Michio Morishima was a distinguished mathematician and econometrician who made a major contribution to the discipline of economics during the second half of the twentieth century. He lived and worked in Britain from the late 1960s, retiring as Sir John Hicks Professor of Economics at the London School of Economics.

Born in Osaka, Japan, in 1923, Morishima was brought up in a time of growing tension in East Asia, and his economics studies at Kyoto University were interrupted by conscription into the navy in December 1943. He obtained a degree in economics in 1946, continued to teach and research at Kyoto until 1951, and then took up a post at Osaka University. Here he taught until the late 1960s, a period during which he made extended visits to Oxford and Yale. Feeling that his intellectual home increasingly lay outside Japan, Michio took up a chair at the University of Essex before moving in 1970 to the LSE. He was appointed Sir John Hicks Professor of Economics in 1984.

His impact on LSE was profound, both through his academic contribution, and through his academic contribution and through his role in the establishment of the Suntory-Toyota research centres, which have over the last 25 years acted as the focus for a range of pathbreaking research in economics and related disciplines. In recognition of his contribution Michio became an Honorary Fellow of the School, and received an honorary doctorate in 1995. In 1981 he became a Fellow of the British Academy.

Morishima began as an economic theorist. He was much influenced by the distinguished British economist, John Hicks (later, the joint winner of the 1972 Noble Prize for Economics) and once described his reading Hicks's Value and Capital (1939) in 1942 as a form of passive resistance to the wartime Japanese government. His doctoral thesis was an imaginative formalisation of Hicks' work. Written in Japanese in 1950, it did not immediately have the great impact it would have had if published in English, but the depth and rigour of these early contributions were conveyed to Anglo-Saxon readers in a series of academic articles.

He soon established an international reputation as one of the world's leading economic theorists. His 1964 book, Equilibrium, Stability and Growth, published in 1964, followed by The Theory of Economic Growth in 1969, demonstrated his capacity to combine general equilibrium theory, activity analysis, and economic dynamics in a highly innovative way. Morishima's standing in the economics profession was reflected in his election as President of the Econometric Society in 1965.

After settling in Britain in 1968 Michio began a series of books on three leading economists of the 19th century: Karl Marx, Léon Walras and David Ricardo. His aim was not an exercise in the history of economic thought, but to re-interpret their work in the light of modern economic theory. He challenged both the standard interpretations of these authors and contemporary general equilibrium theory. The subtitle to his book on Walras, "Walras’ Economics, (1977), "A Pure Theory of Capital and Money", highlighted his intention to develop aspects that received less attention: growth, accumulation and the role of money. There was a strong unifying theme running through his work, culminating in a reformulation of general equilibrium theory in his 1992 book on Capital and Credit.

Morishima made enduring contributions to mathematical economics, but he was no narrow theorist. He sought throughout his career to use economic theory as a means to understand the functioning of modern economies and societies. Indeed, a hallmark of his writing was a breadth of approach that encompassed history and sociology as well as economics. This was reflected in his highly original introductory textbook, The Economic Theory of Modern Society (1976), and in his influential books on Japan. In 1982 he published Why has Japan "Succeeded"?, where the inverted commas alerted the reader to the fact that success was already then closely associated with failure, a highly prescient view that was developed in Japan at a Deadlock, (2000).
Morishima's relationship with his native Japan was not always an easy one. On the one hand, the Japanese government in 1976 honoured his outstanding contribution to economics with the award of the Cultural Order of Japan (Bunka Kunsho), a lifetime award that is Japan's equivalent of a Nobel Prize. He wrote prolifically in Japanese on contemporary issues, taking advantage of his position as a renowned intellectual to comment on a range of aspects of postwar Japan, and also acting an interpreter of Britain for the Japanese. His many books, which included a trenchant analysis of the Thatcher years and comparative works on the two countries, became bestsellers. He worked to bring economics to a broader public through radio, and his complete works in Japanese have been appearing over recent months. On the other hand his forthright manner and frank expressions of opinion were often ill-matched to a society characterised by hierarchy and face-saving, and his willingness to criticise in the interests of intellectual debate appeared to some as hostile and antagonistic. He was critical of many trends in Japan's politics and economy, and profoundly concerned at what he saw as indications of a revival of militarism and right wing trends.

It was, however, because Japan was his country, and so important to him, that his concerns were so important to him. Over recent years Morishima argued strongly that the formation of a northeast Asian economic union, consisting initially of Japan, China and Korea, was desirable not just for economic reasons, but for political and strategic ones as well. These ideas aroused considerable interest in China and Korea, and have since also found advocates in Japan.

During his long years as an academic and as a public intellectual Morishima touched the lives of countless people, and his contribution will be a lasting one. Many did not agree with his views, but his opinions always commanded respect. It was impossible not to admire his unflagging energy and commitment to his work, and his desire to understand better and improve the society in which he lived. In every aspect of this lifelong task Michio was joined by his wife Yoko, whom he married in 1953. To many his fearsome intellect and blunt opinions could seem daunting, but those of us who were privileged to know him found a gentle man, one who was determined and even obstinate, but also one who cared deeply about others.

Tony Atkinson
and Janet Hunter

Michio Morishima, economist: born Osaka, Japan 18 July 1923; Assistant Professor, Osaka University 1951-3, Professor 1963-68; Professor of Economics, London School of Economics and Political Science 1970-84, Sir John Hicks Professor of Economics 1984-88 (Emeritus); FBA 1981; married (two sons, one daughter); died Brentwood, Essex 13 July 2004.

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