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- JIKIDO TAKASAKI  
*In memoriam* Prof. Hajime Nakamura 1
- DANIEL BOUCHER  
On *Hu* and *Fan* Again: the Transmission  
of “Barbarian” Manuscripts to China 7
- ANN HEIRMAN  
What Happened to the Nun Maitreyī? 29
- CHARLES B. JONES  
Mentally Constructing What Already Exists:  
The Pure Land Thought of Chan Master  
Jixing Chewu (1741-1810) 43
- JAN NATTIER  
The Realm of Akṣobhya: A Missing Piece  
in the History of Pure Land Buddhism 71
- REIKO OHNUMA  
The Story of Rūpāvātī:  
A Female Past Birth of the Buddha 103
- BHIKKHU PĀSĀDIKA  
A Hermeneutical Problem in  
SN 42, 12 (SN IV, 333) and AN X, 91 (AN V, 178) 147
- OSKAR VON HINÜBER  
Report on the XIIth Conference of the IABS 155
- Accounts of the XIIth IABS Conference 161

## *In memoriam*

# Professor Hajime Nakamura

JKIDO TAKASAKI

Professor Hajime Nakamura, one of the great authorities in Indian Philosophy and Buddhist Studies, passed away on the 10th of October 1999 at the age of eighty-six. Professor Nakamura, an Honorary Member of the International Association of Buddhist Studies, was world-renowned for his works, including *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples: India, China, Tibet, Japan* 東洋人の思惟方法, see below), a comparative essay on Eastern civilisations viewed through their ways of thinking.

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Born in Matsue, Shimane prefecture, on the 28th November, 1912, Prof. Nakamura entered in 1933 the Faculty of Letters (Department of Indian Philosophy and Sanskrit Literature) of Tokyo Imperial University (now the University of Tokyo). After completing his undergraduate courses in 1936, he went on to the Graduate School of Tokyo Imperial University, studying "The History of Early Vedānta Philosophy" under the supervision of Prof. Hakuju Ui. In 1943 he succeeded Prof. Ui and was appointed Associate Professor of Tokyo Imperial University; at the same time he received the degree of D. Litt. for the above-mentioned study of Vedānta Philosophy.

Prof. Nakamura enjoyed a highly successful academic career: he was promoted to full professor in 1954; he also took on the position of the Dean of the Faculty of Letters from 1964 until 1966. For thirty years, until his retirement in March 1973, Prof. Nakamura supervised the work of young scholars in the Department of Indian Philosophy. Throughout his career Prof. Nakamura's innovative ideas and philological rigor enabled him to make innumerable contributions, not only to virtually the entire domain of Indian Philosophy and Buddhist Studies, but also to the comparative study of philosophy, as is witnessed by his *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples*. His works, which were widely appreciated not just in Japan but internationally, secured a worldwide reputation for Prof.

Nakamura. His academic achievements were rewarded by the Order of Culture in 1977 and a nomination to the Japan Academy (日本學士院) in 1982.

Besides his brilliant academic career, what deserves special mention is Prof. Nakamura's founding of the Eastern Institute (Tōhō Kenkyūkai, 財團法人東方研究會). Instead of taking a new position in another university after his retirement from the University of Tokyo, Prof. Nakamura chose to establish an institute that would give untenured young scholars, fresh from graduate schools, the opportunity to pursue their own research. At the same time, Prof. Nakamura founded the Tōhō Gakuin (東方研究) which he himself called a *terakoya*.<sup>1</sup> In this college, open to the public, he regularly gave lectures on a wide variety of subjects in Buddhism and Indian philosophy with the help of young members of the Eastern Institute. He thus anticipated, by twenty years, the idea that one should pursue "lifetime education," an idea which is so widely accepted today. Here too is clear evidence of Prof. Nakamura's extraordinary foresight and organisational abilities, not just in scholarly research but also in the field of education.

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It is far from easy to describe, or even outline, Prof. Nakamura's scholarly achievements, as they comprise more than 170 monographs, both in Japanese and in Western languages, and over a thousand articles. Let me, however, summarize a few of his principal works and discuss some of their features.

(1) Prof. Nakamura's area of expertise was Indian Philosophy, including Buddhist Studies, if we adopt the current way of classifying academic fields in Japan. The core of his work was largely focussed on the Vedānta school, which one might call "the most authentic of the authentic Hindu philosophies." And the publication which best testifies to his expertise in this area is *The History of Early Vedānta Philosophy*,<sup>2</sup> a slightly revised version of his doctoral thesis. For this publication, Prof. Nakamura was honored with an Imperial Award of the Japan Academy (日本學士賜賞). *The History of Early Vedānta Philosophy* chronologically reconstructs

1. 寺子屋: in the Edo period reading, writing and arithmetic were taught to children in these small schools attached to Buddhist temples.
2. 初期ヴェーダーンタ哲學史, 4 vols., 1951-1956, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.

the history of the formation of the Vedānta school from the Upaniṣadic period on, using internal sources as well as external sources, such as Buddhist and Jain literature. It was highly appreciated by Western scholars for its English translations, and was considered to be the world's first historical study of Vedānta school.<sup>3</sup>

Besides Vedānta studies, the area of research to which Prof. Nakamura contributed most extensively is that of Early Buddhism. Prof. Nakamura discussed the life of Gautama Buddha, the teaching of early Buddhist scriptures and the social background of Early Buddhism, basing himself primarily on Pāli literature, but also very significantly upon Chinese and Tibetan translations, Jain literature and that of other Indian schools of philosophy, as well as the available inscriptional sources. He consecrated great energy to translating Buddhist scriptures, thus furthering modern readers' understanding. Prof. Nakamura vigorously defended the opinion that, in examining the history of the composition of the scriptures, the older stratum of the scriptures, which was closer to the original teaching, was to be found in the texts composed in verse rather than in those composed in prose.

Furthermore, Prof. Nakamura played a pioneering role in studying Buddhist and Indian Logic from a modern viewpoint, as is well brought out by his "Some Clarifications of the Concept of Voidness from the Standpoint of Symbolic Logic".<sup>4</sup> His historical study on Indian society, i.e., the context for Indian philosophy, was the starting point for Japanese research on ancient Indian society: this work is remarkable for being the initial impetus for later full-scale studies on Indian history.

(2) However, it was *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples* (2 vols., Misuzu Shobō), published in 1948-9 before his doctoral dissertation, that led to the wide recognition and fame of Prof. Nakamura. This book is said to have been originally conceived of as being a part of a collaborative work destined to contribute to war-time policy making by furthering the understanding of Asian nations. That said, only the part under Prof. Nakamura's responsibility was ever brought to completion and the contents

3. See, for example, "Upanishadic Tradition and the Early School of Vedānta as noticed in Buddhist Scripture", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 18.1, 2 (1955): 74-104
4. 空觀の記號論理學の解明, *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku Kenkyū* 3.1 (1954): 223-231. See also "Buddhist Logic Expounded by means of Symbolic Logic", *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku Kenkyū* 7.1 (1958).

of the book itself bear no political overtones whatsoever. It was and continues to be the exemplary work for the comparative study of Indian, Chinese, Japanese and Tibetan cultures, initially because of its coherent methodological framework in which the formal aspects of inference and judgement were examined in the various cultures, but also because it carefully delimited the scope of the analysis of Chinese and Japanese cultures by taking Buddhism as the key common cultural substratum upon which comparison could be focussed.<sup>5</sup> This work attracted the attention of American scholars and led to Prof. Nakamura's first invitation to lecture abroad, in Stanford in 1951. The work came to be internationally known through its translations into English<sup>6</sup> and other languages. It can be safely said that Prof. Nakamura's later essays on Japanese culture, in which he took Buddhism as the axis, are extensions of his approach in *Ways of Thinking*.

(3) The preceding discussion enables us to see Prof. Nakamura's fundamental standpoint, namely, that various nations' cultures and civilizations are essentially manifestations, in different geographical locations, of *the* human philosophical and intellectual heritage. In that sense, there is nothing particular that we could call "Indian Philosophy." Indeed, as the title of one of his monographs shows, Indian Philosophy is, according to Prof. Nakamura, simply the *Indian development of philosophical thinking*.<sup>7</sup> Prof. Nakamura thus never abandoned the comparative perspective in approaching different philosophies and cultures. When discussing, for example, religion, he also did not limit himself to doctrinal aspects, but always took into account the social background, be it the history, *belles-lettres*, politics or economics. This methodological perspective was expressed in his *An Essay on Comparative Philosophy*.<sup>8</sup>

5. Note that the part on inference and judgement is omitted in the current edition, in response to criticisms made by specialists in Indian, Chinese and Japanese studies.
6. The first two English translations: 1960, Tokyo: The Japanese National Commission for UNESCO; 1964, Honolulu: East-West Center Press. See also *The Ways of Thinking of the Chinese as Revealed in Chinese Buddhist Thought*, edited by Arthur. F. Wright, 1952, Aspen, CO: The Committee for Chinese Thought.
7. 哲學的思索のインド的展開, 1949.
8. 比較思想論, 1960. There is no mention of an English title in the book itself. But the author says there that Japanese 'shisō' (思想) in this context means 'philosophy' in a broad sense (p. 1). Hence we have translated the Japanese title in this fashion.

and led to the foundation of The Japanese Association for Comparative Philosophy (比較思想學會). His ultimate aim was to write a comprehensive “history of world thought” (世界思想史),<sup>9</sup> based on a quadruple chronological division in terms of what was ancient, universal, medieval or modern.

(4) Prof. Nakamura’s thinking went well beyond disciplinary boundaries and led him to criticize, already from an early age on, the tendency to specialize in narrowly delimited domains such as that of Indian Philosophy. Another criticism which he made was to argue that Buddhist Studies should not follow the model of fields such as Egyptology and deal only with the past: Indian and Buddhist philosophies are of contemporary relevance; Prof. Nakamura’s message was that we should emphasize their philosophical implications for our future. It was his firm conviction that scholarly knowledge should provide us with directions on how to lead our lives.

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It is virtually impossible to imagine anyone equalling the wide-ranging achievements of Prof. Hajime Nakamura. We, who were students of Prof. Nakamura, have only a superficial glimpse of what he accomplished. We should, however, explore new problems and undertake new study projects, all the while bearing in mind the whole domain of Prof. Nakamura’s accomplishments and his methodological standpoint. Let us close this obituary by expressing our resolution to pursue this ideal.

(Except for those in English, those published by Iwanami Shoten, translational works, and editorial works such as dictionaries, all the principal publications by Prof. Nakamura are now included in *Selected Works of Hajime Nakamura* (決定版・中村元選集, 32+8 vols., Tokyo: Shunjūsha), which has been brought to its completion in July 1999.)

translated from the Japanese by Toru Tomabechi

9. Prof. Nakamura explained what he meant by the phrase ‘Sekai Shisōshi’ in the following way: “[T]o be precise these four volumes entitled *Sekai Shisōshi* constitute a treatise aiming at a presentation of common philosophical problems as seen through their parallel development stages in cultural traditions in various spheres in the world.” (*Selected Works of Hajime Nakamura* (決定版・中村元選集), supplementary volume I (Ancient Philosophy, 古代思想), p. 1)