

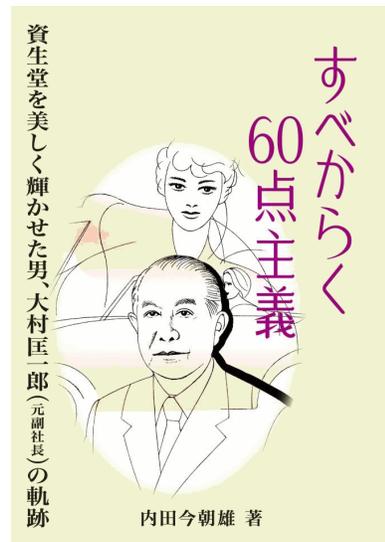


Book Review

内田今朝雄. すべからく60点主義：資生堂を美しく輝かせた男、大村匡一郎（元副社）の軌跡。東京：内田今朝雄, 2012.

Uchida Kesao *Subekaraku 60ten shugi: Shiseidō o utsukushiku kagayakaseta Otoko, Ōmura Kyōichirō (Moto Fuku-Shachō) no kiseki (Observe a philosophy of 60%: The life of the man who brought glory to Shiseido through beauty, former vice president Ōmura Kyōichirō)* Tokyo: Privately Printed, 2012.

SHISEIDO, an international cosmetics and skin care company, rose to prominence from its main store on the Ginza in Tokyo as Japan was making its mark on the international stage as a modern nation. Despite recent weakening in its domestic market, where it earns roughly half its sales, [Shiseido remains among the top ten companies worldwide in the beauty, cosmetics, and skin care industry by overall sales](#), due in part to [a global reputation for high quality and technological innovation](#). This reputation was created and sustained in large part by Shiseido's marketing mastery, including its iconic advertisements; and these were the responsibility of its storied advertising department. Uchida Kesao worked in that department for 32 years, and his book, *Subekaraku 60ten shugi*, is a loving and highly readable portrait of one of its former heads, the colorful Ōmura Kyōichirō (1918-2010).



Uchida was a member of one of the many circles with whom Ōmura socialized in his retirement. Besides his own memories as a Shiseido insider, Uchida's materials included writings by Ōmura, interviews Uchida conducted with Ōmura prior to his death, and stories Uchida collected from former Shiseido colleagues and others close to him. Twelve of the latter contributed essays, most of them written especially for the project, which appear throughout the book. Split between Ōmura's life before and after entering Shiseido, the book is dominated by his involvement with the advertising department, which began in 1970, halfway into his 55-year career. To orient the reader historically, Uchida opens and closes each chapter with a list of major events in the world, the nation, and Shiseido's advertising, presented in chronicle format. A few family photos break up the text.

The title refers to Ōmura's approach to life and the advice he routinely gave others. In Ōmura's day, 60% was the lowest passing grade, so as Uchida (17) explains, that philosophy was: *You are responsible for only the minimum needed to pass. Don't work too hard. Enjoy life.* Understandably this philosophy made an impression on his colleagues, coming as it did from a lifelong salaryman who led Shiseido's personnel department in the midst of the "Japan as Number One" postwar era.

Uchida suggests that this philosophy emerged from Ōmura's unhappy experiences with a dismissive teacher in primary school (30). Discouraged from academic success, Ōmura, whose wealthy family surrounded itself with high culture and lived in a neighborhood rich with artists, developed a voracious interest in movies and music, not to mention alcohol. Entering naval school after a romp through college, he discovered a talent for bringing out the best of even the weakest of those under his command, building cohesive and high-performing units both in overseas posts and during a turn as an instructor. His unhappy experiences at school seem to have nurtured in him a sympathetic desire to help the weakest succeed by giving them respect, encouragement, and social support.

Ōmura returned from China at the end of the war full of self-confidence but eager to remain in Tokyo. An older family friend thought local Shiseido would be a good match for Ōmura's interest in the arts and familiarity with chemistry, the latter gained from his family's background in medicine (55-56). That friend was right: Ōmura would work at Shiseido for 55 years, eventually rising to the rank of vice president.

One of Ōmura's major achievements at Shiseido, and one which clearly displays his values and leadership, was his reform of its personnel practices in the 1960s (62-65). Concerned that the company was losing ground to competitors due to its relatively poor treatment of employees, Ōmura took charge of negotiations with the union leadership and made many reforms, including instituting a system of regular transfers. Making Shiseido more supportive of junior employees and equitable overall led some in management to accuse Ōmura of siding too much with the unions, but it also accomplished his goal, allowing Shiseido to recruit, keep, and get the most from a more talented workforce.

Transferred to lead the advertising department, Ōmura again showed his interest in having people work cohesively towards a common goal. As Uchida states (87), over time the department had come to see itself as almost a separate entity within Shiseido. This influenced unit priorities, so that the advertising department spent money to disrupt other company's advertising, without considering whether this would ultimately increase sales. Ōmura changed this culture, leaving behind a department integrated with and serving the greater Shiseido Corporation.

Ōmura also had effective artistic ideas, stemming from his love of movies and music. Most interesting here, given the importance of graphic design in the creation of Shiseido style and the scholarship about it, is Ōmura's emphasis on effectively using *sound* in the products for broadcast television, the major medium of the day – most designers overlooked this opportunity in their focus on the pictures and words so central to print. During his tenure, songs commissioned for Shiseido commercials became chart-toppers covered by pop singers. Uchida notes that these songs are now used in documentaries covering the 1970s and 1980s (83-86), becoming emblematic of their era in the same way that Shiseido print ads had.

There is thus an interesting tension in Uchida's story – not explored – between the narrative of a man who advised working no harder than one had to and floated through most of his life on a river of alcohol and cinema, whose self-professed aspiration was merely “to live an ordinary life without bothering others,” and the narrative of a man of many achievements, some hard-won and all requiring confidence in his own judgment, who had the underlying sense that his destiny for success would always manifest itself in critical moments (66-67).

Uchida presents Ōmura as a successful and well-loved man. But it is a certain type of success. In retirement we see him out among work colleagues who remember him with love and humor – and alone with his movies when home. Ōmura's wife appears in the story twice: when she marries him, and when she dies. Throughout my reading I thought they were childless; at last a child appears in the final pages. What his family means to him, or how he and his wife worked together, if they did, are not discussed.

This humble, sometimes entertaining biography is not intended to be a work of scholarship. Its goal is to celebrate, not to analyze and certainly not to criticize. There are no references of any kind to scholarship or data sets, and only generalizations and vague numbers are offered to suggest the positive impact of Ōmura's work. Shiseido's activities in (print) advertising, marketing, product research, and market expansion are better chronicled, with pictures and in English, on the company's website (see [here](#) and [here](#)). The book contains no images from any of the commercials and programs with which Ōmura was involved, and there is no close analysis of why they were successful, such as what we have for Shiseido's print art of the prewar and war period (see "[Selling Shiseido](#)" by Weisenfeld, Dower, Miyagawa and others at MIT's Visualizing Cultures project).

The book is nevertheless recommended for two scholarly audiences. First, by showing us a postwar picture of Shiseido, *Subekaraku* invites those studying questions of media, art, and consumer culture to look beyond the Jazz Age and consider the adaptations Shiseido's advertising team made for the company to thrive in the television age. Second, the book provides interesting case material for those studying work and gender during the postwar period. Work studies of this era are dominated by the image of the salaryman, a white collar male employee at a large organization whose life is consumed by his organization in the same way that his wife's is by her family. Uchida's Ōmura is a successful version of this type. As Shiseido stands for Japan, it is interesting to consider whether in Uchida's long eulogy, Ōmura stands for a bygone work culture.

In his introduction, Uchida expresses the modest hope that those who read his book will think of Ōmura and his contributions whenever they think of Shiseido's advertising. Uchida not only achieves this goal, but provides scholars a window into one of Japan's most important and well-recognized global companies during the time of Japan's great postwar economic expansion, giving us the means to explore interesting questions of corporate and culture change. He clearly earns at least a 60.

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