Thinking of Images/Thinking through Images: Shibusawa Keizō and the Idea of the "Pictorial Dictionary"

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This report takes Shibusawa Keizō's idea of a pictorial dictionary, known as an "*ebiki*," as a case study through which we might consider the ideas in the background that supported his cultural research as well as his actual academic practice. I would also like to scrutinize the process of this pictorial dictionary project (which I will, hereafter, call "the *ebiki* project") because I believe it holds valuable suggestions for cultural studies projects based on visual image materials.

1. The Idea of the *Ebiki* as a Tool

In March 1954, Shibusawa Keizō wrote an intriguing essay titled "Is a Pictorial Dictionary Possible?"[1] His use of the word "*ebiki*" was not unprecedented—there were instances of the term's use in the nineteenth century. A book written by Akisato Ritō, published in 1824, has the word "*ebiki*" in its title (**Figure 1**). However, in this *Ebiki setsuyō shū* (絵引節用集) the pictures do not fully function as explanatory depictions, as they fail to enhance the text. Yugensai Nanka's *Dōgu jibiki zukai* (道具字引図解) is another example of a pictorial dictionary published in the 1860s. In the age in which Shibusawa lived, however, the word "*ebiki*" was no longer in circulation.

It is unclear whether or not Shibusawa had this old example directly in mind. However, he used this term because he felt it effectively conveyed the idea of the new research method he had conceived as an approach to the study of picture scrolls as materials for the study of things and customs. Shibusawa's "*ebiki*" was a pioneering concept for contemporary humanities and social sciences efforts to create, in various forms, "image databases" and "film libraries." It was a very important condition of this *ebiki* project that the researchers could utilize published copies of the precious picture scrolls in their detailed observations, unfettered by time constraints. In his study of Ashinaka-zōri footwear (足半草履; see **Figure 2**), Shibusawa seemed to take advantage of Miyamoto Seisuke's hand-copied pictures. However in

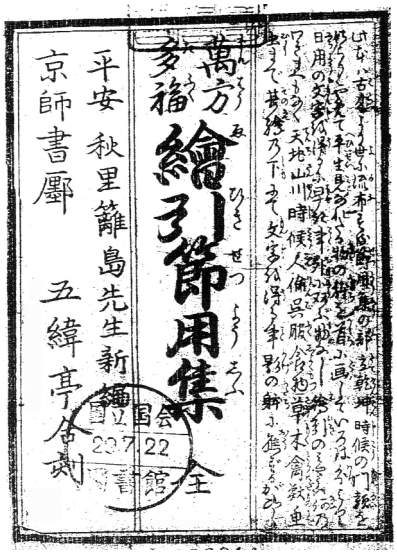


Figure 1: Title page of *Ebiki setsuyō shū*

Figure 2: Ashinaka-zōri in the picture scrolls

the days of the *ebiki* project published copies became the main materials and fundamental objects. I checked when the copies of picture scrolls designated as national treasures could be accessed in Japan, confirming that those mentioned by Shibusawa in his essays had already been published between the 1910s and 1930s.

Moreover, if we try to place this project within the narrative of Shibusawa Keizō's personal life history, we might see it as the dream of an entrepreneur who from youth aspired to be a scholar of biology and who spent his life supporting ethnographic observation and analysis of humans as cultural and social animals.

The work of constructing the *ebiki* began at the Attic Museum (Achikku Myūzeamu) around 1940 and, after interruption by the intensification of the war, began again in December 1955. The work consumed the next ten years as the project of the Picture Scroll Study Group (Emaki no Kai) and was finally published in five volumes, from 1964 to 1968, by Kadokawa Shoten as *A Pictorial Dictionary of the Lives of the Japanese Folk as Seen in Picture Scrolls* (日本常民生活絵引). Unfortunately, however, Shibusawa himself died in 1963, before the publication of the *ebiki*.

2. Producing a Database from the Representations in Picture Scrolls

The idea of an *ebiki* that Shibusawa addressed in his 1954 essay may seem simple, but I think it suggests, in fact, an important and fundamental issue. His observation that this idea "dated back some decades ago" corresponds to a comment he made in 1941 during a talk at the Social Economic History Association Conference in which he listed the reexamination of "picture scrolls" as one of the research topics he was currently engaged in, reporting that he was already making reproductions of four picture scrolls. But when we put this in the context of other projects he was involved in, especially the Ashinaka-zōri study, we can surmise that he had already embraced the idea of an "*ebiki*" by the mid-1930s (**Table 1**).

What Shibusawa envisaged was an image database of the actions and tools of daily life. He noted that phenomena related to folklore and customs were often richly depicted in such ancient picture scrolls as *Shigisan engi* or *Gaki sōshi*. Apart from the

Table 1: Development of the idea of *ebiki*

1964–68	First edition of *Nihon Jōmin Seikatu Ebiki*
1955	The launching of Emaki no Kai
1954	The essay "Is a Pictorial Dictionary Possible?"
1941	Talk at the Social Economic History Association
1936	*Iwayuru Ashinaka ni tsuite (Ashinaka-zori Study)*

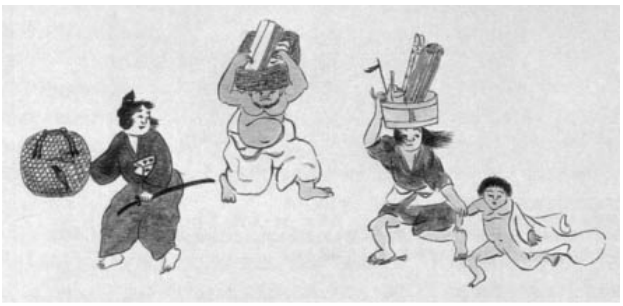


Figure 3: Hashiura Yasuo's hand-copies of selected depictions in picture scrolls

main themes of shrine and temple history which the artists meant to record, Shibusawa observed that one could find a wide variety of things—household goods, agricultural and craft industry tools, and so forth—depicted in the corners and backgrounds of the scrolls. Once you removed the images of aristocratic, monastic, and military class cultures, Shibusawa claimed, you could find "records of the lives of the people" of the time. This was not strictly limited to things. The scrolls also depicted a variety of daily practices, such as clothes washing, hair tying, goods carrying, sitting and walking. In an age without aprons or sashes, how did working people manage their sleeves and skirts? Things never recorded in historical texts were inscribed in these picture scrolls .

Moreover, unlike the orally transmitted data handled by ethnographers and anthropologists, the information preserved in picture scrolls testifies roughly to the chronological moment of the depiction, a fact that is indispensable to historical investigation. It seems likely that Shibusawa was attracted by the possibility that this could supplement the lack of periodized data that is often raised as the weak point of ethnography. The idea of an "*ebiki*" originated in the thought that it might be possible to accumulate a body of materials that could be used to search out data in the same way as a dictionary.

3. The Difference between an "Image Catalog" and a "Pictorial Dictionary"

At this point we must be careful to recognize the fundamental differences between a "*mokuroku*" (list or catalog) and an "*ebiki*" (a dictionary, a lexicon of visual description). In a word, the significance of a catalog is in its presentation of the breadth of the totality of materials. In contrast, the primary purpose of an "*ebiki*" is to enable the researcher to gain comprehensive information about a particular object (**Figure 4**).

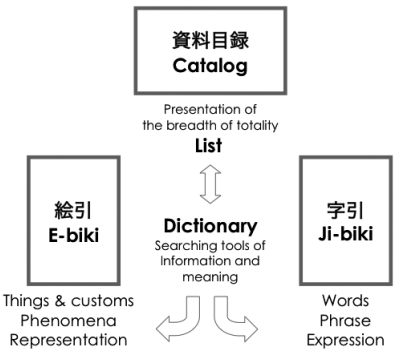


Figure 4: Difference between catalog and dictionary

In this sense, the most important meaning of the idea of an *ebiki* is that it is not formed as a mere listing of visual materials. Some time ago I participated in the production of an image database that was both a catalog of printed

Figure 5: *Shinbun-Nishikie* database

materials and a document collection related to early woodblock-print illustrated newspapers, known as *shinbun nishiki-e* (**Figure 5**). However, a catalog is a form for presenting materials in a certain order (for example, alphabetical, chronological, and decimal), producing a totality that can be grasped.

In contrast, an *ebiki* is a tool for looking up and then thinking about unknown things. Like a dictionary, it is used by someone who has a question—someone who wants to find the unknown meaning of a word—who then employs the reference source to look up the desired word. In fact, the word "*ebiki*" derives from an alternative word for dictionary: *jibiki*. In short, just as a dictionary is used to look up a word or phrase, the *ebiki* is used to look up phenomena. In other words, the *ebiki* is used to find the actual existence, forms and transformations of things and customs. So the basic idea of the *ebiki* is an attempt to produce a mechanism through which images can be consulted.

4. Making the Ebiki: Analyzing the Production Process

The first volume of Shibusawa's *ebiki* project was published in 1964. Whether what they eventually published was actually a realization of their initial concept is a question that can only be answered after close inspection. However, regardless of the auther's desires and plans, we should evaluate the work as research practice, one in which a pile of actual materials was handled, time and money was expended, and the materials were rendered into a database. Here, I would like to move beyond an analysis that simply outlines the project as concept.

When we consider the structure of the *ebiki* as a database, we can see that there were three stages in its production.

(1) Setting the Basic Unit of Recording: Scene

First stage is the establishment of the "object," in other words, the determination of the basic unit that incorporates the information recorded about the object. That is,

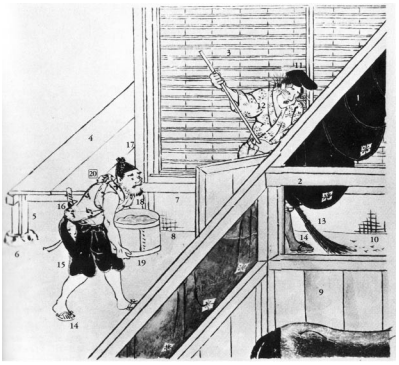


Figure 6: *Mise en scene* as the basic recording unit

production begins with the extraction of objects that should be incorporated into the database out of the continuous scenes of the picture scroll. The object that the Shibusawa group established was defined as "phenomena related to daily life culture" and the basic unit was the "*mise en scene*."

Their goal was to choose according to the perspective of the culture of everyday life, regardless of both art historical perspectives and the context of the picture scroll's original topic. This decision was made strategically, employing "the folk" as a word for throwing into relief the history of everyday life. The key word "the folk" (*jōmin*) was an important concept for the members of the Attic Museum, the group which did the actual work of the *ebiki*.

One unique characteristic of this pictorial dictionary is that the basic unit for the data was the "scene," not the individual objects within. I do not know if this was a conscious decision. But as a result, what is interesting about the database is that the scene in which things and customs were placed was itself included as data.

For example, **Figure 6** is a sample page from the *ebiki*, a corner of a depiction of an aristocrat's house from the *Ishiyamadera engi*. They have extracted from the scroll a scene of two men standing at work near the stable. They have pulled out a single "scene" that includes a number of "objects." You can see here how a "scene" serves as the basic unit of recording.

(2) Reproducing Worksheets and the Structure of the Data

Once a scene was selected, the next stage began. An artist produced a reproduction of the chosen "scene," thus creating a worksheet which served as the basic unit for recording and consultation. Their decision to use a painter rather than a photograph was not simply because the technology was not sufficiently developed. Hashiura Yasuo, a painter and an ethnographer, produced black and white reproductions in accordance with their strategy of clearly extracting scenes from scrolls and rendering their form into data. However, we should not conclude that the actual practice of making copies was a stage of "handwork" necessarily prior to the copy technologies of photography or digitization. Furthermore, when we consider the subsequent task of numbering the individual objects within a scene we can see that they were making a copy with excess white space that could be filled with writing.

Figure 7-1: A worksheet

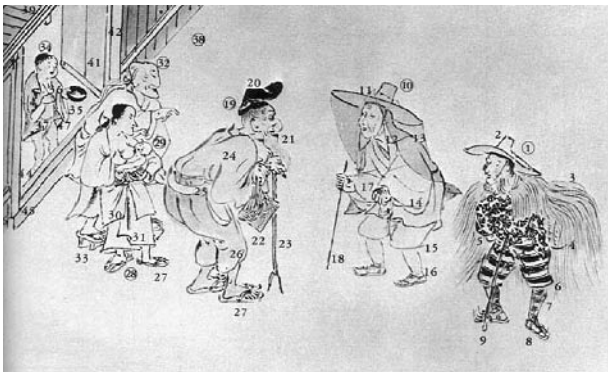


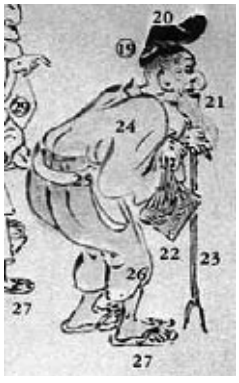
Figure 7-2: Adding numbers

We can see that reproduction by hand was necessary for the process of extracting the forms of things and customs, and creating the foundation for subsequent inscription of information.

Concretely, then, the process involved first making a hand-drawn copy of an extracted scene. That copy was then photographed and multiply reproduced in a particular size and the individual items within the scene were numbered. This process of reproduction gave them room for trial-and-error and a significant degree of flexibility to make adjustments. Through this process "scenes" were systematized into page upon page of worksheets, which served as the units of documentation. The structure of the data was assembled by making the individual objects within the scene accessible by adding numbers to the picture (**Figure 7-1** and **Figure 7-2**).

(3) Searching for a Correspondence to "Words"

Once the structure of the data was so arranged, editors moved to the much more difficult third stage task. This was the creation of an index function that would allow items to be "consulted" (**Figure 8**). That is, they had to construct a correspondence between pictorial data and words. Visual images were situated as data within the historical nodes of language. This was an indispensable task for the completion of the "*ebiki*" as a dictionary.



19	*Rōjin* (big nose)
20	*Nae-eboshi*
21	*Ago-hige*
22	*Uchiwa*
23	*Kase-zue*
24	*Kosode*
25	*Obi* (white)
26	*Hakama*
27	*Zōri*

Figure 8: Searching for a correspondence to words: indexing

However, the first difficulty was that the things which appear in picture scrolls do not name themselves. In other words, there are almost no cases where the names of things are inscribed within the picture. From the perspective of aristocrats who commissioned picture scrolls, names of the common and quotidian things were of no concern. One of the participants in the project, Aruga Kizaemon, said the following about the work: "There are cases where we knew names from old books without

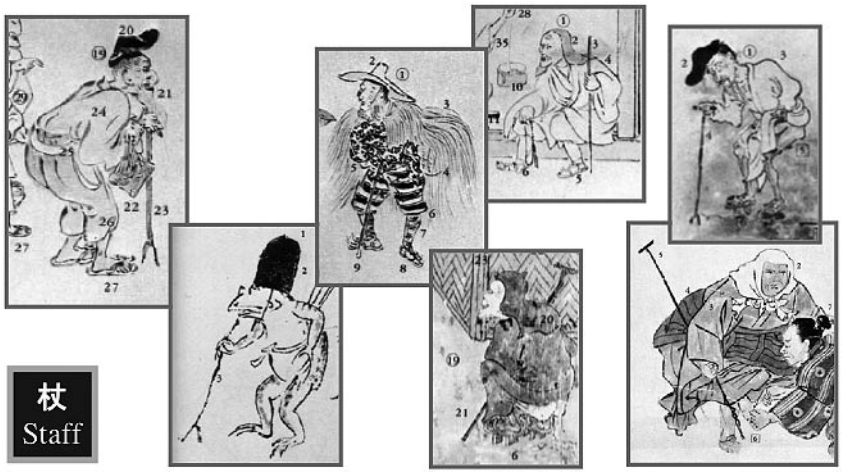


Figure 9. Various depictions assembled under the word of "*tsue*" (staff)

knowing their forms and then we were able to locate the form in picture scrolls. On the other hand, there were cases where we knew the forms of things, but we did not know the names. We knew the uses and histories of things to a certain extent, but we were left with things that we never understood."[2] The first difficulty was the problem of clarifying what the things were actually called. Shibusawa's researchers continued their investigations as a research group hoping to be able to make breakthroughs by relying not on individuals but on the accumulated knowledge of their network of folklorist across Japan.

The second difficulty was deciding how to edit the work as a dictionary, as opposed to a catalog. In other words, this was a question of the organizing principle for the whole. Aruga recalled that "we were unable to decide how to make it into something that would be very useful."[3] To give a concrete example, if you label something with an peculiar ancient name that no one knows, no one will be able to look it up. One of the ways they attempted to raise the utility of the work was to label a broad range of items with a general modern term, such as "staff" (**Figure 9**).

As I shall explain shortly, this was because the Shibusawa group considered the publication of the *ebiki* as a starting point. Their deeper aspiration was that, following publication, questions would be asked and information would be added to the *ebiki*.

5. Problems Unique to the "*Ebiki*"

It is extraordinarily difficult to correlate the recording of names (words) to the depiction of forms (things) historically and then accurately capture changes over time. This is a problem with which those who are today pursuing the possibility of image databases must also wrestle. This is not a logistical problem that can naturally be overcome with the further development of digital technology. How are things themselves rendered into a system? How can they be lined up, one by one, and then how can the whole be imagined? This is a difficult problem that the operation of classification has had to address since the encyclopedias of the seventeenth century.

Foucault said the following about the difficulty of putting materials into an order.

"It may appear easy for people, through the act of seeing, to line up a number of similar forms together and thereby give a reason for differentiating them from other things. But even more simple experiences are managed by application to a particular preexisting standard. There are no resemblances or differences that do not derive from this kind of habitual managing practice and these standards."[4)]

What we are strongly aware of here is how much fundamental power the media of words have in human culture. Our very sensory experiences are divided, regulated, manipulated and, finally, made comprehensible by being woven into a network of words. This was the fundamental problem faced by the people who tried to compile an *ebiki* in a realm in which categorization had not yet achieved stability.

This is still an issue for contemporary "image databases." There are still very few examples of the development of applied methods for creating indexes without the mediation of words, apart from the very narrowly limited realms of such systems as fingerprinting. In areas in which data takes multiple and variable forms, there is little choice but to rely on the power of the semiotic system of words.

According to common sense, coding is the sorting of objects into classified boxes, requiring only one selection and label for each item. But the practice of coding involves not only sorting, but also relating (linking) things to each other. This is important grounds for constructing a system of reference, which enables us to store and consult data. Precisely speaking, a system for repeated reference and comparison is the true force of classifying. Namely, coding requires clarifying a network of the meanings which support the classifications, and questioning the logical order of classifying, instead of labeling the names solely according to common academic concepts. Coding is a very dynamic and multiply-layered process, installing the function of cross-reference into the processing and managing of data, by the power of the network of words.

Indexing has a similar nature. Reading books using an index means reorganizing the structure of texts, which can catalyze alternative ways of reading.

The process of research itself is a compound which includes both sorting and linking. In fact, we start from sorting objects in terms of characteristics and names, which are already shared and understood. Then we gather as much information as possible concerning the objects and begin analysis. But the data collecting process is not over here. Strictly speaking the compound nature of research truly commences from this point. As an analysis is undertaken, the objects fall into plural parts, and logically-dividing lines appear in similarities and differences of distinctive features. However, the effect of these logical lines is not confined within the set of gathered objects. That is to say, these lines require fresh observation and new data collection, beyond the boundary of shared concepts as originally defined.

The *ebiki* has a profound relationship to another work proposed by Shibusawa entitled *Mingu zui* (民具図彙, A lexicon and depiction of utensils) that could not be completed. Shibusawa wrote, "Faced with even a familiar utensil with which we are apparently well acquainted, we are however struck to find ourselves totally ignorant, because apart from its form and material, we have no detailed knowledge of its connections with families and communities, and its application in the daily lives of the people." He suspended direct editing of the *Mingu zui*, and with the aid of

photographs of utensils, began to ask users and local experts to describe their usage. Shibusawa also wrote, "It is very necessary to investigate the life history of utensils from birth to death, that is, from readying of materials to production, use, maintenance, breaking and disposal …, from the ecological point of view paying careful attention to the feelings and understandings of the users."[5)]

A trial and error editing of the *ebiki* and the *Mingu zui* by Shibusawa resulted from the back and forth movement between "setting the logical points" and "observing the facts." Even if this to-and-fro feedback process seems a detour stemming from the shortage of preliminary studies, it is not, however, fair to disregard the influence of the force of this reorganization. In a sense, the school of thought concerning index in which advocates the superiority of electronic devices and their speed, cannot attain true depth without reorganizing the logic and networking of words.

We still cannot know for certain the ideal editorial approach they might have taken for the *Japanese Folk Life Pictorial Dictionary*. In the present state of image database methodology in the human sciences, there has not yet been sufficient debate about the problems peculiar to the field to be able to present a standardized ideal.

6. "Database as Process" and the Force of Small Doubts

I will move now to my conclusion, although my analysis has been, perhaps, too brief. What I would like to end with is a discussion of the possibilities of "database as process" rather than "database as product." Twenty years ago, I commented on Shibusawa's spirit of social cooperation and practical support for academic research, and described four points: namely the idea of "ecology," "collection," "museum" and "research teams."[6)] Although my comments retain their relevance, the words employed—specifically "collection," "museum" and "teams," do not appropriately express the goal of Shibusawa's philanthropic projects. I would like to offer alternative expressions to elucidate their functions, namely the concomitant ideas of "commonality" and of "indexing." Producing common bodies of materials for investigation, and creating systems in which the users (namely, the readers) can consult and refer to the objects and texts, are both the very focus and actual outcome of his work of supporting research. In a sense, "database as process" is the production of the social storage of common knowledge (**Figure 10**).

There exists considerable similarity between Yanagita Kunio's concept of "*jōmin*" (常民) and Shibusawa's concept. However, while Yanagita mainly investigated the local people who farmed as a livelihood, Shibusawa's great interest lay in the people who worked in the world of business as a profession. The Japanese word "*jitsugyō*" (実業), literally, the practical workings of business, was a concept of great significance for Shibusawa. On the one hand, Yanagita's folklore could be characterized as that of a self-sufficient community. On the other hand, Shibusawa's concept might

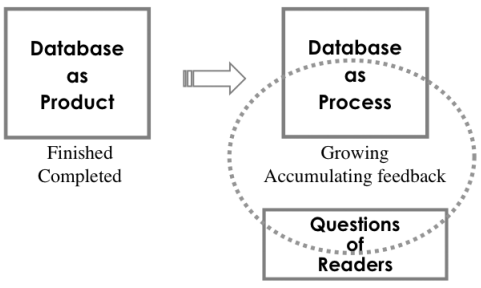


Figure 10: Database as process

be depicted as a folklore of industrializing society, in which economic systems gradually develop and common people encounter the unknown and extensive outside world of the market. Therefore, Shibusawa's definition of the concept of the common people included the small entrepreneurs who had a spirit of industriousness and supported an indigenous development of capitalism.

I see Shibusawa's experiment as providing many suggestions for thinking about growing databases. It is only when databases are opened to the public that their mistakes can be pointed out, that the designations for data become clear and that instruction can be received from people who have looked at relevant information. In other words, the opening of a database to the public is the beginning of a process of accumulating feedback. This way of creating and nurturing a database—the process itself—, is precisely the practice of a kind of research that expands into the social. The idea of a method of sharing materials is itself the way that historical research opens into the realm of the social.

The motivating force that propels this process is actually found in the questions of the user. If we were to analogize this kind of database to a book, we might call this motivating force the readers' questions, rather than the users' questions.

Shibusawa wrote, "It does not matter who does it. Once someone completes the "*ebiki*," they will be aided by the studies of later readers. It is very hard to look at the original of a picture scroll. But even if we use dependable copies, doing comparative investigations of various elements takes an inordinate amount of time and labor. I still believe that in our age with its conveniences such as dictionaries, creating an *ebiki* is better than opening up each and every picture scroll in imitation of the painstaking labors of Sugita Genpaku, who copied his dictionaries entirely by hand."

However, when I read "Is a Pictorial Dictionary Possible?" I can see that Shibusawa himself discovered in picture scrolls a variety of fragmentary questions. For example, why is it that in the past cats were kept tied up like dogs are today? We know there was a custom of using wood to clean up after defecation, but what kind of people did this and when did the custom disappear? Up until the 1950s, one could still see people in Tōhoku doing laundry with their feet, so why is it that washing came, in general, to be something done with the hands, while squatting? (**Figure 11-1**, **Figure 11-2**, and **Figure 11-3**)

These are the kinds of "small doubts" that come to those who read the picture scrolls. They are the "surprises" of the reader. To put it another way, these are encounters with different cultures. These small doubts become the seeds of later investigations. In other words, it is when the "unexpected" and the "surprising," taken in by the eyes, are combined systematically, that we first get the "whys" and the "hows" underlying historical research. We need a mechanism for comparing data in order to answer those questions. Investigation and collection are undertaken and prior accumulations are consulted. The new index form that is the *ebiki* is a cumulative constructive task that makes this manner of referencing possible.

I believe those small doubts are very important bases on which the architecture of image database is settled and constructed. Early in the Showa period, Yanagita Kunio was well known for criticizing the stereotypes of "tradition" taken for granted by Japanese of that time. Using the example of women's *uchiashi*, or walking with the

Figures 11-1, 11-2 and 11-3: Small doubts

toes pointed slightly inwards, Yanagita referred to that as a stereotype when Japanese and foreigners together praised the *uchiashi* as an expression of the spirit of Japanese women's traditional refinement. However, he pointed out, "Of course, folding screens representing everyday life by Iwasa Matabei and others from the Momoyama period as well as works by Nishikawa Sukenobu and the early period of the Hishikawa School depicted women walking spiritedly with their feet point outwards (*sotoashi*)."

He suggested that the origin of *uchiashi* was relatively recent, reasoning that "women probably wrapped the *koshimaki* serving as underwear around their waists into two overlapping layers of cloth. Moreover, smooth materials, such as hemp, came to be outmoded for such uses. As a result, it was no longer possible to open the hem easily and it became entangled in the feet. Consequently, women invented the *uchiashi* as a convenient way of walking."[7] His theory suggested that a new way of walking was produced by the limitations of everyday clothing. Therefore, the new way of walking had no connection with an evaluation such as "elegant" or an ideological judgment such as "lady-like."

The relationship between ways of walking and the materials used as underwear was a very small, yet novel question. However, this example reveals the way we researchers are able to return to and reanalyze the accumulated data employing such types of insightful queries. The repeated practice of such an application likely produces the imaginative ability that makes possible the improvement of image data bases.

I would like to propose that the transition of materials from hemp to cotton that Yanagita takes as an important variable was actually a change in the way of spinning thread. Hemp was once twisted into thread by a rotating implement known as a *tesuritsumu* (spindle; see **Figure 12**). The introduction of the *itoguruma* (spinning wheel) was an innovative convenience which made possible tread production from short-fibered materials such as cotton. The transitions in the history of everyday life that we ought to objectify are established through the interweaving of numerous such transformations of technologies.

What I am suggesting is that history is the web of transformations—a piece of texture made of thread spun by the researcher's inspiration, imagination, and questions. Thus, editing the *ebiki* as a pictorial dictionary is not simply a task to be left to mere practical engineers. Interacting with raw materials, constructing analyses, as

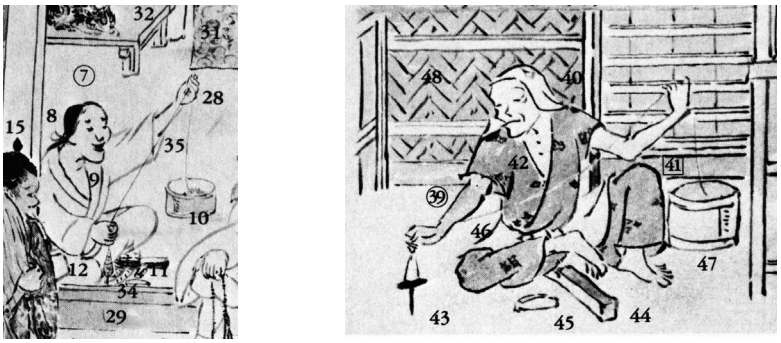


Figure 12: The era of the spindle

well as discovering variables—all of these processes constitute research, itself a form of scholarly construction. Shibusawa Keizō did not seek the publication of the *ebiki* as a result of "thinking of images" or "thinking about images." I believe he desired an *ebiki* that was an expanding commons that would allow for "thinking through images," inspired by small doubts.

Notes

1) In Shibusawa Keizō, Saigyodō zakkō, (Tokyo: Oka Shoin, 1954).
2) Aruga Kizaemon, "*Ebiki* ni yosete," in *Emakimono ni yoru Nihon jōmin seikatsu ebiki*, (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1984), xiii.
3) Ibid.
4) Michel Foucault, *Kotoba to mono: Jinbun kagaku no kōkogaku [Les mots et les chose : une archeologie des sciences humaines]*, (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1974), 18.
5) Shibusawa Keizō, *Kenpo tōbōroku*, second edition, (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1961), 26.
6) 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).
7) Yanagita Kunio, "Mukashi-Fū to Tōsei-Fū," *Momen izen no koto* (1939) in *Yanagita Kunio Zenshū*, vol. 9, (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1998), 452.