

Obituary

Masao Fujita (1926–2000)

More than a year has passed since Dr. Masao Fujita, who was the first Chairman of the Department of Anesthesiology at Tokyo Women's Medical University, met with an untimely death on December 16th, 2000. It happened so suddenly that the word "untimely" is all too apt in this case.

At the end of the year, the Tokyo Women's Medical University was about to celebrate the 100th anniversary of its foundation. Dr. Fujita, who had worked here for 27 years, was in good health when he attended the anniversary ceremony, which was held on December 5th, and renewed his friendship with many of those attending. When his death was announced, comments such as "But he was so vital and lively," "At the anniversary, we made an appointment to have a beer, of which he was so fond," and "I'm very sorry," were heard from many people. But the harsh fact is that Dr. Fujita died of a cerebral hemorrhage on December 16th. He had recently been baptized with the name of Luke at Shimoigusa Church, and it was here that his friends said farewell, and where the funeral took place.

Dr. Fujita anticipated the need for anesthesiology very early, before it was widely used in Japan. He returned from America with a wealth of information about clinical technology, medical equipment, and the system of anesthesiology as a science. He also made a large contribution to the foundation and development of the Japanese Society of Anesthesiologists.

Dr. Fujita was born in Sapporo City on November 18th in the 15th year of Taisho, 1926. He entered Sapporo Iechu, and after Hokkaido University's preparatory course, he graduated in medicine from that university. While studying in the medical department, he had a part-time job as a houseboy with a family of the American occupation forces which were stationed in Japan in those days. I fondly remember him saying that he cooked spaghetti or played for the family to demonstrate his talents as a houseboy, and he mastered the fundamentals of English conversation from this experience.



After graduation from Hokkaido University, he began to train as what is called an intern at St. Luke's International Hospital, and then at the US Army Hospital in Tokyo. After gaining a practitioner's license in July 1952, his ambition was to become a thoracic surgeon. He started training and service as a surgical subassistant at St. Luke's International Hospital in August. There, he saw a visiting American anesthesiologist (in those days anesthesiologists per se did not exist in Japan) inducing total anesthesia easily by intubation for thoracotomies and other procedures. Dr. Fujita decided then and there that he had to study anesthesiology, primarily for the purpose of giving chest surgery an established status. He resigned from St. Luke's Hospital early in September, and with an

introduction from the visiting anesthesiologist, started a residency in the Department of Anesthesiology at the Albany Medical College in New York in mid-October. In the middle of his resident's period he was promoted to Fellow, and spent a year studying in the Cardiopulmonary Research Institute of the same university.

In 1955, after successfully completing a 3-year residence at Albany, he became a resident in a subspecialty at Boston Children's Hospital. In 1956, he was licensed as a Fellow of the American College of Anesthesiologists. Subsequently, Dr. Fujita moved his sphere of activity from Boston to New York. Until early 1957, he worked as a clinical fellow and then an instructor for the Department of Anesthesiology at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, which is familiar to most Japanese anesthesiologists.

In March of that year, he returned to Japan and was installed as Associate Professor at the Department of Anesthesiology at Kyoto University. After spending 8 years in Kyoto, he took the post of the first Chairman of the Department of Anesthesiology at Tokyo Women's Medical University in July 1965. He often said that he was encouraged to do so by Prof. Inamoto, who was a professor of anesthesiology at Kyoto University. Prof. Inamoto said, "Tokyo Women's Medical University, with Prof. Sakakibara of the Department of Cardiac Surgery and Prof. Nakayama of the Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery, is a mecca for surgeons. No other position is as worthwhile as working at that university, so go for it!"

The medical department, which was very small in those days, now has 180 staff members, all of whom graduated from the various university. As its present prosperity shows, Dr. Fujita worked with irresistible

force. He was appointed Chairman of the Kanto District Branch of the Japanese Society of Anesthesiologists in the fall of 1965, when he moved to Tokyo Women's Medical University, Chairman of the Japanese Society of Anesthesiologists in 1972, Chairman of the Circulation Control Society in 1989, and Chairman of the Senile Anesthesia Society in 1990.

Since retirement, Dr. Fujita had devoted himself to the establishment of the Japanese Society of Cardiovascular Anesthesiologists. Thanks to his broad knowledge of North American cardiothoracic anesthesia, he fully appreciated the American system of an academic congress containing many practical workshops. He therefore made an effort to establish a smaller-scale, but more practical, congress with a similar approach. The successful result is our gift and his legacy—the Japanese Society of Cardiovascular Anesthesiologists. In addition, he looked forward to being the Honorary Chairman of the 9th International Congress of Cardiothoracic and Vascular Anesthesiology, which is being held in Tokyo in 2004.

Dr. Fujita was decorated with the Third Order of Merit of the Sacred Treasure in recognition of a lifetime's service.

It is very sad that Dr. Fujita will no longer impart his wisdom to students and staff at this hospital. He was administering anesthesia here just 3 days before succumbing to his final illness. His greatest pleasure lay in being in the operating room and ministering to his patients. May he rest in peace.

Makoto Ozaki, M.D., PhD.
Department of Anesthesiology,
Tokyo Women's Medical University