

Professor Shiba's Friendship with Slovene Historians

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We Slovene historians, Professor Shiba's friends and colleagues, were deeply shocked and saddened, when we received at the end of May the very sad note that our dear friend and colleague all of a sudden passed away. It was only some weeks before, that Professor Shiba informed us he would have to cancel his spring visit to Serbia because of the covid pandemic, but that he would probably come to Belgrade in the autumn. We were already eagerly looking forward to meeting him again. We knew also that he was working on the 19th edition of his *Contemporary History of Yugoslavia* and our friends and colleagues in Japan were writing that he was in good health and working tirelessly as always. On hearing of Professor Shiba's sudden passing, we were left helpless and speechless. Although Professor Shiba passed away far from us in Slovenia, we felt as if this happened very close.

Professor Shiba and I met for the first time some twenty years ago, perhaps in 2000 or possibly 2001, (I am not sure any more) in a small countryside restaurant, not far from Ljubljana. Professor Shiba did not know any Slovene historians until then, but he had already met Bogomil Ferfila, Professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences in Ljubljana, who with his students had visited Japan several times. He thus asked Ferfila to introduce him to a Slovene historian and Ferfila invited both of us that day for lunch. Professor Shiba and I met the very next day in a coffee house in Ljubljana where, over a cup of coffee, he told me that during his first stay in Belgrade in the mid 1970s he had read the short story *A Cup of Coffee* by Ivan Cankar, the most important writer of Slovene literary modernism, which he liked so much that he translated it into Japanese.

The initiative for the cooperation of Slovene and Japanese historians was in the beginning fully in Professor Shiba's hands. Already, in the 1990's before we had met, he had arranged for one of his M.A. students to be able engage in research in Ljubljana on Slovene history and Slovene national development in the 18th and 19th centuries. And then, a year after our first meeting, he sent to Ljubljana a second graduate student, Ryoichi Asada, who after two semesters of friendly and successful work with me, completed his M.A. on Slovene nation building under Professor Shiba in Tokyo.

Professor Shiba was of course interested in Slovene history above all from a larger Yugoslav and Balkan point of view. He discussed, as we all know, different topics of Balkan and Yugoslav history and Balkan Studies in Japan in his articles and essays published in Japanese and in international and Yugoslav history journals focusing particularly on contemporary projects of comparative, nationally balanced high school history education and concepts of regional history going beyond the conflicts and antagonisms of the last two decades. In spring 2003 he organized together with Tokyo University's Center for German and European Studies a very successful international conference with the title *The Balkans as an Aspect of Europe*,

with the participation of some of the most prominent Japanese, American and European specialists in the history of the Balkans. On this occasion, he kindly invited me to speak about the Slovenes and the Balkans in the 19th and the 20th centuries. This was my first visit to Japan and a very exciting, unforgettable experience for me. Professor Shiba was a wonderful host: he introduced his colleagues, Japanese historians and his students to us, foreign participants of the conference and we remained with some of them in touch also in the following years. He took us around in Tokyo and organized a meeting with his historian colleagues in Kyoto. It was during this first trip of mine that the two of us, Professor Shiba and I, visited Yasukuni Shrine and the Yushukan War Museum located on the shrine grounds, where we had a long, critical, -- and for me a very instructive -- discussion about the falsifications and nationalistic misinterpretations of history and public and historiographical controversies concerning World War II and the recent past in Japan as well as in the successor states of the former Yugoslavia.

Two years later another international conference followed, this time with the title *In Search of a Common Regional History: the Balkans and East Asia in History Textbooks* with participants from Greece, Albania, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Slovenia, Germany and Japan. Some months before the beginning of the conference the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Thessaloniki edited and published four volumes of alternative history materials to encourage Balkan historians to review their school history curricula from a larger regional point of view, which in Professor Shiba's opinion was an "epoch making achievement." A comparative approach focusing on regional, social and cultural history in history education (as well as in national history narratives) could, he maintained, contribute in an important way to overcoming nationalistic misinterpretations of history and to a more balanced understanding of the past, if not to reconciliation.

A Search for a Common Regional History in the Balkans and East Asia was thus not only a title of a conference organized by Professor Shiba in Tokyo, but also one that became one of his main history research topics in following years. In 2005, we met also during the International Congress of Historical Sciences in Sydney, where Professor Shiba presented a paper titled *Successor States of Yugoslavia between de-yugoslavization and yugo-nostalgia from the point of view of history textbooks*. And in 2009 and in 2011 we jointly proposed and organized two panels sponsored by the American Society of Slovene Studies at the Convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies in Boston and Washington: the first one about the interpretations of contemporary history in Serbia, Slovenia and Japan with the participation of Dubravka Stojanović from Belgrade and the other one on perspectives of regional history in the Balkans and East Asia with the participation of Christina Koulouri from Athens, Chinyun Lee from Taiwan and John Cox from North Dakota University in the United States.

When Professor Shiba visited us, his colleagues in the Institute of Contemporary History in Ljubljana, and gave us a talk in 2008, we decided to apply for financial support for a bilateral joint research project focusing on the comparative analysis of history textbooks and history education in Japan and Slovenia. We were successful with our first application and after achieving positive results during the first project, applied for a second one in 2013. The papers

presented in our workshops were published in two volumes.¹ We all agreed that our meetings and discussions constituted extraordinary and valuable experiences for us all. We could, during our workshops in Slovenia and Japan, quickly see that we had in many aspects similar ideas about how history education in the secondary schools in our countries should be remodelled and modernized integrating on one hand national history in wider regional and world history frames and on the other turning more attention to deeper, long-lasting cultural, economic, and social currents. And we, Slovene historians, could during our meetings repeatedly see how appreciated was our dear friend Professor Shiba by his colleagues and how popular he was particularly with younger historians, his former students. When in 2013 the Josai Institute for Central European Studies was founded and Professor Shiba became its deputy director, we gained a new, exciting topic for our discussions. In November 2015 Professor Shiba kindly invited me to an international symposium on Central European Studies in East Asia to speak about the exchange of ideas in Slovenia that had taken place on the concept of Central Europe before and after WW II.

Professor Shiba derived great pleasure from his visits to Slovenia not only because he was fond of meeting his Slovene friends and colleagues, but also because he liked Slovenia. We organized our workshops in different parts of Slovenia and once, after a particularly fruitful meeting in the Karst region, south of Ljubljana, we even descended to the coast for a cup of coffee and a glass of wine in Trieste in Italy. But Professor Shiba's favourite destination in Slovenia was Lake Bohinj. When he together with his wife Riko visited Bohinj in 2017, they left in the hotel, where they stayed, a part of their mountain climbing equipment, planning to come back soon. I know that in spring last year they were still planning a trip to Bohinj this year.

In 2017 the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Borut Pahor, conferred on Professor Shiba the Medal of Merit for his historiographical work on the Balkans and Slovenia's position in the region as well as for informing the Japanese public about the Slovene path to independence. We met for the last time in 2018 in Belgrade optimistically making plans for our next meetings and projects. To our deepest regret we will not be able to realize them.

We, Professor Shiba's friends and colleagues, Slovene historians, will very much miss him.

¹ School History and Textbooks: A comparative Analysis of History Textbooks in Japan and Slovenia, Edited by Nobuhiro Shiba, Aleš Gabrič, Kenta Suzuki and Žarko Lazarevič, Published by Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, Ljubljana 2013. The 20th Century through Historiographies and Textbooks, Chapters from Japan, East Asia, Slovenia and Southeast Europe, Edited by Žarko Lazarevič, Nobuhiro Shiba and Kenta Suzuki, Published by Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, Ljubljana 2018.