

Odaka Junchu (1830–1901) was born in Fukaya to a family that served as *myoshu*, or village headmen, during the Edo period. He enjoyed intellectual pursuits from a young age, and eventually turned his family home into an academy for local children. His cousin Shibusawa Eiichi (1840–1931), who was ten years younger, studied at his school for several years. As a leader in his community, Junchu helped farmers from his region petition the Meiji government over a dispute with local authorities. Junchu had been previously employed by the Ministry of Popular Affairs and based on his leadership and knowledge he was asked to work on the site selection, construction, and management of the Tomioka Silk Mill. Junchu delegated the important task of sourcing the construction materials to Nirazuka Naojiro (1823–1898), a local man who had worked for Junchu’s family since his youth. The walls of the mill were to be made of brick, but brick had never before been made in that region, so Naojiro consulted the French workers and carefully tested different local clays until he was successful in producing high-quality building materials. The bricks he developed still make up the walls of the Tomioka Silk Mill. Once the construction of the mill was complete and operations had begun, Junchu became the manager for the Japanese workers. His own daughter worked as a “factory girl,” and he strongly supported the education and general welfare of the women at the mill.