



## From the Editor's Desk

Martha Chaiklin



It is perhaps the nature of *shashi* that they almost always begin with a biography of the company founder. The origins of the company are intertwined with the people who made them. At times, these biographies seem to devolve into a cult of personality and the founders of companies such as Mikimoto (Mikimoto Kōkichi), Sony (Ibuka Masaru and Morita Akio), or Asics (Onitsuka Kihachirō) are known in Japan in a way that the founders of similar American companies like Tiffany's (Charles, Lewis Tiffany), Nike (Bill Bowerman and Phil Knight), Body Glove (Bill and Bob Meistrell) or Zenith Electronics (Eugene F. McDonald) are not in the United States. Certainly, there are a few exceptions, such as Henry Ford, who have become part of the popular consciousness. Ford did not produce a company history but did write an autobiography (*My Life and Work*. New York: Doubleday, 1923). Ford's ideas made enough of an impact to be the basis for a criticism of technology and society in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932).

In modern times, there are a few American business personalities such as Steve Jobs, Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg who are widely recognized and might have the same impact. It is perhaps no coincidence that they are all from tech industries, the frontier of modern industry. In Japanese business, the biographies provided in *shashi* provide insight into some of the lesser-known businessmen that are invaluable to the understanding of corporate development.

If there is any businessman in Japanese history who is prominent in Japanese consciousness, it is Shibusawa Eiichi (1840-1931). His transformation from wealthy peasant to anti-foreign radical to modern-day entrepreneur is remarkable in itself. However, he went on to become involved in nearly every business that formed modern Japan, from shipping, to paper, to cotton, to finance. While the Meiji period seemed to have generated many exceptional individuals, even in this exalted company, Shibusawa had many collaborators and competitors, but no real equals.

Shibusawa is also remembered because he was a prolific writer in both Japanese and English. In addition to numerous books about business, he wrote about art, literature and philosophy. He also penned a popular autobiography, which gives interesting detail about his early life, but frustratingly little about his business interactions.<sup>1</sup> Thus the combination of genuine impact and generous research materials has made the subject of hundreds of books and articles on Japanese business. We feel no shame in contributing to this literature with a special edition devoted to him because Shibusawa was the archetype of the modern Japanese businessman.

---

<sup>1</sup> Published in English as Shibusawa, Eiichi. *The Autobiography of Shibusawa Eiichi: From Peasant to Entrepreneur*. Translated with an introduction and notes by Teruko Craig. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1994.

In this Shibusawa special issue John Sagers utilizes the *shashi* of Dai Ichi Bank to examine how Shibusawa's belief in the importance of Confucian principles infused his business practices and affected the bank's activities during Imperial expansion. Izumi Koide profiles a valuable resource for any researcher on Shibusawa or Meiji business history - the Shibusawa Shashi Data Base. In addition to a book review on recent Shibusawa scholarship, I have provided a translation of a more obscure Shibusawa literary effort that complements Sagar's article on the moral imperatives in Meiji modernization. It is a brief discussion of charity and philanthropy in the West.

Thanks are due to Brian Portzer and David Suzuki for editorial assistance. Shashi welcomes articles on any aspect of Japanese company or business history.



Figure 1 Shibusawa Eiichi circa 1910. Bain Collection, Courtesy of Library of Congress.



New articles in this journal are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 United States License.



This journal is published by the University Library System, University of Pittsburgh as part of its D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program and is cosponsored by the University of Pittsburgh Press.