MODERNOS & CONTEMPORÂNEOS

Revista de Filosofia do IFCH da Universidade Estadual de Campinas, v. 9, n. 21., jan./jun., 2025.

# Musing on the Methodology of Intercultural Philosophy: Drawing upon from Professors Raimon Panikkar and Ninian Smart, and my Study of Nishida Kitarō[1]

# Reflexões sobre a metodologia da filosofia intercultural: Com base nos professores Raimon Panikkar e Ninian Smart e no meu estudo de Nishida Kitarō

Michiko Yusa[2]
michiko.yusa@gmail.com

**Abstract**: The question of methodology in the emerging field of intercultural studies interested my graduate advisors at UCSB, whose formative influences were indispensable for my intellectual development. Raimon Panikkar's complex thought stood on the oneness of epistemology and ontology (you "become" what you "know.") He also directed my attention to the philosophy of Nishida Kitarō. Ninian Smart heralded his own approach to the philosophical study of religion. I touch on such diverse topics (but not limited to) as: The intrinsic unity of epistemology and ontology (Raimon Panikkar, Nishida Kitarō) The indispensable value of "objectivity" (Ninian Smart) The unity of thought, language, and being (Plato, Max Müller, Nishida) My general aim is to reflect on the "methodology" of intercultural philosophy, out of which emerges a suggestion concerning the usefulness of "bilingual texts," the utility of which may be promoted, especially on the graduate level.

**Keywords**: Raimon Panikkar, Ninian Smart, Nishida Kitarō, philosophy of language, methodology as "meta hodos"

**Resumo**: A questão da metodologia no campo emergente dos estudos interculturais interessou meus orientadores de pós-graduação na UCSB, cujas influências formativas foram indispensáveis para meu desenvolvimento intelectual. O pensamento complexo de Raimon Panikkar baseava-se na unidade da epistemologia e da ontologia (você "se torna" o que "sabe"). Ele também direcionou minha atenção para a filosofia de Nishida Kitarō. Ninian Smart anunciou sua própria abordagem para o estudo filosófico da religião. Abordo tópicos tão diversos (mas não limitados a) como: A unidade intrínseca da epistemologia e da ontologia (Raimon Panikkar, Nishida Kitarō) O valor indispensável da "objetividade" (Ninian Smart) A unidade

1 Presentation for the III International Conference, Latin-America Association of Intercultural Philosophy, Associação Latinoamericana de Filosofia Intercultural (ALAFI), August 26, 2024, São Paulo, Brazil.

2 Professor Emerita, Western Washington University.

do pensamento, da linguagem e do ser (Platão, Max Müller, Nishida) Meu objetivo geral é refletir sobre a "metodologia" da filosofia intercultural, da qual emerge uma sugestão sobre a utilidade de "textos bilíngues", cuja utilidade pode ser promovida, especialmente no nível de pós-graduação.

**Palavras-chave**: Raimon Panikkar, Ninian Smart, Nishida Kitarō, filosofia da linguagem, metodologia como "meta hodos"

## Introduction

I am honored to present my keynote talk today (via Zoom). Seizing this opportunity, I look back on the formative influences I received from my professors. I will start out with my graduate student days at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) from the 1970s through 1983 (Part I). I will then talk about the "methodology" or "methodologies" of intercultural philosophy (Part II). I will make some references to Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945), who profoundly shaped my thinking.

## I

## Formative Influences

I attended UCSB, first as an undergraduate student under the Junior Year Abroad Exchange Program between International Christian University (ICU) in Tokyo and the University of California system. I was beginning to become interested in the **study of religions** at ICU, and my professor of Indian thought, **Minoru Kasai**, happened to be a very good friend of Professor **Raimon (Raimundo) Panikkar**, whom he met in Varanasi (Benares). Professor Kasai suggested that I consider Santa Barbara, as Panikkar was moving from Harvard to UC Santa Barbara to take up the faculty position, starting in the winter quarter of 1973. Kasai thought that I ought to meet this very unique and special teacher-thinker.

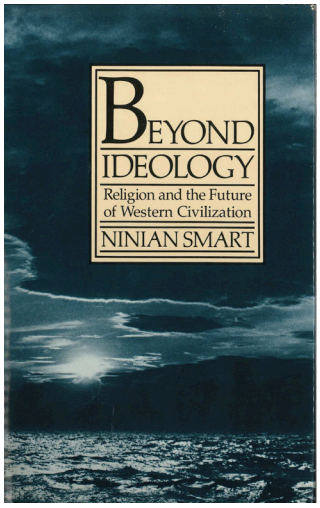
I still remember to this day the very first day when I saw Raimundo Panikkar. It was a stormy January afternoon, when it was raining cats and dogs outside and very windy. His undergraduate offering of that quarter was on "The Upanishads." He walked into the lecture room, undisturbed by the weather, full of energy, and neatly dressed, with a folded umbrella. He started his first day with bibliographical references, and he lifted up important books in English on the *Upanishads* that we should know about. (He brought those books in his briefcase—an impressive dedication to teaching on a stormy day.)

In no time, he kindled my desire to learn, and I eventually chose the path of an academic. In 1974, following my graduation from ICU, I returned to UCSB to begin my graduate studies. A long story short, Panikkar became my graduate advisor, and I ended up completing my doctoral dissertation on Nishida and Jacques Maritain under his guidance, ten years from that stormy day.

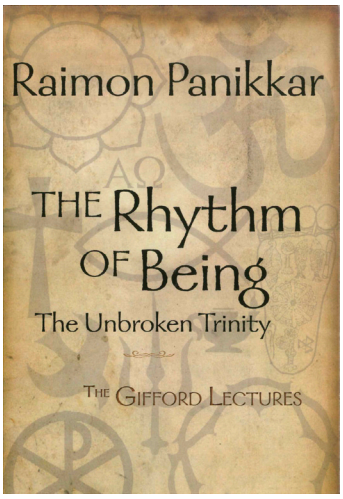
It was around 1977 when Professor **Ninian Smart** joined the faculty of the Religious Studies Department at UCSB. He arranged a "split" appointment between the University of Lancaster, U.K., and UCSB. I was assigned as his "reader" in the first quarters of his arrival on campus. During that time, Ninian turned 50. On May 6, 1977, I threw a birthday party for him at his rented apartment in Isla Vista and invited professors and graduate students to his place. In an inverted proportion to the humble bareness of his apartment, the joy of the occasion abounded beyond limit.

Those were the days when we basked in the blessings of natural beauty of Santa Barbara and California (wildflowers, the sun, the beach, the ocean, the sand, the mist, the avocados, the artichokes, the Chardonnay, the Pinot Noir), and the warm convivial company. Ninian's arrival removed all the barriers of formality that existed between professors and students, and we freely mingled to celebrate many occasions that merited get-togethers.

How could I have known what an unusual and special fortune it was to study closely with these unique professors? Just to show you how Panikkar and Smart were regarded in their profession, let me mention that Ninian Smart delivered his **Gifford Lectures** during the academic year 1979-1980, and Raimon Panikkar in 1988-1989—both at the University of Edinburgh. I actually assisted compiling the bibliography for Ninian when the time came for the publication of his Gifford Lectures, *Beyond Ideology: Religion and the Future of Western Civilization* (1981).




Raimon invited me to attend his Gifford Lectures (April 25- May 12, 1989), but alas! By then, I had moved on to my university teaching job, and I could not get away from my duties. Raimon's lectures were on "The Trinity and Theism: The Dwelling of the Divine in the Contemporary World," the expanded version of which was published fifteen years later as his last book, *The Rhythm of Being* (2010). He died two months later (on August 26, 2010, and so it happens that today, August 26, 2024—when I am finishing the first draft of this talk—is his anniversary of death).



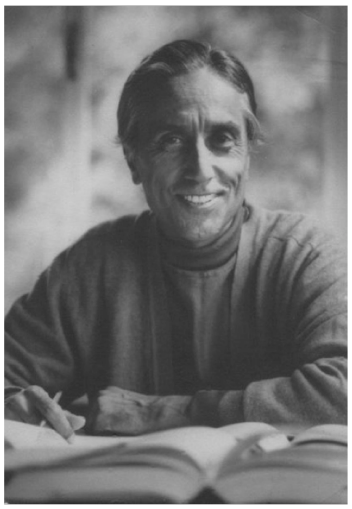

**Raimon Panikkar (1918-2010)**

Panikkar's father was a Hindu Indian of the Brahmin caste (from Kerala), his mother a Spanish Catholic and a professional pianist. The two met, fell in love, married, and Raimundo was born on November 2, 1918, in Barcelona, as the

oldest of the four children. He used to "lament" that he spoke many languages (e.g., Spanish, Catalan, English, Italian, German, and French), but with a (Spanish) "accent." Actually, he grew up, knowing English as his father's tongue. He earned three doctoral degrees—in Philosophy, 1946; in Chemistry, 1958; and in Theology, 1961. He became a priest in the Roman Catholic Church in 1946 (9/29) and celebrated his 50th anniversary of sacerdotal ordination in 1996 (9/29) at Montserrat Monastery outside Barcelona, to which I received an invitation but could not make it.

From 1940 through 1966, Panikkar was a member of the Opus Dei—he joined the lay Order in 1940 in the wake of the Spanish Civil War, and he ultimate left it in 1966 on around June 25. Panikkar's free spirit did not seem to go down very well with the leadership of the Opus Dei.

From these brief biographical sketches, you may gather that he was a highly complex man. Intellectually yes, but spiritually, he strove to acquire clarity, simplicity, and candor. In this unique combination of "contradicting" forces, we find Raimon Panikkar.



**<Raimundo Panikkar in his study at his home in Santa Barbara, ca. 1974; photo taken by Scott Eastham, my seminar-mate>**

Among many grounding ideas I received from Professor Panikkar, I distill some memorable points.

- The intrinsic unity of ontology and epistemology: You become what you know. He used to say (half in jest): "Be careful what you choose your dissertation topic, because you will become it!"
- The inner dynamic of this unity of ontology and epistemology is that "you will end up *loving* what you study, and therefore you will become what you love and what you know." In other words, you cannot study something you do not really love. This is the intrinsic unity of the mind and the heart.
- The term "comparative study" can be a misnomer, as one cannot "compare" two cultures in intercultural philosophy. One is already a part of the "comparative" approach. Panikkar used to say that we are able

to know something new, only ***based on what we already know***. In other words, all knowledge is inherently "comparative" (i.e., it is built on what we already know).

• In the "comparative study," a disinterested third neutral position (like a judge) is not possible. Panikkar often referred to Heisenberg, whose experiment revealed that the observer's energy altered what is being "observed." The observer and the observed are inseparably connected. For Panikkar this was also true in the intercultural humanistic studies.

• Panikkar was developing an approach that would directly lead us into the heart of "comparative studies," and to "intercultural philosophical studies." It consisted in engaging in "dialogue" (deep mutually respectful conversation) with the other, and to "listen" to the "other," with an open heart. In such an attitude of the mind and the heart, we can quiet down the unnecessary noise inside us, and we begin to hear something meaningful we did not hear before. The effect of such dialogue is "*intra*" and not simply "*inter*," as it involves a profound self- transformation that takes place deep within us.

• In the end, knowing the other will enrich the knowledge of who "I am." This led Panikkar to insist that we must study not just one tradition but at least two, which can set in motion the "mutually enriching" hermeneutical circle. (Cf. Max Müller: Only by understanding the other religion, do we understand our own religion—it was the fundamental principle on which the discipline of "comparative study of religion" stood.)

• These insights constituted Panikkar's "**dialogical diatopical hermeneutical approach**," which I believe are readily applicable to intercultural philosophical studies.

• It was Panikkar who introduced me to Nishida's philosophy. He personally knew Nishitani Keiji, Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, and Takeuchi Yoshinori from international conferences. These thinkers fondly talked about their former professor, Nishida, with such respect. Panikkar thus wanted me to study Nishida's thought, which, I sensed right away, was going to have a profound impact on shaping my intellectual life.

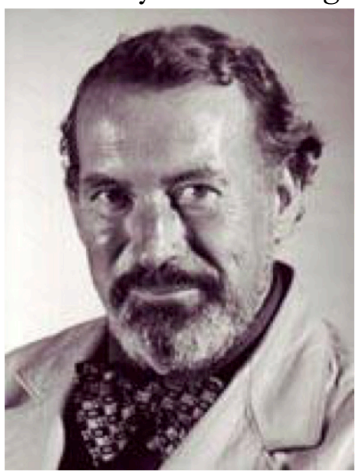
**<May 8, 2008. Panikkar's last public appearance at the Basilica dei Frari, Venice, Italy. Titian's *Assumption of the Virgin* is in the background; photo by M. Yusa>**

I cannot close this section on Raimon Panikkar without quoting his favorite poem "Caminante [Wayfarer]" by Antonio Machado, which for him epitomized his philosophical path:

*Caminante, son tus huellas*
*el camino, y nada más;*
*caminante, no hay camino,*
*se hace camino al andar.*[3]

**Ninian Smart (1927-2001)**

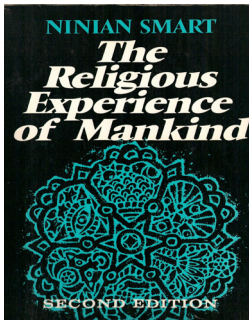
Ninian's parents were both Scottish. Father was a distinguished professor of astronomy at Cambridge University. Mother (née Carswell) was a classy lady, who always "wore high heels even at home," as Ninian recalled. She was literary minded, conversational, witty, and artistic. They had three sons, the eldest became a professor of philosophy at universities in Australia (J. J. C. Smart, 1920-2012), the second son was a professor of art history at the University of Nottingham (Alastair, 1922 - 1992), and Ninian was the youngest, who singlehandedly established the field of secular study of religion, *independent of theology*, at Lancaster University in 1967. "Ninian" is the name of a Scottish saint.



**<photo: Ninian Smart in the early 1970s>**

He told me in private that it was his aspiration to become "pious" in the true sense of the word. Hidden from the gaze of the world that associated him with his analytic approach in Religious Studies, his heart was always connected to "faith" and to the universal virtue of "love," which anchored him and nourished his work.

Ninian Smart is today best remembered for his "seven dimensions of religion"— (1) Practice-ritual; (2) Experiential-emotional; (3) Narrative-mythic; (4) Doctrinal-philosophical; (5) Ethical-legal; (6) Social-institutional; and (7) Material-artistic. (See *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, and elsewhere.)




**<Image: The popular textbook widely used in Religious Studies worldwide in the 1970s and '80s. it was first published in 1969, and the revised edition in 1976.>**

3 "Wayfarer, your footsteps are the way, and nothing more; Wayfarer, there is no way, You make the way while you go." (quoted and translated by Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being*, p. 12)

Put it in this cut and dried way, it is a bit daunting, so I will illustrate these dimensions with concrete examples. Ninian always remembered birthdays of his family and friends. Birthday parties were for him essential "rituals," which were full of "joy" ("emotional elements"), and such parties were the occasions for telling stories, anecdotes, and hilarious jokes. A philosophical element was present in such parties, as the deep conviction that "affirmed life." (Ninian and his wife Libushka lost their youngest son Roderick to illness—when the boy was about 5 or 6 years old, and this excruciating experience never left them.) Ninian was also mindful of the significance of his wedding anniversary, as marriage for him had the fundamental ethical and legal implications, standing for the social and institutional (e.g., family) values. At these celebratory occasions, Ninian would typically compose poems (artistic dimension), which he wrote down on a beautiful birthday (or anniversary) card—the material dimension.

I don't think Ninian would have objected, if I were so bold as to suggest that these seven dimensions were not "writ on the stone," as it were—absolute and definitive categories, but rather a way to make sense of the multifaceted "religious phenomena" in the academic study of religion. Ninian was rarely trapped by his own theories, and he remained flexible and inquisitive in his intellectual inquiry. Theories are there to aid and facilitate our conceptual formulation (like a raft to get to a place), and he seems to have known deep down that theories do not reach the "moon," as "the finger pointing to the moon" would never reach it.

What I learned from Ninian are simple and practical "wisdom" of life (both in academia and in "real life"):

- Make long paragraphs short; if the original text has long big paragraphs, it is permissible to break them into smaller paragraphs. Use subtitles, as you see fit. (This was Ninian's first suggestion, when I translated Nishida's writing for him. He was extremely annoyed by Nishida's long rambling style!)
- Avoid neologisms and big fancy words. Use "problem," instead of "problematic," for instance. This point has remained in the back of my mind. I may still choose some words that Ninian may find inelegant, but at least, I have become sensitive to this point. He wanted me to **respect and celebrate the integrity of English language** and avoid "obscure practices" that get in the way of a reader from understanding what I want to say. Highly jargonized philosophical writings would inevitably go out of style, sooner, if not later.
- Be fair-minded and objective in evaluating students' exams and papers. Do not bring in your own assumptions to color your judgment. (This has been an important reminder for me, as my Japanese cultural background sometimes sneaks up on me to consider the "extraneous circumstances.")
- Be happy. Even if you cannot help other people's situation, your being happy with yourself is contagious. (Ninian used to say, "Happy parents make happy children.")

• Publish your writings promptly, without too much dallying. He used to say, if you find some mistakes or errors in your book, you can write another book to right those errors (!). I must admit, I continue to struggle with this piece of advice.

**<June 1983, Ninian and Libushka in Santa Barbara, photo by M. Yusa.>**

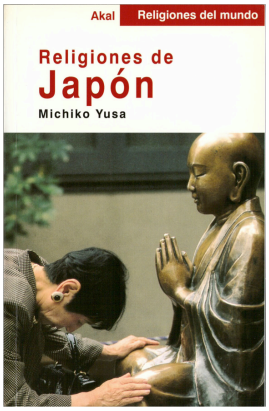
Before I finish this section on Ninian, let me share the words that capture his artistic and creative mind:

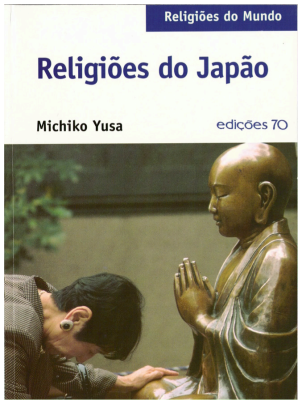
"Brevity is the soul of wit."

*"La brevedad es el alma del ingenio." (Spanish)*

*"A concisão è a alma do saber."* (Portuguese)

These lines were taken from his foreword to *the Religions of the World* series, to which I contributed my *Japanese Religious Traditions*, which has been translated into Spanish and Portuguese upon publication.




**"Harmonious diversity"**

My elderly friends in Santa Barbara were mystified that I studied with Raimon Panikkar and Ninian Smart—two very different types of professors. Once at a luncheon at the beautiful Biltmore Hotel, I was asked this very question. How is it possible? Is it tenable? To my lady-friends, Panikkar and Smart seemed to stand at the opposite ends of the spectrum. They somehow had the impression that Panikkar was more like a "sage" or a "contemplative," whereas Smart a "hard-nosed British analytic philosopher." The reality

was much different from that. I simply replied with the following explanation, which seemed to satisfy my friends. I said: "While Professor Panikkar encourages me to follow my intuition, Professor Smart challenges me to maintain my level-headed critical reasoning."

For me, Raimundo and Ninian shared much in common. Both were "men of the world," who knew and traveled the wide world. They lived through the "war," and were familiar with diverse cultures and religious traditions. Both were "spiritual" in their own ways—which goes to show that spirituality comes in diverse forms—the awareness of immanence and transcendence of the sacred can take different shapes, depending on different cultures and different individuals. Both Raimon and Ninian were intellectual and highly "analytical" in their own ways. Both were "metaphysical," too. Both enjoyed their friends and cultivated wide social network—although it is true that their different personality attracted different kinds of friends, but they also had a group of students and friends, including me, who remained very close to both of them. They shared so much in common in terms of human decency, embodied in their colorful personalities. I adored Raimundo *and* Ninian very much as my dear professors.

**<June 1983, Santa Barbara, from left to right, Raimon Panikkar, Michiko Yusa, Ninian Smart, on the occasion of the celebration of the completion of my doctorate degree.>**

## II
## Musing on the Methodology of Intercultural Philosophy

### The Zen saying: "Kyakka shōko" and Nishida's onto-epistemology

*"Look down and see where you stand"*


Now I turn to my musing on the ways we can best engage in intercultural philosophy. It is about "methodology," or "how we go about thinking interculturally and philosophically." In terms of etymology, the word methodology was formed from "*meta hodos*" μετα ὁδος ("the road by which" we travel). To start out the discussion, I want to introduce the well-known Zen expression, "*kyakka shōko*" 脚下照顧, which means "Look down to see where you stand," as well as the related expression, "*kan jiao xia*" 看脚下 ("*kan kyakka*" in Japanese), meaning "Mind your steps."

This expression traces its origin to the following Chan (Zen) anecdote:

> One day, Master Fayan (J. Hōen) 法演, who was accompanied by his three disciples, Fojian (J. Bukkan) 仏鑑, Foyan (J. Butsugen) 仏眼, and Foguo (J. Bukka) 仏果, was practicing meditation in the nearby mountain.
>
> The sun was setting, and it was time for them to return to the temple. As they descended the mountain slope, it quickly became dark, and they could hardly see the trail. It was a moonless night, and the area was shrouded in darkness.
>
> The master said to his three disciples: "Now, what do you make of this present situation we are in? Put it into words."
>
> Fojian, a poet at heart, said, "It is like a pair of large phoenixes flying above us, adorning the sky."
>
> Next, Foyan said: "It is so dark that we might encounter a snake lying on the trail; I'm scared."
>
> Foguo said: "Mind your steps" (*kan jiao xia* 看脚下), meaning, "let's take careful steps and safely get back to the temple."[4]

"*Kyakka shōko*" in today's everyday Japanese usage simply means, "Take off your shoes before you enter the house."

But I find a methodological hint in this expression regarding how we may proceed in our intercultural philosophical studies, as I sense in this expression the element of critical self-reflection, of paying attention to the standpoint from which to view the world.

Max Müller and Raimon Panikkar, for instance, talked about the comparative method as: "**In order to know yourself, you need to know the other**." Panikkar emphasized that "**the other will deepen your self-knowledge**," and that the "other" as a "thou" is the deep source of one's self-knowledge.

*Nishida's Onto-epistemology of "where I stand"*

Nishida offers yet another layer of interpretation of this expression, when he points out that "**For those who are in the habit of thinking about things only in an objectifying fashion, where they stand is not visible, and whatever is outside their vista, they dismiss it as 'mysticism.'**"[5] Nishida knew all too well that the objectifying direction of the mind is only half of the story, as the workings of the mind proceed both in the external (objectifying) and the internal (subjectifying) directions. He always took these two directions—outward and inward, or the noematic and noetic aspects that Husserl aptly grasped, as the built-in nature of the mind. Moreover, Nishida saw that the noetic is necessarily more comprehensive and always embraces the noematic.

4 The *Wudeng huiyuan*『五燈会元』[ The Five Records of Chan Schools Compiled into one during the Song Period], (1252), in 20 scrolls. This episode is in scroll 19.

5 「対象論理的にのみ考える人には、自己が立っている足許が見えないのである。しかして自己の視野に入り来らざるものは神秘と考えるのである。」(NKZ 8.426) Taken from Nishida, "Praxis and the recognition of the object" (1937)「実践と対象認識」(NKZ 8.395-499).

From around 1934, when Nishida moved on to a larger question of the self and the world, and how the human mind constructs various "worlds," it became clear to him that human beings **are (nothing more than) individual elements within the larger "world,"** and each of us is a "focal point" of the world. We think about what is before us and around us, precisely because we are already present in the world as its **constitutive elements**. In this way, the self and the world stand radically interconnected in "a contradictorily self-identical" way. Nishida used to say: "I am born into the world, I work in it, and I die into it."

In such a world, language plays the essential role as enabling "expression" and "communication," just as the hands are essential in "creating things" (including tools, and instruments), and intersubjective consciousness renders us into beings that know how to "love and respect" life.

(I intentionally kept this section on Nishida brief and succinct, so that I may move on to the next point without getting lost in the mountain on a moonless night.)

**Study of plural traditions**

Panikkar's personal intercultural background inevitably reflected in his academic advising. He insisted that for our dissertation, students should work on "two traditions"—the one familiar to us, and the other something different from our own. In my case, Panikkar insisted that I must ***not*** abandon my Japanese roots. He was equally adamant that I must also take up an intellectual tradition that was different from something I was familiar with. He believed that only in this critical (and sympathetic) "dialogue," could each of us widen our intellectual horizon, which was essential in any intercultural studies. He especially cherished the importance of cultivating sensitivity and subtlety of awareness at the deeper level in our studies. Thus, all of his doctoral students took up at least two discrete traditions in their dissertational work.

As I mentioned earlier, it was under Panikkar's influence that I turned to Nishida Kitarō's philosophy. It was in the spring of 1975, when he asked me to make a brief presentation of Nishida's notion of "nothing" ("*mu*," or "μὴ ὄν") in the Graduate Seminar. As I went through Nishida's texts for the first time in my life, I found an immediate affinity with his thought. Thus, I began my wayfaring on the "long and winding (and sometimes tortuous) road." For my dissertation, after some deliberation, I chose Nishida and Jacques Maritain. It might have been more appropriate, had I chosen Henri Bergson, instead of Maritain, but things are often clearer only in the hindsight.

I must say, Panikkar's insistence that I work on a Japanese thinker was more than fully justified. He was afraid that there were too many young generations of Asian students (remember, Panikkar was half-Indian), who became culturally

"uprooted" in their effort to emulate the "western intellectual style." Thanks to Panikkar, I discovered Nishida under the beautifully penetrating blue sky of California, and I began to develop a deep appreciation of my own heritage, which extended into the heritage of my friends.

**An interdisciplinary interest**

Almost immediately after my dissertation work, I began to get interested in the Japanese aesthetic tradition, initially prompted by the opportunity to attend a noh drama workshop given by the master actor Umewaka Rokurō at the University of British Columbia (UBC). The whole new world of noh literature opened up to me, and Zeami's noh treatise (which was deeply influenced by his Zen practice) captured my interest as something that "added color" to Nishida's otherwise "monochromatic" philosophical discourse.

When I visited Professor **Nishitani Keiji** at his home in Kyoto in 1984 or thereabout, I spoke to him about my emerging interdisciplinary interest. To my delight, the wise professor said, "It is good to study other things outside Nishida's philosophy, because wider interest in other fields will lead you to a much deeper understanding of Nishida's philosophy" (to paraphrase Nishitani's words). Indeed, Nishida's philosophy shows his multidimensional interest in art (poetry and painting), history, physics, ecology, biology, mathematics, and other areas of knowledge, including Christian and Buddhist thoughts.

**Language**

*Language requirements*

In the Religious Studies Program at UCSB, graduate students were required to demonstrate their reading proficiency in French and German, or take two years of college language courses in these two languages. It did not occur to me that I request my Japanese to be considered as one of the two required languages. So, I took two years of German and French, which I thoroughly enjoyed.

So it happened that UCSB offered excellent programs in many other languages, and, moreover, the Department of Religious Studies was physically located right next to the Classics Department. Ninian knew a certain Oxford scholar from back home in the U.K., and that initiated a kind of interdepartmental communication network. Naturally, I came to befriend some of the professors in the Classics Department. I opted to study Latin and Greek as my "general education in Western humanities." (Alas, I never developed a real proficiency in either of these languages, but at least I can enjoy reading the original texts in the Loeb bilingual edition.) In the last years of my graduate days, I worked as a typist for the professors in the Classics Department under the work-study program.

Also, my interest in Indian thought led me to study introductory Sanskrit taught by Prof. Gerry Larson; I also read Classical Chinese with Prof. Weiming Tu,

who was visiting UCSB from UC Berkeley during the summer quarters. After my six-month's break from my graduate study in Europe (in 1975), I continued with my German and French, and I began studying Italian as well, as I realized English did not go very far in Italy in those days.

Studying various languages by no means made me a polyglot, but they kept me busy enough from getting into trouble. In fact, Sanskrit saved my life. In those days, marihuana was readily available, and at rare occasions, even LSD, in Isla Vista (where students lived), and invitations from my friends to "get stoned" came my way a few times. It was only my need for more time to study Sanskrit that I declined such invitations. Thus, Sanskrit literally saved my life. Gerry Larson told us that we should learn the Sanskrit grammar in an "inductive way." Thus, I spent hours making my own charts of nouns and verbs (declensions and conjugation paradigms). Through this work, I discovered that **the linguistic awareness that was within me was actually "universal," and that it did not matter that my mother tongue was Japanese**. I began to gain faith in the **universality of "logos."** Logos is trans-cultural. This discovery came as a liberation, a guiding light, and it uplifted me from the abyss of self-doubt. This has to be understood in the context of the fact that in the early days of pursuing graduate courses *in English*, I was unsure of my aptitude to carry out a graduate work, because much of my energy was devoted to developing my English skills.

**Language and thinking**

Language and thinking are organically connected. Nishida found Max Müller's formulation best captured this point: "The word is the thought incarnate."[6]

I, independent of Nishida, came to believe that there is a deep mystery concerning how we human beings acquire language at all. Moreover, there is no end to the process of language learning, even in one's own native tongue. Language, perception, feelings, and thinking are all deeply interconnected. Plato said that thought and language are one, and that "thought is a silent dialogue with oneself" (*Theaetetus* 189e; *Sophist* 263e), and Plotinus reflected on this point as: "Thinking (*noein*), life (*zēn*), and being (*einai*, "who I am") are all together in what is real/actual (*on*)" or, "τὸ νοεῖν, τὸ ζῆν, τὸ εἶναι ἐν τῶι ὀντι." (*Ennead* V.6.6:21-22)

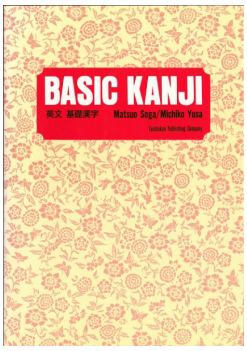
*Language teaching*

I would like to say a few words about language teaching, because some of you may be teaching language as part of your academic obligation. There used to be a rather pejorative view of language teaching uncritically shared among academics who considered it to be "beneath" the philosophical engagements. I must admit that I initially had my own misgivings about teaching Japanese at the university to earn

6 Quoted by Nishida as "*gengo wa shisō no shintai de aru* 言語は思想の身体である." See "Gengo" [Language], in NKZ 13.144.

my living. But soon, I was captivated by the profound mystery of language as well as how students acquire Japanese as a new language, and how their perceptions were changed in and through this process; besides, I discovered that there were highly effective ways of teaching Japanese to the English-speaking students that saved them much precious time.

The following is a kind of brief summary of some of my experience.



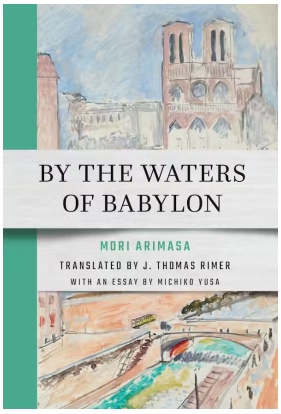

- Chinese characters (known as "*kanji*" or "ideograms") have stories to tell. I adopted the etymological approach, somewhat inspired by Professor Panikkar and his seminar on Heidegger's "On the way to Language." Lo! "kanji" began to tell their stories to me. In this way, I ended up writing my first book, *Basic Kanji* (1989), in which I introduced 423 basic kanji together with their etymology. This book is now out of print, but I understand that one can still find a used copy on the internet.

- Teaching Japanese honed my understanding of fine subtleties of Japanese language, which as an instructor I was obliged to explain in English. This analytical training turned out to be extremely useful, as I often I translate Nishida into English. I give a sample here below to illustrate my point. Here is the Japanese text on the left, and my English translation on the right.

| | |
|---|---|
| ゲーテにおいては内もなく外もなく、 | In Goethe, there is no distinction of inside and outside. |
| 有するものは有るがままにあるのである、 | All things that exist exist *as they are*. |
| 何物もなき所から来り | Everything comes into being from where there is nothing, |
| 何物もなき所に去り行くのである、 | and disappears into where there is nothing. |
| しかもかく無より無に入るところに | Moreover, in this very coming into being from nothing and returning to nothing, |
| 微妙なる人間の響があるのである。 | we find the subtle "sound" (*hibiki*) of humanity. |

(Text: Nishida, "Goethe's Background," 1931, NKZ 12.148)

In this text, the first two "*tokoro*" are written in "kanji" and the last "*tokoro*" in a "hiragana" syllabary. (They are all highlighted). These are the kinds of questions typically asked by my students—"Why?" The "tokoro" in kanji (ideogram) indicates some concrete "place" in space, whereas the "tokoro" in hiragana refers to the idea of "at" or "in," which is used figuratively to indicate the unfolding of a situation, and often an element of surprise is involved therein. (I would not expect that the "AI" is able to make this kind of subtle distinction—at least, not for now.)




- In the context of language teaching, let me turn to **Mori Arimasa** (1911-1976), a Japanese thinker, who was consumed by his existential quest so much so that he eventually quit his prestigious professorial position at the University of Tokyo, in order to settle, to live, and to work in Paris. He gradually obtained the professorial posts of instructor of Japanese literature and language at the Sorbonne and the École Nationale des Languages Orientales Vivantes. His teaching duty led him to discover Motoori Norinaga and Dōgen, for instance. What is noteworthy is that Dōgen's thought unexpectedly shed light on Nishida's philosophy for Mori. In this way, Mori realized that his experience of language teaching enriched his philosophical thinking and made him a unique thinker. (About Mori's fascinating intercultural "experiment" he ran on himself, see my essay, accompanying Professor Thomas Rimer's translation of Mori's *By the Waters of Babylon,* just published in 2025.)

- If your academic appointment involves language teaching, it can be a very good opportunity to hone your philosophical sensitivity and acquire organizational and analytical skills. But I must admit, it is necessary to strive not to lose sight of one's philosophical pursuit, which can be challenging at times. But think of the positive benefit and hang in there.

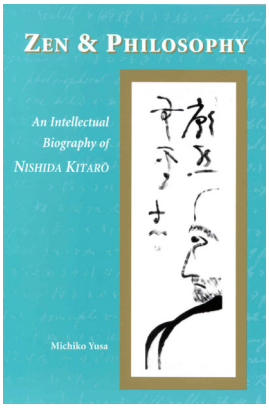
## Conclusion

I would like to end my presentation by posing two questions in the interest of developing teaching materials in the field of intercultural philosophy.

> (1) Are the bilingual texts (as opposed to "monolingual text) helpful in carrying out your intercultural philosophy? (E.g., a text in the original language, accompanied by one of the more widely used languages?) See my sample on "Goethe's Background," above.
>
> (2) Are you familiar with the recent book, *Key Concepts in World Philosophies*, edited by S. Flavel and C. Robbiano (2023)? I contributed a chapter on "I-Thou Relation," in which I talked about the "I-Thou" philosophies, starting with Feuerbach and Martin Buber, and also developed by Nishida and Nishitani in Japan. I believe the editors of this volume wanted to break

> a fresh ground for intercultural philosophy by providing new introductory materials for the undergraduate students to read and ponder.

I would like to add one more observation before I finish, namely, it is good to **play to your strength**. What fashioned my research method was the element of "**field trip**." I began visiting places and people related to Nishida Kitarō, when I launched my project of the intellectual biography of Nishida (which resulted in my book, *Zen and Philosophy: The Intellectual Biography of Nishida Kitarō*, 2002). I found visiting places where Nishida lived or had been to be enormously helpful to come closer to him.




First of all, I got to see the physical environment in which Nishida was carrying out his thinking and other activities, such as his daily walks.

Second, I was able to connect with local scholars, who either knew Nishida personally or who were specialized in Nishida's thought, and I found the conversation with these people enormously helpful. I also visited university libraries, where important documents, often untapped, were kept.

Third, I love traveling to a new place, where I encounter interesting customs, or even a different pronunciation of the name of the person. For instance, the first Christian missionary to reach the shore of Japan was a Jesuit, Francis Xavier. His name is pronounced in the unvoiced fashion as "Sabieru" in the Yamaguchi area, where Christianity once flourished, as opposed to the more standard voiced pronunciation of "Zabieru." I realized from my taxi driver that this simple fact reflected the pride of the local people, who wanted to keep their ancestors' memory of actually having interacted with this remarkable Father Francis alive.

"*Ashi o hakobu*," they say in Japanese— "let your legs do the work." In this process, I developed a dog-like sensitivity, as I began to "smell" where I may find new sources of information. Once I said to Professor **Ueda Shizuteru**: "Sensei, I have become a dog!" To which he responded, "Excellent!"

That's why I regret that I cannot visit São Paulo this time to deliver my talk in person. But I hope that I will get a chance to visit your parts of the world sometime in the near future. I cannot wait to taste pão de queijo again!

**References:**

**Abbreviation:**

NKZ (1978-1980). *Nishida Kitarō Zenshū* 『西田幾多郎全集』 [Collected Works of Nishida Kitarō]. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten).

* *

FLAVEL, S.; ROBBIANO, C. ed. (2023). *Key Concepts in World Philosophies*. (London, New York, Oxford, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic). E-book is available online.

NISHIDA, Kitarō. (1931). "*Gēte no haikei*" 「ゲーテの背景」 [Goethe's background]. NKZ 12.138-149.

NISHIDA, Kitarō. (1937). "*Jissen to taishō ninshiki*" 「実践と対象認識」 [Praxis and the recognition of the objects]. NKZ 8.395-499.

NISHIDA, Kitarō. (1938). "*Gengo*" 「言語」 [Language]. NKZ 13.143-146.

PANIKKAR, Raimon. (2010). *The Rhythm of Being, The Gifford Lectures*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books).

PLOTINUS. (1984). *Ennead V*. Armstrong, A. H., an English trans. (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Harvard University Press). (Loeb Classical Library 144).

PLATO. (1921). *Theaetetus, Sophist*. Fowler, H. N., an English trans. (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Harvard University Press).

SMART, Ninian. (1976) [1969]. *The Religious Experience of Mankind*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), second edition.

SMART, Ninian. (1981). *Beyond Ideology: Religion and the Future of Western Civilization*. (San Francisco, Cambridge, Hagerstown, Philadelphia, New York, London, Mexico City, São Paulo, Sydney: Harper & Row).

*Wudeng huiyuan* 『五燈会元』. (1252). [The Five Records of Chan Schools Compiled into One During the Song Period]. https://tripitaka.cbeta.org/X80n1565_019. Internet accessed August 16, 2024.

YUSA, Michiko. (1989). *Basic Kanji*. With Matsuo Soga. (Tokyo: Taishūkan).

YUSA, Michiko. (2002). *Zen and Philosophy: An Intellectual Biography of Nishida Kitarō*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press).

YUSA, Michiko. (2002). *Japanese Religious Traditions*. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall). Portuguese translation (2002); Spanish translation (2005).

YUSA, Michiko. (2018). "Intercultural Philosophical Wayfaring: An Autobiographical Account in Conversation with a Friend," *The Journal of World Philosophies* 3.1 (2018), 123-134.

YUSA, Michiko. (2023). "I-Thou Relation," in *Key Concepts in World Philosophies*, ed., Flavel & Robbiano, pp. 237-246.

YUSA, Michiko. (2024). "Human Rights as One Third of the Rights," *Modernos & Contemporãneos*, *Revista de Filosofia de IFCH de Universidade Estadual de Campinas*, v. 7, n. 17 (July/Dez, 2023), 3-20.

YUSA, Michiko. (2025). "Mori Arimasa: A Philosopher in the Making," in Mori Arimasa, *By the Waters of Babylon*. Trans. by J. Thomas Rimer. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press), 144-183.

Revista digital: www.ifch.unicamp.br/ojs/index.php/modernoscontemporaneos