

Global Significance of Compiling the Pictorial Dictionary of Everyday Lives

FUKUTA Ajo

Introduction

Seikatsu ebiki, or pictorial dictionary of folk culture, is an unfamiliar term whose meaning is little known in lay or academic circles. *Seikatsu ebiki* was first developed as *Emakimono ni yoru Nihon Jōmin Seikatsu Ebiki* (Pictorial Dictionary of Japanese Folk Culture Compiled from Picture Scrolls). Even today, it is only known as such among specialists especially in the field of Folklore. It is hard to express it in English or French: a fitting translation for *ebiki* has probably yet to be found, and the corresponding word in either language probably does not exist.

I would therefore like to look at the process of compiling this unique pictorial dictionary and shed light on its characteristics. I would also like to examine the wider significance of pictorial compilation by introducing some of our recent efforts, namely a project that will extend the compiling method to everyday lives in early modern Japan.

1. Institute for the Study of Japanese Folk Culture

A unique facility called the Institute for the Study of Japanese Folk Culture is currently based at Kanagawa University. Although many research institutes have been set up at private universities in Japan, most of which assist research of the academic members of particular faculties. In other words, they serve as facilities to allot research funds. Research institutes with their own goals and content are rare. The Institute for the Study of Japanese Folk Culture at Kanagawa University is unique in that it is not attached to a specific department and its research topics are independent of the academic content in other departments.

The institute's uniqueness is due to its history. It initially operated as a private incorporated foundation and its originality was widely known. It was not until 1982 that the institute was transferred to Kanagawa University due to financial difficulties. Consequently its financial base was secured and the institute was able to carry on and expand its activities. At the same time, however, it became subject to the various restraints of a facility attached to a private university. The crucial limitation was the lack of full-time institute members, as is the case at most of such research institutes. Usually the faculty members of the undergraduate and graduate schools serve concurrently as institute members. The institute at Kanagawa University is no exception and the faculty members of the departments take time out of their teaching to conduct research.

Although opinions vary on when the Institute was established, I believe it was 1925 when Keizō Shibusawa opened what is called the Attic Museum at his home with friends. Keizō was a businessman and the grandson of Eiichi Shibusawa, an industrialist of the Meiji period. True to its name, it was a museum that displayed various items that he had been collecting privately. Yet the museum's key activity was research and the publication of the findings carried out with Keizō's ample funds. The three pillars of the Attic Museum's activities were *minzoku* (folk custom), *mingu* (folk implements) and *monjo* (written documents). The museum was unique in which it conducted research that integrated the three. It was Keizō who coined the word *mingu* that is widely used today. Around 1942, the Attic Museum changed its name to the Institute for the Study of Japanese Folk Culture, the name it has to this day.

2. Pictorial Dictionary of Everyday Lives Compiled from Picture Scrolls

Keizō Shibusawa had a broad outlook and took time out from his busy schedule as a businessman to participate in research. He began to take particular interest in paintings as historical records. Shibusawa was driven to accumulate basic data for academic research and open it to the public. Consequently he compiled a vocabulary

dictionary (*Bunken sakuin* 1935/1936) for various literary documents such as *Seiken muna zanyō* (Worldly Calculation), *Tōkaidō chū hizakurige* (Shank's Mare), a comic book of travel, and *Jikata hanreiroku*, a book on the systems of the local regions. He also wrote *Nihon gyomei shūran* (1942-1944), a compilation of fish names in Japan. The concept of a pictorial dictionary using illustrated material as the key emerged as an extension of such activities.

Shibusawa established the Emakimono kenkyu-kai, a research group for handscroll paintings, in 1940 and began to study ways to use the picture scrolls as historical records. He had been studying *ashimaka* (a short type of footwear made of braided straw and other material) and must have focused on the picture scrolls while studying that history. So he asked Japanese-style painter Yasuo Hashiura to reproduce the picture scrolls and the study group members went on to name the objects depicted in them. Instead of simply reproducing the entire picture, Hashiura, who was also a folklore researcher, picked out the parts that depicted people's daily lives and left out others. The task, however, was interrupted by the war, during which Hashiura's reproductions were destroyed. But Shibusawa lost none of his enthusiasm for creating an *ebiki* using handscroll paintings as historical records and picked up the task after World War II.

In 1954 Shibusawa published a short essay titled, "Could we not create an *ebiki* (pictorial dictionary)?" presenting the concept of the *ebiki* and explaining his dream to restart the compilation. The study group resumed its activities the following year and this time Japanese-style painter Deigyū Murata was commissioned to reproduce handscroll paintings. Many of the group members took part in pursuing the project and the results were published in 1965, by which time Shibusawa had passed away. It was indeed a pictorial dictionary that allowed people to learn about things from drawings. The *ebiki* was made by: (1) sectioning off the painting; (2) erasing unnecessary elements such as the background while reproducing the drawing and emphasizing scenes in daily lives; (3) assigning numbers; (4) naming each object; (5) adding what could be interpreted from the drawing in writing. The *ebiki* was compiled for each picture scroll and was completed as a five-volume work. Short scrolls were brought together to form a volume, while a long scroll, such as *Ippen hijiri-e*, was given a volume on its own.

3. The originality of the *ebiki*

The compilation of this pictorial dictionary can be characterized by the following points:

First of all, the *ebiki* takes stock in the fact that the picture was drawn at a specific time in the past and pays attention to the depicted scenes. Although backgrounds and scenes deemed unnecessary are left out and the reproduction does not show the exact scene in the scroll, the compilers have in general used the picture itself as a source. This way they are trying to help observers grasp the features of a particular period. The picture has not been changed by arbitrarily altering or adding lines.

Secondly, the *ebiki* tries to name each object thoroughly. The compilers have carefully observed the depicted objects, given the historical names that were used at that time, and put some thought into what it should be called in present terms. This attention to detail demonstrates that they are pursuing a method of learning about things through pictures as opposed to words.

Thirdly, the *ebiki* does not break down what is depicted into individual objects but focuses on the relationship between them. This enables the viewers to understand how the depicted accessories, clothes and people interconnect. The *ebiki* sections off the pictures broadly to show the combination of head ornaments, clothes and footwear and also whether a person is standing on a street, at home or in the grounds of temples or shrines. This is an extremely important point.

The above three points are noteworthy characteristics of the *ebiki* which similar publications lack. Among a range of publication that offer similar contents are illustrated dictionaries, which seemingly are pictorial as opposed to word indices. Such books are published around the world for novice language students. The names of the items depicted in the illustrations are drawn for the dictionaries and are shown through numbers or arrows,

allowing students to learn the meaning of words without complicated explanations. This method is also used in other kinds of dictionaries; for example in architecture or those showing the names of different parts of Buddhist statues.

Another similar type of book is the illustrated lexicon which offers illustrations and symbols from the past arranged according to theme. Even when they refer to a picture scroll, however, the illustrations are often redrawn for better understanding. Usually a lexicon does not pick out and names objects in close detail or depicts them on their own. Rarely do such books depict items in combination. When a scene is shown as a whole, the names of each object are not shown and only the general impression of the scene is given.

The same can be said for many of the recently-published dictionaries that aim to depict life and customs using illustrations. Therefore we can say that the pictorial dictionary is one of a kind. It is unlikely that anyone else has tried to compile a dictionary based on illustrations and symbols drawn in the past, either inside or outside Japan. In this sense, the *ebiki* (the pictorial dictionary) is Japan's unique contribution to the world.

Our study has been adopted by the 21st Century COE Program under the title of "Systematization of Nonwritten Cultural Materials for the Study of Human Societies." We plan to carry on and expand the project of compiling which our research predecessors put together, and turn it into a shared world asset. We will begin by introducing the *ebiki* to the world so that it may be used to promote Japanese studies. We are also compiling a multi-lingual edition of the *ebiki* to introduce the compilation method. For this purpose, the captions of objects in the *ebiki* will first be translated into English, Chinese, Korean and French and then edited and published together with the English translation of the overall interpretation. Along the way we also hope to complete a comparative database table of the objects and their corresponding names in the four languages.

We also hope to apply the compilation method for the *ebiki*, which only covers up to the Middle Ages, to the recent modern periods in Japan and eventually compile an *ebiki* in these periods too. Over the five years of the COE program, we will try to complete draft editions. Our presentations today will be part of this effort.

Our third goal is to test the unique compilation method of the *ebiki* on projects outside Japan. We are already working on a pictorial dictionary of everyday lives based on the Genre paintings from the Joseon dynasty of Korea as well as a noted handscroll painting, entitled *Flourishing Suzhou* from Qianlong era of the Qing dynasty China.

To initiate a global project like this, we must first consider whether illustrated material depicting daily life is available everywhere in the world and to what extent drawing pictures was common. Indeed, whether people drew pictures as a record of their lives is also a point to be examined. In Japan, painting scenes from daily life was (comparatively usual from the early modern period. From the middle of this period onward, in particular, an increasing number of books with many illustrations were published. In novels, the illustrations enhance to understand the story and are works of imagination. Gradually, however, realistic depictions of subject matter emerged. The series of *meisho zue*, paintings of notable sights, that first came out at the end of the 18th century is a typical example. Also, a number of paintings by nonprofessional painters began to increase. Some people began to draw what they could not express in words keeping diaries and turned them into picture diaries. Others began to sketch what they saw during trips and added the sketches to their travel records. Although people used words at first, they gradually began to recall through pictures. This eventually led to paintings in the context of modern art education.

I do not believe that this Japanese's way to appreciate drawing process is universal. From what I know of China, for example, drawing realistic scenes of daily life was rare, especially during the Qing period. Nonprofessional drawings such as picture diaries are also hard to find. This is probably the case elsewhere around the world; the compilation of the *ebiki* in Japan may not be carried out in the same manner everywhere. We must understand the different nature of illustrated material in various cultures and pursue the compilation of an *ebiki* with originality.

4. An attempt to compile a pictorial dictionary of everyday lives in the early modern period, Japan – *Tōkaidō meisho zue*

During the later stage of the early modern period, heavily-illustrated geographical guidebooks on specific regions called “meisho zue” (views of notable sights) were published in large numbers. First to be published was the five-volume *Miyako meisho zue* (1780). The illustrated guidebook on sights of Kyōto was the joint effort of Akisato Ritō who resided in Kyōto and a painter Takehara Shunchōsai, and published by Yoshinoya Tamehachi, a Kyōto based publisher. This book reportedly sold well. Readers were attracted to such guidebooks, which had large illustrations that depicted landscape and objects in detail, at times from a bird’s-eye view and at other times at an eye level. Akisato who was successful with the guidebook on Kyōto, went on to write and publish a series of guidebooks including *Yamato meisho zue* (1791) on the present-day Nara region, *Settsu meisho zue* (1796-98) on the present-day Ōsaka and Hyōgo regions, *Tōkaidō meisho zue* (1797) on the noted route connecting Edo (now Tōkyo) and Kyōto, *Kawachi meisho zue* (1801) on the present-day eastern part of Ōsaka. Among them the *Tōkaidō meisho zue* covers the largest area and offers a number of illustrations that were drawn by not one but five painters.

Tōkaidō meisho zue picks up scenic and historic places along the road and depicts them through illustrations. Usually the guidebook picks a landmark that is mentioned in old poems and introduces it along with the poem. The book also focuses on places where historical events took place and explains them along with the artist’s rendition of the event. *Tōkaidō meisho zue* contains about 200 illustrations, many of which show classical landmarks. More noteworthy, however, is the fact that some pictures capture the atmosphere of post station towns or festivals in different places. About a quarter of the illustrations are such paintings. The originality of *Tōkaidō meisho zue* made an impact on *Kane no waraji* and *Tōkaidō-chū hizakurige* written by an Edo-period writer, Jippensha Ikku. Also similar compositions have been found in the work of an ukiyo-e artist Utagawa Hiroshige depicting the post stations of Tōkaidō. This shows that the illustrations in *Tōkaidō meisho zue* are highly original and valuable as reference material.

By luck, we were able to obtain the valuable 1797-edition of *Tōkaidō meisho zue*. We have begun preparations for compiling our third draft edition of the *Pictorial Dictionary of Everyday Lives in Early Modern Japan* based on *Tōkaidō meisho zue*.

The following is an outline of our project:

- (1) Scan the 200 illustrations contained in the six-volume *Tōkaidō meisho zue* and convert them into digital image files.
- (2) Of the 200, pick out about 50 illustrations that depict scenes related to daily life.
- (3) Pick out as many items shown in each picture as possible and name them. Check the names against those that were used during the early modern period.
- (4) While adding captions, determine the theme of the picture and remove parts that are not closely related to the theme.
- (5) Look at the theme and the picture as a whole, explain the meaning and describe the individual items in relation to them.
- (6) Place an illustration on a two-page spread and lay out the illustration, caption and explanation.
- (7) Complete the 100-page draft edition in A4 size with 50 illustrations, print and publish it as the *Tōkaidō* edition of the *Pictorial Dictionary of Everyday Lives in Early Modern Japan*.
- (8) Prepare a table that compares the word used in the caption and the corresponding illustration. This will then be turned into a database with a two-way search function. The database will be released on the internet.

5. The significance of compiling the *ebiki*

It is difficult to understand objects of daily life through only written materials. For contemporary objects, we only need to look at them. Even with objects from the past, we can use folk customs and implements that still exist today as clues. The modern folk customs and implements, however, cannot be used when examining things from a specific time in the past. Although illustrated material is a type of incidental record, it has immense value since it specifically tells us about objects and behavior at a particular time in the past. And this is what Keizō Shibusawa saw. He should be commended for pioneering the concept of the *ebiki* and for his efforts to compile it.

The *ebiki* is a unique method of compiling dictionaries by using illustrated material from the past as clues to understand how daily life was in a given period. This method was made possible by the large amount of illustrated material available in Japan. Some may think that it is impossible to compile a similar pictorial dictionary in other societies or cultures. Some complain that although Japan and China are neighbors in East Asia, things are different between the two nations. In China, they say that drawings are created according to certain standards, so the realistic depiction of people's daily lives has not been accumulated, resulting in a lack of illustrated material. Yet, there are limited Chinese works that have attempted to realistically capture scenes from daily life, suggesting that although it is difficult, a compilation is not completely impossible. The same applies to the United States and Europe. By extending the pictorial dictionary of folk culture in Japan to the early and recent modern periods based on Shibusawa's model, we will be able to show that the source material of the *ebiki* is not limited to handscroll paintings from the medieval period and that it therefore has universal applications.

There are problems, however, with using the compilation method as a guide for the study of everyday life including the following:

First of all, we must check to what extent the illustrations accurately depict reality. For the main part, illustrations were drawn by professional painters who tended to be bound by the rules they had studied as apprentices. In many cases their depictions are based on *funpon*, or reference drawings created by painters in the past. We must take this into consideration and understand the subjects correctly.

Secondly, we must verify how the local characteristics are shown. If objects from different regions are depicted in the same way, we know that the painters had preconceived notions of how things should look.

Thirdly, we must determine whether the depicted items can be used as records of that particular time. The date of the work is not an accurate guide to the age of the objects depicted. Unless we look at the material critically, it can not be a guide to study everyday lives in a specific period.

The pictorial dictionary of everyday lives has great value but also faces many challenges.

<Figures>

Fig.1 *Pictorial Dictionary of Japanese Folk Culture Compiled from Picture Scrolls*

Fig.2 *Tōkaidō meisho zue*

Fig.3 Gion, Kyōto

Fig.4 Nihonbashi, Edo

Fig.5 (1) Example of a scene used for *Pictorial Dictionary of Everyday Lives in Early Modern Japan*
(Fish Market in Nihonbashi)

Fig.6 (2) Example of a scene used for *Pictorial Dictionary of Everyday Lives in Early Modern Japan*
(Minamizume, Nihonbashi)