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REMEMBERING DR. HAJIME NAKAMURA

Hajime Nakamura (1912–1999)

Sengaku Mayeda

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Three or four years ago we, his colleagues and students, began to notice some physical deterioration in Dr. Nakamura, who had hardly ever been known to fall ill. Confined to a wheelchair, he continued to lecture at Eastern Institute and to fulfill his commitments. In failing health and pain-ridden, he appeared to us to be like the Buddha who was untiring in his effort to guide his people until his very last moments at Kushinagara. In accordance with his own wishes Dr. Nakamura was cared for at his home, where on October 10, 1999, at 10:45 AM, he peacefully breathed his last. He was surrounded by all his children and under the tender care of Mrs. Rakuko Nakamura, a physician. He was 86 years old.

Dr. Hajime Nakamura was born on November 28, 1912 in Matsue City in the Shimane Prefecture, not far from the house where Lafcadio Hearn (1850–1904) lived. The following year, his family moved to Tokyo. In 1936 he graduated from the Department of Indian Philosophy and Sanskrit Literature in the Faculty of Letters at the University of Tokyo. In 1943, at an exceptionally young age, he was appointed Associate Professor at the University, and in 1954 he became full Professor. From 1964 to 1966 he served as Dean of the Faculty of Letters. In March 1973, having reached mandatory retirement age, he left the University, and in the same year he was appointed Professor Emeritus by the University. Since 1984 he has been a member of the Japan Academy.

Dr. Nakamura's field of research was exceedingly broad, encompassing Indian philosophy, Buddhist studies, historical studies, Japanese thought, comparative thought, and more. His areas of interest spanned Japan, India, China, Europe and America, extending to the Eurasian continent. His scholarship stretched from the ancient to the modern. Moreover, with regard to every field, he undertook research that was novel, original, and pioneering, and the quantity of his publications is astonishingly large. He eventually became bed-ridden and could not utter even a word, but he would occasionally raise the wrist of his right hand a little, and when provided with a magic pen his hand moved, seemingly automatically as though writing a document on a piece of paper. Without his being aware, the right hand moved spontaneously. It seemed that his right hand remembered the skill of writing he had exercised all through his life until his very last moment. It was with that single right hand that Dr. Nakamura authored more than 1000 books and articles, in Japanese and in the European languages (those written in European languages numbering more than 200). He was indeed a scholar of unprecedented greatness. Here I can touch upon no more than a small segment of his achievement.



Hajime Nakamura (1912–1999)

The scholastic production of Dr. Nakamura sprouted with vigor and continued to expand like a banyan tree, granting people respite and tranquillity. The banyan tree possesses numerous enormous trunks that have their roots firmly embedded in the soil. At a casual glance one gets the impression that each trunk is an individual tree. However, upon closer observation one notices that the trees all constitute one immense cosmos-like formation, with a single tree in the center as the axis with all the others securely attached to it. In the case of Dr. Nakamura, I personally am of the opinion that the tree that constituted the central axis, was none other than Indian philosophy.

With the above in mind, among his many scholastic achievements we have first of all to mention *The History of Early Vedānta Philosophy* (Iwanami Shoten, 1943–1956), an epoch-making study in four volumes. This was a philological, historical, and philosophical reconstruction of nearly a thousand years of pre-Śāṅkaran Vedāntic philosophy, which until then was almost entirely unknown. In 1957 what was his doctoral dissertation earned him the imperial award of the Japan Academy. Through the efforts of the late Professor D.H.H. Ingalls, he was able to obtain some financial support from the Enchin Research Center of Harvard University. Thereupon, in 1967, he undertook the English translation of the work, and finally in 1982 the first English language volume was published as, *A History of Early Vedānta Philosophy*, translated by Trevor Leggett, Sengaku Mayeda, Taitetz Unno, and others (Delhi etc.: Motilal Banarasidass). The second translated volume is currently in press, and despite being on his sick bed, he was eager to know about the translation. To the original four volumes, *The Thought of Shankara* was added in 1989, thus completing the five volumes of the series *Indian Philosophical Thought*.

Dr. Nakamura's research on Indian philosophical thought reveals a trail of development that is most remarkable. It was in July 1999, three months prior to his death, when the authorized edition of *The Selected Works of Hajime Nakamura* (Shunjusha) was finally completed. This series consists of 32 volumes and an additional 8 volumes, which together make up a total of 40 volumes. One might be able to view this entire body of selected works as a sequel to the series mentioned above and Dr. Nakamura regarded the first 32 volumes as his *Outline of the History of Indian Thought*.

The first four volumes of his collected works include those that propelled Dr. Nakamura into international prominence, namely *The Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples* (Tokyo: The National Commission for UNESCO, 1960); and *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples: India, China, Tibet, Japan*, ed. by Philip P. Wiener (revised edition, Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1964). According to Dr. Nakamura these works provide an introduction to the entire series, including, in the fourth volume, a new section: "Ways of Thinking of the Korean People." Volumes 5 to 7 include three works on the history of India and make up the introduction to what follows as the main discourse. One of Dr. Nakamura's masterpieces, *The History of Indian Thought* (Iwanami Shoten, 1956), reveals the importance of Indian history in the formation of Indian thought. The remaining volumes, through number 32, are arranged chronologically to show the evolution of Indian thought.

The history of Indian thought begins with the country's oldest literary work, namely the Vedas. Dr. Nakamura's *Outline of the History of Indian Thought* begins with a clarification of Vedic thought, *The Thought of Veda* (vol. 8). The Upanishads are represented by a singular sizable volume, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads* (vol. 9). In volume 10, the teachings of the anti-Vedic independent thinkers (*śramaṇa*) who appeared in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E. have been expounded upon, including the teachings of the well-known Jains.

The main thrust of Dr. Nakamura's research into Buddhism was directed toward early Buddhism. The many years that he devoted to research on this topic have borne fruit in eight volumes, namely volumes 11 to 18 of the collected works. On the study of early Buddhism, there have no doubt been a great many other publications, but Dr. Nakamura's work is unique, based as it is upon a rigorous methodology. Also, for the clarification of Mahayana Buddhism, four volumes (vols. 20 to 23) were newly added.

The contributions of Dr. Nakamura towards Buddhist research is not confined to just these works. Special mention must be made of the compilation and publication of his dictionaries of Buddhism, which were executed in simple and accessible language. In particular, his timeless *Dictionary of Buddhist Terms*, which was completed in 1974 in 3 volumes (Tokyo: Shoseki) earned him the Mainichi Publications Cultural Award as well as the Society for the Promotion of Buddhism Cultural Award in 1975. As a sequel to this work, in 1988 the *Illustrated Dictionary of Buddhist Terms* was published (Tokyo: Shoseki). In the *Dictionary of Buddhist Terms*, recorded Buddhist terms have been explicated in words while in the *Illustrated Dictionary of Buddhist Terms*, various facts in Buddhist scriptures are elucidated in a straightforward manner with the support of illustrations, pictures, and photographs. The latter work happens to be the one and only illustrated dictionary existing at present that encompasses not only Buddhism but also Hinduism and Indian civilization.

The first four of the six volumes that comprise volumes 24 through 29 of the selected works focus upon what may well be referred to as the kernel of ancient Indian philosophy, namely the six philosophical systems. The two that follow are a Japanese translation of *The Compendium of All Philosophical Systems (Sarvadarśana-samgraha)* by the renowned savant Mādhava of the fourteenth century. This translation by Dr. Nakamura happens to be the world's first of the complete text. *Hinduism and the Epics* (vol. 30) and two volumes on modern and contemporary thought (vols. 31, 32) round out the body of the series.

In other volumes Dr. Nakamura transcends India and looks towards Japan and the world. His four volumes titled *History of World Thought* are comprised of *Ancient Thought* (vol. 1), *Universal Thought* (vol. 2), *Medieval Thought* (vol. 3), and *Modern Thought* (vol. 4). The English draft of the public lectures that Dr. Nakamura delivered in 1963 at Harvard University formed the basis of these volumes. They were later compiled by Professor Ronald Burr of the University of California, and in 1975 the compilation was published in English as *Parallel Developments: A Comparative History of Ideas* (New York and Tokyo: Kodansha International-Harper). The Japanese translation with certain inclusions and revisions of this excellent English work

appeared as the four volumes of *Sekai Shisoshi* (History of World Thought). This is a work based on Dr. Nakamura's own methodology of comparative thought, a work transcending the frameworks of age, time, race, nationality, and so forth, and embracing the thought that appeared in all the regions of the Eurasian continent. It is a history of human thought, a construction of the history of the thought of the world. It is a bold and original endeavor, wholly distinct in structure from the history of philosophy or the history of thought as we have known them so far. The chapters and sections are assembled and explicated through the names of individual persons or schools.

In another set of Nakamura volumes, we have *The Inter-change of the Cultures of the East and the West* (vol. 1), which may be regarded as an introduction to Japanese thought in the volumes to follow. We have *Prince Shotoku* (vol. 2), wherein he deals with the source of Japanese Buddhism. Then follows *The Critical Spirit of Modern Japan* (vol. 3), wherein he discusses the thought of Shosan Suzuki and Nakamoto Tominaga. Finally, in *The Modernism of Japanese Religion* (vol. 4) he discusses the modernism of Japanese religion prior to the arrival of western civilization.

Dr. Nakamura has made a lasting contribution not only within Japan but in scholarly gatherings all over the world. That he has been highly acclaimed for these activities is obvious from the fact that within Japan he has received the Medal of Culture and the First Order of the Sacred Treasure among other decorations. He has also received numerous awards from abroad, including an honorary doctorate from the president of India (Vidyāvācaspati).

In 1970 Dr. Nakamura established a non-profit organization, Eastern Institute, with himself at the head as chairman of the board of directors. The purpose was to cultivate young scholars and to engage in the dissemination of Eastern thought. In 1973, upon his retirement from the University of Tokyo, he was able to realize something he had long dreamed of, namely creating a community for the guidance of individuals. At his institute, he was able to do what had been impossible for him within the University. The quest for truth is the primary objective of his institute. He opened the doors wide to all those who possessed a sincere zeal for study without being encumbered with considerations for a person's academic career, age, occupation, nationality, or gender. Dr. Nakamura served as the Institute's director and devoted his efforts to the guidance of numerous individuals without isolating himself within an ivory tower of academia.

In accordance with his own wishes, Dr. Nakamura's funeral was sponsored by the Eastern Institute and on November 6, 1999, at four o'clock in the afternoon, it proceeded with solemnity. His majesty the Emperor dispatched as an offering a sum of money to cover part of the funeral expenses. A bouquet of flowers arrived from both the Emperor and Empress and condolence messages from other members of the royal family. The day was blessed with good weather and the mourners numbered more than 1200. In keeping with the wishes of Dr. Nakamura, who was not attached to any Buddhist sect, the *Three Treasures*, the *Heart Sūtra*, the *Four Great Bodhisattva Vows* and the *Creed of Life* were recited before the traditional segment of the funeral service began. The mourners all recited them with deep devotion, while cherishing the memories of this illustrious figure.