

IN MEMORIAM

ABE Yoshiya
(1937–2003)

The passing away in December last year of Dr. Abe Yoshiya, President of the Shinto-affiliated Kokugakuin University in Tokyo and a longtime member of the Advisory Board of this journal, came as a shock to all who knew him, even though many of us here in Japan were aware of his precarious health and of the struggle he had been waging against a debilitating sickness. Strong of character Dr. Abe certainly was. It was this almost innate strength that sustained his continuous endeavors to give the scientific study of religion as pursued in this country the place it deserved on the international scene. It was this strength also that impelled him to take on a wide range of tasks of heavy responsibility in different sectors of society, whether in the fields of higher education and administration or in the role of representing Japan and her academic community abroad. No doubt it was in that latter capacity that many of our readers might have met him, since Dr. Abe was a highly esteemed presence at international gatherings all over the globe.

The great diversity of Dr. Abe's interests and of the issues he dealt with in his research makes it impossible to give here a full account of his academic achievements. Suffice to say, after receiving an MA degree from the Department of Religious Studies at Tokyo University in 1963, he was awarded a PhD in History from Claremont Graduate School (USA) in 1969. After a short teaching stint at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, he returned to Japan, entered the Religious Affairs Section of the Agency for Cultural Affairs (Ministry of Education), became chief of the Exchange of Persons Section of the Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science, and taught afterwards at various universities. His last assignment was that of President of Tokyo's prestigious Shinto university. This career testifies not only to his erudite academic credentials but also to the trust people from diverse areas of society placed in his broad-ranging skills.

In this connection we might also refer to the role Dr. Abe played as one of the key figures in the group of sociologists of religion associated with the late professor Yanagawa Keiichi (1926–1990). He more than anyone else was instrumental in elevating the group to a status whereby it could harmonize international openness with a fundamental grounding in Japanese culture, an enduring challenge in this country. In all this we can see that Dr. Abe's diplomatic skills, honed through his contacts with an ever-growing circle of acquaintances all over the world, together with his fairness and deep loyalty to his many friends and colleagues, comprised some of his most fundamental and excellent characteristics. Certainly, Dr. Abe could at times exhibit a frankness and outspokenness in his dealings with people that, in the eyes of some at least, initially engendered reserve, if not resistance. Yet, once acquainted with his style of speaking, nobody could doubt his deep and warm humaneness of character.

That Dr. Abe became a member of the Advisory Board of the *JJRS* from the very beginning is not surprising, as he had been for many years an active member of the International Institute for the Study of Religions in Tokyo, which was the original sponsor of our journal. In fact, from 1966 he was an editorial staff member of that Institute's Japanese language publication and from 1969, the year he returned from the USA, he became a member of the Advisory Board of its English language journal *Contemporary Religion in Japan*, the forerunner of the *JJRS*. When the *JJRS* changed publishers in 1981, Dr. Abe continued his support, convinced as he was that the role the journal intended to play in the academic world had always been analogous to his personal one.

Dr. Abe's enormous capacity for work, manifested in the many articles and books he wrote—including Japanese translations of a considerable number of important foreign publications—especially concerning the problem of State-religion relationships and, more recently, globalization, will remain for us an incentive to continue what he aimed at during his lifetime. Together with many others this present writer, who had the honor of sharing almost forty years of friendship with the deceased, will continue to remember him with deep esteem and gratitude, for Dr. Abe was a man whose passion for work never prevented him from relaxing and sharing life's joys and sorrows in genuine friendship. May he rest in peace.

JAN SWYNGEDOUW
Former JJRS editor