

Intercultural Philosophical Wayfaring: An Autobiographical Account in Conversation with a Friend

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The formation of the discipline of intercultural philosophy reveals its “karmic aspects,” in which dynamic encounters of scholars and students lay its future courses and clear unexpected paths. What was it like for a Japanese female Junior Year Abroad Exchange student to be in the American academic environment in the early 1970s, and her subsequent experience at the University of California Santa Barbara? A slice of her early memories, as well as her observations regarding the present and future of Japanese philosophy and intercultural philosophy in Japan and in the global context are presented in this essay, in which, while Raimon Panikkar and Ninian Smart figure largely, Nishida Kitarō is also significantly in the picture. The essay is a “conversation” with an invisible interlocutor.

Key words: Raimon Panikkar; Ninian Smart; Nishida Kitarō; Nishitani Keiji; Abe Masao; Ueda Shizuteru; intercultural philosophy; Japanese philosophy; female thinkers; Zeami

1 My Encounter with Raimon Panikkar

During my sophomore year at International Christian University (ICU) in Tokyo, I applied for the Junior Year Abroad Exchange Program between ICU and the University of California system (the UC). I was interested in going to Berkeley, but the two professors who were in the fields related to my interest (Professor Brown in Japanese history and Professor Robert Bellah in religion and society) were both to be on leave the year I was to be in California. Thereupon, the professor of Indian Thought at ICU, Professor Kasai, suggested that I go to UC Santa Barbara and study with Professor Raimundo (Raimon) Panikkar (1918-2010), who had just moved there from Harvard Divinity School. Prof. Kasai knew Panikkar through his regular visits to Varanasi, India, and thought that I must meet this unique person.

The Foreign Student Office at UCSB placed me in the Department of Religious Studies, because there was no program related to “Indian Philosophy” or “History of Ideas” at UCSB, and the closest program that offered such courses was the Religious Studies Program. During my study abroad year, 1972-73, I eagerly absorbed the American academic rigor. “If this means to *study*, then I love to study,” I said to myself, facing 300-page weekly reading assignments as an undergraduate student, and going through Eliade’s *Yoga*, among other challenging readings. I came to know Professor Stephen (Steven) Hay, who offered courses on Gandhi in the History Department, as well as professors in the Religious Studies Department—Wilbur (Bill) Fridell, the Shinto specialist; Gerald Larson, the Indian Philosophy scholar; Birger Pearson, the specialist of nascent Christianity; Richard Comstock, the specialist of a philosophy of religion; Charles Wendell, an Islamist who was fluent in Arabic; and Walter Capps, the Director of the Institute of Religious Studies. (I came to know Professor Robert Michaelson many years later through Ninian Smart.) Professor Fridell, who had spent many years in Japan, was especially kind to me. It is significant that it was during this Study Abroad year in the U.S. that I was introduced to Daoism and Buddhism. Buddhism was not an academic subject regularly taught at Japanese universities in those days (and probably not even today), except at those universities that train the sons (and daughters) of Buddhist priests who want to continue their family tradition.

Busily settling down into the life of a foreign student, I waited for one quarter to enroll in Panikkar's undergraduate course, "The Indian Tradition: Study of the *Upanishads*" (winter quarter 1973). On the very first day of the class, it was raining hard and stormy outside. There, Panikkar walked in, fashionably clad in a raincoat with an umbrella in his hand and a briefcase-full of books. His impeccably neat appearance struck me as exuding from his concentrated spiritual-intellectual energy. It was by no means easy to follow his lectures, in part because he spoke very fast when his mind got going, but I still somehow understood what he was saying. This amazed Professor Fridell, who himself found it challenging to follow Panikkar at times. Out of my sense of deference, I waited until the winter quarter was almost over to go and see Panikkar. I do not recall how it all began, but my friend from ICU, Mark Blum, who had been at ICU in Tokyo as an American exchange student and had since then returned to UCSB, told me that he was to enroll in Panikkar's graduate seminar with a special permission. I think he might have persuaded me to do the same. In any case, I must have gone to Professor Panikkar's office to ask for his permission, as well as to introduce myself as a student of Minoru Kasai. In spring 1973, Mark and I were bright-eyed participants in Panikkar's graduate seminar, "Cross-Cultural Religious Anthropology: Earth as the Symbol." Of course, being among graduate students, and my English language skills still where they were, it must have been a daunting experience to follow the seminar, but somehow I managed the course work, and even gave a small presentation on the Japanese creation myth of the "eight major islands" by god Izanagi and goddess Izanami. The impact of this seminar on me was profound, although I did not know it at that time.

Panikkar was then developing his notion of "symbol" (as distinguished from "concepts") as that which bridges the subject-object dichotomy both epistemologically and ontologically. Any "thing" as a symbol encompasses its "appearance" (or manifestation), the speaker's description, the speaker's intention, the listener, listener's act of interpretation, the language as the means of expression, and a specific and universal cultural and historical environment. His style of thinking—original, creative, and dynamic—was so stimulating to my young mind, and his existential sincerity in the pursuit of scholarship came as the source of inspiration. In this seminar, I got to know the core members of the Panikkar seminar—Scott Eastham among them.

After the completion of my Junior Year Abroad Program, I returned to ICU in Tokyo, wrote my graduating thesis on "the Symbol Earth" under the guidance of Professor Stuart D. B. Picken (1942-2016)—as Professor Kasai was on leave that year—by adopting Panikkar's philosophy of symbol, got my BA in March 1974, and returned to the Religious Studies Program as a MA student in April. I believe Gerald Larson, then the chair of the department and my Sanskrit teacher, kindly supported my application for the MA Program.

2 My Encounter with Nishida

It was thanks to Panikkar's seminar that my interest in Nishida was ignited. His graduate seminar in the spring quarter of 1975 was on "the symbol for the ultimate, e.g., God, Heaven, Spirit, Light, Time, Nothingness, Being, World, Love." Out of this list I chose "Nothingness" ("mu") and turned to Nishida's notions of "absolute nothingness," "relative nothingness," and "topological being"—ideas that were discussed in his famous essay, "*Bashō*" ("Topos" or "Field," 1926) for my seminar presentation. To do my research for my report, I went to the university library, which houses an excellent Oriental Collection on the fifth floor. There, on one shelf I found neatly ensconced the entire 19 volumes of the *Collected Works of Nishida Kitarō* (*Nishida Kitarō Zenshū*, NKZ). I took out volume 4 that contained the important essay "*Bashō*" (Topos), as well as several other volumes of NKZ that looked helpful. As I began leafing through the pages of Nishida's writings, I was immediately drawn to the lectures he delivered to the members of the "Shinano Philosophy Association," which were compiled in volume 14. In one of the

lectures, Nishida, talking about “time,” was describing how “measured time” by a clock is just “objectified time” and different from actual lived “time,” which each and every person possesses. This caught my attention, for I sensed a French flair in this description, as well as detected a phenomenological approach. I soon found myself nodding to his observation, and utterly fascinated by his thought process. That’s when my love affair with Nishida began. My “being” resonated with Nishida’s bold and original thinking.

A few years ago, I was sorting out my old seminar files (in my attempt to compile a chronology of Panikkar at UCSB), and discovered my seminar presentation of May 13, 1975. By rereading it, I was amazed as to how my initial comprehension of Nishida was not to be trifled with. What I understood then became the foundation of my understanding of Nishida, and what eluded my comprehension remained as my “kōan” for many years to come.¹ The work I began then on Nishida for Panikkar’s seminar became my lifelong engagement. Panikkar probably knew that I was onto something so congenial to my being. Ever since, he solidly stood by me for my interest in Nishida.

I wanted to understand Nishida’s thought more thoroughly, and what else is better than understanding his intellectual life in a context? Therefore, I began my research (involving a lot of traveling) on Nishida’s life and thought. After ten and several years, when I finally finished my manuscript of his intellectual biography, I asked Professor Panikkar if he would write a foreword to it.² He responded to my query with a personal communication to me, dated December 31, 2000, which I would like to share with you:

Dearest Michi,

In these last hours of the setting millennium I finished reading your manuscript. I finished it with tears in my eyes and a feeling I cannot put into words—perhaps because I am personally touched. After all, I have lived longer than Nishida (and met Nishitani, Hisamatsu—you don’t mention Takeuchi Y.) and have lived the war and postwar hysteria. You describe that kind of university life I would have desired [...].

Prompted by my sense of duty, although pleasant duty, I began to glance at your book. You caught my interest and I could not leave it. How well I can understand Nishida the man! And his intellectual, i.e., religious vocation.

I thank you!

Now I will have to write something, at least similar. I thought of you while reading. This biography should be a “*Schicksal*” for you.

Blessings and a joyful New Year,

A loving hug,

Raimundo

3 R. Panikkar as the Dissertation Advisor

When I started out my graduate work, I initially applied only for the Master’s program, for I was not sure of what it meant for me to pursue an academic career, and I was also unsure of what I wanted to do with my life. I took it as it came, day by day. In the midcourse of my MA studies, I found myself getting really interested in scholarly research, and I wanted to continue it. Therefore, I applied for and got accepted into the doctoral program. At first, Panikkar was concerned about the expertise that might be needed for him to guide my dissertation in Japanese philosophy. What convinced him was that I saw Nishida’s philosophy of “person” (*jinkaku*) to have the universal dimension that transcended cultural differences. After due deliberation, he took me on as a doctoral candidate, and since then he closely guided me with his living

knowledge of western philosophy and Christian theology. Ninian Smart, who was by then on the UCSB Religious Studies faculty, unequivocally supported my proposal. To have Ninian on board must have given Panikkar a greater confidence to direct my intercultural philosophical work. Robert Gimello, the specialist of Huayan Buddhism, who had joined the faculty in 1975, was also on my dissertation committee, but upon his accepting the new position at the University of Arizona in 1979, he resigned from my dissertation committee.

4 My Encounter with Ninian Smart

I believe Ninian Smart (1927-2001) joined the Religious Studies Department at UCSB in the fall of 1976, although his teaching appointment did not start till the winter quarter of 1977. Initially it was a “split appointment,” as Ninian still kept his position at the University of Lancaster, where he spent half of the year and another half in Santa Barbara. I still remember the very first day of our encounter—a sunny January day in 1977. A few of us graduate students were waiting for the elevator to get up to the fourth floor of the South Hall (whose outside façade was covered with bougainvillea branches and covered with colorful flowers), where the department office was located. Here walked in a person who obviously was new to campus, but whom we immediately recognized as Professor Smart because his pictures were on the back cover of his textbooks. He had a flower in his lapel, but was extremely casually dressed otherwise, as if he were on vacation. We all got into the same elevator car, and as the door closed, my dear friend, a very well-bred polite Californian named Wade Dazey, asked this gentleman, “Excuse me, Sir, but by any chance are you Professor Smart?” Thereupon this gentleman responded in a deep voice, saying, “Call me Ninian.” We all burst into laughter. Our very happy association began then and there. I had the honor of serving as his “reader” (quasi-teaching assistant) for his very first quarter or two at UCSB. His wife Libushka had to be back in England to take care of family-related matters, so I did more than a TA’s work for him—driving him to places (including to the Hope Ranch Cricket Field every Sunday), and giving him the fiftieth birthday party at his rented apartment in Isla Vista on Embarcadero del Mar. I still remember Walter Capps bringing Ninian a boxful of avocados as a birthday present, which he had picked from the trees in his own backyard in Santa Barbara Street! This birthday present most delighted Ninian.³ I think, in retrospect, he must have really felt welcomed in Southern California, not only by his colleagues, but also by the region’s enchanting nature.

His experience of living in California, which presented to him a totally different cultural environment from that of Britain, found its expression in his Gifford Lectures of 1979-1980, which were published as *Beyond Ideology; Religion and the Future of Western Civilization* (1981),⁴ in which he wrote about the Pacific Ocean as a kind of metaphor:

As we look across the cold North Sea and remember the cruelties of collectivism and wild nationalism. As we scan the Pacific we can remember cruelties too but the sun shines upon new waves of thought and culture. There may be born that Pacific mind which balances dynamism with non-violence, and this may prove to be the starting point for new relations between East and West and North and South (Smart 1981:313).

By “the Pacific mind” Ninian meant “a transcendental humanism as something which overleaps the great ocean” (Smart 1981:14-5). In the capacity of his research assistant, I worked on the bibliography of this book and did some typing of the manuscript as well. Ninian presented me with a copy of this book, when published, with the inscription: “For Michi, in gratitude from Ninian, December 23, 1981” with a note to my name: “who is an incarnation of the ‘Pacific

mind.” I mention this not to brag about anything, but rather to show how personable and endearing Ninian was.

5 Ninian Smart’s Interest in Nishida

Perhaps, Ninian did not share my interest in Nishida initially. It fell on me first to make Nishida’s thought accessible to Ninian (as only a few English translations of Nishida’s works existed then, and many of them were not so reader-friendly). I remember I had translated Nishida’s relatively short essay for Ninian as part of fulfilling his seminar requirements, to which he gave an extremely simple comment: “Paragraphs are too long,” with not so lackluster a grade. I learnt from his comment a great deal, however. Ever since then, I learnt to insert “subheadings” and make shorter paragraphs whenever appropriate. Meanwhile, I believe Ninian gradually came to appreciate Nishida’s thought, as he briefly wrote on Nishida in his *World Philosophies* (1999).⁵ So, I suspect that his interest in Nishida was growing. Had he had more time to read and get to know Nishida’s thought, he would have raised stimulating and interesting questions, but unfortunately that was not to be, as Ninian died in January 2001.

6 Scarcity of Women in Academia in the 70s

As for the presence of female academics in my field, there were no other (female) Japanese colleagues in the United States. Female students and scholars from Japan were extremely rare in those days, especially in Religious Studies and Philosophy. In fact, there was no female professor in the Religious Studies Department, with the exception of Professor Nandini Iyer, who was a part-time lecturer in Sanskrit. There was a Japanese female graduate student, Tomoko Matsuzawa, who came a year or two after me from ICU to study in the Religious Studies Department at UCSB, but her field of specialization was quite different from mine, and we hardly interacted.

But I did strike up a significant friendship with an elderly American lady, Jory, who eventually became more than a mother to me. She loved me and opened her home to me as one of her children. She had moved to Santa Barbara from London, when she learned that Panikkar was living in Santa Barbara. She audited several of Panikkar’s undergraduate courses. I was a TA for his “Upanishadic Tradition of India,” where I got to get to know her. Jory had been studying *advaita* with a guru in south India, and was a published poet and an essayist. In jest she used to say that she was the least WASP-like WASP (white upper-class American Protestants). She was my confidante and the source of deep comfort for years until her passing about a decade ago. Friendship with Jory gave me the unshakable confidence in the possibility of establishing a genuine human relationship, transcending age, nationality, race, social class—when two souls meet eye to eye, all the nonessentials fall away.

Actually, now that I think about it, there was a female instructor in the Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies at UCSB, who was in charge of the Japanese language program, Keiko Mochizuki. I had only brief interactions with her, as someone who could check the quality of my translation works into Japanese, but she kindly gave my name to the search committee of the Western Washington University, when they were looking for someone to fill the position in the Center for East Asian Studies. In 1983, I was invited for an interview and offered the position that I now hold.

7 Panikkar and Smart as Thinkers and Professors

In terms of methodology in the discipline of Religious Studies, I think Panikkar and Smart took positions that might appear to be quite opposite, but deep down, the parameters of their concerns and thoughts remarkably overlapped to a great extent. In fact, I see more similarities than differences between them—both of them being great humanists.

In terms of their philosophical temperament, Panikkar and Smart belonged to very different camps. I found the “tension” between them beneficial. Panikkar’s approach embraced the dimension of intuition as an essential philosophical ingredient, while Smart’s approach stood in the line of the British tradition of “common sense,” emphasizing the rational and the logical. They guided their students with both spiritual-metaphysical wealth (Panikkar) and empirical objective spirit (Smart). I eventually learned to navigate my own course, a sort of *via media*, between the two. As I proceeded in my study of Nishida’s thought—whose worldview of radical interconnectedness of all things and the “topological” workings of consciousness began to shape my own methodology—Nishida became my “maestro,” which Panikkar first recognized, and on which he heartily congratulated me.



(from left to right: David C. Young, Classics, Professor of Greek; Ninian; and Raimundo—my favorite professors at UCSB in June 1982)

8 Panikkar’s Major Contributions to Intercultural Studies

If you ask, what in my view is the most important aspect of Panikkar’s work for intercultural studies, I submit that it is Panikkar’s holistic understanding of reality—his *cosmotheanthropic* (or *theanthropocosmic*) worldview—and his dialogical and diatopical dialogue as the method for deepening mutual intercultural understanding. Panikkar’s urgent concern rested in bringing about a way to a more harmonious and less conflict-laden world sustained by the spirit of reconciliation—which arises out of genuine mutual understanding informed by contemplative wisdom. For Panikkar, engagement in intercultural philosophy had the broader aim of giving us a sense of hope for the future of the world. Philosophizing was for him never for its own sake, as he disliked what “art for art’s sake” stood for.

Panikkar’s theanthropocosmic holistic worldview encompassed matter (or nature, “cosmos”), consciousness (or human, “Anthropos”), and the divine (or divine, love, “theos”) as the constitutive dimensions of human experience. Panikkar’s three doctorates (in chemistry,

philosophy, and theology) may be viewed to buttress each of the three dimensions of the natural-human-divine aspects that render the whole into vital reality. He insisted that by tending to relegate the body to the sideline, traditionally philosophy and religion had not taken matter seriously enough. At the same time, the impoverishment of “*homo interior*” that was taking place as the result of excessive emphasis given merely to “*homo exterior*” was his major concern.⁶ He saw this split to have come about with the separation of the humanistic and natural scientific disciplines that marked modern mentality. He critiqued that we have reduced space to “outer space” alone, forgetting its inner counterpart. “If inner and outer space are intrinsically and constitutively correlated, the harming of the one will wound the other,” he wrote.⁷ Panikkar’s fundamental claim, as I see it, is that *the fragmentation of knowledge goes hand in hand with the fragmentation of being*. It is because *we become what we know*. This is the reason why studies of religious and philosophical traditions other than our own have a vital importance in the globalized world.

What sustained Panikkar’s practical dialogical conviction is related to his onto-epistemological observation. He experienced firsthand how a “conversion” can take place within oneself in the pursuit of scholarly activities. Here is a rare peek into Panikkar’s straightforward observation, which he jotted down on the last page of the copy of Kadowaki Kakichi’s book, *Zen and the Bible* (1977), which Kadowaki presented to Panikkar personally. Kadowaki (1926-2017) was a Japanese Jesuit, who, like his predecessor Hugo Enomiya-Lassalle, embraced Zen meditation as a Catholic. Panikkar noted his reflection upon finishing reading this book:

An excellent book. It confirms my thesis: the ultimate insights of religions are historically—and thus culturally—different. Transcending those boundaries they coalesce. To study one religious tradition in depth converts us into that tradition. We can then interpret it both ways—“Zen Christianity” or “Christian Zen.” This is the new phase of the encounter of religions. Kadowaki looks at Zen and finds Christ. I looked at the *BS [Brahma Sūtra]* I.1.2 and found Christ. But also Kadowaki looks at Christ and finds the Zen insight. I look at Christ and find *advaita*.⁸

In sharp contrast to the Huntingtonian paradigm of “clash of civilizations,” Panikkar offers a paradigm of “*reconciliation of civilizations*” that is sustained by each and every dweller on this earth in their enriched inner awareness.⁹ Here, learning (education) and contemplation-action become truly powerful in addressing the issues that embroil this planet. Panikkar was convinced that humanity can overcome the paradigm of confrontation and heal the fragmentation of our worldview and our being in at least two ways. The first is to learn from the rich wisdom of our traditions accumulated for over the last 6,000 years. The study of religious-philosophical traditions must be guided by “wisdom,” for “wisdom is the art that transforms destructive tensions into creative polarities” (Panikkar 1995: 102). The other path of healing is to engage other (than one’s own) traditions into dialogue in addressing concrete actual conflicts (among the peoples, religions, ideologies, etc.). Panikkar’s thought stood for the conviction that in this day and age, “no culture and no religion can solve the human problem all by itself; a cross-cultural approach to the world’s problems is imperative” (Panikkar 1989: xix, xxi).¹⁰

Panikkar’s philosophy of pluralism and dialogue as a concrete method were aimed at reaching intercultural understanding and reconciliation, which would lead to the resolution of conflicts. Simply put, Panikkar wished to see the world free of wars and sufferings, such as starvation and epidemics. To criticize his stance as “utopian” is for us to miss out on the chance for peace. I believe that for Panikkar to philosophize interculturally (diatopically—*dia-topoi*, “through places”) and dialogically (*dia-logos*, “through logos”) was synonymous with the very survival of being.

9 My Association with the Members of the Kyoto School Philosophers

As for my work on Nishida, when I began my graduate work in 1974, there was hardly any interest in Nishida or in the Kyoto School philosophers in North America. I believe there had been only one or two dissertations written on Nishida—one by Robert Wargo, *The Logic of Bashō and the Concept of Nothingness in the Philosophy of Nishida Kitarō* (U. Michigan, 1972), and the other possibly by David Dilworth. Nishida's name was still virtually unknown. It was Panikkar who actually led me to Nishida's thought. He had met Nishitani Keiji and other members of the Kyoto School, from whom he no doubt learned about their great teacher Nishida, and he wished to know more about his thought.

In Japan, by the middle of 1970s, the interest in Nishida's philosophy was starting to show the sign of recovery by shaking off the postwar ashes that were piled upon it during an extremely ideologized period of Japanese intellectual life. In the wake of the defeat of Japan in the Pacific War in August 1945, self-fashioned anti-establishment "leftist" thinkers denounced the prewar intellectuals more or less in a wholesale fashion, by accusing them of having lacked any intellectual foresight and fortitude to stand against the war of expansionism and invasion. (Since I have addressed this issue in detail elsewhere, I shall not go into it for now.)

My first direct contact with the Kyoto School philosophers came in the summer of 1977, when I visited Japan during my summer break. At that time, I attended the Japanese Buddhist-Christian Dialogue Group annual meeting, held in Takarazuka, a city near Kyoto, thanks to the kind facilitation of Professor Abe Masao. At that meeting, I came to befriend Mihoko Okamura, who worked for the great D. T. Suzuki until his passing in 1966. I was also introduced to Professor Ueda Shizuteru, whom I visited in his office at the University of Kyoto. That summer, I also got to meet Professor Nishitani Keiji for the first time. I wrote about this memorable visit in my published essay, so I quote a passage from it here below:

I was a graduate student, a complete stranger, but when I telephoned him, he invited me to come right over. In half an hour, I found myself seated in the small guest room of his house, only two blocks away from the large red *torii* of the Yoshida Shrine. I wrote in my diary [July 29, 1977]: "I have heard he is seventy-seven years old this year, but the voice on the phone did not sound that old." My visit lasted about two hours, during which we talked about the general subject of the East-West encounter [i.e., intercultural philosophy].¹¹

I also called on Professor Abe at his home in Kyoto; he was then translating some fascicles of Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* into English with the assistance of a young American student. What a memorable summer it turned out to be! It all began with Panikkar's urging me to go and meet Nishitani while I was in Japan.

In 1978, Professor Abe, then teaching in the U.S., visited Professor William LaFleur at UCLA, as he was looking into the possibility of establishing a center for the study of Japanese philosophy in the U.S., with the support of some Japanese grant (unfortunately this plan never materialized), and on that occasion he extended his visit to UCSB to consult Panikkar on this project. At that time, Abe actually attended as an observer my oral qualifying exam for advancing into a doctoral candidacy (passing of which exam earned me the title, "Candidate of Philosophy"), held on 2 November 1978.

I wrote my doctoral dissertation on Nishida and Jacques Maritain on the authenticity of "person." It was titled "*Persona originalis: Jinkaku and personne*, according to the Philosophies of Nishida Kitarō and Jacques Maritain" (1983). Chapter Three of this dissertation eventually grew into the intellectual biography of Nishida, *Zen and Philosophy*. The chapters dealing with Maritain, however, failed to receive an enthusiastic support from a quarter of American Catholic scholars

living in Japan, who were of the opinion that Maritain was “passé” and commented to me that “it is too bad that you wrote your dissertation on Maritain.”

Be that as it may, my translation of Nishida’s final essay, “The Logic of *Topos* and the Religious Worldview” (*Bashoteki ronri to shūkyōteki sekaikan*, 1945), that was included as the appendix in my dissertation saw its way to publication in *The Eastern Buddhist*.¹² The editor of *The Eastern Buddhist*, the journal founded by D. T. Suzuki, was then Nishitani Keiji, who was happy to publish an English translation of his mentor’s last work. Nishitani, who also read parts of my dissertation, recognized something new and original in my interpretation of Nishida. I exchanged with him a few letters, and I called on him at his house in Kyoto a few more times.

I believe it was in 1997 when Professor Ueda Shizuteru gave me an international telephone call out of the blue to ask me to write a biography of Nishida in Japanese. By then, for nearly a decade I had been working on the project of writing about the life and the thought of Nishida. Ueda’s request was a heaven-sent gift to this snail-speed writer. I was able to complete the first draft of Nishida’s biography in Japanese in just about six months. It was published in 1998 by Tōeisha in Kyoto as part of the series, *Nishida Philosophy: Selected Writings* (*Nishida Tetsugaku Senshū*). Following this experience of finishing one manuscript, I became energized and was able to bring to completion my English manuscript in a year. This is the *Zen and Philosophy: An Intellectual Biography of Nishida Kitarō* (University of Hawaii Press, 2002).

My biography of Nishida in Japanese was warmly received, and they tell me that it has become the standard reference book for the staff members of the Nishida Memorial Museum in Kahoku City, who are in charge of arranging displays of their holdings. I also established a warm convivial kinship with the Japanese scholars working in the related fields. If I’m in Japan at all, it has become my cherished duty to take part in the annual observation of “*Sunshin-kei*,” the memorial service offered to Nishida at the Reiun’in temple in the Myōshinji compound, on the first Sunday of every June.

10 My Interest in Female Thinkers

As for my interest in female thinkers, this interest goes back to my graduate student days when I was studying with Panikkar, who used to talk about the phenomenon of spiritual “pairs of male and female” who worked together and mutually enhanced each other’s spiritual life: e.g., Abelard and Eloise, John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, Francis of Assisi and Clara. He also talked about Śiva and Pārvatī, and the primary power of *śakti*. So my eyes were opened to the dimension of female-male synergy in religion a long time ago.

After the completion of my doctoral work, I moved to Bellingham in 1983 to teach at Western Washington University (WWU), which is located only 60 miles south of the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Canada. In the early 80s, we used to enjoy much closer intercollegial ties between WWU and the UBC. It was there at the UBC that I was introduced to *nob* acting, where a master of the Umewaka *nob* school demonstrated and spoke about his art. At that time, I immediately sensed the presence of Zen philosophy in the *nob* theory of acting, especially in the writings of Zeami Motokiyo (1363?-1443?). Thus, I began reading Zeami’s *nob* treatises as well as his *nob* plays (written by him as well as attributed to him). I was especially drawn to the plays that portrayed woman as the protagonist, mainly because of the elegance, beauty, and gentle wistfulness that permeate the mood of these plays. Through this study, I discovered that Zeami was a student of Zen in the Sōtō lineage. I also encountered in a few *nob* texts a mention of the idea that women were spiritually handicapped by “five obstacles” (that is, women could not become Brahma, Indra, Mara, Sage King, and Buddha) and were obliged to live the life of threefold submission (to the father when young, to the husband when married, and to the sons in old age)—the idea of “*goshō sanshō*.” These ideas never came up in the formal studies of Buddhism during my graduate student days at UCSB, and I began my further reading

on the Japanese women of the past, especially in ancient and medieval Japanese literature. Ever since, I have been intermittently working on this project of “Women in Japanese Buddhism”—now over the last three decades.

The philosophical reason that drove me to develop my interest in Zeami’s writings of *noh* treatises and *noh* plays was my wish to understand Nishida’s thought better. I felt that while Nishida’s philosophy presented the aspect of *śūnyatā* (in monochrome), the *noh* dramas represented the aspect of *rūpa* (in full color and shape), and the two aspects call for each other, as the famous line of the *Heart Sutra* has it: “*yad rūpam sā śūnyatā, yā śūnyatā tad rūpa*” (*shiki souk ōe kū, kū souk ōe shiki*). I felt that the investigation into the philosophy of traditional arts would help me better understand Nishida’s thought. When I spoke about this, Prof. Nishitani actually encouraged me to branch out into such areas as I was beginning to do, instead of just staying within the confines of Nishida *tetsugaku* proper. His reasoning was that such an interdisciplinary approach would definitely deepen my understanding of Nishida’s thought. Today I am convinced of its wisdom.

My interest in women’s philosophical writings was a natural progression of my research in women in Buddhism. So, when the request came my way in 2007 to identify female thinkers who may be included in the forthcoming sourcebook of Japanese philosophy, I gladly took up the inquiry, and began reading in earnest writings of more contemporary women thinkers. To make a long story short, among about ten women I brought to the editors’ desk, Hiratsuka Raichō, Yosano Akiko, and Yamakawa Kikue survived their screening and made entry into the *Japanese Philosophy: A Sourcebook* (University of Hawaii Press, 2011). Among the three women, I especially resonated with Hiratsuka Raichō (1886–1971), who practiced Zen in her early twenties and had her awakening authenticated at two different times by two different Zen masters—Shaku Sōkatsu and Nakahara Nantenbō. I became interested in her writings, in which she openly describes in detail her own Zen practice, covering her *zazen*, *sanzen* (a private interview with the master), and *kōan* practice, the process through which she arrived at awakening (*kenshō*), and what spiritual and psychological impact it had on her.¹³ To my knowledge, this is one of the rare straightforward, honest accounts of what it is like to practice Zen, coming from someone who had undergone rigorous practice. Raichō was not only an awakened person to her “original face,” but she was also one of the most influential Japanese feminists, who began her social activism in 1911—the last years of the Meiji—together with her like-minded female friends, with whom she began publishing their monthly magazine, *Seitō* (or *Bluestockings*). It is curious that it was also in 1911 that Nishida’s first book *Zen no kenkyū* (*An Inquiry into the Good*) was published. Thus, two new beginnings took place in 1911—one in Japanese philosophy and the other in the Japanese women’s liberation movement—which somehow came together a century later in my interest.

11 Intercultural Philosophy as a Personal Path

Regarding “intercultural philosophy,” I feel that “intercultural philosophy” is a thing I was destined to pursue. There was not yet a term, “intercultural philosophy,” when I began my studies, and it fell on all of us graduate students who were working under Panikkar (and Smart) to develop this approach one way or the other. I feel my work has been to clear and find a path in “doing” intercultural philosophy. As such, the term “intercultural philosophy” describes a “course” of my life itself. Has it changed my life? Perhaps, yes, as it has taught me to articulate my thought and pursue further readings and thinking. Whatever worthwhile I find in my study ends up constituting part of me, nourishing and enriching my experience, and even giving me the courage to be. Panikkar is right: you become what you know.

12 Japanese Philosophy Today and Tomorrow in a Global Context

No one would object to the statement that “Nishida” ceased to be a strange name over the last two decades or more. This already says something about the state of our field. In the year 2018, we are witnessing dynamic developments taking place in the North American academy, as students of philosophy and other related disciplines are progressively interested in tradition(s) other than their own, and the younger generations of students and scholars are eager to embrace new ideas to such an extent that they now fashion their private lives reflecting what they study, and take pleasure in the intercultural way of life that comes with their intellectual interest. The widening of the horizons of study seems to go hand in hand with their ever expanding and deepening personal quest.

My impression of the current state of “Japanese philosophy” in Japan strikes me to be marked by the tendency to go into detailed studies of a single aspect of a philosopher. This enables the students to go into a highly technical discussion of the philosopher’s thought. The inherent danger in this approach, of course, is that as one gets deeper into the analysis of a tree, one tends to lose sight of a larger picture of the forest or the mountain.

The more globalized the world becomes, there will be an increased need to maintain the tradition, the local root. Panikkar insisted that I study a Japanese thinker, because Japanese heritage was part of my self-identity. I think his insistence was right on the mark. I can only think that when Japanese philosophy students study Japanese traditions, they will not only be able to put other global philosophers in some sort of perspective. Their study will also be enormously rewarding for them personally. They should be encouraged to know that they are positioned to make indispensable contributions by explaining their traditions to the wider world, and thereby creating a more colorful, multidimensional, and enduring global philosophical tapestry.

If I may mention a practical issue: the humanistic discipline is facing a budgetary crisis in Japan today, under the present government’s policy of promoting natural and social sciences alone. Philosophical study being the core of the humanistic discipline, the threat coming from the decisions made by the policy makers is even more keenly felt. I know for a fact that some of the senior colleagues in philosophy and humanities are involved in speaking up for the indispensable importance of funding humanistic disciplines, and meeting with politicians and powerful businessmen, who are in the position to make funding decisions concerning research and education.

Despite the current myopic political policies, I know that the study of Japanese philosophy within Japan will be carried out by those dedicated to it for the time being. But as the interest in Japanese philosophy spreads beyond Japan, it will gain its strength and presence in Japan. How an “external pressure” (*gaiatsu*) can change the minds of Japanese policy makers is a familiar story. Thus, serious engagement in intercultural philosophy, including Japanese philosophy, on a global scale presents itself as a hope for the future of philosophical studies at large in Japan. In this way, intercultural philosophical engagement can materially contribute to the preservation of traditional wisdom and scholarship, and it will also give us the hope for forming a more inclusive global world, in which no one, no culture, no region, no gender, is excluded from the “mainstream” and considered insignificant.

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- ¹ I quote the first paragraph of my seminar presentation, which contains my initial crude understanding of Nishida thus:
- Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945) is the founder of modern Japanese philosophy. His work shows the influence of Kant, Hegel, Fichte, Bergson, William James, Plato and Aristotle, as well as of Zen Buddhism. Adopting a Husserlian approach [*si*] (theory of consciousness), Nishida accounts for the “eastern” intuition of absolute nothingness, which embraces everything and which serves as the *topos* (ground, place) of being. His philosophy has two important achievements: [the notion of] “Absolute Nothingness” and the “Unity of the Opposites” (Absolutely contradictory self-identity).
- ² Raimon Panikkar, “Foreword: A Contemplative Life,” in Michiko Yusa, *Zen and Philosophy: An Intellectual Biography of Nishida Kitarō* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), vii-xii.
- ³ I wrote about this in my essay remembering Ninian. M. Yusa, “Game of Cricket, Roses, Ninian,” *Religion* 31, no. 4, (2001) 385-86.
- ⁴ Ninian Smart. *Beyond Ideology: Religion and the Future of Western Civilization*, Gifford Lectures delivered in the University of Edinburgh, 1979-1980 (San Francisco, Cambridge, Hagerstown, Philadelphia, New York, London, Mexico City, São Paulo, Sydney: Harper & Row, 1981).
- ⁵ Ninian Smart, *World Philosophies* (London: Routledge, 1999), see “Nishida Kitaro and His School,” 341-42.
- ⁶ These expressions, “*homo interior*” and “*homo exterior*,” are taken from Nishida, who in turn adopted it from Augustine. See “*Basbo no jiko-gentei to shite no ishiki sayō*” [The operation of consciousness as the self-determination of “*topos*”] (1930), NKZ 6.112.
- ⁷ For Panikkar’s dire analysis, see Raimon Panikkar, “Appendix,” to his “There is no Outer without Inner Space,” in *Concept of Space Ancient and Modern*, ed. Kapila Vatsyayan (Delhi: India Gandhi National Center for the Arts, Abhinav Publications, 1991), 38.
- ⁸ Dated January 13, 1982. Panikkar was in the habit of jotting down his reactions and reflections on the last page of books he read. This inscription is on page 180 of the copy that was in Panikkar’s possession, now a part of “*Fons Panikkar*” (Panikkar Collection), housed in the library of the University of Girona. My archival research was conducted on September 30, 2016.
- ⁹ Raimon Panikkar, *Cultural Disarmament: The Way to Peace* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 59, 100, also 89 on reconciliation as the fruit of contemplation.
- ¹⁰ Raimon Panikkar, *The Silence of God: The Answer of the Buddha* (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1989); also see Panikkar (1995: 20).
- ¹¹ Michiko Yusa, “The Eternal is the Transient is the Eternal: ‘A Flower Blooms and the Whole World Arises,’” *The Eastern Buddhist* (new series) 25, no. 1 (an issue dedicated to “In Memoriam, Nishitani Keiji 1900-1990”), (Spring 1992), 149.
- ¹² Trans. Michiko Yusa, “The Logic of Topos and the Religious Worldview,” *The Eastern Buddhist* 19, no. 2, (1986): 1-29, 20, no. 1, (1987): 81-119.
- ¹³ The first two volumes of her four-volume autobiography are now available in a wonderful English translation by Teruko Craig, *In the Beginning Woman Was the Sun* (Columbia University Press, 2006).