



Vale Emeritus Professor Jiří V. Neustupný

Robyn Spence-Brown

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OBITUARY

Vale Emeritus Professor Jiří V. Neustupný

Emeritus Professor Jiří V. Neustupný, founding Professor of Japanese Studies at Monash University, influential linguist and pioneer in Japanese language education, passed away in Melbourne on Thursday, 2 July 2015, after a long illness.

Professor Neustupný studied Japanese and History of the Far East at Charles University, Prague, Czechoslovakia. After a period as a research student at the University of Tokyo, he obtained a CSc (PhD) from the Oriental Institute of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, where he worked for seven years.

In 1966 he was appointed as the Foundation Professor and Chairman of the Department of Japanese at Monash University, a position which he held for 26 years, developing an innovative and internationally respected program in Japanese Studies. As a sociolinguist, his philosophy for both teaching and research stressed the integration of the study of language with the study of culture and society. He recruited a multi-disciplinary team of young scholars, building a language/area studies department very different to the traditional model for foreign language and literature programs at the time. He established an Honours program which included a period of study in Japan from the earliest years, stressing immersion approaches both at home and abroad, and integrating research into undergraduate and postgraduate teaching, producing a generation of young students who participated actively in the developing the Australia–Japan relationship.

Professor Neustupný had many academic interests and published prolifically on a wide range of topics, but he is best known for his Language Management Framework, developed together with Björn Jernudd (with whom he worked at Monash) as well as for his ideas on teaching language for Interactive Competence. He loved to debate ideas with colleagues and students, and was instrumental in launching and progressing many academic careers across a range of disciplines in Japanese Studies. A considerable number of the promising young colleagues and students he nurtured have gone on to become professors of their own programs around the world. While stressing the need for a deep understanding of Japan, taught by specialists in their disciplines, he also took the business of language teaching very seriously, using his extensive links in Japan to recruit well-qualified young teachers as tutors, many of whom continued their postgraduate studies under his guidance and returned home to become leading scholars in Japan, or elsewhere.

Apart from his work within his own department, Professor Neustupný possessed a broad vision which included co-founding, with Professor Yoshio Sugimoto of La Trobe University, the Japanese Studies Centre in 1981, which was set up as an interdisciplinary centre focused on Japan-related research across the universities in Melbourne.



FIGURE 1. Premier John Cain and Professor Neustupný at the opening of the Japanese Studies Centre at Monash University. Photograph courtesy of the Monash University Archives.

He also supported Asian studies more generally and was the Foundation Director of the Institute for Contemporary Asian Studies at Monash, and Fellow of the Australian Academy of Humanities.

Professor Neustupný had an important role as a passionate advocate for Japanese outside of the university – being particularly influential in the establishment of Japanese as a school subject in Victoria. He was an active participant in curriculum committees during a formative period for Japanese teaching, and mentor to many of the teachers who built the discipline from the 1970s until recent years. His focus on sociolinguistic and cultural competence and on the provision of authentic opportunities to interact in Japanese was ahead of its time, and can be seen as the forerunner of many of the directions in which language teaching has moved in recent years.

After his retirement from Monash University, Prof Neustupný embarked on an equally active career in Japan. There he became the first non-Japanese full professor at Osaka University (1993–1997), and held professorial appointments at Chiba University (1997–1999) and Oberlin University (1994–2004) where he taught hundreds of undergraduate and postgraduate students. He continued to be actively involved in professional associations and centres in Japan and elsewhere, including The Society for Teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language, The Japanese Association for Language Policy, and The Japanese Association of Sociolinguistic Sciences. He and his wife Reiko returned to Australia in 2004, to join his children and grandchildren in Melbourne. Tragically, he suffered a severe stroke while visiting Europe in 2005, but bore the limitations of his condition stoically. In 2013, he was awarded the Order of the Rising Sun.

Professor Neustupný was a seminal figure in Japanese studies in Australia, and more broadly. His academic output was prodigious, but in addition he was a visionary and an activist, influencing the shape of several important institutions,

and building a continuing human legacy in the form of the substantial network of scholars and teachers whom he inspired to make their own contributions to the development of Japanese Studies in Australia, Japan and in many far flung corners of the world.

ROBYN SPENCE-BROWN

Monash University

robyn.spencebrown@monash.edu