business almanac noted.¹⁸⁷ Local police reports testified to this phenomenon. The culture of consumption, which revolved around department stores and movie theaters, began to blur class and ethnic divides, growing unabated despite official admonishments against luxury and repeated calls for austerity. Colonial emporiums had pledged to support the military but not at the expense of their "consumer-subjects," whose subversive agency apparently was fed by a competing variety of recreational facilities throughout the war.¹⁸⁸

By the late 1930s, the two family stores founded by Ōmi merchants had outgrown their provincial origins to morph into retail titans of continental scale. Both commanded a network of stores that extended the length of the Korean peninsula and into the bustling cities of Manchukuo and back to the ancestral ground in Ōmi and Kansai (map 9).¹⁸⁹ Neither department store enjoyed quite the cachet of Mitsukoshi, which became a brand unto itself. Yet Minakai's "vigorous ability to expand stands unrivaled," observers noted, even by Mitsukoshi, which had only one branch in Seoul (1906) and another in Dalian (1928).¹⁹⁰ Minakai's status in the capital of Manchukuo was unshakable. One former Japanese resident reminisced: "When one spoke of department stores in Shinkyō at the time, it was Minakai. In its status as a go-to place for gifts, the store was identical to Mitsukoshi in the metropole."¹⁹¹ By 1940, Minakai had officially become the largest department store chain in the Japanese empire, with branches on the continent and with a cluster of affiliates and subsidiaries run more or less by the same cadre of the Nakae family's relations.¹⁹²



MAP 9. Minakai's main store and its branches in Korea and Manchuria. Source: Ōhashi Heiei 1935.

Its empire-wide network was also captured in the lyrics of “A Song of Minakai,” composed at the height of business expansion in 1938. Covering the entire chain of Minakai stores in seventeen verses, the song cycle’s final verse extols its Ōmi roots.¹⁹³

Ōmi merchants
 As renowned as Lake Biwa
 The cornerstone of our Minakai
 Is everlasting and indestructible Kondō.

Minakai’s anthem was the latest addition to the expanding blend of new and old techniques deployed to maintain a sense of pride and loyalty among employees to the Nakae family and its ancestors in Ōmi. As its concluding verse suggests, the store continued to frame itself as the finest incarnation of the diasporic spirit of Ōmi shōnin: even as its operations as a department store spanned the Asian continent, Minakai remained forever anchored in its birthplace and its merchant identity.

. . .

Few surpass the wealth and status attained by Minakai and Chōjiya in the prewar history of Japanese overseas retail.¹⁹⁴ Their activities in Korea and Manchuria from the turn of the century charted overlapping boundaries of business and empire, illustrating their co-expansion. Merchant capital trailed and buttressed colonial power, all the while redeploying provincial sentiment to serve a national project. The surviving records of Minakai convey the dynamic of this locally driven imperialism. Minakai’s rise as a department store rested on its adoption of a global form of mass retail, but one accompanied by a novel application of inherited practices and maxims in Ōmi—what I have conceptualized in terms of rescaling and grafting. This body of regional knowledge was given new life and meaning on the continent, where the scions of Ōmi merchants joined their fellow countrymen in shoring up the colonial enterprise while spearheading a retail revolution.

Overseas operations of Minakai and Chōjiya bore an unmistakable imprint of their provincial heritage. Chōjiya’s Buddhist commercial philosophy revealed diasporic sensibilities manifest in a long line of Ōmi merchants. Minakai’s business strategy demonstrated how their customs of cross-border trading were repurposed for continental expansion, even as they were rescaled to the colonial regime of accumulation. Echoes of tradition lingered in all aspects of Minakai’s corporate architecture, from the leadership cemented by kin and the method of accounting to the pattern of recruitment and the system of apprenticeship. For merchant families like the Nakae, the department store was a modern offshoot of Ōmi tradition, rather than a radical innovation.

In a spirit reminiscent of the Iwakura mission likened to a global “shopping spree,”¹⁹⁵ Katsujirō’s transpacific journey mapped a cornucopia of ideas for

modernizing Minakai, and by extension, for making Japan a prosperous and powerful nation. I read his travel diary as an internal dialogue with America, unspooling discoveries on its retail and migrant frontiers, while reaffirming values he cherished as a merchant of Ōmi. Such a dialogue linking the local to the global shaped his spatial multiplicity, a local cosmopolitan who operated a business empire-wide yet remained anchored in the religious and social milieu of Ōmi.

Katsujirō's encounter with two Americas—the global retail pioneer and a marginalized racial diaspora—provided the main impetus for upscaling Minakai into a modern emporium vested with a duty to expand Japan's hegemony. Yet its metamorphosis did not fundamentally disrupt Minakai's strategy of grafting imported ideas onto the inherited know-how of Ōmi *shōnin*. The department store that emerged from the process was not a mere hybrid of existing practices but a new and different (and unpredicted) "blend" possessing "characteristics present in neither of the two original components."¹⁹⁶ Nor did its continental expansion result in a simple "disembedding" of social and economic relations from its place of origin.¹⁹⁷ For Ōmi merchants active overseas, it had the contrary effect of strengthening their place-based ties and loyalties as they were stretched across Japan's East Asian empire.

Minakai's rapid growth in the 1930s underscored the new centrality of department stores as drivers of affluence and national power—and aspirations of their owners as social reformers. With a web of branches sprawling across the continent, Minakai and Chōjiya each served as the harbinger of consumer capitalism as well as the handmaiden of colonial rule, advancing the imperatives of accumulation and assimilation. As the empire's leading retailers, the two stores of Ōmi lineage stood at the front line of merchant capital's collaboration with the state, which crested during the war.

As surely as their active support for the empire boosted their business, however, it also guaranteed their sudden demise after 1945. Department stores headquartered in the metropole, such as Takashimaya and Mitsukoshi, survived the collapse of Japan's overseas imperium to revive their fortunes quickly in the postwar era. By contrast, colonial emporiums like Minakai and Chōjiya never emerged from the rubble of defeat. They lost everything with surrender—not unlike the way some merchants of Ōmi, having relied on official patronage, went under with the fall of the Tokugawa regime. All that Minakai and Chōjiya had built across the vast Asian mainland would vanish as quickly as their business had prospered during the war, leaving only architectural relics of their past grandeur behind.¹⁹⁸