

# J. V. NEUSTUPNÝ FAHA

1933–2015

FELLOW · ELECTED 1981



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Emeritus Professor Jiří Vaclav Neustupný, Foundation Professor of Japanese Studies at Monash University, who pioneered Japanese language education and Japanese Studies in Australia, Japan and beyond, passed away in Melbourne on 2 July 2015, leaving behind a rich and enduring intellectual legacy. He will long be remembered for his ground-breaking theoretical innovations in sociolinguistics and interdisciplinary Japanese programs, which integrated language learning with studies of society and culture.

When I landed in the Department of Sociology at La Trobe University as a lecturer in sociology in 1973, Professor Neustupný was already an eminent scholar of international repute and influence. Knowing little about his attainments, I enjoyed frank academic discussions with him, often impertinently, and as our friendship developed, came to fondly call him Neus-san, a practice that made me uncomfortable when addressing him with proper formality.

Born into an academic family in Czechoslovakia in 1933, Neus-san pursued a brilliant career from his young days. He studied Japanese and the history of the Far East in the Faculty of Philosophy at Charles University in Prague, before moving to the University of Tokyo as a research student, a period when he acquired an amazing

level of fluency and eloquence that surpassed many native speakers. In 1964, he obtained a CSc (PhD) from the Oriental Institute of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, where he had worked for seven years.

In 1966 at the age of thirty-two, he was appointed to the position of Foundation Professor of Japanese at Monash University and worked tirelessly for nearly three decades to establish and expand an internationally renowned department of Japanese Studies. Under his leadership, it developed innovative, progressive and interdisciplinary programs that fostered researchers and students with ‘interactive competence’ – communication expertise supported by cultural literacy. For this purpose, he hired not only Japanese-language specialists, but also experts in Japanese history, sociology, labour studies and other disciplines of social inquiry and spearheaded genuinely sociolinguistic, cross-disciplinary and post-structural endeavours. His approach differed fundamentally from conventional language teaching methods that focussed solely on grammar, pronunciation and writing, and ignored thorough studies of society and culture. He trained students to acquire the profound understanding of socio-cultural context at play in situations encountered by users of different native languages. Many of the students he taught and conducted research with later occupied key positions in Japanese Studies departments worldwide and shaped them based on the Monash model.

Neus-san articulated his innovative perspective in his first book, *Post-Structural Approaches to Language: Language Theory in a Japanese Context* (1978) and elaborated it further in many other works published by Japanese publishers, including *Communicating with the Japanese* (1987). Among his many scholarly achievements, his model of ‘contact situations’ in particular has had a powerful, compelling and lasting impact on specialists in the field. The model highlighted situations involving users of more than one language system and entailing the cultural contact of different language norms. The model makes a distinction between external and internal contact situations. External contact situations concern cross-cultural encounters such as Japanese versus English, encompassing variations across national boundaries. Internal contact situations involve diversities in class, age, gender, occupation, education and other socio-economic dimensions. The model is sensitive to both inter-societal and intra-societal diversity. I recall many occasions of

intellectual interaction with him, since I was working on a multidimensional model of social stratification from a sociological perspective around the same time.

Neus-san was a prolific writer of books in Japanese, not only attracting admiration for his academic work but also influencing the broad Japanese readership. In particular, *Gaikokujin to no komyunikēshon* (Communicating with Foreigners) made him prominent among the Japanese reading public. It was published in 1982 by Iwanami Shoten, a highly reputable publishing house in Japan, as a title in the popular and respected Iwanami paperback series. The book was reprinted numerous times and sold hundreds of thousands of copies, capturing the imaginations of a wide range of Japanese readers – language experts as well as the general audience – interested in transnational communication. Neus-san also published *Atarashii Nihongo Kyōiku no tame ni* (Towards a New New Japanese Language Education) (Taishūkan, 1995) in Japanese, a book that further impacted on the field of Japanese teaching for foreigners. He was thus involved in the public debate over intercultural contact in the Japanese language at the time when Japanese intellectuals and practitioners began to encounter the waves of internationalisation and globalisation.

By good fortune, a set of circumstances brought me to work closely with Neus-san towards the final quarter of the last century to address some issues and controversies in Japanese Studies. He was visionary in promoting cross-institutional interactions in the field. Sometime at the end of the 1970s, we attended a meeting in Sydney together, and on the return flight to Melbourne, enjoyed a couple of glasses of fine whisky and engaged in lively conversation about ways to study Japanese society. Based on this dialogue, the idea of an inter-disciplinary and inter-university institute for Japanese Studies was born. We were both in high spirits in the belief that this would provide a unique setting for the cross-fertilisation of ideas and activities among researchers. After we had a series of meetings, he took the lead in establishing what is now called the Japanese Studies Centre. Thanks to his resolute and successful efforts to garner both administrative and financial support, its building was completed and opened in 1981 at Monash University's Clayton Campus. For the past thirty-six years, this Centre has been the most important site for Japanese Studies academics across tertiary institutions in Victoria. In 2006, marking the fortieth anniversary of the Japanese Studies program at Monash University, the Centre's auditorium was formally named the J. V. Neustupný Auditorium in his honour.

Neus-san was an active member of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. Elected as a Fellow in 1981, he served as a member of its Council from 1987–89 and as Vice-President from 1988–89. At another level, Neus-san was instrumental in introducing Japanese as a subject across primary and secondary schools in Victoria, while

nurturing many students at Monash who later became teachers in schools of the Japanese language.

Neus-san's scholarship bore the marks of a continental European intellectual tradition, an orientation that emphasised high levels of abstraction and generalisation. Building and expanding on his earlier models, he advanced the Language Management Framework together with Björn H. Jernudd at Monash University, an all-embracing and grand theory that involved speech corrections and repetitions, careful pronunciation, foreigner talk and many other forms of 'language behaviour'. His meta-theoretical approach exerted significant influence over the more empirically inclined analysts in Japanese Studies at the time. Closer to my home ground, I remember him as the first scholar to articulate the notion of paradigms of Japanese Studies and promote the importance of typologies. He played a major role in the symposium for alternative models for understanding Japanese society in 1980, which I organised with Ross Mouer, then at Griffith University, at the inaugural conference of the Japanese Studies Association of Australia. Articulating that our collective endeavour at the symposium was an attempt at a paradigm shift, he presented a three-stage model of Japanese literacy and passionately maintained that we were on the verge of developing a contemporary paradigm that featured variation, conflict, processes, interdependence and determinants as the key dimensions governing the study of Japan. This was a crucial contribution which contextualised our work. It was at about this time that I coined another nickname for him, calling him 'Mr Paradigm', both jokingly and respectfully, and I am sure that he liked this reference to his thesis. He also played an active role in the landmark conference in 1982 at Noosa Heads, Queensland, which literally facilitated the abovementioned 'paradigm shift'.

Neus-san was an intellectual with an uncompromising moral backbone, an attribute he revealed when we encountered the so-called Hidaka affair that proved to be a significant incident in the history of Japanese Studies. In 1981, Neus-san and I invited Professor Hidaka Rokurō, an eminent progressive sociologist who used to teach at the University of Tokyo, to Monash and La Trobe universities as visiting professor. To our great surprise, the Australian government rejected his visa application on the unfounded grounds that he had been associated with the Japanese Red Army. Realising the gravity of the allegation, Neus-san visited me at the beach house on the Mornington Peninsula, which our family rented for summer holidays. I recall the tone of his voice at the time, which indicated how serious he deemed this matter to be. He took the initiative to contest the Australian Department of Immigration's misunderstanding by phoning and writing to the politicians and bureaucrats involved in the case. As a Czech migrant, he was highly

sensitive to government intervention into civil liberties and academic autonomy and was defiant of state-manipulated misinformation and disinformation. The lengthy struggle involved a sustained Australian media campaign against the false allegation as well as the submission of a petition to the Australian government signed by dozens of eminent intellectuals in Japan, including Maruyama Masao and Katō Shūichi. In 1983, the government finally admitted its error and issued a visa to Professor Hidaka, who arrived soon thereafter and delivered a well-attended public lecture. Involved heavily in the saga myself, I cannot forget Neus-san's contented happy face on that occasion. This was a rare moment when cross-border civil protest won the day over international state control.

In 1993, Neus-san was invited to a full professorship at Osaka University (1993–97), becoming the first foreign scholar to be appointed at this level in a national university in postwar Japan. Until his return to Melbourne in 2004, he continued to hold professorial appointments at Chiba University (1997–99) and Ōbirin University (1994–2004), while being actively involved in Japanese professional associations throughout his stay in Japan, including the Society for Teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language where he assumed its Vice-Presidency (1999–2003). In 2001, he was awarded a Commendation by the Japanese Minister of Education and Science for his contribution to international exchange. In 2013, in

recognition of his long-term and wide-ranging academic achievements, the Order of the Rising Sun (Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon) medal was conferred on him by Emperor Akihito.

Whilst Neus-san was dignified, solemn and formal in appearance, he had a wit and sense of humour that showed a lighter approach to life. He was a master at delivering complicated jokes that were so sophisticated that I would sometimes be left wondering what they meant, only to experience an epiphany later that would leave me roaring with laughter.

Neus-san was a towering scholar in a number of fields, breaking new theoretical ground ahead of his time, building enduring networks and institutions and fostering numerous researchers and teachers based on his vision. Though our paths diverged in the 1990s, and we went on to pursue new and different projects, I observed his plethora of scholarly achievements from a distance and have no doubt that his multifaceted intellectual heritage will live on for many years to come.

#### YOSHIO SUGIMOTO FAHA

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