Tamaki Ipponmatsu

1901–1985

By Walker L. Cisler

Tamaki Ipponmatsu, internationally recognized and highly respected for his long-standing pioneering work in the field of nuclear energy for power production, died on January 24, 1985, at the age of eighty-three. At the time of his death, he was adviser general of the Japan Atomic Power Company. His contributions to the very successful use of nuclear energy in Japan are acknowledged internationally.

Tamaki Ipponmatsu was born on April 29, 1901, in Hiroshima-ken, Japan. He received a B.S. in electrical engineering in 1925 from the Kyoto Imperial University and a Ph.D. in engineering from the Osaka Imperial University in 1945.

Dr. Ipponmatsu was one of the key leaders in the development of the electric power industry after World War II. In 1947 he became managing director of the second largest utility company in Japan, the Kansai Electric Power Company. Ten years later, as a result of recognition of his work in the nuclear energy field, he was appointed vice-president of the Japan Atomic Power Company. He was promoted to president in 1962, and in 1970 he became chairman, a position he held for seven years. Dr. Ipponmatsu then became executive councillor and finally advisor general from 1981 until his death in 1985.

Although his main interest in later years was nuclear energy, his broad contributions to the electrical engineering
field resulted in many prestigious appointments: president of the Institute of Electrical Engineers of Japan; executive secretary and adviser to the Japan Committee for Economic Development; director of the Muto Institute of Structural Mechanics; and director of the Japan Motive Power Association.

His special contributions to engineering were recognized in Japan when he was awarded the Blue Ribbon Medal of Japan (1959) and the Second Class Order of the Rising Sun (1977). He was also honored by Great Britain in 1977 when he was named Commander of the Order of the British Empire. He was elected a foreign associate of the U.S. National Academy of Engineering in 1978.

Dr. Ipponmatsu was a pioneer in the field of nuclear engineering because he was one of the first to recognize the importance of evaluating all aspects of the nuclear fuel cycle: uranium procurement, uranium enrichment, spent fuel reprocessing, and—a very important area—the problems of satisfactory waste disposal. Through his early emphasis on these aspects of the cycle, Dr. Ipponmatsu was instrumental in focusing international attention on nuclear energy as a viable remedy for the world's energy problems.

A number of his achievements in the nuclear energy field are clearly documented in his numerous publications, which include "Problems on Nuclear Power," in the Journal of the Japan Society of Mechanical Engineers (vol. 75, no. 647, November 1972 [Tokyo]) and "IAEA Conference on Environmental Aspects of Nuclear Power Stations" (New York: August 1970). Dr. Ipponmatsu also authored two books: Overall Energy Planning of Power and Fuel (Kyoto: Denki Shoin, May 1948) and A Story of Tokai Nuclear Power Station (Tokyo: Tokyo Keizai Press, September 1971).

Despite his active technical and engineering life, Tamaki Ipponmatsu also found time to devote to cultural and civic matters. He was particularly active in promoting the use of nuclear power in Japan, and his efforts led to the wide public acceptance of its use. As a result of those efforts, to a considerable
extent, nuclear power is now economically producing a significant part of the energy requirements of Japan.

In a country such as Japan, which is deficient in energy resources, the acceptance of nuclear power has meant much to its phenomenal economic growth. Japan and the world of nuclear power will greatly miss Tamaki Ipponmatsu.