

In Memoriam: Takagi Kiyoko-sensei

All of us at the Inter-University Center were deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Takagi Kiyoko-sensei, the Center's first Associate Director and a teacher of extraordinary talent. Takagi-sensei passed away on January 3, 2011. She was 93 years old.

Takagi-sensei served as Associate Director from the very inception of the school, which began in 1961 as the Stanford Center for Japanese Studies, and she continued to serve in that capacity at the Inter-University Center for Japanese Language Studies from 1963 through 1981. After two decades of devoted service, she left the IUC to join the faculty at Ochanomizu Women's University as a professor of philosophy, and subsequently moved to the faculty of philosophy at Toyo University in 1985. In 1991, at the age of 73, she received her Ph.D. in religious studies from the University of Tokyo.

An accomplished scholar and poet, Takagi-sensei was a source of tremendous inspiration among her students and the object of universal admiration at the IUC. As a scholar of religion, Takagi-sensei often surprised IUC students with her keen interest in the religious philosophy of William James, as well as her erudition in literature and philosophy in general. As a tanka poet, she continued to write and publish poetry well into her 90s.

Takagi-sensei is fondly remembered by her students not only for her wry wit, sparkling intelligence and erudition, but also for her grace and generosity of spirit.

"Takagi-sensei was a truly great teacher and mentor, who profoundly influenced me—and so many others—at IUC and beyond." (John Wheeler, IUC '68-69)

"She was an extraordinary woman—a standout in a group of outstanding teachers. Scholar, musician, poet, philosopher, teacher—she excelled at them all. Her rapid-fire out-of-the-corner-of-her-mouth Japanese used to scare the hell out of me. She was kibishii in the best possible sense of the word." (Jim Wagner, IUC '70-71)

"She was one of those teachers you just wanted to be taught by forever." (Richard Okada, IUC '70-71)

"I was so fond of Takagi-sensei, who was a woman of great erudition and talent, and a marvelous wry humor also. A good many years after we were students at the center, in 1990-91, I was working on the project that ended as the "Wages of Affluence" book, and came across a union organizer who had kept a six year run of his daily appointments and notes, an extraordinary source, but in a really hard to decipher handwriting. I called the IUC to see if there was a faculty member who might privately tutor me in making sense of this guy's techo, and they put me in touch with Takagi-sensei. How much fun it was to spend a few hours with her trying to figure out what he had written, what his idiosyncratic abbreviations meant, etc." (Andrew Gordon, IUC '73-74)

As someone who made an indelible impact on the lives of so many IUC graduates, we would like to honor Takagi-sensei's memory in the upcoming issue of the IUC Newsletter. Please contact Indra Levy (ilevy@stanford.edu) if you would like to contribute your memories of Takagi-sensei to our tribute.