

Introduction to the English Edition

The story of how the original Japanese edition of this *Pictopedia of Everyday Life in Medieval Japan* was compiled begins before the Second World War with Shibusawa Keizo (澁澤敬三, 1896-1963). Shibusawa, grandson of the influential financier and entrepreneur Shibusawa Eiichi (澁澤栄一, 1840-1931), was himself a very “public person”, serving in the Cabinet of Prime Minister Shidehara and as director of the Bank of Japan, as well as being a leading business figure. However, he also had a very different claim to fame—prominent pioneer and promoter in the field of Japanese folk culture studies.

Shibusawa’s particular interest lay in the fields of *mingu* (民具), “folk implements” such as agricultural and fishery tools, and the history of fisheries in Japan. However, he was also instrumental in encouraging and promoting, both inspirationally and financially, a wide range of studies in what came to be called Japan’s “material culture” (物質文化), to this end establishing the “Attic Museum”, which developed into the Institute for the Study of Japanese Folk Culture (日本常民文化研究所). This Museum and Institute attracted a large number of young, talented researchers who later formed part of the core for post-war folk culture studies in Japan.

Shibusawa developed an interest in the Japanese art known as *emakimono* (絵巻物), picture scrolls. These scrolls contain stories, lavishly illustrated with pictures of scenes described in the text, concerning historical, fictional, or religious themes. He was especially interested in scrolls painted during the Heian and Kamakura periods, but not only for their great artistic value. He noticed that the great detail in the illustrations could provide a unique window into actual lifestyles of the people at that time, their clothing, homes, food, their interpersonal relations, their manner of walking and carrying things. In other words, he recognized their ability to show concretely what could only be surmised through readings of literary works or historical documents. If, he suggested, a dictionary, in Japanese a *jibiki* (字引), literally a “puller of characters”, can be created to allow us to “pull out” the meanings of words, why not make an *ebiki* (絵引) to “pull out” the meanings of the things and customs illustrated in these scrolls?

In 1940, Shibusawa formed a “study group” to explore the possibilities of such an “*ebiki*”. However, its research was interrupted by the war, and much of the initial work destroyed. It was in 1955 that the work was resumed, with a newly formed group. In those days before the advent of copy machines, digital cameras, and word processors, it was a task requiring much time and effort. Pertinent sections of each scroll were selected, and the painter Murata Deigyū (村田泥牛) would then painstakingly copy them in detail by hand. The group, meeting the last Sunday of each month, would then allocate numbers to the objects or activities in each sketch, giving special attention to those involving the “com-

mon people” rather than those in authority. After identifying each to the best of the group’s ability there would be discussion of the function, context, and significance. The folk culture specialist Miyamoto Tsuneichi (宮本常一), a central member of the group, was delegated to write the analysis for each picture. A detailed index was also provided to enable prospective readers to “pull out” objects or actions they were interested in. For example, if there was interest in various styles of sitting—sitting cross-legged, sitting with knees up, sitting on the ground and worshipping, etc.—one would consult the index to find the relevant pictures and the occasional analysis in order to discover the how, when, or why of people sitting in the various contexts provided. It was hoped that this would enable readers to understand not only everyday life in medieval Japan, but also to help them understand what has changed and what has remained the same throughout the years.

This labor finally resulted in the publication by Kadokawa Shoten in 1966 of the *Emakimono ni yoru Nihon Jōmin Seikatsu Ebiki* (『絵巻物による日本常民生活絵引』) in five volumes. Unfortunately, Shibusawa did not live to see what became of one of his favorite projects, having died in 1963. After the Institute for the Study of Japanese Folk Culture was incorporated into Kanagawa University (1981), the *Ebiki* was re-issued by the Heibonsha publishing house in 1984. It is this edition to which the Kanagawa University 21st Century COE Program, “Systemization of Nonwritten Cultural Materials for the Study of Human Societies”, has provided this translation.

The first two volumes of the original five have been translated, and re-titled *Multilingual Version of Pictopedia of Everyday Life in Medieval Japan, compiled from picture scrolls*. “Multilingual Version” refers to the translation of the original Japanese captions into English, Chinese, and Korean, in order to assist and encourage comparative studies in Asian folk culture studies.

As might be expected in pioneer works such as the original *Ebiki*, not all of the information or interpretations have stood the test of time. Subsequent new research reveals some inaccuracies in the captions or in the analyses provided, or at least casts doubt on certain statements. However, the editors have chosen to respect the efforts of the original compilers and have for the most part translated the text as it stands, leaving judgments of accuracy to the discretion of the reader.

It is hoped that this *Pictopedia* will deepen interest in the rich folk culture of Japan, and at the same time give a glimpse of an interesting page in the history of folk culture studies in Japan as written by Shibusawa Keizo and his associates.

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