OBITUARY

Riojun Kinosita

Professor Riojun Kinosita passed away on September 7, 1977, at the age of 84, after a lengthy illness during which he was under the loving care of his daughter, Akiko. He shall long be remembered for his brilliant series of experiments that proved that a number of azo dyes were hepatocarcinogens of varying strengths (1932 to 1937).

His student years at Tokyo Imperial University Medical School until 1920 were exciting days indeed. In little more than half a century, after a rude awakening from a slumber of three centuries in self-imposed isolation from the outside world, Japan had modernized herself in the occidental mold, and the first wave of original discoveries in Japanese medicine began. To mention a few, the pathogen of cholera-like dysentery was identified in 1898 by K. Shiga and named after him, Shigella dysenteriae. In 1912 Hashimoto described lymphocytic thyroiditis, the disease that bears his name. The demonstration by Professor K. Yamagiwa in 1915, that malignant carcinomas can be experimentally induced by repeated painting of rabbit ears with coal tar, was fresh in the memory of everyone; thus it was natural that young Kinosita and his fellow student, Tomizo Yoshida, should plunge enthusiastically into cancer research. It was no coincidence that his crowning achievement, together with T. Yoshida and M. Harada, was to be the experimental induction of hepatomas in rats by a variety of azo dyes. As professor of pathology first at Hokkaido and then at Osaka (Imperial) Universities, he cultivated the next generation of leaders in Japanese cancer research. My personal knowledge of Professor Kinosita dates from 1953 when I became his last graduate student, and it is limited to his American era.

Perhaps because Mrs. Margherita Kay Kinosita’s passion for the breeding of Great Danes was equal to my passion for thoroughbred horses, I became the Kinositas’ adopted son, and my wife an adopted sister to their daughter, Akiko. The old adages of “No man is a hero to his valet” and “Familiarity breeds contempt” did not sour our relationship. In fact, my respect for Professor Kinosita grew as I became older and I hope wiser.

Professor Kinosita was an imposing physical specimen in height as well as substance; he was quite a sportsman in his youth. Indeed, his postdoctoral years in Cambridge, Freiburg im Breisgau, and London (1922 to 1926) were filled with enough sporting and social activities that the friendships he cultivated extended well beyond scientific circles. A dream that his close friend, Ryutaro Azuma, shared with him in their Cambridge days was finally realized in 1964 when Azuma, as a governor of Tokyo, brought the Olympics to Japan.

In London in 1925, he found and persuaded an English beauty, Margherita Kay, to be his wife. Their devotion to each other was of the quiet and long-lasting kind that needed no demonstrative enhancements. One could readily see why their love endured through what must have been the most trying period of World War II in Japan. Her death in 1971 was a crushing blow to him.

Those who have already achieved lasting fame tend to have a better perspective of their place in the world. Kinosita taught me not to have a distorted sense of self-importance, for life goes on with or without one’s great discovery, real or imagined. He specifically advised me not to follow in his footsteps. Instead, from the very beginning, he constantly encouraged me to create my own niche and then to expand it.

He was a worldly man in the true sense of the word, and I mourn the unfortunate truth that modern societies are no longer capable of producing this type of man. It was a rare privilege that my scientific youth was shaped by so imposing a personage.

A small basic research unit that he started in 1952 at the City of Hope Medical Center has since grown and established a world-wide reputation. Thus, his last achievement was no less monumental than his earlier ones. If there is one who evaluates our lives in the heavens, I am certain that he has ranked Riojun Kinosita very high in his book.

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