

## Preface: Experiencing the Process of Thesis

A doctoral thesis seems to be many things: a write-up of a research design and execution that demonstrates a certain level of academic skill; a tangible artefact of some years of concentrated focus and effort; a journal in which one's adventures are reported during a quest for previously unknown knowledge; an initiation ritual undertaken by a select few to gain admittance to a relatively exclusive, not-so-secret society.

The thesis document itself, as one of my committee members recently noted, is typically a formulaic piece. It begins with a review of extant literature covering the general and specific fields of investigation, and the statement of a problem. This is followed by an exposition of the methodology and method(s) that were used to investigate said problem, and the findings subsequently revealed. After some considerable analysis, there is a discussion of how the findings inform some resolution of the problem, and the implications thereof. Finally, there is the author's reflection on the conclusions, some enumeration of the limitations of the study, suggested guidance for transforming discovered theory into practical application, and a statement of what further research may be inspired by the findings and conclusions of this research.

Indeed, this thesis includes these components. It also includes one additional component that is not typically found in academic theses, save those that draw from arts-informed inquiry (Knowles & Cole, 2008). This thesis specifically unpacks methodology into explicit – how the empirical research and analysis are conducted –

and tacit, namely, how I as researcher and author negotiate the non-linear, emergent, sense-making process that manifests as the aforementioned formula more-or-less dictates. I have chosen to be very explicit about this tacit methodological process using a narrative representation of my actual, internal dialogues, collectively entitled, *Conversations with Nishida*. One such conversation precedes each “formula” chapter with an intention to convey my state of mind to you, the reader. I invite you to pause and contemplate each *Conversation*, to share the cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and perhaps even psychic space from which the ensuing chapter emerged.

My choice of the fictitious “inner Zen master” character, Nishida, not only reflects the authentic nature of my own reflections on both the experience and the content of my research project. He is also inspired by the very real founder of the Kyoto School of Philosophy, Nishida Kitaro (b. 1870; d. 1945) whose work forms one of the philosophical bases of this thesis, as will be explained in detail in the chapter entitled, *The Place*.

My interactions with Nishida, the character, were often quite surprising and unexpected. Often, my inner Zen master challenged me with a problem or question or paradox that my otherwise rational and logical mind had not discovered, and these led to some of the more interesting observations and conclusions of the research. These “aha” moments of insight are, I hope, accurately captured and conveyed in the *Conversations*, and are as much a part of my method as are in-depth interviews and grounded theory analysis.

Finally, the *Conversations* chapters were a joy to write, and the “wise master” – as curmudgeonly as he sometimes behaved – a joy to come to know. I hope that you will enjoy them as much as I have.