

A Private Public: Shibusawa Keizō's Museum of Economic History

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This essay explores a 1937 proposal to build a museum of economic history by Shibusawa Keizō (1896–1963) in light of the questions it raises for generating and disseminating “public” narratives from a “private” source.¹⁾ Although in the end this museum was never built, Shibusawa’s bold yet meticulous plans provide a glimpse into the fluidity of lines between conceptions of “public” and “private” in the early twentieth century, foreshadowing the renegotiation of such boundaries in the present-day.

I would like to begin by offering a puzzle: Shibusawa’s call to create an institution to educate contemporary Japanese regarding the dramatic economic transformations of the nineteenth century managed to avoid any use of the terms “capitalism” (*shihonshugi*) or “state” (*kokka*), otherwise commonly employed in Shibusawa’s own day as well as our own. That the author of the document was the grandson of the so-called “father of Japanese capitalism,” Shibusawa Eiichi (1840–1931), only makes their absence all the more glaring. Was this a rejection of the language of leftist debates then raging in the Japanese intellectual world? Or was it an implicit critique of the claims of capitalism to encapsulate the range of recent transformations, and an attendant refusal to grant the “state” a monopoly on agency? As the problem lies in what Shibusawa did not say, rather than what he did say, we must turn to contextualization for an answer. This, I would argue, tips the balance toward the latter, though by no means rules out the former. Regardless, these absences have the effect of accentuating Shibusawa’s actual choice of terms to develop his proposal, whose trajectories I trace in the pages that follow.

From Private to Public Property

Shibusawa Keizō led a double life. Officially, he was head of the financial empire founded by his grandfather, the legendary entrepreneur Shibusawa Eiichi. Groomed from an early age to lead, he was an insider’s insider within the establishment. Yet, on his own time, he was a generous patron of scholarship that ranged from Kindaichi Kyōsuke’s linguistic studies of the Ainu to the primatology of Imanishi Kinji.²⁾ In particular, Shibusawa is known for his intimate association with the emerging field of native ethnology (*minzokugaku*).³⁾ This new discipline championing investigation of the everyday life of commoners, or the Japanese “folk” (*minzoku* or *jōmin*), itself had roots in a concern for rural poverty relief.⁴⁾ Evincing a particular affection for fishing implements, Shibusawa was an indefatigable participant, thoughtful writer and

guiding force in the field. Thus, while the grandson continued to carry out the family tradition of classic philanthropy, he firmly grounded it in early twentieth century methods and concerns, pursuing the generation of social knowledge in a scientific mode.⁵⁾

The Shibusawa family had its roots in the wealthy rural peasant social stratum of *shōya hyakushō*.⁶⁾ From this sprang Eiichi's sense of "public ethics" (*kōkyō rinri*) that explicitly looked toward gaps in the state system. As Shibusawa reminisced, "My grandfather was the kind of person who did not take a hand in matters that the government and the like could properly handle. He tended to feel moved when things went wrong. Moreover, he tended to be motivated to do things for the sake of society (*yo no naka*). I am like that, too."⁷⁾ However, there existed a deep gulf between Eiichi's and Keizō's respective eras. Eiichi took pride in the identity that he saw between his rural origins and the entrepreneurial career that took him to the highest levels of Japanese society, on which basis he championed a form of economic democracy (*keizaiteki minshushugi*). But by the early twentieth century, relations between the flourishing industrial sector and flagging agricultural sector were widely articulated in hostile rather than harmonious terms. It should come of little surprise, then, that Keizō saw his role at the helm of the family empire in a different light. Fulfilling his official responsibilities meant immersing himself in an adversarial world that contained aspects that he described as "so unpleasant it makes one gasp in horror" (*zotto suru hodo iya na koto*).⁸⁾ In other words, unlike Eiichi, Keizō saw conflict rather than coincidence between his working duties and personal enthusiasms, which in turn gave rise to doubts about the leadership mission of his class.⁹⁾

In 1937, Shibusawa Keizō drew up detailed plans to establish a "folk" museum of economic history, thereby providing us with a revealing look into how he sought to structure relations between the two halves of his life, to discipline the fragmentation that had come to constitute him as a member of his society. Shibusawa presented this idea to his colleagues on the board of the Ryūmonsha Foundation (now known as the Shibusawa Eiichi Memorial Foundation) in the course of discussions regarding the renovation of a piece of foundation property. Shibusawa's museum proposal was accepted after a series of minor revisions, and the groundbreaking ceremony was performed in 1939. However, war with China and then the Allies made allocation of funds difficult. Following defeat, the American occupation saw the break-up of the Shibusawa empire under Shibusawa's own direction as Finance Minister. Thus, the proposed museum has yet to be realized as a permanent independent institution.¹⁰⁾ Yet Shibusawa's plans and the still extant core collection are well worth revisiting for the distinctive way in which they worked through the museum form to bring together early twentieth century notions of public and private, history and memory, nation and folk.

Shibusawa's "One Proposal" (*Hitotsu no Teian*) carefully laid out the reasons why such a museum ought to exist, what it would consist of, how much it would cost and how it would be administered. This document was never published, nor was it intended for a general audience, which makes the breadth of the proposal's conceptual framework all the more striking. For Shibusawa framed the central problem in terms of how to transform a private space into a public one. As the

“master” of a structure changed from a private individual (*ichi shijin*) to the public (*kōkyō dantai*), “use” (*shiyō*) necessarily raised different issues.¹¹⁾ Merely opening up the former private residence of Eiichi to visitors was not enough. Instead, Shibusawa suggested the addition of a “public attraction” (*shakai kōkyōteki atorakushon*), something specifically structured for the desires or needs of a collective general subject.¹²⁾ He allowed that perhaps a generic assembly or recreational hall would fit the bill. Yet Shibusawa wanted to make the most of the specific possibilities of the particular site, which meant paying tribute to Eiichi, not simply as an illustrious ancestor in the Shibusawa family tree, but as a part of a broader stream of history. The museum would offer a truly public space with “social educative significance” to benefit Japanese youth. Moreover, with a nod to cosmopolitanism and a dash of topicality, he noted that the museum could attract foreign visitors as well by working synergistically with the upcoming World’s Fair and 1940 Olympics that were to have been hosted by Japan.¹³⁾

The imperative attributed to “the public” in Shibusawa’s thought had its roots in the thoroughness of his training as a member of the ruling class. As touched on earlier, there was first and foremost the guiding example of his grandfather Eiichi, who was not only a close adviser to the final head of the Tokugawa regime but also played a formative role in the Finance Ministry of the fledgling Meiji state during his brief tenure. Eiichi himself directly played on and reinforced Shibusawa’s sense of public responsibility by insisting that it was the young man’s duty to society (*yo no naka no tame*)—not to his grandfather or to the family—to surrender his dreams of a career in the sciences to succeed to the position of the head of the Shibusawa empire.¹⁴⁾ Thereafter, Shibusawa mingled with bureaucratic hopefuls in the Economics Department at Tokyo Imperial University, while his subsequent career in banking had him on the fast track to sit on various boards of directors. He was urged on many occasions to enter into politics, and in the postwar he served a short stint as a cabinet minister. This would seem to illustrate the general case made by scholars such as Kojita Yasunao, who argues that the public as a modern concept emerges in the Japanese case from “above” rather than from “below,” that is, from the matrix of interests embodied by the state.¹⁵⁾ Shibusawa’s social location ostensibly made service to the nation a natural-seeming justification for his decision-making powers that affected the general population, regardless of the various crosscutting motives that propel any individual corporate head or bureaucrat.

Yet neither in this proposal nor in his writings in general did Shibusawa conflate the leadership with the rest of the nation, or portray the nation as an indivisible whole. In this sense of a distinction between state and society, Keizō could in fact look once more to his grandfather, who exited state service with great deliberation, countering requests to return with the assertion that he could contribute more effectively as a civilian.¹⁶⁾ Thus, even as Keizō made extensive use of the term “national subject” (*kokumin*) to describe the potential public for his museum, this was a social grouping not only explicitly set off from the state but one he saw as needing to become more, not less, aware of class as well as regional and temporal diversity within Japan.

Moreover, Shibusawa identified his present as precisely a moment in which the public as such has come to play a new and important role. In his “Brief Thoughts on

the History of Advertising in Japan,” Shibusawa noted that, if we can say that the “self” (*jiga*) was discovered during the Renaissance and “society” (*shakai*) in the nineteenth century, then the most recent discovery has been the “public” (*kōshū*).¹⁷ While the latter two terms might appear interchangeable, Shibusawa suggested that their difference might be grasped in the gap between nineteenth and twentieth century modes of advertising. The former was characterized by an “Enlightenment” mentality in which emphasis was placed on the enunciative power of the speaker to shape an audience. In the case of the latter, however, there was an acute consciousness of “the mutual relationship, or the correlative relationship, of the speaker (*hasshatai*) with the public that is the recipient.”¹⁸ While Shibusawa did not push his analysis any further at this point, he implicitly pointed to two divergent models for exercising power: one in which the people were simply told what they want or need, the other in which their response or will was factored in at the very moment of speaking. The political implications are intriguing, although it is important to note that Shibusawa wrote his advertising essay in the postwar era and “Hitotsu no Teian” belonged to a time when war with China was already well underway. Nevertheless, his observation indicated a strong sense that the present-day demanded a greater degree of attention to, and participation from, the “public.”

Why did Shibusawa see a museum as the best way to complete the transformation of the site into a public entity (*kanzen na kōkyōbukka*)? We might begin by noting that Shibusawa had a lifetime affection for the museum form: his enduring contributions include not only the “The Attic Museum” and its various permutations touched on below, but also a decisive role in the founding of the Fisheries Research Agency Museum (Suisan Shiryōkan), the National Institute of Japanese Literature (Kokubungaku Kenkyū Shiryōkan), the Bank of Japan Currency Museum (Nihon Ginkō Kinyū Kenkyūjo Kahei Hakubutsukan), and the Open-Air Museum of Old Japanese Farm Houses (Nihon Minka Shūraku Hakubutsukan).¹⁹ Shibusawa’s first efforts in this direction were made in 1918, at the age of 22, when he made over a portion of an estate storehouse for the display of natural history specimens gathered with friends. In 1921, he founded the “Attic Museum Society” to expand and regularize the collection and display of regional toys that had displaced the original focus on natural history specimens. From the very beginning, this was a serious scholarly and institutional endeavor: artifacts were carefully organized and identified with printed labels that not only named the item, but also the donor and date it was added to the collection. In 1936, Shibusawa made his first attempt to transform the Attic collection into public property through a petition to the Minister of Education. Its guidelines for display begin and end with indications of just how important the public function of the museum form was for Shibusawa:

- to make [the collection] public;
- to provide both enlightenment and suggestions for the future;
- to have the displays show actual conditions to the greatest degree possible;
- to also employ as many models, photographs, visuals and charts as possible;
- to illuminate the process of development as much as possible;
- to build up records preserving production methods, materials, etc., as much as

- possible;
- to consider using figures of related peoples (the ethnological *minzoku*) as much as possible;
- to keep in view the materials in state approved textbooks²⁰⁾

In particular, the very materiality of the objects housed by museums played a critical role as a resource for, but also as a check on, linguistically based research. Pointing to the confusion that often arose from gathering linguistic terms from many different regions, Shibusawa noted:

If we think of the actual object as the denominator and its name as the numerator, it generally appears that the denominator remains constant while the numerator alone changes. In actuality, however, there are many cases in which the numerator is singular but the denominator varies widely. Since both the numerator and the denominator have the potential to shift, one cannot really get anywhere if one tries to discuss the two only on the basis of their linguistic transcriptions, however many one has gathered together...²¹⁾

Thus, the essence, and attraction, of the museum form in Shibusawa's eyes was the way it provided public communication through the distinctive medium of concrete objects coupled with visual displays.

Eventually Shibusawa's efforts bore fruit, and the Attic collection provided the kernel for the National Ethnological Museum when it was established in the postwar period. Indeed, the process of transformation undergone by the Attic Museum raises a number of interesting questions regarding the establishment of public institutions by private entities. Yet the original and distinctive structure proposed for what came to be known as the "Shibusawa Seien Memorial Museum of Entrepreneurship" (Shibusawa Seien-ō Kinen Jitsugyō Hakubutsukan) reveals in particularly sharp relief the interrelationship between notions of public and private, nation and folk, history and memory in Shibusawa's thought. In illustration, let us turn now to his concrete suggestions.

The proposed museum, which would be administered by the foundation, was to have featured three sections: the first would commemorate Eiichi himself, the second would focus on late Tokugawa and Meiji period economic history, and the third would be a portrait hall (*shōzōshitsu*), which he explained would serve as a "shrine" dedicated to all those who had contributed to recent Japanese economic development. Taken together, the different sections were intended to offer "thorough instruction to those who only know the already completely transformed present-day circumstances, and provide latter generations with materials for reflection, regarding the struggles, efforts, and achievements of our ancestors."²²⁾ Each section, however, would fulfill this purpose in a different manner. Most prominently, the balance between public history and private memory shifted from section to section. Moreover, each section was marked by an ongoing tension between the principles of exclusion and comprehensiveness. Exclusion was necessary for clarity and containment. In this case, while the museum would fill in an important gap in the museum system as a

whole, it would eschew dealing with pre-Tokugawa developments because it would be too hard to separate out economic from other basic cultural developments; similarly, it would leave the history of the application of scientific precepts to an industrial museum that would undoubtedly be founded in the near future.²³⁾ Comprehensiveness, on the other hand, was required to provide an accurate portrait of the diversity of reality, and constituted the most primal urge in Shibusawa's scholarship.

The "Seien" (Eiichi's posthumous name) division, occupying the first floor and about 100 *tsubo*, would have featured his personal effects, writings, photographs and other such materials. In order to provide a holistic sense of the man, the "Seien" collection was exempt from the museum's stricture to concentrate on economic matters: Eiichi's contributions to "education, international goodwill, labor issues, social works, and the like should all be covered in depth..."²⁴⁾ The authentic artifacts associated with Eiichi anchored an eternalizing form of memory at work in this "commemorative room" (*kinenshitsu*). This temporality was joined, however, with a strong measure of progressive history in the form of a biographical diorama, photographs, charts and models to "as realistically and simply as possible make clear at a glance the transformations, complexity, and unity of his life."²⁵⁾ While such two- and three-dimensional replicas complicated the eternal "personal" time evoked by objects sacralized by Eiichi's touch, together they provided a foundation for telling the orthodox tale of the winner of all winners in the midst of the great transformations that took place from the Tokugawa through the Meiji era. Eiichi, often referred to as the "father of Japanese capitalism," was a doer and a maker, a heroic individual who set in place the basic structure of Japan's financial system. Yet the "Seien" section should not be analyzed in isolation. Its function as a gateway would have granted it, on the one hand, the power to frame what followed, suggesting the eventual triumph of a new economic order. On the other hand, as a portal, it was itself governed by anticipation of the next set of displays, and was therefore already contextualized by subsequent arguments regarding History and the agency of the folk. Not only would personal time have been hybridized with progressive time, but the integral individuality of Eiichi would have been melded with social diversity. The tribute paid to Eiichi in this section would have already pointed beyond and behind him to a rich and irreducible past.

The second section proposed by Shibusawa would have occupied 450 *tsubo* (4.5 times the space of the Eiichi section) and virtually the rest of the three-floor structure. This, then, constituted the "meat" of the museum. The central theme was the degree, direction and rate of as well as reactions to "the process of change and development" in the Japanese economy from the late Tokugawa through the Meiji periods. That is, the sign of History ruled. However, this was to be History "from the perspective of the totality of the nation's people" (*waga kokumin zenpan*).²⁶⁾ In other words, this was where the "folk" entered Shibusawa's project and took it over. Indeed, in Shibusawa's description of the contents of this section, he explicitly excluded most if not all of the traditional fields dominated by the elite, including anything related to "military affairs, diplomacy, politics, academics, art, religion, [and] aristocratic culture ..." To be sure, he also noted that commoner culture not related to commerce would also be kept out.

The rationale was that these areas were already or soon would be represented in museums elsewhere. However, Shibusawa's other writings on economic history suggest that the above exclusions reflected his general tendency to view the field from "below" rather than "above." His graduation thesis for the Economics Department at the University of Tokyo, for example, examined Japanese industrial history from the perspective of household production (*kanai shigoto*).²⁷⁾ Similarly, his 1955 essay on advertising, which draws on the economic museum collection, pursued the emergence of commodity exchange through a focus on the activities of peddlers, fishermen, small-scale merchants and the like.²⁸⁾

This approach was underscored by the proposal's emphasis on tactile culture (*sesshoku bunka*) for representing recent economic history. Thus, the kinds of artifacts actually collected include shop signs, storage chests, keys and locks, abacuses, lanterns, weights, scales and other tools for measurement, desks, braziers, safes, account books, seals, artisanal tools, spinning wheels, *banzuke*, photographs of vendors, prints illustrating production processes and more in the same vein.²⁹⁾ Whether the objects would have been displayed in an "evolutionary" series or as recreations of specific holistic environments, the "commoner" character of the museum's primary economic subject was clear. There were no treasures there that would command high prices in an art market, or curios related to some prominent historical personage. The objects in this section were resolutely anonymous: anyone in a given line of business might have used them.

Moreover, these artifacts evoked the "street" rather than mansions or bureaucratic offices. Indeed, many of the photographs Shibusawa commissioned for the collection were of actual street vendors, their tools of trade and wares.³⁰⁾ The temporality was one of "everyday life," but not in a static or eternal form. Change played an integral role. In part, this was the effect of the distance of the objects from the present day. Shibusawa repeatedly stressed in his proposal the importance of educating people "who only know current conditions" regarding practices of the past. But the driving force of change could also be read from within the collection, most obviously through the juxtaposition of, for example, gas lamps with lanterns. Nevertheless, while the overarching narrative spoke of progressive "development" to the present, the guidelines for collection did not emphasize either a quaint "vanished" quality to be recuperated or the genealogies of economic victors in a race for survival. In his history of advertising, Shibusawa offered a more complex view of historical change: "[I]t is not the case that different stages are characterized by just one [mode], which comes to an end and then another appears. Just as in the world there are magnificent 80,000 ton or 60,000 ton steam ships but also small barges or *daruma* boats, such things co-exist in every economy. It is their ratio that greatly differs from age to age..."³¹⁾ Shibusawa thus had a layered conception of economic temporality, in which production processes and modes of circulation from different "stages" co-existed in peoples' daily lives. The result was a composite synchronic moment in which change as exchange, that is, as the daily circulation of commodities, knit people and regions together. It should be noted that a number of intellectuals in the era, notably native ethnologist Yanagita Kunio, took analysis of such temporal "unevenness" to a more thoroughly theorized level. Despite their close association, however, the positions of

Shibusawa and Yanagita were not the same. According to H. D. Harootunian, Yanagita sought to contest the unevenness he saw as stemming from the encroachment of capitalism into the rural regions of Japan by positing “the seemingly concrete but historically indeterminate agency of the unchanging life of the folk in their native place.”³²⁾ In contrast, Shibusawa explicitly placed change at the center of his museum project, with ordinary people as active and mobile agents in bringing about transformation. Shibusawa’s observation above regarding the co-existence of different temporalities was intended to point to a diversity of lived experiences that both necessitated pragmatism and sparked inventiveness.

The third division was slated to feature various portraits and short biographies of “businessmen, industrialists, scholars, inventors, hardworking farmers, etc., that is, economic actors in the broadest sense, those who were active in the era, regardless of the size of their success, whether they were of high or low class, poor or rich.”³³⁾ In terms of space, it was to have taken up a mere 50 *tsubo*, primarily utilizing the hallways and staircase of the museum structure. Since its function was to elicit “the expression of respect and appreciation of descendants to their forebears,” “it could be called an economic shrine to the war dead (*shōkonshitsu*).”³⁴⁾ The conception for this “shrine” was certainly intriguing: Shibusawa melded the concepts of a shrine with the “genius hall” that was characteristic of prominent Western museums such as the Louvre, but with a characteristic twist. Veneration was not to be reserved for the greats, but for the collective. Yet this collective was not an undifferentiated mass. Rather, as indicated by a later, even more comprehensive list of potential candidates in the proposal, Shibusawa defined the economy in terms of diversity: of individuals, occupations, technologies, modes of exchange, and so on. Despite Shibusawa’s refrain regarding the limited nature of his economic museum, this third section, like the others, pushed the boundaries of what should be considered a constituent part of this world.

Shibusawa laid particular emphasis on the emotions that were to be roused by the third section. However this portrait collection might have functioned within the spatial layout of the proposed museum, in the proposal itself it served as the final frame. A visitor first drawn in by the great man Eiichi, then taken back into the past and broadened by the study of the social processes of economic transformation, would at the last be spiritually uplifted by encountering individuality within the masses that wrought such great changes. The dialectical interplay of personal memory and social history in the museum would come to a climax and the visitor would leave personally charged to go out and accomplish just as one’s ancestors had done. The suitability of the term “*shōkonshitsu*,” or shrine to the war dead, to describe this third portion of the museum comes from this moment of personalization, both of the museum’s themes but also of the visitor him or herself. The visitor would leave with a transformed sense of his (and possibly her) role in society, of himself (or herself) as a member of the public.³⁵⁾

What, in the end, was this public that Shibusawa wanted to serve—and create—through the establishment of a museum on the family estate? In his proposal, Shibusawa made repeated use of the terms “public” (*kōkyō*), “society” (*shakai*), “(Japanese) people” (*minzoku*), “folk” (*jōmin*) and “nation/national subject” (*kokumin*)

in close association. “Public” and “social” were largely interchangeable and had a strong consumerist orientation, referring to the hypothetical collective beneficiary of spaces and services such as those offered by a museum. “Nation/national subject” indicated in a more specific fashion the Japanese people as a totality, but was in fact often the subject of sentences that broke down or complicated that supposed whole. Finally, the “people” and “folk” were two variants of the idea that the “foundation” (*kiso*) of Japanese society consisted of a group that explicitly excluded the state and ruling classes. Accordingly, we might sum up Shibusawa’s central argument in his proposal as being that the “public” would benefit from seeing the “folk” as the subjects/agents of the museum, thereby revealing the true engine of the “nation.” All of these terms fell within a sphere that we might today call “civil society,” a realm outside of the state as such. Given the way in which the term “nation/national subject” (*kokumin*) generally functioned in the context of Japan’s hostilities with China, its inclusion might seem to undermine the above generalization. However, the specific ways in which Shibusawa employed this term in his proposal pulled it away from an obligation-laden state-centered read toward one that emphasized a sense of popular collectivity. This is, of course, not to suggest that Shibusawa was somehow anti-state. He was quite proactive in trying to get the Japanese government involved in his ethnological museum, for example. Yet it is important to note that the “state” did not in any way figure as a motivating force or rationale for this proposal; Shibusawa looked instead to the “people.”

Let us take closer look, then, at how Shibusawa envisioned the “people.” Shibusawa increasingly came to make use of the term “*jōmin*” for this purpose from the late 1920s; it came to symbolize his legacy when in 1942 he changed the name of the “Attic Museum” to the “Nihon Jōmin Bunka Kenkyūjo” (known today as the Institute for the Study of Japanese Folk Culture) in response to the government’s demand that English be excised from the title.³⁶⁾ Shibusawa’s specific choice of “*jōmin*” over various alternatives—the wartime government would have undoubtedly been pleased with “*kokumin*”—was explained in a 1956 commemorative volume as follows: “... *jōmin* was employed to refer to the common people (*konmon hitoburu*), which did not include the aristocratic class, the military class, the priestly class, and other [members of the elite]. It was Keizō’s word to encompass not only the agricultural, mountain and fishing villages, but also the markets and streets, that is, the peasants–artisans–merchants [referring to the Tokugawa *nō-kō-shō* categories] all together.”³⁷⁾ In this, we find Shibusawa once again parting ways with Yanagita Kunio.³⁸⁾ Various scholars such as Aruga Kizaemon have scrutinized how “*jōmin*” worked within Yanagita’s hegemonic formulation of native ethnology to emphasize “abiding” social practices—agrarian in origin—that bound all Japanese together, from the lowest on up to the Imperial Household.³⁹⁾ In contrast, Aruga sees Shibusawa’s usage as more straightforward in its adherence to the idea of ordinary Japanese explicitly distinguished from the upper classes.⁴⁰⁾ Aruga further suggests that Shibusawa was a bit “naïve” in such views regarding the “*jōmin*” in comparison to Yanagita’s subtle, even poetic, meditations on the category. However, I would argue that Shibusawa’s views on the people should by no means be dismissed as simplistic.

It is important to keep in mind that, for Shibusawa, the “people” were

fundamentally defined by internal diversity rather than uniformity. Throughout his proposal for the economic museum, Shibusawa repeatedly distinguished between different sectors of society:

If we were to roughly classify our nation (*waga kokumin*), those who are in charge of politics are the so-called aristocrats and politicians. Those in charge of defending our country are the warrior class (*bushi kaikyū*), that is, the military. Those in charge of nourishing our people (*minzoku*) are the farmers and fishermen. Those in charge of commerce are we businessmen (*keizainin*). Each group has created its own special culture.⁴¹⁾

While the above structure harkened back to the occupational hierarchy of the Edo period, the political orientation of Shibusawa's vision for his economic museum could not have been more different from that of the Tokugawa ruling regime.⁴²⁾ Not only did Shibusawa insist in his proposal on the representation of the agency of ordinary people in historical transformation, he made a point of drawing attention to the contributions of a social sector—merchants and entrepreneurs—that had been systematically discounted from the Tokugawa through the Meiji eras. In the Tokugawa era, they were too “forward,” in every sense of the word; in the Meiji era, they were seen as lagging behind. Moreover, by granting these particular actors center stage in the proposed economic history museum, Shibusawa diverged from Yanagita's efforts to ground the “folk” in largely self-contained agrarian communities. Shibusawa's latent critique went beyond urging greater inclusiveness. Telling in this regard is Shibusawa's one criticism of Hayakawa Kōtarō's *Hana Matsuri* (Flower Festival), a foundational text in native ethnology that was in fact only completed through Shibusawa's unstinting financial support: “What I still feel is lacking is any grounding in social economic history.”⁴³⁾ In turning the spotlight toward merchants, tradesmen, and peddlers, Shibusawa was calling for a reevaluation of the importance of exchange to commoner identity.

This concern with exchange marked Shibusawa's involvement with Native Ethnology from the beginning. Even when Shibusawa was gathering folk toys for his fledgling Attic Museum, his primary interest was in deciphering patterns of social interaction and exchange. He and his fellow society members counted and categorized their finds in order to track lineages and modes of transmission, to explore links to religious beliefs, and other aspects of communal interrelationship. Far from viewing the analysis of material culture in terms of its physical properties as an end in and of itself, Shibusawa insisted that his ultimate goal was to comprehend the folk objects he gathered “as living in negotiation (*kōshō*) with people, negotiation with households, and negotiation with villages.”⁴⁴⁾ That is, Shibusawa saw material culture as a key to unlocking community formation in terms of interaction, transmission, circulation, in short, in terms of human patterns of exchange. For this reason, diversity and heterogeneity within the folk was axiomatic rather than incidental. The existence of difference drove exchange, and thus historical change.

After all, Shibusawa was proposing a museum that took the transformation of economic practices between the nineteenth and twentieth century as its central theme.

In this light, we might pause to consider the shift that took place from the proposal's generic description—"a museum of early modern economic history"—to the eventual proper name used for collecting purposes—the "Shibusawa Seien Memorial Museum of Entrepreneurship." Why was "entrepreneurship" (*jitsugyō*) substituted for "economy" (*keizai*)? No records have yet been found to reveal exactly when or why this change took place. However, Satō Kenji has speculated that "entrepreneurship" may have won out because of its contemporary popular associations.⁴⁵ "Entrepreneur" was featured in the titles of a number of circulars during the time, conveying a sense of energy and inventiveness in contrast to the more academic (and potentially leftist) overtones of "economy."⁴⁶ In addition, Toshitada Kitsukawa has suggested that "entrepreneurship" better conveyed Shibusawa's sense of the particular importance of individuals (*kobetsu no ningen*), offering an oblique challenge to the way in which economics as a discipline primarily focused on aggregates.⁴⁷ Thus, the shift to "entrepreneurship" underscored Shibusawa's goal of celebrating heterogeneous and individual folk agency engaged in trade.

Shibusawa was certainly not an economist in *volk* clothing. Rather, he saw himself as governed by the principles of natural science, asserting that "even a bank can be considered a biological organism (*seibutsuteki ni kangaeru*)."⁴⁸ According to Satō Kenji, Shibusawa's practice is best described as "ecological" rather than "economic" in character.⁴⁹ This scientific cast of mind undoubtedly informed the politics of the "public" in Shibusawa's museum proposal. Various scholars have noted the importance of the "teamwork" model for Shibusawa, who was the guiding force behind the comprehensive and interdisciplinary group investigations of villages and other sites that produced a number of key publications in native ethnology. For Shibusawa, scientific investigation entailed a communal effort, a layering and interlocking of research in the pursuit of knowledge. The scientific model he idealized was a public project, constituted by a community of scholars who shared their findings with each other and a general audience, and thus generated further investigation in an open-ended process.⁵⁰ The economic museum was to have operated in just this fashion, opening up a dynamic between visitors and researchers to produce possibilities rather than certainties. The economic "shrine" in Shibusawa's museum would have played a key role in this regard, providing individual stepping stones between past and present to reach a characterization of the contemporary public as also constituted by difference, exchange, and an unknowable future.

Even in the midst of frequent laments over gaps in or insufficient materials, Shibusawa treasured the generative potential of the "as yet unknown." Of course, both the desire for more data and an appreciation for trial-and-error experimentation had their roots in an idealized scientific method. The key point here is that Shibusawa was not afraid of the possibility of failure. To the contrary, he explicitly embraced it. As an advocate for "the history of failure" (*shippaishi*), Shibusawa insisted that scholarship could not possibly comprehend a given phenomenon if it only took into account its positive features, its successes.⁵¹ Failures were far more revealing of principles and character. In fact, Shibusawa's proposed museum to commemorate his grandfather offers us an illustration of just what he meant. It was certainly a rather curious tribute that had the effect of putting Eiichi in his place, contextualizing his

greatness and devoting the greater part of the museum's narrative to economic practices and patterns that, on the one hand, predated and at best had only an attenuated connection to the man, and on the other, often did not survive into the modern era. An essay entitled "Sofu no ushiro-sugata" (Looking at Grandfather from Behind) made it clear, however, that Keizō did not seek to diminish Eiichi. It was precisely because Keizō felt love for Eiichi that he urged close scrutiny of the latter's failures.⁵²⁾ A superficial achievement-based perspective only obscured Eiichi's drive to endlessly give time, labor, and attention to all kinds of people and projects regardless of whether he could actually succeed in making much of a difference. For this, Keizō loved, not just admired, his grandfather.⁵³⁾ Failure, of course, was also the fate of Keizō's proposal for a folk museum of economic history. But, taking our cue from Shibusawa, we can see this failure as worthy of study as any museum completed in the early twentieth century. The reasons it was not built were purely pragmatic, but the fact that it was never built in certain ways allowed its principles to come through all the more clearly.

In Shibusawa's 1937 proposal we see an attempt to conceptualize and engage the public through the museum form that revealed a distinctive social positioning, outside the state yet with rare access to the material resources to even dream of bringing such a project to fruition. While the Shibusawa Eiichi Memorial Foundation and the National Institute of Japanese Literature are currently re-examining the potential of the still extant collection, the museum envisioned by Shibusawa is unlikely to be revived as such in the present day, nor should it be. Certainly, his concept of a "shrine" to celebrate of individual economic agents has less than desirable associations in the present-day. Moreover, for all that Shibusawa set out to highlight the agency of ordinary people in his proposal, he did not directly involve citizens at any point in the (incomplete) process. Nevertheless, the dynamic Shibusawa set up between public and private within his proposed museum deserves further consideration, not only for the window it opens up on latent possibilities in the first half of the twentieth century, but for its implications for today's ongoing debates.

Notes

- 1) I would like to express my great appreciation for support during the year 2004–2005 from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, which made it possible for me to pursue this line of inquiry in Japan. I was granted access to Shibusawa's unpublished "Hitotsu no teian" by the Shibusawa Eiichi Memorial Foundation thanks to the kind offices of Shibusawa Masahide and Koide Izumi. Alan Christy first suggested I look at the proposal and patiently read through multiple drafts of this essay. Nagai Miho, currently engaged in a comprehensive analysis of Shibusawa's economic history museum project, has been generous with her expertise. Kusumoto Wakako invited me to speak at the "History of Entrepreneurship Research Society" and organized panels for the 2006 Asian Studies Conference Japan and the Society for East Asian Anthropology 2006 conference that provided me with opportunities to present these ideas and receive stimulating comments and suggestions.
- 2) Satō Kenji, "Shibusawa Keizō to Achikku Myūzeamu," in Kawazoe Noboru and Yamaoka Yoshinori, eds., *Nihon no kigyōka to shakai bunka jigyō*, (Tokyo: Tōyō Keizai Shinpōsha, 1987), 128.
- 3) Alan Christy discusses the important role that Shibusawa played in the formation of native ethnology. See Alan Christy, *Ethnographies of the Self: Japanese Native Ethnology, 1910–1945*, forthcoming from the University of California Press.
- 4) Harry D. Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 309.

- 5) Satō offers a rich analysis of the differences between Eiichi and Keizō in Satō, 124–25, 127, 131, 137–41.
- 6) Aruga Kizaemon, “Nihon jōmin seikatsu shiryō sōsho, sōjo: Shibusawa Keizō to Yanagita Kunio, Yanagi Muneyoshi,” in *Nihon jōmin seikatsu shiryō sōsho*, vol. 1, (Tokyo: Sanichi Shobō, 1972), 22–23; Satō, 137.
- 7) Quoted in Satō, 137–38.
- 8) Quoted in Satō, 138–39.
- 9) Satō, 125–26.
- 10) However, the extensive “Museum of the History of Japanese Entrepreneurship” (Nihon Jitsugyōshi Hakubutsukan) collection is currently housed intact at the National Institute of Japanese Literature (Koku Bungaku Kenkyū Shiryōkan). Under the direction of Aoki Mutsumi, the National Institute of Japanese Literature is in the process of making an abbreviated version of the catalog and elements of the collection directly available to the general public. See the home page (<http://www.nijl.ac.jp/>), which already offers direct access to reproductions of numerous *nishiki-e* prints collected for the proposed museum.
- 11) Shibusawa Keizō, “Hitotsu no teian,” (unpublished document, Shibusawa Memorial Museum (Shibusawa Shirōkan), Tokyo), 1.
- 12) Shibusawa, “Teian,” 2.
- 13) Shibusawa, “Teian,” 6.
- 14) Quoted in Satō, 131.
- 15) Kojita Yasunao, “Nihonteki kōshi kannen to kindai,” in Sasaki Takeshi and Kim Tae-Chung, eds., *Kōkyō tetsugaku 3: Nihon in okeru ooyake to watakushi*, (Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 2002), 39, 47.
- 16) For an account of Eiichi’s leave-taking from government service, see Shibusawa Eiichi, *The Autobiography of Shibusawa Eiichi: From Peasant to Entrepreneur*, translated by Teruko Craig, (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1994), 146–48.
- 17) Shibusawa Keizō, “Nihon kōkokushi shōkō,” in Shibusawa Keizō chosakushū, vol. 3, (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1992), 349.
- 18) Shibusawa, “Kōkokushi,” 349.
- 19) Satō, 134–35; for more detail, see Yokohama-shi Rekishi Hakubutsukan and Kanagawa Daigaku Nihon Jōmin Bunka Kenkyūjo, *Yane-ura no hakubutsukan: jitsugyōka Shibusawa Keizō ga sodateta tami no gakumon*, (Yokohama: Yokohama-shi Rekishi Hakubutsukan, 2002), 150–52.
- 20) The petition was titled “Bill for the Establishment of the Japan Ethnological Museum on the 2600 Anniversary of Imperial Rule.” Quoted in Yokohama-shi Rekishi Hakubutsukan and Kanagawa Daigaku Nihon Jōmin Bunka Kenkyūjo, 120.
- 21) Shibusawa, “Atikku no seichō,” in Shibusawa Keizō chosakushū, vol. 1, (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1992), 16.
- 22) Shibusawa, “Teian,” 5–6.
- 23) Shibusawa, “Teian,” 4.
- 24) Shibusawa, “Teian,” 5.
- 25) Shibusawa, “Teian,” unnumbered “10.”
- 26) Shibusawa, “Teian,” 5.
- 27) Shibusawa Keizō, “Honpō kōgyōshi ni kansuru ichi kōsatsu,” in Shibusawa Keizō chosakushū, vol. 1, (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1992), 235–325.
- 28) Shibusawa, “Kōkokushi,” 348–80.
- 29) The National Institute of Japanese Literature will soon issue a complete catalog for the collection. For specific examples, see Kanagawa Daigaku Nihon Jōmin Bunka Kenkyūjo, 126–29. See also the catalog for the exhibit based on Shibusawa’s collection (Meiji-Taishō-Shōwa keizai bunka tenrankai) held in 1940 through the sponsorship of Tōyō Keizai (Oriental Economist). Tōyō Keizai Shinbunsha, ed., *Meiji-Taishō-Shōwa keizai bunka tenrankai mokuroku*, (Tokyo: Tōyō Keizai, 1940).
- 30) The world famous photographer Hamaya Hiroshi (1915–1999) was commissioned for 144 of a total of 2,450 photographs. Hamada met Shibusawa at the outset of his career, when he was just twenty-four, and credited Shibusawa with a profound influence on his subsequent work in terms of the

- documentation of “everyday life.” See Kanagawa Daigaku Nihon Jōmin Bunka Kenkyūjo, 100–01.
- 31) Shibusawa, “Kōkokushi,” 352.
 - 32) Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*, 315.
 - 33) Shibusawa, “Teian,” 5.
 - 34) Shibusawa, “Teian,” 5.
 - 35) I intend to directly address the issue of gender in relation to the collection at some later point in time. At present, I will simply note that gender played an interesting but opaque role. The artifacts for the first (Seien) and third (portrait) sections of the proposed museum were overwhelmingly male in orientation. The artifacts for the second (folk economic history) section, however, included many objects that could and would have been used by either men or women, and some specifically by women. Moreover, many of the prints collected for the museum portrayed women at work, in factories and elsewhere. Thus, while records of the collection did not explicitly take gendered usage of the artifacts into account, re-examination of the artifacts in light of gender should prove illuminating, both in terms of how the collection internally cohered as a system, and how viewers (of different genders and generations) might have understood what they saw.
 - 36) Aruga, 15–16.
 - 37) Quoted in Aruga, 16.
 - 38) I would also like to note that the surveys and published works of researchers associated with Shibusawa’s Nihon Jōmin Bunka Kenkyūjo have given rise to a “re-thinking” of the entire span of Japanese history in terms of systemic mobility and exchange. A number of the published works of Amino Yoshihiko, former head of the research institute, place such findings into a broad and challenging interpretative framework.
 - 39) See Aruga, 16–19. In English, see the penetrating critiques of Yanagita’s conceptualization of the “jōmin” offered by Harootunian in *Overcome by Modernity*, particularly pages 306–28, and by Christy in *Ethnographies of the Self*.
 - 40) Aruga, 24.
 - 41) Shibusawa, “Teian,” 3.
 - 42) Perhaps Shibusawa was drawn to the possibilities for a Tokugawa “public sphere” as recently explored by Mary Elizabeth Berry in *Japan in Print: Information and Nation in the Early Modern Period*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).
 - 43) Quoted in Satō, 130.
 - 44) Shibusawa, “Mingu mondōshū, dai-issū, maegaki,” in *Shibusawa Keizō chosakushū*, vol. 3, (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1992), 250.
 - 45) Kenji Komatsu discussed the difficulty in tracing the transition from the initial to the final project title during his presentation entitled “‘Jitsuhaku’ setsuritsu ni muketa Shibusawa Keizō ‘Hitotsu no teian’ no seiritsu to hen’i,” given at the National Institute of Japanese Literature on March 22, 2006. Satō Kenji made his suggestion following a presentation I made for the “Research Group on the History of Entrepreneurship” (Jitsugyōshi Kenkyūkai) on February 27, 2006.
 - 46) In the discussion following the February 27 presentation mentioned above, several distinguished economic historians offered further suggestions for contextualizing both the eventual dropping of the term “economy” (*keizai*) from the title of the museum project and the marked absence of any direct mention of “capitalism” in the proposal itself; one possibility was that the terms “economy” and “capitalism” had become too closely associated with the famous debate in the 1920s between the Kōza and Rōnō schools of Marxist thought.
 - 47) Kitsukawa Toshitada, private communication, July 20, 2006.
 - 48) Quoted in Satō, 132.
 - 49) Satō, 131–132.
 - 50) Aruga provides a sketch of the team investigations sponsored and led by Shibusawa (Aruga, 3, 9–10). Satō analyzes these team projects as part of Shibusawa’s fundamental methodology (Satō, 136–37). In English, see Christy, *Ethnographies of the Self*.
 - 51) Satō, 134.
 - 52) Shibusawa, “Sofu no ushiro-sugata,” in *Shibusawa Keizō chosakushū*, vol. 1, (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1992), 175–81.

53) Shibusawa, "Sofu no ushiro-sugata," 177-78.