



### **Eiji Takemura (1962-2020)**

Eiji Takemura (DLitt. at Toyo University [東洋大学] in 2017) was born in Osaka on 27th August 1962. He died in Kamakura on 15th February 2020.

Since 2015 a member of the Bureau of the Commission for the Theory and History of Historiography, affiliated to the Comité International des Sciences Historiques (CISH), Eiji was a cosmopolitan historian who possessed a free-ranging curiosity and sincere interest in the variety of world's cultures. He was driven by the search of the ways in which societies and cognitive paradigms interacted and generated continuity and change.

From the very beginning of his career, his penchant for international comparisons brought him to the University of Melbourne, where he read political science and history from 1985 to 1987 and received his BA degree in 1988. From 1991 to 1994, he was at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, where he got his MPhil in 1996. His London dissertation was published as a monograph the following year, under the title *The Perception of Work in Tokugawa Japan. A Study of Ishida Baigan and Ninomiya Sontoku*. In this research Eiji analyzed the interplay between culture and society in 18th-century Japan through two representative thinkers and people in business, namely Ishida and Ninomiya. In doing so Eiji tackled two crucial methodological questions that have been at the core of his approach. The first was the constant interest in the mutual interaction between theory and social practice. Ishida and Ninomiya acted as practical men in society and confronted issues in everyday life: Eiji was genuinely and instinctively interested in grasping the meaning of “work” both as an abstract category and as an indication for real life. Ishida and Ninomiya provided evidence of the evolution of work as an act of spiritual self-cultivation, influenced by their adherence to Neo-Confucianism and, in general, to a coherent vision of society within the framework of a religious view of the natural and human environment. The second was Eiji's concern that Western and European historical approaches and historical realities would help understand the Japanese transition from a non-market to a market society. At the same time, Japan early modern and modern history is crucial, according to Eiji, for qualifying sweeping statements current in Western and European historical writing. Emphatically, accurate knowledge of Japanese history was essential to all sectors of historians. In his book on the perception of work, this concern pushed Eiji to critically scrutinize canonical authors of 20th-century sociology, like Max Weber and Robert Bellah. Eiji wrote interesting pages to challenge Max Weber's argument that in Japan religion did not promote rationalization in economic life. He also blamed Robert Bellah's *Tokugawa Religion* (1957) for being too close to Weber in his approach, despite his more accurate knowledge of Japan. In the following years, Eiji's scholarly output revolved on questions related to the Japanese modernization both from the social and economic and from the intellectual standpoint. He became more and

more interested in the investigation of the history of historical knowledge. His familiarity with the European historical tradition and his deep empathy and love for the Japanese culture were the starting point for his reflections on the analogies and divergences in the Eastern and Western historiographies. He looked for the ways in which these traditions became engaged in a parallel effort to develop a notion of accurate, scientific, document-based historiography. Besides his publications on this subject in Japanese academic journals and collective works and in his monograph *Textual Criticism and the Eighteenth-Century Tokugawa Confucians* (2016), his essay in *Storia della storiografia* published in 2016, *Confucian Origins of Modern Japanese Scholarship*, challenged fascinatingly the conventional interpretation that the impact of the German Rankean historiography abruptly changed the Japanese approach to history. In fact, he argued that before coming in touch with the European scholarship in the second half of the 19th century, Japan saw an innovative and pervasive evolution in the qualities of philology, exegesis, and historical chronology that provided Japanese culture with a solid scholarly foundation for historical studies after the 1850s.

In this thought-provoking essay Eiji showed how essential it is to be familiar with a variety of cultural codes. To him, comparing and analyzing the interactions between different historical traditions were based on empathy for all expressions of social and cultural life, respect for the autonomy of historical development, and openness to diversity.

He also published many papers and books in Japanese, among which his last book was *Edokōki Jusha no Firorogī – Gentenhihan no shosō to sono kokusai hikaku* (Philology of Japanese Confucians in the late Tokugawa Period: Aspects of their textual criticisms in international comparison) (Kyoto, 2016), 256 pp. (竹村英二『江戸後期儒者のフィロロギー：原典批判の諸相とその国際比較』(思文閣出版、2016) 全256頁).

Eiji Takemura was very active in the field of intellectual exchanges and research projects. As a professor of intellectual history at the Kokushikan University in Tokyo and a research collaborator at the Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia at the University of Tokyo, he devoted much time and energy to the establishment of a wide international network. He was awarded numerous research grants and was repeatedly a welcome guest in Oxford and Cambridge. He was twice the recipient of, among others, a three-year research grant, funded by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, from 2013 to 2016 and from 2019 to 2021. In the forthcoming CISH Congress to be held in Poznan Eiji was expected to be the organizer of a panel on Sources of Historiographical Methodology in East Asia and Europe, that he would have run with his searching irony, deep knowledge and respectful understanding of things human. We will miss him.

Edoardo Tortarolo