

OBITUARIES

Gadjin M. Nagao and His Buddhist Studies

Thank you, Professor Jonathan Silk, for your sufficiently detailed and well-balanced memorial speech on the life and works of Gadjin Masato Nagao (1907–2005), my own teacher. Having listened to such cordial words, I feel an additional memorial speech almost superfluous, but please allow me some further moments to reflect upon my teacher's Buddhist studies and to try to deduce some fundamental principles of Buddhist studies for us and our future generation to continue and develop even further. At this moment, I would also like to express my heartfelt thanks to the organizing committee of the present IABS conference for its kind decision to spare the precious moments of the opening ceremony to this memorial event.

Let me try to enumerate some seven fundamental principles of our Buddhist studies to be learnt from G. M. Nagao's lifelong devotion to our discipline roughly in chronological order and to learn briefly some lessons therefrom.

1) Our Buddhist studies should start with deciphering and editing any available, i.e., unearthed or transmitted, complete or fragmentary, written or quoted, etc. Sanskrit or Prakrit manuscripts: Quite exceptional in those pre-war days of Japanese Buddhist studies, Nagao recognized the fundamental importance of Sanskrit or Prakrit manuscripts for establishing Buddhist texts. He learnt this from Susumu Yamaguchi, who was at that time deciphering and editing the single Nepalese manuscript of Sthiramati's *Madhyantavibhāgaṭīkā* and Yamaguchi, in turn, had learnt this from Sylvain Lévi and Louis de La Valée Poussin. This principle traditionally of Western Buddhist studies is currently attracting more and more attention thanks to various new discoveries of Sanskrit and Prakrit manuscripts, as everybody here knows, but we should remember that this is not the end of our Buddhist studies, but the beginning, as Nagao has proven masterly.

2) Our Buddhist studies should then compare all the textual traditions, not only the Indian originals, but also the Chinese, Tibetan and any other trans-

* This obituary was read in continuation to that of Professor Jonathan Silk (published in *The Eastern Buddhist* 36, nos. 1/2) on the occasion of the conference of IABS held in London, 2005.

lations as well as those embedded in commentaries, even in the case that Sanskrit or Prakrit manuscripts are available, but all the more so in the case that they are not: Nagao made any and every effort to discover a Sanskrit manuscript of the *Mahāyānasamgraha*, when he decided to study this philosophical compendium largely due to its importance in Sino-Japanese Buddhism, but he was obliged to establish its text only on the basis of comparing all the available translations. He came to the conclusion that this kind of text should be translated on the basis of a hypothetical Sanskrit text arrived at through a meticulous comparison of all those translations. We all know what a large number of Buddhist texts, especially Mahāyāna sutras, should be studied with this comparative method. Could I suggest in this connection that this kind of comparative study should be conducted so as to establish the oldest stratum of the text first and then to trace its text-strata development therefrom?

3) Our Buddhist studies should translate those well-established Buddhist texts into one or another modern language with an ever penetrating textual understanding: Throughout his whole life from his graduate student days (when Lévi's text was first published) to his very last day, Nagao devoted his assiduous philological efforts to the translation of the "most beautiful philosophical text," the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*, into modern Japanese. His translation is accompanied by the copious annotations based on his comparative studies of the text in the Sanskrit original as well as in the Tibetan and Chinese translations and on his thoroughgoing understanding of the two commentaries by Sthiramati and Asvabhāva. Since he had been working on this annotated Japanese translation until his last day at the age of ninety-seven, this almost completed work is now left posthumous. How infinitely deeply demanding is a translation into a modern language!—we should realize.

4) Our Buddhist studies should interpret such well-understood textual evidence in the light of any relevant archeological, art-historical and anthropological evidence: In 1939 and 1943 under critical wartime conditions, Nagao undertook his personal anthropological expeditions to investigate Lamaist "Buddhist university" temples in Inner Mongolia where the Indian "Buddhist university" tradition was still living and might by any chance be preserving Sanskrit manuscripts. And then in 1958 through 1959 under the quite early post-war difficulties, Nagao organized an archeological and art-historical expedition team to excavate and investigate Buddhist remains on the spot. Later, he said that it is important to try to understand Buddhist texts as living in the actual Indian historical scenes. Could I suggest that especially

Mahāyāna sutras should now be studied in the light of archeological and art-historical remains and *vice versa*?

5) Our Buddhist studies should synthesize all the textual, archeological, art-historical and anthropological evidence into a coherent historical process of Early and Mahāyāna Buddhism: In 1984, at the age of seventy-seven, Nagao finally decided to write a history of Indian Buddhism under the title: *In Quest of the Origin of Buddhism*. Even in this final synthetic work, Nagao asks a fundamental question toward the end of the book, “How could Early Buddhist sūtras be Buddha’s words?” In Indian as well as Sino-Japanese Buddhism for a human Buddhist to speak Buddha’s words or to listen to Buddha’s words seems to have been a fundamental religious experience to be understood rightly by us moderns.

6) Our Buddhist studies should identify the fundamental Buddhist truth with its fundamental structure as creatively at work in the historical process of Early and Mahāyāna Buddhism: In his presidential address to the Sixth Conference of IABS in 1983 Nagao delivered a lecture under the title, “Ascent and Descent: Two-Directional Activity in Buddhist Thought.” “Ascent and descent” is, indeed, the kernel or the essence of Buddhist philosophy all through Indian Mahāyāna to Japanese Pure Land Buddhism, as understood by Nagao. Nagao understood by “ascent and descent” the fundamental Buddhist truth with its two-directional activity, *pratītyasamutpāda* and *śūnyatā* ascending from the former to the latter and descending from the latter to the former. I would suggest that *pratītyasamutpāda* means our bodily existence conditioned by hereditary and socio-historical conditions, while *śūnyatā* refers to our living life-as-such in communication with Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and other sentient beings (cf. *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 24.18). Thus the fundamental Buddhist truth with its two-directional activity is nothing but our bodily existence here-and-now living, not our individual life, but our life-as-such in communication with Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and other sentient beings. Isn’t this the fundamental truth of our own living life-as-such here-and-now?

7) Our Buddhist studies should realize the fundamental Buddhist truth of our own living life-as-such with its two-directional activity more and more completely within our bodily existence so as to convert the latter from the old nihilistic existence to the new ecological one: As everybody here knows, Nagao was through and through a Buddhist scholar and devoted his whole life to our discipline, but in 2001 when he lost his “most important part,” his dearest wife, Toshiko, all of a sudden, while he was absorbed in his own study

as usual, he seems to have been converted from a Buddhist scholar to a true Buddhist of Nembutsu or *buddhānusmṛti*. The fundamental Buddhist truth with its two-directional activity which he had been endeavoring to understand deeper and deeper, seems finally to have converted his bodily existence into a true Buddhist reciting Nembutsu infinitely. I believe that such a religious conversion, once having taken place, is also historical, infinitely at work to convert a nihilistic history to an ecological one.

Among the seven fundamental principles of Buddhist studies I have tried to deduce from Nagao's lifelong Buddhist studies, the first five may be characterized as philological and the last two as philosophical. Nagao used to emphasize that Buddhist philology should be guided by Buddhist philosophy and the latter should be evidenced by the former. I do hope that our IABS conference starting here in London now, will prove to be developing these philological and philosophical fundamental principles of Buddhist studies even further so that our Buddhist studies may prove to play an active role in converting our contemporary history from the nihilistic devastation of desire to the ecological harmony of life.

Lastly, once again I reiterate my thanks to all of you for sharing the lasting remembrance of Nagao with us.

Noritoshi Aramaki

Sakamoto Hiroshi (1913–2005)

It is with great sorrow that we report the passing of Professor Emeritus Sakamoto Hiroshi 坂本弘 of Otani University on September 19, 2005 at the age of ninety-two. Having studied under D.T. Suzuki, Professor Sakamoto made important contributions to the field of philosophy of religion in Japan. He was the successor to D.T. Suzuki in his post as professor in the Philosophy Department at Otani University. He served as one of the editors of *The Eastern Buddhist* from the start of the New Series in 1965 until his retirement in 1985. His contributions to the journal include "A Unique Interpreter of Zen," vol. 2, no. 1, "D.T. Suzuki and Mysticism," vol. 10, no. 1, and "D.T. Suzuki as a Philosopher," along with several book reviews and a translation. His presence will be greatly missed.

Horio Tsutomu (1940–2006)

With deep regret, we inform you of the passing of Professor Horio Tsutomu 堀尾孟 of Otani University on April 24, 2006 at the age of sixty-five. Professor Horio was a leading figure in the field of philosophy of religion in Japan. He served on the Editorial Board of *The Eastern Buddhist* from 1999 until his early retirement due to illness in 2002. His contributions to the journal include “The Zen Practice of Nishitani Keiji,” vol. 25, no. 1. His influence in this field will be unforgettable.

Frederick Franck (1910–2006)

We also relay our grief over the passing of Frederick Franck on June 6, 2006 at the age of ninety-six. Franck, a noted artist, essayist and medical doctor, is best known for his work, *The Zen of Seeing*. His numerous writings include *Ode to the Human Face*, *The Book of Angelus Silesius* and *My Days with Albert Schweitzer*. He was a student of D.T. Suzuki and contributed a variety of articles to *The Eastern Buddhist*. These include “Angelus Silesius 1624-1677: A Bridge between East and West?” vol. 8, no. 2, “Sea Change: An Emerging Image of the Human,” vol. 11, no. 1, “The Myth as Lodestar,” vol. 13, no. 1, along with several other articles and book reviews. His views and comments have been very resourceful in the field of Japanese Buddhism.