



IN MEMORIAM

Jan SWYNGEDOUW
(1935–2012)

Jan Swyngedouw and I met for the first time in the spring of 1966 when we were both accepted into the doctoral program at the University of Tokyo. As fellow students, we sat side by side in many Religious Studies classes and went together on numerous field trips to study festivals under the tutelage of Professor Keiichi Yanagawa. Neither of us wrote a doctoral dissertation, but the four years of graduate study at the University of Tokyo had a great impact on the rest of our work in Japan, not least because of the relationships formed with fellow students, many of whom later became recognized authorities in the field.

In 1973, when I became director of the International Institute for the Study of Religions, we changed its journal from *Contemporary Religions in Japan* to the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, and Jan Swyngedouw was a strong and encouraging supporter. Funding for the institute and its journal then came largely from Risshō Kōseikai 立正佼成会. But toward the end of the decade, Risshō Kōseikai decided to redirect its resources, and the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* appeared to be headed for oblivion. At that point, Jan Swyngedouw stepped in and offered to explore the idea of having the journal published through Nanzan University. The idea materialized, and Jan quite literally saved the *JJRS*. To this day it continues to be published by the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture.

Jan was fluent in many languages. His native language was Flemish, but he was also thoroughly at home in French. We communicated in English, but he was probably more comfortable in Japanese, which he could not only speak and write smoothly but also read at great speed. He told me once that

during the two-hour commute from Nagoya to Tokyo he could read an entire book in Japanese.

He also had a playful, mischievous streak. As a young man, when he was studying theology in Rome, apparently it was the custom for one student to read from the stories of the saints, in Latin, during the meal. But Jan had a comic book he wanted to read. So when his turn came, he quickly memorized the Latin story and recited it aloud while reading his comic book. He got caught and was disciplined, but this incident says a lot not only about his intellectual ability but also about his character.

Because he was so openhearted and good humored, people sometimes teased him with equal good humor. One Buddhist priest, on hearing his last name (pronounced *Shingedō* in Japanese), immediately thought of the Buddhist term *gedō* 外道, meaning “heresy,” and during an after-dinner speech declared in Jan’s presence that he represented a *shingedō*—either a “true heresy” (真外道) or a “new heresy” (新外道). Jan took it in good spirit, and such teasing is a testimony to the warmth people felt for him.

I know that I am a better person for having known him, and the world a sorrier place now that he is gone.

David Reid (Irvine, California)
Former Editor, JJRS