

PHILIP B. YAMPOLSKY

1920–1996

Philip Yampolsky, a leading translator and scholar of Zen Buddhism and former Director of the C. V. Starr East Asian Library of Columbia University, died Sunday, July 28, 1996, in St. Luke's Hospital in New York City. He was 75 and a Manhattan resident.

A scholar of Chinese and Japanese religions and a specialist in Zen studies, he was known for his analytical translations of Zen classics now used as texts in both graduate and undergraduate Asian studies courses in American universities. They include *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (1967) and *The Zen Master Hakuin: Selected Writings* (1971), both published by Columbia University Press.

Dr. Yampolsky's most recent books, *Selected Writings of Nichiren* and *Letters of Nichiren*, translated and explained the works of the thirteenth-century Buddhist thinker and reformer whose ideas inspired religious and political movements still active in Japan. They were published by Columbia University Press in 1990 and 1996, respectively.

He taught at Columbia for 32 years, from 1962 to 1994, most recently as a special lecturer after retiring in 1990 as a full professor of Japanese.

From 1968 to 1981, Dr. Yampolsky was the librarian of Columbia's East Asian Library, now the C. V. Starr East Asian Library, one of the major such collections in the United States with more than 600,000 volumes in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and other languages.

Philip Boas Yampolsky was born in New York City, October 20, 1920, the grandson of the famed anthropologist Franz Boas, who founded Columbia's Department of Anthropology. He attended the Horace Mann School and was graduated from Columbia College in 1942. He enlisted in the Navy that year and learned Japanese when he was trained as a translator in an elite group at the Navy Language School in Boulder, Colorado. He served as a lieutenant, jg, in World War II and fought in the battle of Iwo Jima. Assigned to the Navy's Joint Intelligence Center, he was awarded the Bronze Star "for meritorious service as a translator."

In 1954 he received a Fulbright scholarship to study Buddhism in Kyoto, Japan, where he spent the next eight years. He was an active member of a group of Beat generation scholars and writers studying Zen. With poet Gary Snyder, scholar Burton Watson and Japanese scholars Yoshitaka Iriya and Seizan Yanagida, he helped translate such influential publications as *Zen Dust* and *The Record of Lin-Chi*, which helped popularize Zen outside of Japan.

He returned to the United States in 1962 for further study at Columbia. He joined the staff of the East Asian Library, received his Ph.D. in 1965, became head of the library in 1968 and was named a full professor of Japanese in 1981. He retired in 1990 but continued as a special lecturer until two years ago. At his retirement he received the Buddhist Studies Senior Scholar Award, created in his honor with gifts, primarily from Japan, through the Institute for Medieval Japanese Studies to recognize his lifetime of research and teaching.

Besides his wife, Yuiko, he is survived by three children: Susan Niland of Saddle Brook, N.J., a daughter from a previous marriage, a daughter, Ruri Yampolsky of Seattle, and a son, Robert Yampolsky of New York City. He is also survived by six grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

NED WALSH
Columbia University