

# Wilhelm Schiffer, S. J., 1914-1972

## *In Memoriam*

**D**uring his thirty-six years in Japan, Fr Wilhelm Schiffer rendered invaluable services to *Monumenta Nipponica* and to Japan studies in general. It is thus only right and fitting that we devote a few words here to honor his memory.

Soon after the first publication of *Monumenta Nipponica* in 1938, the young Wilhelm Schiffer became the secretary and assistant of the journal's enterprising founder, Johannes B. Kraus, S.J. Fr Schiffer was trained primarily in Chinese philosophy and religion; his knowledge of Chinese characters was as exact as it was vast and proved to be a great asset in the demanding work of editing the journal. Indeed, it was his command in this field and his untiring efforts which helped to carry *Monumenta Nipponica* through many initial difficulties.

Complications arising from the Pacific War brought the publication of the journal to a halt only a few years after its founding issue. At that time Fr Schiffer was in China, completing his studies at the Jesuit theologate in Shanghai, where he was ordained priest. Unable to return to Japan immediately after the end of the war, he spent further years in Manchuria expanding his knowledge of the Chinese people and their civilization. Upon his subsequent return to Tokyo, he joined the Department of Philosophy at Sophia University.

Thanks to his exertions *Monumenta Nipponica* was able to recommence publication in 1951 after an interruption of eight years. As the editor-in-chief he felt it his first responsibility to reawaken interest in Japanology after the wartime interim. He pledged to maintain high standards of scholarship in the journal, as his own numerous book reviews from this time amply indicate.

In connection with his work on *Monumenta Nipponica*, Fr Schiffer enjoyed close relations with the various scholarly societies of Tokyo. He twice served as President of The Asiatic Society of Japan, and for many years until his death he was a member of the Deutsche Ostasiatische Gesellschaft. When Dr William P. Woodward left Japan, Fr Schiffer was elected Research Director of the International Institute for the Study

of Religion. In this capacity he supported and guided the research of many foreign scholars in Japan. His advice inevitably arose from his own profound erudition and rich experience, and was always highly esteemed.

Fr Schiffer's predilection was more toward critical than original work, although the latter was not excluded. He authored one of the first articles on modern Japanese popular religion (in *Monumenta Nipponica*, xi, I, 1955), as well as collaborating with R.D.M. Shaw in an English translation of *Yasen Kanna* 夜般閑話 ('A Chat on a Boat in the Evening'), a treatise by the Zen master Hakuin (*Monumenta Nipponica*, xiii, I, 1957). Mention must also be made of his endeavors in support of a modern English translation of the *Lotus Sutra* (Risshō Kōsei-kai, Tokyo, 1971).

Scholars and friends of Japan alike will remember Fr Wilhelm Schiffer with deep affection and lasting appreciation. R.I.P.

*Heinrich Dumoulin*