
IN MEMORIAM

Professor Dr. Nobuhiro Shiba (1946-2021): From Exchange Student to Doctor Honoris Causa

The news that Professor Emeritus of the University of Tokyo and Director of the Josai University Institute for Central European Studies Nobuhiro Shiba passed away suddenly in Tokyo on May 28 was an unexpected, powerful and painful blow to his family, but also to his many colleagues and friends, from ex-Yugoslav republics. As tireless researcher, historian, pedagogue, but also a curious traveler, he has often come to Belgrade in recent years. We, his Belgrade colleagues and friends joked that spring would come only when Professor Shiba in March came to Belgrade. Knowing for many years Professor Shiba I think that his gentle, calm and friendly nature in truth had a prominent „spring side“.

His „Yugoslav connection“ was established in the early 1970s. He then stayed between 1975 and 1977 at the Department of History of the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, specializing in the history of Yugoslavia. As a young researcher, he was attracted by the then current Yugoslav experiment of self-government. But over time, his interest in Yugoslavia and the Balkans became more widespread. In this way, Professor Shiba became one of the best experts on the history of this area in Japan, and his books and numerous other scientific papers brought the complex past of the Yugoslav peoples closer to the Japanese professional and general public, but also helped to better understand the tragic problems of the Yugoslav crisis of the 1990s as well as the present and past of all the nations and states of the European Southeast.

Only a few of his most important works should be mentioned here. These are the books: *Contemporary History of Yugoslavia* (18 editions!), *Nationalism in the Balkans* (13 editions) and *Illustrated History of the Balkans*. His role as the publisher of five collections of scientific papers dedicated to the Balkans published in Japanese should be also mentioned. He was the head of numerous scientific projects, the participant in a large number of scientific conferences, foreign member of the scientific journals, including those published in Belgrade.

These are all persuasive proofs of his great commitment to the science, constant improvement of knowledge about the history and modernity of our region. It is also a proof of his extremely dynamic nature, despite his calmness and gentleness in relations with other people. He traveled through the Balkans, visiting almost every

part of Serbia, Slovenia and Croatia. He followed and knew well not only the history and events on the public stage, but also the popular culture, and music, gaining the deserving respect and friendship of many colleagues.

Thanks to his scientific and pedagogical reputation, he managed to gather around himself and arouse interest for this geographically distant area, a larger group of Japanese students. In that way, Professor Shiba's "Balkan School" was created, and in a few decades had about 30 postgraduates and doctoral students. They came mostly to Belgrade (and other university cities in former Yugoslavia) as scholarship holders of the Japanese government, studied the language, attended classes at the Department of History of the Faculty of Philosophy, participated in teaching process and conducted research. Thus, thanks to Professor Shiba and his decades-long ties with Belgrade and our faculty, a new generation of Japanese researchers of the Balkan past and present was formed. They continue to build bridges founded by Professor Shiba following the tradition of good cooperation.

Professor Shiba was considered an "honorary, unofficial member" at the Department of History, especially on our Chair for General Contemporary History. He often said that the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade was his second alma mater. I had the opportunity and pleasure of cooperation with colleague Shiba for almost a quarter of a century. During that long period, I was also honored with a sincere friendship, which confirmed the cordiality of each of our meetings in Belgrade or Tokyo. Thanks to Professor Shiba, I got the opportunity to visit Japan twice and give lectures at the University of Tokyo, at Josai University and Kobe University. During my last visit, to Japan in the fall of 2018, we traveled together to Kobe where I had the opportunity to meet new Japanese colleagues, but also to use two days for long conversations and socializing with Professor Shiba.

These stays are an extremely valuable personal and professional experience. I was just one of many colleagues coming from Serbia, but also from other Balkan countries, who thus got the opportunity to visit Japan and to be acquainted at least briefly, at least superficially, with this fascinating country, its history and culture. The most valuable thing, however, was that we all got the opportunity to meet our Japanese colleagues and in that way contribute to maintaining those connections that Professor Shiba built during his entire professional, scientific and pedagogical career.

We also used his regular visits to Belgrade to organize lectures that Prof. Shiba gave to our students, but also to a wider audience (National Library of Serbia). He was, with his wife, Mrs. Riko Shiba, the author of several scientific articles that were published in our journal *Annual of Social History*.

Having in mind the overall decades-long contribution of Professor Shiba to the cooperation with our University, the Chair for General Contemporary History gave an initiative for Professor Shiba to be elected as a *Doctor Honoris Causa* of the University of Belgrade. This proposal was approved by our Department and supported by the

Faculty. The University accepted our proposal and by the decision of the University of Belgrade in 2010, to our joy and his great satisfaction, he was awarded the title of *Doctor Honoris Causa*. The honorary charter was solemnly handed to him by the Rector of the University of Belgrade in the presence of the Ambassador of Japan in Belgrade and representatives of our faculty. Thus, our intention to thank Professor Shiba in this symbolic way for his commitment to scientific cooperation, but also for sincere friendship, was fulfilled.

Despite his numerous obligations which did not decrease even after his (formal!) retirement, the passion for new research did not diminish. About 10 years ago, he began working with his wife, Mrs. Riko Shiba on the biography of a Serbian who spent the most active years of his life in Japan, from the first decade of the twentieth century to the beginning of the Second World War.

Dušan Todorović, a native of Surčin, today a suburb of Belgrade, was a student of engineering at the University of Belgrade and a doctor of mathematics and physics at the University of St. Petersburg. He came to Tokyo in 1906 where he, thanks to his knowledge of several languages was appointed as professor at the Institute for Foreign Languages of the Higher War School of the Central Cadet Corps in Tokyo. His wife Katarina Nikolajevna was a piano teacher and taught girls from high Tokyo circles. Their four children were born in Tokyo. Although foreigners, they quickly gained a reputation in the high society of the Japanese capital.

The unusual biography of Dušan Todorović and his wife has been the focus of Professor Shiba's research since 2011. The help sent from Serbia after the earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan incited Professor Shiba to start researching the organization of aid to Serbia in Japan during World War I the Japanese archives. Using his social connections in the elite circles of Tokyo and at the court, Todorović and his wife Katarina initiated and led an action of collecting medical supplies, clothes and other necessary material which were sent through the Red Cross to Serbia, a country deeply exhausted by the war destruction. The research of Professor Shiba and Mrs Riko Shiba showed that the high reputation that Dušan Todorović and his wife gained was of great benefit for their humanitarian activity in favor of Serbia during the First World War. Then, with great success, they received the support of members of the highest social circles in Tokyo, some of whom became members of the Committee for collecting aid to Serbia.

Since then, the professor and his wife have managed to collect extensive material from Japanese and Serbian archives, to get in touch with the descendants, to travel to the United States, where the Todorović's descendants live and managed to get a part of the family archive. Extensive and extremely intriguing research says also a lot about Japan in turbulent times during the first half of the 20th century. Through the biography of a man from the Balkans and his Russian wife, Professor Shiba explains that the book should be a complex picture of the intertwining of lives and experiences

of people from seemingly very distant parts of the world, in the context of Japanese society and culture of the first half of the 20th century. We eagerly awaited the final result. Unfortunately, the departure of Professor Shiba interrupted the work on the completion of the book.

The hope remains, that Mrs Riko Shiba, with the help of former students of Professor Shiba will be able to publish the results of this long-standing, exciting, scientifically intriguing project. It is a small consolation that we published a segment of their research as an article in the *Annual of Social History*.

We last met Professor Shiba in Belgrade in March last year, at the very beginning of the pandemic. Then he promised to come in the fall or early spring of next year. For the first time, he did not fulfill his promise...

This short reminder of Professor Nobuhiro Shiba is a modest attempt to pay our humble tribute. But also an opportunity to express to what extent the long-term cooperation and friendship was a valuable experience, my personal and the experience of my associates and colleagues from the Chair and the Department of History. Memory and respect remain.

Milan Ristović