In memoriam of Dr. Sato Tsuneko

Energy. This is the word that best describe Dr. Sato Tsuneko.

As a Monbusho Kenkyuuusei Ryuugakusei, I met Sato-sensei when I started my tenure at the Institute for Medical Science of Aging (Kareiken) of the Aichi Medical University. In the spring of 1990, Dr. Sato was the Director of Kareiken and I had a scholarship to study there for one year under her advice.

Dr. Sato was very kind receiving me in the lab for the first time and we talked about the research that I would be involved in over the following months. Although I had studied the Japanese language for six months at the Osaka University of Foreign Studies, at that time I could barely sustain a real conversation in Japanese. We talked in English about the routine to be done and she introduced me to the Kareiken's people. Then, to my surprise, she said to them all: "This is Jekuru-san from Brazil. He will stay at our Institute as a kenkyuuusei and from now on everybody must speak only in Japanese with him". And, to my despair, everyone did just that. During that year, I passed the entrance examinations for the graduate course and stayed at Kareiken until 1995. Of course, due to the circumstances, I became skilful in Japanese and I am very grateful to Dr. Sato because I could defend my Ph.D. thesis in Japanese and discuss it with the professors who comprised the committee.

This situation describes the Sato-sensei's way of doing things: direct, precise, without rhetoric and with a lot of energy. Sometimes, this way of being could confound who met her for the first time or had short contact with her. But after a short period working together, one could realize that she had a very warm heart, despite the first impression of objective and sharp speech.

Somebody once told me that Sato-sensei was one of the first women that achieved the Medical Doctor degree in Nagoya. Before working on aging, she made a career as pathologist and had a sharp eye to detect changes in tissues and cells. Her background in pathology was very important in investigation of aging because one of the most difficult challenges in this area is to differentiate the natural changes that occur as time passes from the changes due to diseases. It was not easy to hold an academic discussion with her if you did not have a good point and solid arguments. And this is very important for a graduate student to learn if one intends to be a scholar.

But the lab's life with Sato-sensei was not only science, papers, gakkais etc. Once a year she spent almost a week preparing a dinner for all the lab staff. She cooked very well and enjoyed (to our delight) to prepare exquisite Japanese dishes and offer us a real gochiso. Even the sake was very special, from Takayama brewers and other famous places.
I went to a lot of famous restaurants in Japan, but none of them served a menu as elaborate and delicious as those Sato-sensei cooked for us on those remarkable gastronomic nights.

Sato-sensei liked to study Japanese culture and was very happy when she told us about her classes on shuji or the last art museum she visited. With the same enthusiasm, she could talk about a new paper on aging or the last symposium she attended.

This is the way I will always remember her. It was an honor for me to study and research under Sato-sensei's advisement. I pray for her soul to rest in peace.

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