

About the Sempeikan Collection and the Establishment of the Currency Museum

Outline of Sempeikan

Sempeikan was a private museum established in the house of the renowned numismatist, Keibun Tanaka, in 1923. In this brick-built museum, he conserved and displayed coins, notes, and related materials, and also conducted academic research. The Sempeikan collection, known as one of the world's leading collections of Asian currency, was composed of as many as 100,000 items. This was not a simple collection of old notes and coins; it included a range of currencies and reference materials that were indispensable to study the history of Japanese currency and culture.

Sempeikan Collection (Examples)

Japanese currency (ancient coins such as Wado Kaichin, old gold and silver coins such as Tensho Oban gold coins, Kan'ei Tsuho copper coins, clan notes [*hansatsu*], and medals [*ezeni*]); currency of East Asian countries, such as China, Korea, Vietnam and Thailand; coin molds; printing blocks for clan notes; old documents; numismatic books; colored woodblock prints; old maps; wallets; chests for storing Koban gold coins (*sen-ryo-bako*); fake swords for concealing coins; lottery tickets; and certificates for the sale of rice (*kome-kitte*)

Brief history of Keibun Tanaka (born Ken Tanaka)

July 1884: Born in Shiba Shirokanedai in Tokyo

October 1906: Joined Tokyo Kosen Kyokai, an association of old coin collectors

July 1918: Became director and manager of Toyo Kahei Kyokai (formerly Kosen Kyokai)

May 1920: Became the third president of Toyo Kahei Kyokai

January 1923: Built a private museum (Sempeikan) to conserve and display his collection within the premises of his house (presently in Shinagawa, Tokyo)

December 1944: Donated the Sempeikan collection to the Bank of Japan

July 1950: Published the first issue of the numismatic journal *Sempeikan*

December 1956: Passed away

(Reference materials: *Kahei*, Toyo Kahei Kyokai and an article on Keibun Tanaka, the owner of Sempeikan, written by Isao Gunji and published in the monthly magazine *Bonanza*)

Donation of the Sempeikan Collection to the Bank of Japan and the Currency Museum

■ Donation to the Bank of Japan

During the last worsening years of the Pacific War, Sempeikan faced the threat of destruction from air raids. In 1944, Keibun Tanaka, who was worried about losing his Sempeikan collection to such a fate, talked with Keizo Shibusawa, then Governor of the Bank of Japan, about donating his collection to the bank. Governor Shibusawa was both a collector and researcher of folklore materials and had a deep understanding of the need of protecting cultural assets. He reportedly had the idea of opening a currency museum featuring the Sempeikan collection.

The Sempeikan collection was donated to the Bank of Japan at the end of 1944, when the air raids were becoming more frequent in Tokyo, and the collection is now conserved in the Currency Museum.

Brief history of Keizo Shibusawa

August 1896: Born in Tokyo

April 1921: Joined Yokohama Specie Bank

July 1926: Became a director of Daiichi Bank

1936: Opened a folklore museum in the village of Hoya in Kitatama-gun

March 1942: Became a Deputy Governor of the Bank of Japan

March 1944: Became the 16th Governor of the Bank of Japan (~October 1945)

October 1945: Became Finance minister (in the Shidehara Cabinet) (~May 1946)

1946: Became president of the folklore society of Japan

July 1956: Became chairman of the Committee for Financial System Research

January 1957: Became an advisor to the Socio-Economic History Society

October 1963: Passed away

(Reference: *Shibusawa Keizo*, Shibusawa Keizo Denki Hensan Kankokai)

■ Establishment of the Currency Museum

In receiving the Sempeikan collection, the Bank of Japan employed Isao Gunji, who had worked in collection and research activities at Sempeikan, at the request of Governor Shibusawa, who believed it to be necessary to employ a specialist for appropriate management and study of the collection. Mr. Gunji devoted himself to the classification, preservation and study of the bank's currency collections, primarily the Sempeikan collection,

and made great contributions to the conservation of the collections as cultural assets for future generations.

In May 1947, the GHQ included the old gold and silver coins of the Sempeikan collection as one of its targets for condemnation, but Mr. Gunji strongly insisted that the collection, including the old gold and silver coins, represented Japan's cultural assets and should be preserved and utilized by the Japanese people. In response, the GHQ decided not to condemn the coins on the condition that they would be shown to the public as cultural assets.

Subsequently, *Zuroku Nihon-no Kahei* was published from 1972 to 1976 (edited by the Research Department of the Bank of Japan: 11 volumes) and based on the research results, the Bank of Japan opened the Currency Museum in November 1985.