

Foreword

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When, as a new student at Ca' Foscari University, I began to attend the lecture halls of the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, and in particular the Oriental Languages courses, I clearly remember that the fame of a young professor, who had recently arrived in Venice, had already spread. His lessons in East Asian Religions and Philosophies soon became more and more crowded with students, including myself, and would remain so in the years to come.

It goes without saying that the abovementioned professor, who had trained at the School of Fosco Maraini - unforgettable master of Italian anthropological and Japanese studies - is the respected academic that this volume honours, who, after graduating from the University of Florence, completed his studies at the universities of Kyoto and Oxford.

Professor Raveri performed all the stages of his academic career at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, focusing mainly on his own teaching subject; however, he has also taught History of the Explorations of Asia and History of Religions. In addition to this, he has gained a rich international teaching experience as lecturer at many prestigious universities such as the Freie Universität in Berlin, the University of Copenhagen, the Leiden University, the Research Center for East Asian Religions of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) of the University of London, the "El Manar" University of Tunis, the Centre d'Études Asiatiques of the University of Geneva and the École Nationale Supérieure de Lyon.

With regard to his teaching activity, I would like to add to the memory I recalled above, the many expressions of esteem and even

affection towards him that I have been able to collect over the years from students of our degree programme: his wise lessons, carefully prepared but at the same time capable of constantly encouraging listening and dialogue, have ensured Prof. Raveri an appreciation as deep in intensity as it is exceptionally long-lasting.

His authentic vocation for teaching is one with his vocation for research and, if I had to establish which one prevails over the other (assuming that it is so), I would say that it is undoubtedly the first, in the sense that his dedication to research, together with the well-known and excellent results he has achieved, which I will mention in the following lines, appears to be alien to the cult of personality and devoted entirely at the service of his students.

The variety of his interests, which include issues at the heart of Eastern religious life and experience (also in a comparative perspective), ranging from the analysis of forms of asceticism in the tradition of esoteric Buddhism to that of the different conceptions of death and visions of the afterlife in the ecstatic experience of shamans or of new forms of faith and media languages of contemporary religiosity, with constant attention to the problems of coexistence of different faiths, has been expressed in contributions that have marked an important chapter in the history of this strand of studies. Limiting the list to monographs, I here refer to the books on the problem of evil (*Del bene e del male. Tradizioni religiose a confronto*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1993), on asceticism (*Il corpo e il paradiso. Le tentazioni estreme dell'ascesi in Asia Orientale*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1998), on inter-religious dialogue (*Verso l'altro: le religioni dal conflitto al dialogo*, ivi, 2003), on Zen Buddhism (*Sentieri di illuminazione: il giardino zen e la meditazione sul paradiso*, Biella, Pacefuturo Edizioni, 2009) and on Japanese philosophy, on which focuses the volume released on 2006 (*Itinerari nel sacro. L'esperienza religiosa giapponese*, Venezia, Cafoscarina) and the recent, monumental synthesis published by Einaudi and soberly entitled *Il pensiero giapponese classico* (2014, over six hundred pages).

His researches in this particular area of studies have earned Prof. Raveri international reputation and recognition. In 2012, the Japanese Government awarded him the "Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette" for his contribution to the advancement of Japanese cultural studies. In addition to this, he held and still holds various important positions at prestigious institutions, in Italy and abroad: he lectured at the Ambrosian Academy of Milan (Class of Far Eastern Studies); he has been a member of the Academic Council of the Ateneo Veneto for the four-year period 1998-2002; he is a member of the council of Centro Vieussieux-Asia of Florence and a member of the Istituto Veneto di Scienze Lettere ed Arti of Venice as well as of the Réseau Scientifique sur l'Asie established in Paris by the Conseil National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS); speaking of

France, he has also been a member of the Conseil Scientifique du Pôle Asie; moreover, he took part in the European Association of Japanese Studies and was a councillor of the Associazione Italiana di Studi Giapponesi (Aistugia) for the three-year period 1983-1986; lastly, he has been a research fellow at St. Antony's College of the University of Oxford.

It would be an arduous task for anyone, and certainly it is beyond the scope of this writer, who participates in such a beautiful initiative merely as author of this foreword, to dwell in detail on the scientific profile of Prof. Raveri. The essays written by the colleagues and friends who have promoted this *Festschrift* (or have enthusiastically supported it) are perfect to face this task without running the risk of indulging in the affectation of the empty celebratory rhetoric into which this literary genre sometimes ends up falling, extraneous to the nature of our honoured fellow.

I rather prefer, given my institutional role, to spend some words on a different aspect of Prof. Raveri's activity, which would otherwise risk remaining in the shadows, obscured by the merits of his work as teacher and scholar.

I refer to his efforts in organising and directing numerous scientific initiatives, among which I recall the coordination of a two-year European Comenius project (2013-2015) that involved five universities, the research program *I linguaggi dell'assoluto* (The languages of the absolute) (2011-2014) funded by Ca' Foscari University and the European "Marie Curie" research program on the theme *Beyond "the West" and "the East"*, the direction of the research program on *Le religioni e la memoria. Strategie della memoria e dell'oblio nei discorsi religiosi dell'Asia* (Religions and Memory. Strategies of memory and oblivion in Asian religious discourses) (2009-2012), funded by Fondazione Venezia per la Ricerca sulla Pace and, to conclude, the coordination of the research unit of Ca' Foscari University in three research programs of national interest (PRIN) funded by MIUR (2001, 2004, 2007).

Furthermore, I would like to mention here the important institutional functions held by Prof. Raveri at Ca' Foscari University, such as his presence in the Advisory board (2011) and in the Academic Senate (2012-2015), his position as Rector's Delegate for the Erasmus Program and member of the Commission for International Relations, the chairmanship of the Committee of the Specialist Inter-university Degree in Science of Religions, involving our university and the University of Padua, whose scientific aspects and setting were mainly organised by him.

This forward apparently impersonal attempts underline instead a peculiar trait of Prof. Raveri's personality, whose behaviour does not remain confined in the purely intellectual or contemplative dimension, but constantly results in action, showing a marked inclination

(not at all incompatible with the reflective aspect of his character) for concreteness: he is different from his much-loved ascetics, who retreat into the solitude of the mountains (the 'other' place *par excellence* in Japanese culture), and reveals himself as *homo politicus* or, in other words, as an Aristotle's man, a son of the Western World.

In conclusion, I would like to complete Prof. Raveri's profile, which I have tried to retrace in its essential traits, by sharing with you and the readers some brief personal notes inspired by some moments of the professional path and friendship that bind us.

In the space of a few years, the young professor that I mentioned at the beginning became, for me, first an authoritative guide, then a companion on the road, with whom I shared many scientific initiatives and conferences, as well as a valuable advisor, who never failed to support me during the most delicate stages of my institutional career at our university: first as director of the Department of Asian and North African Studies, then as Vice-Rector for International Relations (an area on which, as I have already mentioned, Prof. Raveri's work has focused for many years). Lastly, he was the one who encouraged me to apply for the position of Rector: he always supported and motivated me while I was full of doubts and hesitations. I must admit that one of the reasons I decided to accept this professional challenge is the trust that he placed in me.

In many occasions during our long professional collaboration and in the moments that I have just remembered, I could always count on his presence, discreet but decisive, and appreciate the courtesy of his manners, the affable cordiality, the composed reasoning and the sincere disposition to listen, which avoids any attempt to reach a superficial agreement, and is based on a frank confrontation of ideas, seen as a proof of mutual respect. A genuine discussion and, sometimes, a lively debate take place only when (or rather: precisely because) the parts involved are ready to listen to each other. I owe this lesson to him.

I would like to conclude these brief remarks by sharing a memory that I am unable to trace back to a specific occasion, which is rather a sort of 'hyper-recollection': the condensation of many individual episodes and situations. It is that of one time (one of the many times, any time, all times: it doesn't matter), of a late evening, in the Department, in which, knocking at the door of his study to exchange some ideas on a scientific issue or to share our opinions on one aspect of the academic life, I saw him look away for a moment from his computer or raise his eyes from the books on his work table and welcome me with a smile, which expressed better than many words his disposition to listen, without any trace of the fatigue of a long day dedicated to teaching, studying, writing or to the performance of one of the many institutional roles that I have already mentioned above.

All this to say, in conclusion, that if I had to draw a very personal portrait of Prof. Raveri, it would come out a figure in which, paraphrasing freely, the vision of the oriental sage, who encourages people to look for a job suitable to one's nature and appropriate to one's strengths, accepting it without complaining, and the *jouissance* of a European professor of Humanities in the United States, who abandons himself to his object of study to the point of not distinguishing anymore between work and fun, blend harmoniously or perhaps confuse themselves (I couldn't say). I trust that such an image, even though imbued as it is with a bold (but I hope not irreverent) syncretism, will not displease our honoured fellow.

