IN MEMORIAM J. W. DE JONG (1921–2000)

On 22 January 2000 Jan Willem de Jong, the co-founder with F. B. J. Kuiper in 1957 of the Indo-Iranian Journal, died in Canberra (Australia). By the time of the founding of the IIJ he had become well aware of the need for a new periodical in a field where scholarly communication and the diffusion of information has all too often left much to be desired. Presumably the new IIJ was intended originally to continue the older Zeitschrift für Indologie und Iranistik which by then had ceased publication. But de Jong’s own interests in Buddhism and Inner Asia soon lent a very special character to the new journal. His regular contributions to the IIJ will be missed by its readers who, over the past 40 years, have come to count on the prompt appearance in this journal of his eagerly awaited reviews; these constituted substantial, and often original, contributions to the subjects treated in the books he was reviewing. De Jong was indeed in the very forefront of scholars of Buddhism in his generation. His death leaves a large gap that will be sadly felt by his colleagues and friends.

De Jong received his school education at Leiden (Netherlands) in what, in his youth, were still the traditional humanistic school-subjects. At university he studied Chinese as his main subject, and Japanese and Sanskrit as his secondary subjects (bijvakken), in the extremely difficult circumstances of the war years and the resulting temporary closure of Leiden University. This was of course the Leiden of such world-renowned scholars as J.J.L. Duyvendak, J. Ph. Vogel and F.D.K. Bosch (who was to be the Promotor for de Jong’s Leiden doctoral thesis of 1949). Immediately after the war he spent a year (1946) at Harvard University with Walter Eugene Clark, and then several years (1947–1950) in Paris with Paul Demiéville and other eminent scholars in Buddhist studies, Sinology and Indology at the Collège de France and the Sorbonne.

On his return to the Netherlands he was first connected with the Sinologisch Instituut of Leiden University. In 1956 he was appointed to the newly established professorial chair in Tibetan and Buddhist studies based in the Instituut Kern, the Indological institute at Leiden. His inaugural lecture, published as De studie van het boeddhisme: Problemen en perspectieven

(English version in his collected papers, on which see below), outlined historically some salient points, and briefly sketched out a programme for the future, in Buddhist studies. In 1965 de Jong moved to the Australian National University in Canberra, where he was professor of South Asian and Buddhist studies until his retirement in 1986. There he supervised a number of doctoral theses.

De Jong’s scholarly career filling the second half of the 20th century showed a combination of intellectual acumen and philological acribia with a commitment to the highest scholarly standards. Perhaps the main shift in his interests to be observed over this long period was a slightly diminishing concern with Inner Asian studies balanced by an increasing involvement with non-Buddhist Indology, including notably the Sanskrit epics. This change may have been influenced by the difference between the titles and responsibilities of his Leiden and Canberra professorships. He also had a keen interest in philosophy, on which he however published only shorter articles (see below), and in religion. Throughout his career he has been regarded above all as a master of Buddhist philology, possessing as he did an outstanding command of the main classical languages of Buddhism – Sanskrit, Pali, Chinese, Japanese, Tibetan and Mongolian – as well as of the European languages required for Buddhist studies. But the assessment of de Jong as exclusively a textualist and (hyper)critical reviewer of books is, surely, a somewhat one-sided view of a scholar who, at the end of his inaugural lecture of 1956, said the following (in the English version): ‘The most important task for the student of Buddhism is the study of the Buddhist mentality. That is why contact with present-day Buddhism is so important, for this will guard us against seeing the texts purely as philological material and forgetting that for the Buddhist they are sacred texts which proclaim a message of salvation.’ Not all universities have yet taken this very pertinent analysis to heart.

De Jong’s first book was the *Cinq chapitres de la Prasannapada* (1949), a philologically meticulous and philosophically well-informed translation, accompanied by an edition of the Tibetan version, of chapters xviii–xxii of Candrakīrtī’s great commentary of Nāgārjuna’s *Madhyamakakārikās*. This work was de Jong’s Leiden doctoral thesis of 1949. From this period comes also his short, but philosophically acute, article ‘Le problème de l’absolu dans l’école Madhyamaka’ (1950, an English translation of which appeared in 1972); reference can additionally be made to the review-article ‘Emptiness’ (1972). The first two works may justly be said to have inaugurated the contemporary period in the study of the Madhyamaka school of Mahāyāna Buddhist thought. In 1962 he published an edition of the Sanskrit and Tibetan texts of Candrakīrtī’s *Madhyamakaśāstrastruti*