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can provide us with truly wonderful hints in addition to giving us support. Professor Nishitani's relaxed personality, too, was probably not unrelated to an understanding of existence that says, "Anything and everything is fine just as it is."

### **The Eternal is the Transient is the Eternal: "A flower blooms and the whole world arises"**

**Yusa Michiko**

To know Professor Nishitani Keiji ought to be one of the nicest things that life has to offer. I'm sure I'm not the only one who felt that way. I was first introduced to his work in graduate school by Professor Raimundo Panikkar, my dissertation advisor, then in the Religious Studies Department at the University of California at Santa Barbara. Later, in the summer of 1977, when I was preparing to visit Japan, Professor Panikkar urged me to go and meet Nishitani.

I do not usually keep a diary, but July 29, 1977 was an exception. I wrote: "Saw Professor Keiji Nishitani for the first time." I was a 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 at the entrance of the Yoshida Shrine. I wrote: "I've heard he is 77 this year, but the voice I heard on the phone certainly didn't sound that old." My visit lasted about two hours, during which we talked about the general subject of the East-West encounter.

I remember him saying how much he admired the philosophical efforts that Christians were making in attempting to face the challenges of modernity and science. The problems Christians have to deal with will become more acute if Christianity remains within the "framework of the Bible." On the other hand, Buddhism, especially Zen, in the sense that it is free from "dogma," does not face the same problems. But Buddhists cannot afford to be complacent. Precisely because Christians are dealing with those challenges, they are in a better position than Buddhists to overcome the problems in a truly meaningful way.

This was the gist of his talk. Even today, I think that this is a nice reflection of Professor Nishitani's basic philosophical posture. He understood the prob-

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lems of the West from the inside, and he was never uncritical of nor naively romantic about the heritage of the East. In fact, I can now see that he was a sharp critic of contemporary Japanese culture. But I also think that his style of writing and the subtlety of his thinking tended to attenuate the sharpness of his criticisms so that they passed relatively unnoticed.

The conversation shifted to the topic of Nishida Philosophy. He urged me to read *Zen no Kenkyū* (A Study of Good) and *Shisaku to Taiken* (Thought and Experience). When I expressed doubts as to whether my interpretation of Nishida was correct or not, he said, "On that point I think everyone is in the same boat" (*sore wa dare de mo onaji deshō*). He never discouraged this novice from attempting to pursue her formidable quarry.

As our conversation further shifted to the topic of language, Professor Nishitani posed the question whether language was just a tool, or something else. His own feeling was that language was more than a mere instrument, but that it demanded at the same time ever more accurate, precise expression. In this connection, he told me that it was more important for me to grasp the philosophical content of a thinker than to be able merely to read writings in a foreign language. I think he was telling me to be concerned with the substance, with ideas, and not with merely honing a linguistic tool. He said that "while one wrestles with a philosophical writing, say, in German, one will begin to come to understand German anyway." He also said, "You must first of all lay an egg, although whether it will hatch and grow into a bird or not is a difficult thing" (*mazu tamago o tsukuru koto desu ne. Sore ga niwatori ni naru ka naranai ka wa muzukashii desu ga. . .*). I now realize that he was urging this novice to develop her own thinking, that is, to be focused, critical and original.

As the conversation drew to an end, he surprised me by saying, "Someday, you'll have to think about marriage" (*kekkon no koto ga arimasu kara ne*). The famous Professor Nishitani, whom I met for the first time, talking about such personal matters? "Don't rush into a wrong decision," he said. "When you make a decision, take a week when you could make it in only a day, take six months when you could make it in only a month, because we human beings are prone to make mistakes" (*ningen wa machigai o suru yō ni dekite imasu kara ne*). When I look back on these words, I cannot help but feel his concern for the human, so freely expressed alongside purely philosophical concerns. And he expressed them in a surprisingly impersonal way, which is the freest and sincerest expression of the personal. The mundane and the ideal were perfectly fused in his being. He might well have retrieved his words if he had known that I was very much going to stick to them, taking years to make any significant decisions!

The next time I saw Professor Nishitani was at the Mt. Baldy Zen Center

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near Los Angeles, where he had come to give a seminar. Again it was Professor Panikkar who informed me of his coming to the United States, and who encouraged me to participate in the Zen sesshin that was to take place prior to the seminar. I took my copy of *Shūkyō to wa nanika* (What is Religion?) with me to the seminar, and the day after his lecture I asked him to "baptize" it. He pondered for quite some time before writing on the inside cover: *Ikka kai sekai ki* (一花開世界起, "A flower blooms and the whole world arises"), which happened to be the topic of the seminar that day.

I did not see him again until August 22, 1983 when I returned to Kyoto. We talked about concepts that Nishida had developed, such as *kōiteki chokkan*. He tried to explain it with the phrase, "At the tip of a brush there is an eye" (*hittan ni manako ari*). Stimulated by the expression, I imagined a calligraphic brush (or paint brush, or my Cross pen for that matter) acquiring an eye at its tip and poised, waiting to be put to the blank surface of the paper. The moment of *spannung* (creative tension), of fulness and birth, in which action is seeing and intuiting at the same time.

I saw Professor Nishitani again in September of the following year. I had become interested in the issue of the political involvement of the Kyoto School during the War period. Our conversation led naturally to his personal experience. He had been expelled (*tsuihō*) from his position at Kyoto University following the war, and he wanted me to know what had happened to him during the war as a member of the Kyoto School and the circumstances surrounding his expulsion.

I didn't make another trip to Japan until the spring of 1991, after Professor Nishitani had passed away. I had continued my interview with him by correspondence, however, and on May 13, 1984, I received a three-page letter from him in reply to a letter I had written on May 6. I had asked him two questions. One concerned Nishida Kitarō's "*Sekai shin chitsujo no genri*" ("The Principle of the New World Order"), the other had to do with his own philosophical position. In my view, I wrote, that position was global, and not confrontational or "antagonistic to the West" as an American colleague, Professor David Dilworth, had suggested. The question came up in connection with a book review of *Religion and Nothingness* (Van Bragt's translation of *Shūkyō to wa nanika*) that Dilworth had written in *Monumenta Nipponica*. I had questioned the appropriateness of a line in that review in which Professor Dilworth stated that "his (Nishitani's) sweeping indictment of Western traditions makes sense within the rhetorical framework of Buddhist discourse." I wanted to clarify the point and I decided to ask Professor Nishitani directly. I wrote in my letter: "It is my understanding that you treated the problem of nihilism not from the point of view of East and West in opposition, but as a modern man (living in the global age), and moreover as a thinker. But what

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would you say? When you wrote *What is Religion?* in the 60's, were you anti-West? Did you have the West in mind in the sense of an opponent?" His reply to these questions may be of some interest.

To the first question concerning Nishida's "The Principle of the New World Order," he wrote:

Behind how that article of Nishida's came to be written. There was an extremely complicated situation in terms of the domestic politics and political thought of the period (especially with regard to the global historical movement toward, and eventual plunging into, the War, and the '*raison d'etat*' of Japan which was swallowed up in that movement). A detailed analysis of that situation would be an onerous task. Even today, Japanese historians have not yet cut into the problem with sufficient penetration.

He mentioned his own work in this connection:

It's somewhat embarrassing to have to say it myself, but my *Sekai kan to kokka kan* (*The View of the World and the View of the Nation*) was the first book which attempted to analyze, from a *philosophic* point of view, the historical *reality* of that time in terms of world politics (and of Japan as a country viewed from that same perspective). At that time, even to use expressions such as 'universal humanity' (which I used in the introduction to my book), required a certain courage and determination. It was that kind of period. (Emphasis in original)

He explained how the followers of the Kyoto School had been fiercely attacked by the rightists: "We were dissidents (*hi-kokumin*) in their eyes and what we were doing was 'sacrilegious' because 'we dealt with the question of Japan as a nation using the logic of the West.' " He added,

*The View of the World and the View of the Nation*, as I mentioned above, gave readers a kind of 'shock'. It was widely read. The ultranationalistic government of the time became alarmed. I was examined by the Special Military Police (Tokkō Keisatsu). Then, in the postwar period, I was subject to a 'purge.' The Allied Occupation Forces accused me of having been influential as an ultra-nationalist, and I was forced to leave my academic position. I received slaps on the face twice—in the prewar period on the left cheek, and in the postwar period on the right cheek.

I felt in reading these replies that Professor Nishitani wanted concerned people to know what had really transpired. After a few years, he was reinstated

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to his posts in the university, and I think in weighing the facts that it was deserved.

In response to the second point, concerning his philosophical position, he wrote:

In short, I think the facts are just as you stated them in your letter (*hitokoto de ieba, anata no okangae no tōri desu*). I don't understand why Mr. Dilworth thought of my work as anti-West. It is true that I didn't consider [the problem of nihilism] within the traditional Western framework, but neither did I consider it within an Eastern framework. Rather, I think I raised the question from the point of view of a global world in which Orient and Occident are 'one'. Such a oneness has not yet come about, but the formation of one world in the true sense of the word is beginning to take place. Such a world is beginning to emerge *at present* from historical necessity. (This was the viewpoint from which I approached the problem of nihilism.) In other words, my position is that of so-called 'dialogue.'

In the last chapter of my book *Nihilism*, I stated that not only is nihilism present at the ground of the *present* Western culture, but the situation of Japan, which has adopted the course of modernization, is exactly the same. I made the point that inasmuch as Japanese in general have not yet taken note of that fact, they are one step behind Westerners who are conscious of the nihilism at the ground of their culture. I wrote something to the effect that because the Japanese have yet to come to take conscious note of the presence of nihilism in their modern culture, the situation of nihilism is compounded or "squared" (that is, it is not just an  $x$  but an  $x^2$ ). This is not, I think, anti-West or anti-East. (Emphasis in original).

I think Professor Nishitani's statements make it clear that it was not his intention to put Japan over against Europe in an antagonistic way; it was to address the present state of Japanese culture, for it was its well-being that he was concerned about. Being a philosopher trained in both Eastern and Western philosophical traditions, he was able to grasp the issues at stake more deeply, comprehensively, and systematically than the majority of Japanese, and he wished these views (if not warnings) to be known to his countrymen.

I think I can understand why Professor Nishitani's book "seemed" to Dilworth to "exhaustively attack Western thought and institutions" and "come off as 'antagonistic' to the West by and large." The key to resolving this misunderstanding lies in hermeneutics. We need to ask the basic question, Who is the author's intended audience? This intended audience is an important ingredient in any hermeneutical exercise. Professor Nishitani wrote

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*Shūkyō to wa nanika* primarily for Japanese readership. I got this impression when I first read it, long before it was translated into English. In the process of translation into any language, this factor—the intended audience—becomes irrelevant or disappears, so much so that any reader who takes up the English translation, for example, may dangerously assume that the author wrote it for the English-speaking world. Or that assumption may not even arise in the consciousness of the reader. This, I think, is at the root of the misinterpretation. In order to avoid this pitfall, we need to exercise our hermeneutical awareness and try as much as we can to put our feet into the shoes of the originally intended audience. To play with this metaphor a while longer, perhaps Western readers might have to take their own shoes off and put on a pair of *geta*, or *zori*. These traditional types of Japanese footwear—or even shoes made in Japan—can be rather hard on Western feet! (Of course, for Japanese the situation will be the same, in reverse.) I guarantee non-Japanese readers that they will feel the difference. It may soon occur to them that what they are reading is a very different sort of book from what they are used to—although it may be in English! Indeed, this—the examination of the very presuppositions we all have, which are often culturally conditioned—is the challenge of the rapidly globalizing world and the hard reality of dialogue. Our feet might hurt for a time, but that is good for us, and that is the beginning of the truly eye-opening walk—*sansaku* 散策, *Spaziergang*, *promenade*, *passeggiata*—that we are going to take into the next century. And along the way, we might encounter a flower that blooms “and the whole world arises.”