

**INTRODUCTION:
A SYNOPSIS OF THE SHIBUSAWA
INTERNATIONAL SEMINARS
ON JAPANESE STUDIES, 1999-2004**

Gil Latz and Masato Kimura

Introduction

On July 3-4, 1999, the first Shibusawa International Seminar on Japanese Studies was convened by the Shibusawa Ei'ichi Memorial Foundation, in Tokyo and Odawara, Japan. Its purpose was to address the legacy of Shibusawa Ei'ichi (1840-1931), widely regarded as one of the key architects of Japan's emergence as a modern country. The principal organizer and keynote speaker was Ei'ichi's great grandson, Shibusawa Masahide. The two men's lives had intersected briefly between 1925, the year of Shibusawa Masahide's birth, and his great grandfather's death, in 1931, at the age of 91. The significance of their encounter, with each at one end of the spectrum of life, was far greater than a young child's recollections, however, as presentations at the seminar made apparent.

As keynote speaker, Shibusawa Masahide initiated the seminar's discussion of the life and accomplishments of Ei'ichi by posing a particularly intriguing question: As Japan enters the twenty-first century, what possible lessons might be obtained through review of the leadership and vision of one of the compelling figures in modern Japanese history, whose life bore witness to Japan's transformation into a modern country in the late

nineteenth and early twentieth century?¹ For answers to this question, Shibusawa Masahide's remarks focused on the last thirty years of Ei'ichi's life, when his attention shifted from the projects of nation building through economic modernization to the question of Japan's place in the international community.² Ei'ichi recognized that the success of Japan's modern nation building, for all its contributions to the welfare and prosperity of the Japanese people, also contained a darker potential in the nationalist sentiments it encouraged. In particular, Ei'ichi was aware that Meiji-era modernization was an inward-looking revolution but that the rise of Japan as an economic power would give it a new interest in its relations with other nations. From 1902 until the end of his life in 1931, Ei'ichi devoted his extraordinary energies to building positive relationships with those nations that he saw as the most important actors on the world stage. He was especially concerned to foster mutually advantageous relationships with the United States and China, indeed the triangular relationship between all three countries, and consistently fought against misguided stereotypes about Japanese culture.

Shibusawa Masahide concluded his remarks by drawing provocative parallels between Japan in Ei'ichi's time and since 1992, the post-bubble economic era. Japan, he argued, has historically repeated a cycle of alternating isolation from and openness to the world at large. As this cycle unfolds in the phase of isolation, social stagnation can result; this is followed by an outward-looking phase in which Japan opens itself to ideas from

1. The three presentations around which the First Shibusawa International Seminar on Japanese Studies were organized were: Shibusawa Masahide, "Comments on the Life of Shibusawa Ei'ichi"; Shimada Masakazu, "Shibusawa Ei'ichi as Business Leader"; and Kimura Masato, "Shibusawa Ei'ichi's Legacy: Finance, Nation Building, International Relations."
2. For assistance in compiling a summary of the First Shibusawa International Seminar, we are indebted to Dr. Melissa Williams, University of Toronto, who shared with us her excellent notes of the two-day event. Mr. Hiroshi Ishii, Managing Director for Shibusawa Ei'ichi Memorial Foundation, also provided a most useful overview of the First Seminar (translated by Keiko Ikeda), which can be found at www.shibusawa.or.jp/research/seminar/seminar_01.html (Japanese) and www.shibusawa.or.jp/english/research/seminar/seminar_01.html (English).

other cultures, granting them a distinctively Japanese context in the process, followed by renewed inward turning. Shibusawa Masahide suggested that contemporary Japan, like Japan at the threshold of the twentieth century, is turning inward after a period of intensive exposure to and experimentation with ideas and practices from abroad. In doing so, there is a risk of stagnation; one of the lessons of Ei'ichi's life should be to resist this tendency. The "go it alone" approach was not desirable then, and it is not viable now. The keynote overview ended with the observation that such concern is discussed widely in Japan; nonetheless, at the present time there is a dearth of clear conceptions of Japan's role in the world.³

By challenging those attending to consider the intertwined connections of Japan's past, present, and future prospect, Shibusawa Masahide set in motion a thoughtfully conceived, extended discussion that, with this publication, represents a fifth year of productive contributions to the field of Japanese studies. It is fitting, at this juncture, to acknowledge his unique and creative leadership in a review of the initial ideas that shaped the Seminar project in light of what has been accomplished to date.

The Shibusawa International Seminars on Japanese Studies

The 1999 establishment of the seminar has been well summarized by the International House of Japan, as follows:

The Shibusawa International Seminar on Japanese Studies is named after the visionary Japanese leader Shibusawa Ei'ichi (1840-1931), who demonstrated extraordinary leadership as a modern nation builder, far-sighted entrepreneur, and social reformer. It is a joint initiative of Ryūmonsha, a foundation established in honor of Shibusawa Ei'ichi, and the International House of Japan, which

3. In summary, three themes emerged at the first seminar, based on comparison of Ei'ichi's thinking and challenges facing contemporary Japan. They were: the form Japanese entrepreneurship should take and the way we should conceive its contribution to broader public interests; the importance of institutional reform, that is, resisting traditional bureaucracy and increasing transparency; and the challenge of (re)conceiving leadership in society and politics.

is a private, non-profit organization devoted to promoting academic, educational and cultural exchange between Japan and other countries through a variety of programs, including support of Japanese studies abroad.

The seminar intends to provide an opportunity for Japanese and non-Japanese scholars and researchers in the broad field of Japanese studies to examine the major challenges facing contemporary Japan from an historical and international perspective. Wherever possible, it attempts to shed new light on and draw lessons from the accomplishments and legacy of Shibusawa Ei'ichi and trace their implications for contemporary Japan and her future as well as for other parts of the world. In other words, the seminar is Janus-faced: looking backward to the challenges of modern nation-building in Japan during the Shibusawa era and to Japan's response, and looking forward to the future of Japan in the age of globalization.

Beginning with the second seminar, the project takes place under the joint auspices of the International House and the University of Missouri, St. Louis, where an endowed chair, the Ei'ichi Shibusawa-Seigo Arai Professor in Japanese Studies, has been established. This endowed chair symbolizes the university's commitment to developing Japanese studies and a close cooperative relationship between the university and Japanese academic institutions, including Ryūmonsha and the International House of Japan.⁴

In the overview, then, the characteristics of seminar analysis are threefold: to perceive the contemporary meaning of Shibusawa Ei'ichi's ideas and activities; to analyze Japan-specific social, economic, and political challenges in relation to the contemporary world community; and to cultivate a new, multinational network of scholars through collaborative research. The latter point is particularly important in that multi-authored papers are not only to be comprised of teams that include Japanese and non-Japanese scholars, but also that these papers are presented in a seminar setting that includes junior and senior scholars in order to obtain the deepest possible cross-generational as well as inter-disciplinary discussion.⁵

4. Dr. Alan Bird was appointed to the Ei'ichi Shibusawa-Seigo Arai Professor in Japanese Studies Endowed Chair in 2000.

Linkage to the 2000 Obuchi Report⁶

At the second Shibusawa International Seminar on Japanese Studies, in 2000, there was consensus that the evolving agenda should examine the many challenges confronting Japan's domestic and international leadership, challenges that are rooted deeply in Japan's modern history and contemporary circumstances. Looking forward, the role of leadership in twenty-first-century Japan was identified to be a pressing and immediate issue. For guidance on the leadership question, seminar participants urged a comparison between Ei'ichi's thinking and the late prime minister Obuchi's commissioned publication, *The Frontier Within: Individual Empowerment and Better Governance in the New Millennium*. The Obuchi Report is an extraordinarily thoughtful exploration of the challenges Japan will face in the twenty-first century. It identifies a need for new forms of leadership and individual initiative that are remarkably similar to the ideas offered by Ei'ichi as Japan confronted the twentieth century. Like Ei'ichi, the Obuchi Report focuses on engaging the public in a discussion of national aspirations—of empowering people in such a way that they become the chief agents leading government to pursue national goals. As such, it is a thoughtful discourse on the concept of civil society and the role that civilians must play in the face of the pervasive forces of economic, cultural, and political globalization, domestic and international issues of human securi-

5. Papers associated with the Shibusawa International Seminars illustrate the breadth of thinking generated by the seminar project. In the aggregate, research has concentrated predominately on the political and finance/business controversies facing Japan, followed by social issues and international relations. See International House of Japan, ed., *Challenges for Japan: Democracy, Business, and Aging* (Tokyo: IHJ, 2001); Latz and Koide Izumi, eds., *Challenges for Japan: Democracy, Finance, International Relations, Gender* (Tokyo: IHJ, 2003); Alan Bird, ed., *Asian Perspective*, Special Issue on Japan, vol. 27, No. 3 (2003).

6. The following two sections are revisions of earlier observations of the seminar project. See Gil Latz, "Back to the Future: The Intellectual Themes of the Second Shibusawa Seminar on Japanese Studies," in International House of Japan, ed., *Challenges for Japan: Democracy, Business, and Aging*, pp. 5-28; and Gil Latz, "Introduction: Shibusawa Ei'ichi's Legacy," in Latz and Izumi, eds., *Challenges for Japan*, pp. vi-xi.

ty, and national self-determination in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world.⁷

The Obuchi Report is remarkable in yet another way. It echoes in an almost uncanny fashion the evolving themes of the Shibusawa International Seminar on Japanese Studies, as identified from 1999. Then, and now, the seminar's respective papers on the challenges for democracy, economics, and social reform mirror the domestic impact of trends identified by the Obuchi Report, namely, globalization, global literacy, the information-technology revolution, advances in science, and falling birthrates and aging populations. Furthermore, the elements of reform called for in the Obuchi Report are presented in similar language: the need for Japan to consider the intellectual distinction between governing and social governance, the imperative of empowering individuals in the creation of new public space, and the recognition that, for Japan, the twenty-first century is a frontier that will be traversed by pioneering individuals and groups. Reading this report, one can almost discern the ghost of Ei'ichi calling for the nurturing of individuals and groups committed to Japan in much the same way that he embraced the challenges to Japan's transformation from a feudal to a modern, capitalist state.

In short, the aspirations of Japan and its citizens need to be fused in the twenty-first century by rebuilding the relationship between public and private space in Japanese civil society. A citizenry and its leadership, committed to serve the public good, is a conception of social and economic organization that Ei'ichi

7. Prime Minister's Office, Japan, Prime Minister's Commission on Japan's Goals in the 21st Century, *The Frontier Within: Individual Empowerment and Better Governance in the New Millennium* (Tokyo, 2000). The Obuchi Report "outline[s] two essential changes. One is to change the methods and systems whereby citizens interact with society. . . . People must become more aware that government is their agent. The other essential change is to redefine and rebuild the relationship between private and public space in civil society. This means first and foremost promoting individuality and individual initiatives. . . . These tough yet flexible individuals will participate in and expand public forums on their own initiative, creating dynamic public space. This will lead to the emergence of individuals and a society endowed with diversity and vigor, individuals and a society that take risks more boldly, address pioneering challenges, and are more creative and imaginative."

understood intuitively; in practice, such values are the measure by which one contributes to society. Ei'ichi's life and the Obuchi Report eloquently articulate such values.

Evolving Research Mission of the Seminar Project, 2002

A second critical moment in the maturation of the seminar project was the contribution its discussions made to the formulation of a mission statement for the Research Department of the Shibusawa Ei'ichi Memorial Foundation, in 2002. At that time, the foundation took the creative step of formally establishing a research department committed to the proposition that the wisdom embodied in the leadership and vision that Ei'ichi offered Japan in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is of critical value to its transition to the twenty-first century. The research department noted in particular:

Three ideas stand out in the analysis of his life and thought: the need for *Japanese capitalism* to be infused with moral principles; a definition of Japan's *national interest* that challenged the private, *min*, sector to collaborate with government, *kan*, in pursuit of the common good; and clarification of Japan's *international position* in the complex regional and world communities that emerged during his lifetime.

In light of the unique contributions of Shibusawa Ei'ichi to Japanese society, the mission of the research department includes creating a body of literature that articulates and furthers the ideas of Shibusawa Ei'ichi. From 2002, with the articulation of the criteria guiding the seminar project, the department assumed formal responsibility for an agenda that focuses on analysis of and provides selective insight into the twenty-first-century characteristics of Japanese capitalism, the evolving definition of Japanese national interests, and Japan's international position in world affairs. And, in tribute to Ei'ichi's legacy, a formal commitment is made, as well, to explore such ideas from the perspective of international scholarly teams.

One of the immediate consequences of the establishment of a research division guided by a clear mission is that it concentrated on the Confucian wellsprings of Ei'ichi's thought. Early in the Meiji Era (1868-1912), Ei'ichi articulated the view that drastic

national reform was needed in order to respond to Western imperial activity in East Asia. He was quite strategic in the way he introduced the key concepts around which Western civilization was organized. Abandoning the doctrine of *jōi*, or “expel the barbarians,” he introduced and transplanted into Japanese business and society various aspects of Western thought, technology, and the notion of capital, in order to encourage Japan’s modernization. To do this, Ei’ichi initiated reforms that revolutionized the modes of thought characteristic of the secluded Tokugawa (Edo) Period (1603-1867), establishing, in the process, new forms of social and economic organization.

To realize a new and more appropriate social system for the country, Ei’ichi addressed the need for a national consciousness regarding the concept of “public” and the nature of Japan’s economy. He reasoned that if he could lead others to embrace the idea that Confucianism legitimizes economic activity as a rational act, this would become a driving force for Japanese leaders, and society at large, to see the need for change. To this end he devised a form of neo-Confucian thought that juxtaposed, constructively, notions of harmony, economy, and morality, concluding that prescribed human behavior, as defined in the *Analects*, did not prohibit acquisition of wealth through economic activity.⁸

Ei’ichi’s neo-Confucian perspective was a unique addition to Japanese society for two reasons. First, it broadened Confucianism’s ethical scope to the level of the state, thereby superseding, but not eliminating, traditional behavioral norms that prescribed a set of hierarchical social relationships between parents and children, or lords and vassals. Second, it proposed that, based on the Confucian ethic, those engaged in commerce and industry are also obligated to render service to the public and to the state. From this perspective, national and local governments,

8. Ei’ichi’s interpretation of *The Analects* can be paraphrased as follows: He wanted people who were engaged in commerce not to misunderstand its meaning and directed his fellow citizens to look for private gain in ways that also benefited the public. He argued that this approach would not only bring about prosperity for oneself and one’s family but would also make possible “a more peaceful society.” Shibusawa Eiichi, *Rongo to Soroban* (The Analects and the Abacus) (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1985), pp. 85-88.

as well as private companies and nongovernmental organizations, are compelled to devise a “public” dimension; explicitly, all social organizations are expected to define their relationship to the public interest, and to do so hand-in-hand with their profit-seeking agenda. In this way, Ei’ichi made clear the ethical responsibilities of those involved in the business of creating a modern nation-state.

The leadership Ei’ichi provided was rooted in a Confucian value system constructed to legitimize Japan’s transformation to a modern society. Indeed, there is no irony in pointing out the remarkable similarity between the national challenges tackled by Ei’ichi throughout his long life—values, citizenship, and world affairs—and those facing Japan today. Were he alive, Shibusawa, of course, would not be alone in arguing for a national and global debate on democracy, economic morality, and the values governing the private sector’s contribution to the public good. His voice is noteworthy, however, because of the unique value system that shaped his thought and the moral and historical legitimacy his thinking brings to such discussion.⁹

The Fifth Shibusawa International Seminar on Japanese Studies

In this *Asian Perspective* special issue, nine articles are presented on the social, economic, political, and international relations challenges facing Japan. Five of the nine articles were papers presented originally at the Fifth Shibusawa International Seminar in June 2004: those by Jennifer Amyx, Maria Toyoda, and Harukata Takenaka; by Mari Miura, Robert Weiner, and Kap Yun Lee; by Lam Peng-Er; by Melissa Williams, Catherine Lu, and Toshihiro Menju; and by Peter D. Feaver, Takako Hikotani, and Shaun Narine. The article by Noboru Yamaguchi and David A. Welch is an outgrowth of seminar discussion on the civil-mili-

9. Since April 2004, the Shibusawa Foundation has begun to explore the Confucian roots of Ei’ichi’s thinking through the *Shibusawa International Confucian Seminars*. Dr. Tao Demin, Professor, Kansai University, is the project director. The First Confucian Seminar was held at the International House of Japan, Tokyo, September 24-25, 2004.

tary theme. Two additional articles are republications of papers originally presented at the Third Shibusawa International Seminar: These are authored by Mari Osawa and by Glenda Roberts. A final addition, by Masato Kimura, is a revised paper from the Second Shibusawa International Seminar. It is worth noting that the important question of civil-military relations is a new analytical dimension added to the seminar project's long-standing concern with foreign affairs.

Let us return, in light of this latest contribution to Japanese Studies, to that moment half a decade ago when the seminar project was inaugurated by Shibusawa Masahide. As he has pointed out, descriptive terms like extraordinary leader, nation builder, entrepreneur, and social reformer are rarely used to describe Japan's intelligentsia at the turn of the twenty-first century, much less one individual man or woman. Yet many accord such accolades to Ei'ichi as descriptors of his leadership with respect to the challenges faced by twentieth century Japan, and his achievements continue to set the standard by which many great accomplishments of modern Japan can be measured. Moreover, in reviewing the legacy of Ei'ichi, bold, decisive, and visionary national and international leadership characterized his life as it stretched across the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. He struggled intellectually with questions of moral leadership as Japan sought to transform its feudal society, and for guidance on such matters he became a widely acknowledged Confucian scholar. His prowess in the business world is illustrated by the role he played in the creation of the Japanese ministry of finance and Japan's first Western-style bank, Dai-ichi Kangyō. The astonishing fact is that he was involved in the creation of hundreds of companies and business associations that covered the entire spectrum of Japan's newly emerging modern economy.

Ei'ichi's social convictions were equally bold:

[one] obsession of Ei'ichi's was to combat Japan's age-old habit of paying undue respect to government officials and hold the private citizens in contempt (*kanson-minpi*). There is a legend about Ei'ichi in which, at the age of 15, he was embroiled in a fit of anger against an arrogant *daimyō* who had the nerve to demand from the leading farmers in his domain a substantial monetary donation to defray the cost of his daughter's wedding. The legend goes on to explain that such an experience was at the root of his burning conviction

that Japan should liquidate the practice of allowing one class of people to dictate over the other. Ei'ichi's emotion was later to be expanded into a political conviction as he saw that the nation's all important economic development hinged critically upon a presence of a social system where every man, woman, and child is treated equally and allowed full play to his or her ability . . .¹⁰

This sense of social conviction manifested itself in terms of philanthropy, as well. Early on in his career as a banker, Ei'ichi volunteered to reactivate the poverty relief system of the Tokugawa government which was subsequently reorganized into the Tokyo Yōikuin, the forerunner of Japan's social welfare system. He served as the head of this organization for more than five decades, until his death in 1931.

And yet, it is also the case that Ei'ichi's thinking can hardly be summed up neatly as the antidote for the challenges of our day. Some of his thinking would strike us as entirely unconventional, even provocative. For instance, his call for examination of the relationship between Japanese capitalism and morality addresses Japan's place in the world and, by implication, the place of moral values in world capitalism. This observation is particularly pertinent as the world's two great economic powers, Japan and the United States, debate with the larger world community the place of moral values in an age of economic globalization. Even so, the urgent global question of how we can identify a moral analogue for contemporary economic behavior, Confucian or otherwise, is one that remains to be made explicit in subsequent Shibusawa International Seminars. Similarly, the effort to identify the features of Ei'ichi's leadership qualities, as if they could be distilled into some kind of prescription to meet the needs of the present, has thus far been conceptualized all too simplistically by seminar participants.

In admitting that the ideas, even the recommendations, emanating from the Shibusawa International Seminars are to be

10. Masahide Shibusawa, "Life of Ei'ichi Shibusawa: Possible Areas of Study," unpublished manuscript, 1992, p. 4. For a more recent comment on *kanson-minpi*, see Masahide Shibusawa, Foreword, in Latz and Koide, eds., *Challenges for Japan*, pp. iv-v. For additional discussion of Ei'ichi's moral position, see Kimura, "Ethical Challenges Facing Japanese Businesses: Historical and Contemporary Observations," in this volume.

seen as preliminary, as food for further thought and debate, however, in no way diminishes the profound curiosity that gave birth to this immensely rich and invigorating project. For that, all involved would like to express their thanks and heartfelt gratitude to Shibusawa Masahide, Director and CEO of the Shibusawa Ei'ichi Memorial Foundation. His vision and counsel since 1999 remind us of the great gifts that come from intellectual inquiry, as worlds of complexity are unveiled and new understandings are born.¹¹ In addition, we would like to express our appreciation to the many scholars and committed individuals in Japan and the United States who participated in and organized the Shibusawa International Seminars between 1999 and 2004. Finally, we would like to acknowledge Ms. Ikeda Keiko, Assistant Editor, Portland State University, for her exceptional professional collaboration and collegiality in the course of bringing these manuscripts to publication.

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11. For those interested in the burgeoning international character of the scholarly agenda, which the Shibusawa Seminars have anticipated as well as epitomize, see Stephen R. Graubard, *Public Scholarship: A New Perspective for the 21st Century* (New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2004), pp. 43-44. Note, for example, Graubard's concluding observation: "Is it possible that the most imperative need today is to acknowledge that the world is not becoming uniform, that national, religious, social, political, cultural and intellectual identities call for a kind of scholarship more respectful of difference, prepared to acknowledge complexity? . . . Is a new kind of international scholarship not called for in which the Americans, still principal investigators, work more closely with those prepared to entertain different views and priorities, who do not normally publish in English? . . . While the term "public scholarship" does not in itself express the total ambition of a venture that goes beyond the practices of the 20th century, it implies that there is a public, more extensive than the one that exists in the United States, that needs to be served by scholarship less wedded to the needs of a single society."

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