

OBITUARY

Remembering Okamura Mihoko

KIMURA SENSHŌ

OKAMURA MIHOKO was a constant companion of Daisetsu Suzuki (1870–1966), whom she revered as her spiritual master, during the final fifteen years of the latter’s life. Ms. Okamura was born in Los Angeles in 1935. Subsequently, she moved with her family to New York, where she met the then eighty-one-year-old Daisetsu in 1951. At that time, Daisetsu was a visiting professor at Columbia University lecturing on the *Huayan Sutra*, and she, a fifteen-year-old high school student, attended his lectures together with university students and professors. Subsequently, she frequently visited Daisetsu and engaged in dialogues with him. Ms. Okamura reminisced, “I was able to talk about anything with Sensei,” and she thanked him by saying that it was “unusually good luck” that she was able to meet him.

Ms. Okamura accompanied the aged Daisetsu when he traveled to the Eranos Conferences held in Switzerland and when he gave lectures at various universities in America and Europe. She also took care of his personal affairs and engaged in candid dialogues with him, learning about his thought and approach to life directly. She was the person who was most knowledgeable about his character and philosophy. For this reason, after Daisetsu died in 1966 she served from 1975 to 1981 on the editorial board of the journal *The Eastern Buddhist*, which Daisetsu and his wife, Beatrice, took the lead in founding. In addition, for fourteen years from 1992 she devoted her energies to teaching English at Otani University, where Daisetsu formerly served as professor.

In November 1962, Daisetsu gave a lecture at Otani University entitled “My View of Shin Buddhism.” It was on this occasion that I first met Ms. Okamura. Daisetsu occasionally used English words and phrases during the lecture, and he sometimes looked toward Ms. Okamura, who was sitting in the front row in the audience, and asked, “Now, how do I say this in Japanese?” In those moments, I felt that, transcending the sixty-five-year difference in their age, they were truly “soul mates.”

Ms. Okamura said of Daisetsu that “Sensei was always quiet” and also described him as a person who was “free and spontaneous by nature.” This “quietness” and “freedom” that she spoke about also became the driving concepts of the D. T. Suzuki Museum that was opened in 2011. It was in order to keep these qualities from being forgotten that Ms. Okamura was appointed its Honorary Director by the city of Kanazawa, which established the museum.

Ms. Okamura passed away quietly on June 17, 2023. I would like to express my sincere condolences.

(Translated by Robert F. Rhodes)