

“The Shibusawa Photographs”

This collection of photographs is a part of “The Shibusawa Photographs” at our institute.

Our institute has a photo collection called “The Shibusawa Photographs.” Mr. Shibusawa was a businessman, president of the Bank of Japan, patron and organizer of the academic world, a scholar and the founder of our institute. The collection is made up of photos that Mr. Shibusawa had commissioned. They were taken around 1935 by various people, for example, professional photographers, farmers and scholars from. They show Japanese in daily life, landscapes and tools. They are valuable in the study of Japanese culture and history. We have wanted to show them to the public for a long time, but there have been serious problems to solve first. First, we would like to explain about the problems we have been faced and our plan to open an exhibition.

One of the problems is that almost all of these photos have no negatives, and we don't know if they have been lost, or not. After Mr. Shibusawa's death in 1963, his institute almost completely stopped its operations for a while, because the project had been run by him personally. After many twists and turns, 23 years ago, our university invited the institute to join us. From that time, the institute has belonged to our university. Many historical materials were taken over by our university. Among the materials were 100 photo albums. Each album had small-sized photos, without negatives. We called them “The Shibusawa Photographs.” No one knew where the negatives went. The albums contained about 4000 photos, but their condition was bad, so, we began to take close-up pictures. That was 15 years ago.

Digital cameras and scanners were not common at that time. After taking close-up pictures, we made cards pasted with the enlarged photos, and now we are arranging them for analysis. Later, we found 4000 more photographs, so the total number is about 8000. The latter 4000 are being arranged now.

We got the approval of the Shibusawa family to use these photos as we like. Since the origin of our institute was Shibusawa's personal institute, this approval was important. But, of course, it is still difficult to use them freely in public. Someone, living somewhere, may have the negatives, if only a small part of them. The real owners of the photos are the people who hold the negatives. We are facing the problem of deciding what rights we have to show them in public.

I said, Mr. Shibusawa had photos taken by various people. In almost all of the cases, it is not clear how Mr. Shibusawa was involved with the taking of the photos. He might have spent money to have the photos taken, sometimes he might have lent a camera and film and other times he might have bought previously taken photos, and even more rarely he might have taken pictures by himself. It is difficult to know every detail clearly, because about 80 years has passed. But our right to show them in public may be affected by his level of involvement in the process. These four years, we traced the history of some of the photos to better understand how and by whom they were taken. We found it was hard to get accurate information with such a short investigation. As times passes, the number of people who have first-hand information about the photos is decreasing.

One more thing is that, many pictures have been pasted onto paper, and some of the pieces of paper have captions written on them. We found the captions are mostly accurate, just a few of them have mistakes, but we have to check them, too.

At the same time, the number of people who are asking us to show the photos is increasing. If we want to hold the exhibition, we should start soon, even though we don't have a clear solution to our problem. We have to do it well-mannered and rationally. This book is the first to show these photos to the general public. The photos in this book were taken on Kikai island in 1935/1936.