

Three projects - many years of cooperation with professor Shiba

Žarko Lazarević

(Institute of Contemporary History/Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, Ljubljana, Slovenia)

When the news of the sudden passing of Professor Nobuhiro Shiba reached us in the final days of May (2021), the initial astonishment was followed by silence – a silence in which we came face to face with emptiness. The silence announced that the world would no longer be as it was. It had become smaller! We needed the silence to face the pain of the transience of life. Professor Shiba was closely connected to Slovenia, professionally and personally through a network of acquaintances and friends. He did much to promote Slovenia and to broaden and deepen scientific and cultural cooperation. The irony of fate was that his death occurred during preparations for the commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of Slovenian statehood in Japan.

Even before meeting Professor Shiba, I had become interested in Japanese history. It started with a book that made me think a lot about the country. In 1982, I read a book about Japan's economic development. The title alone was fascinating: *Japan - from imitation to originality*. The authors, leading Slovenian economists, and sociologists, Lojze Sočan, Veljko Rus and Stane Možina, systematically presented the great social and economic transformation of Japan against the background of formal and informal social institutions. My interest continued with the films of Akira Kurosawa, who provided insights into the dynamics of relationships and the cultural code in families and local communities. Later, browsing the libraries, I discovered the imaginary world of specifically Japanese but also universal life dilemmas drawn by the novelist Haruki Murakami. While I was working on my doctoral thesis, I came across a series of articles in one of the Slovenian journals about the Japanese economy in the interwar period. The articles, written by geographer Vinko Šarabon, whose work drew heavily on stereotypes from various Western sources. This could not have been otherwise, because at that time there was almost no direct contact with Japan. The degree of economic cooperation was statistically hardly noticeable. Šarabon tried to understand the expansive power of the Japanese economy from the standpoint of culture and social values. He also spoke of what he called the "yellow peril" and then presented five points of "dangerous" Japanese behavior in international markets: Social "dumping" (unreasonably low wage levels and living standards of the Japanese population), organization of society (domination of the community over individuality), high productivity of the economy, currency dumping (undervaluation of the national currency) and unfair competition (low prices, intellectual property issues, especially the use of foreign patents without permission). Later, I published an article about the stereotypes of the Japanese economy under the provocative title *Rice Standard vs. Meat Standard*, taken from the interwar press.¹ The quote was once again the stereotypical "self" explanation of cultural differences between Japanese and Western societies.

¹ Žarko Lazarević, "Riževi standard proti mesnemu standardu": elementi stereotipa o japonskem gospodarstvu pri Slovencih pred drugo svetovno vojno. Prispjevki za novejšo zgodovino, let. 40, št. 2, 2000, pp. 37-46.

At that time, I was unable to find the source of the Šarabon's article. But years later, accidentally I came across a book published in Leipzig, which was obviously the main source for Vinko Šarabon. Karl Rathgen published in 1911 a book on Japan's place in the world economy. The book is divided into 7 chapters introducing territory, population, culture, banking, long-term economic development, and international trade, i.e. Japan's expansion into foreign markets. Statistics on Japan's economy were also provided, including the breakdown of the national budget and exports. Chapters six and seven are devoted to the so-called "yellow peril" ("Gelbe Gefahr").² Even a cursory glance is enough to see that the Rathgen book was most certainly a source Vinko Šarabon would have had on his desk.

The other way to learn about Japan was through the conferences of the European Business History Association. Japanese business historians attended in considerable numbers. For several years, the European Business History Association functioned as a world conference on business history, as participants came from the United States, Australia, Japan, South Korea, South Africa, and India. Later, Chinese colleagues also joined. Every time I was at the conference, I attended a session or two on Japanese economic history. Even today, I remember the lively discussions about "zaibatsu" companies, their structure, management, business strategies, and their role in economic development in Japan.

I had the privilege of having been part of Professor Shiba's network of associates and friends. Peter Vodopivec told me about an interesting Japanese professor even before I met him personally. The moment of our meeting came in 2008 when Professor Shiba gave a lecture at our institute. After the lecture we spent the afternoon together discussing history, Japan and Slovenia, the former Yugoslavia and the changes that took place there. Also, my interest in Japan. Word spread and we soon came up with the idea that we should try to deepen our cooperation. After brief research, we agreed that it would make the most sense to apply for a bilateral project. In 2009, we applied to a call for proposals and were the only ones in the field of humanities to receive approval for a project. Since we had no hopes, the joy of the approval of the first joint project was all the greater.

In the project entitled *Comparative Analysis of Japanese and Slovenian History Textbooks*, we focused on the structures, contents, and interpretations (2010-2011) of school history teaching. *“The goal of this project is to conduct an interdisciplinary historical and linguistic comparative analysis of Japanese and Slovenian history textbooks from the perspective of content, interpretations, and linguistic structural features. The project research will focus on textbooks printed after World War II and on the analysis of textbooks in two different cultural environments and value systems. Indeed, historical textbooks are the mirror of the society in which they were written, and analyses of textbooks are important for understanding the social mentality as well as the role of history in a particular society and attitudes towards it. The basic research question of the project is precisely the interaction between the social environment and the structures, contents and interpretations of history at the level of schools. In other words, it is about the interaction between the declared social values and the methods and practices of teaching history at different levels of school education in terms of contents and interpretations. The project is about the analytical identification and treatment of the construction and concepts of the reinterpretation of history as a school subject at the comparative level and in the*

² Karl Rathgen, *Die Japaner in der Weltwirtschaft*, Leipzig, 1911.

historical perspective. Within the conceptual framework created in this way, we intend to examine the research sections that will encompass the so-called macro and micro levels. At the macro level, the research will focus on the issues of educational policy in the field of history as a school subject and the way curricula are created. We will also not ignore the issues related to the introduction of textbooks in schools, the so-called licencing processes, and reasoning (why, when, under what circumstances, institutions, evaluation procedures). The particularly relevant research topic is also the analytical and interpretative presentation of the theoretical-conceptual and methodological approaches to planning and designing the teaching of history in primary and secondary schools.

At the so-called micro level, we also intend to focus our research efforts (apart from linguistic structural features) on the study of the structural relationships between the economic and social content of textbooks in comparison with their political and cultural content in the dynamics of time, on the contexts and interpretive frameworks of textbooks in the long-term perspective (causality, process dynamics, unique/general, national/international, empirical/interpretive), and on the analysis of approaches (issue-oriented/chronologically oriented, global/regional/local, general/individual). In this analytical part, the aim is to identify interpretive representations of contexts and relations between national and regional history, more specifically, to analyze the placement of Slovenian history within the narrower and broader regional boundaries of Europe and its sub-regions of Central and Southeastern Europe. On the other hand, it is necessary to emphasize the aspects of relations from Japanese history in the context of East Asia. As for the outline of the research questions, the proposed project also includes the authors (who, origin, teachers - college professors, the conditionality of the interpretive approaches from the authors' point of view), the analysis of the learning units in these textbooks (complexity, integration, critical character, intention, etc.), the way the textbooks are used in schools and the temporal dimension of their usefulness. The focus of this research is on the analysis of the original sources.”

Inspired by our fruitful collaboration, we decided to submit another application. If I remember correctly the idea emerged in one of the regular meetings of Professor Shiba and Andrej Bekeš in Tokyo. Later Professor Shiba proposed to me by email the new project application. I was not surprised since Andrej Bekeš already informed me about their agreement in Tokyo. This time we went further by including historiography in the object of analysis, broadening the region, and extending the object of analysis to the 20th century. Hope was not in vain; the Slovenian and Japanese agencies approved the new project titled *20th Century in the Historiography of Japan and East Asia and Slovenia and Southeast Europe (2014-2015)*. “*The 20th century is considered a very significant period in historiography. The entire century was marked by profound geopolitical, economic, and social changes. State politics, economy and society took a new shape through transformation; new forms of economic and social life were introduced. In the case of the 20th century, we can distinguish two turning points that strongly influenced historical development in regional terms. The first was the wars, World War I and World War II and the post-war reality, and the second was the end of the Cold War (transitional period) with the collapse of communist regimes in Europe and Asia and Soviet Central Asia. At the same time in East Asia socialism was transformed into communist party-led capitalism in China and Vietnam or remained essentially unchanged in North Korea. Each of these events had a significant impact on the creation of new historical identities at the level*

of societies, interest groups, and individuals, as the changes in geopolitical conditions, statehood, and political and economic regimes were far-reaching. The creation of a new identity framework that would enable different societies and individuals to legitimize their position in the new socio-political reality was a continuous process and an integral part of historical development. This process did not emerge suddenly, but evolved over time and under certain social circumstances, to which it also had to adapt. History was and is an important factor, which is hereby emphasized as an assertion of the thesis. Both for the society as a whole and for the political, economic, and cultural elites and individuals, the question of the historical justification of the political, cultural, social, and economic character of societies became very important.

The changes took place not only at the internal level, at the level of individual states/societies, but also at the international level. Our thesis is that after each turning point in the regions studied, processes of reinterpretation of history took place due to changes in societal value systems, priorities, and perceptions. Moreover, we claim that these reinterpretations were elaborated in historiography and gradually transferred into history textbooks. In this way, we can speak of the "struggle for history", the "struggle" to interpret history from the point of view of the socio-economic position of interest groups or individuals, with the intention of legitimizing current positions, relations, and interactions, including at the international level, in international relations. The concept of international environment, international relations, is very important from the point of view of the two regions under study. Therefore, the basic standpoint of the potential project represents a comparative and multidisciplinary research and interpretation of the genesis, dynamics, and typological structure of identity concepts in Japan and East Asia and in Slovenia in comparison with the South-East European region.

With the proposed project we would like to carry out an interdisciplinary historical-linguistic comparative analysis of the change and prevalence of prevailing historical discourses (coexistence or conflict relation). The project research will focus on the definitions and comparison of changing reinterpretations in national historiographies/monographs on inter/national history as a whole and reflections of these changes in history textbooks printed after World War II. The analysis of such social contexts is important for understanding the social mentality as well as the role of history in a particular society and attitudes towards it, to understand the "struggle for history." The basic research question of the project is precisely the interaction of social environment and structures, contents, and interpretations of history at the level of history writing and history textbooks and their interdependence at the national and international level. The significance of the proposed project lies in its interdisciplinary and comparative nature, which, together with our case study methodological approach, would contribute to a multi-perspective contextualization and a better understanding of the interdependence of the prevailing historical narrative and the narrative of history textbooks in Japan and Slovenia in comparison with wider regions of East Asia and Southeast Europe."

We successfully completed both projects with the publication of two books.³ The first of these establishes a comparative context between the Yugoslav region and East Asia. This volume, titled, *History as Human Experience*, linked two different cultures and traditions of historiography. Peter Vodopivec, Aleš Gabrič and I from the Institute of Contemporary History, and Andrej Bekeš and Luka Culiberg from the Department of Asian Studies at the Faculty of Philosophy participated in the Slovenian group. During the several years of the project we had numerous meetings with our Japanese colleagues during which we produced multiple interesting studies: on the chronology, social contexts, and textbook changes in former Yugoslavia and Japan; in East Asia, on the dynamics and conceptual changes in the interpretation of the 20th century; on local and global historiography; on the national and international role of history; and on the relationship between politicization and the professionalism of the use of history in different publics. The boundary between topics and discussions was limited only by our imagination, which was constantly encouraged by Professor Shiba. When he had to be, he was also critical. An attractive aspect of the projects was that participants were able to address and analyze issues from another country. For example, Peter Bekeš and Luka Culiberg confidently analyzed Japanese textbooks and historical reviews. A few younger Japanese colleagues, students of Professor Shiba, courageously confronted Yugoslav textbooks and monographs, and Shinichi Yamazaki tackled Slovenian material. The workshops in Japan and Slovenia were full of energy, the discussions lively, and the social gatherings unforgettable. Professor Shiba was a thoughtful host, an effective organizer, able and willing to respond positively even to the most minor requests. He opened wide the door to the Japanese academic community, landscape, culture, and history.

When we applied for the project with colleague Satoshi Murayama from Kagawa University in 2018, Professor Shiba showed great interest in discussions about the research questions of the project. He was attracted by the idea of linking social, economic, and environmental history. I informed our dear colleague Murayama about the exchange of ideas with Professor Shiba. Murayama immediately suggested that we should also invite Professor Shiba due to his interest, reputation, and experience. Professor Shiba was pleased to receive the invitation but was cautiously reluctant. He wondered how he could contribute to the realization of the project. After a brief reflection and the exchange of a few letters, he agreed to cooperate, explicitly emphasizing that he would have to learn a lot during the project. Thus, he accepted participation in the project as a challenge to learn about the concepts and methodology of environmental history, the relationship between society and the environment, between unilateral exploitation and the search for sustainability. So, I learned about new dimension in the personality of Professor Shiba. It is the desire to follow the development of the historical profession outside his field of research.

Our project proposal was titled *Sustainable habitats: a comparative approach to modernization in rural Japan and Slovenia during the Anthropocene epoch (1800-present)*. “The aim of the project is to jointly discuss the developmental stages from agrarian to industrial

³ Shiba Nobuhiro, Gabrič Aleš, Suzuki Kenta, Lazarević Žarko (eds). School history and textbooks: a comparative analysis of history textbooks in Japan and Slovenia, (Zbirka Vpogledi, 7). Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2013; Lazarević Žarko, Shiba Nobuhiro, Suzuki Kenta (eds). The 20th century through historiographies and textbooks: chapters from Japan, East Asia, Slovenia, and Southeast Europe, (Zbirka Vpogledi, 21). Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2018.

and finally to post-industrial low-carbon societies, as well as the different developmental paths towards modernity during the Anthropocene period (1800-present), using Japan and Slovenia as examples, both of which have a preponderance of small, even tiny, landholdings. From a historical perspective, Japan can be described as an economically developed country, while Slovenia is a latecomer in terms of modernization. It could also be said that the first country is very densely populated, while the second has a sparser population, but share quite a variety of environmental conditions, although Japan is much larger than Slovenia. Their different development trajectories and timing can be explained by the geo-economic context, socio-cultural patterns, and the relationship between humans and the environment. We will focus on the latter and address the question of the different relationships in terms of "environmental economics."

A comparative view of the ecological foundations of local cases and practices of different economic structures and stages of development can contribute to a broader generalization of modernization processes on a global scale. A second aspect is that by focusing on rural areas, their use of natural resources, their economic system, and their pathways to modernization, we will be able to identify traditional solutions in economics and environmental management that can serve as models for future rural development policies. A clear difference between the pre-modern economy and the modern economy is that the latter includes the development of scientific/sociotechnological knowledge and global dependence in the use of fossil fuels. On the other hand, the pre-modern world has two aspects. "Pre-modern" refers to: 1) the transitional period to modern fossil fuel society, and 2) the concluding period of at least hundreds of years when agricultural societies used limited fossil fuel energy. Even in modern times, people in both Japan and Slovenia cultivate traditional knowledge and ways of life in agricultural fields to survive as a peasant economy. Economic historians have long discussed periods of transformation to modernization, calling them "feudalism to capitalism," "proto-industrialization," "industrious revolution," and "industrial revolution" or "transition from an organic economy to an industrial revolution." These concepts are very useful for comparative studies, but they are not sufficient. As conventional modernization theories they were mostly derived from an evolutionary understanding of history.

In this project, we would like to upgrade these theories with a different concept based on the systemic nature of the peasant economy. We propose the introduction of a new concept in comparative analysis: the integrated peasant economy (IPE). Through the proposed project, we hope to contribute to the ongoing discussion on the history of economic and social development. Therefore, we emphasize two very important goals of the proposed project: 1) to further develop a new conceptual approach in the history of development, independent of the still dominant Western European and Western world-centered view, based on Japanese and Slovenian economic and social historical realities, and 2) to identify the possible active contribution of rural areas to current and future sustainable economic development.

The significance of the proposed project lies in its transnational and comparative nature, which, together with our case studies and IPE-based approach, would contribute to a multi-perspective contextualization and better understanding of the modernization of the agricultural and environmental landscape in Japan and Slovenia. We will make comparisons in a broader geographic context, including other countries in East Asia and Central Europe." Our proposal was accepted and the project began at the start of the Japanese fiscal year, in the spring of 2019.

Between and after the projects, I was in regular contact with Professor Shiba. We met in Japan, Slovenia, Serbia, Bulgaria, and once when our paths crossed in the United States. I especially remember the meetings in Belgrade. Due to other commitments, he, and his wife Riko were in Belgrade regularly every March. It is not far from Ljubljana to Belgrade, and during my visits to the archives and libraries I always found time to meet him. In fact, I timed my research visits to Belgrade to coincide with his trips. I enjoyed listening to his assessments, initiatives, and reflections on the past and the connection with the present. In the middle of March 2019, we had a very pleasant meeting in a Belgrade restaurant together with Riko Shiba, Peter Vodopivec, Bojan Godeša and Dubravka Stojanović. At the conclusion of our meal, when we were leaving the restaurant, we agreed to meet again in the fall during my trip to Japan. We had no idea that this would be our last dinner. How could we think otherwise, seeing Professor Shiba so full of vitality and with such firm plans? Sadly, this was more than his time on earth would allow. In September 2019 I was visiting Japan in connection with a project with colleagues at Kagawa University in Takamatsu. Unfortunately, the planned meeting and the participation of Professor Shiba at workshops was prevented by illness. Professor Shiba was in hospital at the time. We took it all together as a temporary disruption, simply a part of normal life. We were not worried about the future. Full of optimism, we promised to meet in Belgrade after his recovery in March 2020, so as not to interrupt a series of regular meetings. Although Japan is far away, he managed to come to Belgrade with great difficulty, but I could not. In the meantime, disease intervened again. The Covid 19 outbreak interfered with our intentions, although we had planned another meeting in Japan in the fall of 2020. The pandemic also stopped all project activities with Kagawa University since Japan closed borders even for scientific exchanges.

When the news of his death reached me, I was stunned to realize that there would be no new opportunities to work together. With his passing the joy of friendship too suddenly disappeared. Through our regular correspondence and frequent contacts, I came to know Professor Shiba both personally and professionally. He was known for his commitment to high professional standards, his deep knowledge, and his strong loyalty to colleagues. He was a cheerful and warm person, a helpful host and a kindly reserved guest, a friend and colleague who could be counted on. Because of these qualities, I deeply respected him.