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

« Toy Stories of Modern Japan:
Labour-intensive Industrialisation and Skills in the Interwar Period »

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Abstract

A recent book titled *Labour-intensive Industrialization in Global History* (Edited by Austin and Sugihara, 2013) pointed out that the labour-intensity should not be regarded as a feature of a stage but as a type of industrialization in the context of the economic development. The lecture tries to exemplify this hypothesis by exploring the role of small-scale industries in Japan's industrialization by focusing on the changing patterns of the export trade from the late nineteenth century to after World War II. Although the individual categories only accounted for small proportions, the sum of various consumer goods other than textiles contributed a considerable proportion of manufactured exports, with changing the patterns in the composition after World War I. We can assume that there was an evolutionary process in production and that the small-scale industries played a central role in it. In other words, the foundation of the competitive-edge of Japan's export-oriented industries transformed from cheap female labourers at the large textile factories to the skilled or semi-skilled male workers in the small workshops. We exemplify this process by focusing on the development of urban toy industry, a typical labour-intensive industry proliferated among industrialized as well as developing countries and regions from 19th century onward, and suggest that this form of industrial rivalry—competing for the affluent market in industrial finished goods—appears to have pioneered an important type of world trade, which expanded after World War II.