

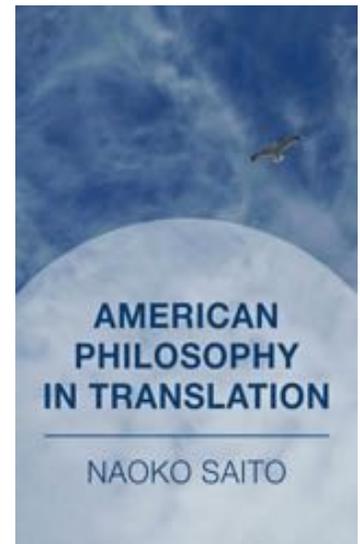
"I AM AN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHER"



[Naoko Saito](#) is Professor in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Kyoto. She is the author of [The Gleam of Light: Moral Perfectionism and Education in Dewey and Emerson](#) (2005) and [American Philosophy in Translation](#) (2019). She is co-editor, with Naomi Hodgson, of [Philosophy as Translation and the Understanding of Other Cultures](#) (2018), and co-editor with Paul Standish of [Stanley Cavell and Philosophy as Translation: The Truth is Translated](#) (2017), [Stanley Cavell and the Education of Grownups](#) (2012) and [Education and the Kyoto School of Philosophy: Pedagogy for Human Transformation](#) (2012). She is a past recipient of SAAP's Ila and John Mellow Prize and the Joseph L. Blau Prize.

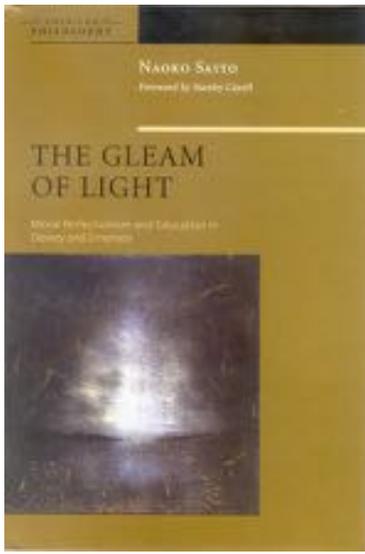
What does American philosophy mean to you?

My area of research is American philosophy and philosophy of education, with a special focus on John Dewey's pragmatism, Ralph Waldo Emerson's and Henry David Thoreau's American transcendentalism, and Stanley Cavell's ordinary language philosophy. I feel that education in the East and the West today is in need of a language and a mode of action that can resist not only the economic tide of globalization but also threats posed by anxieties of inclusion—by this phrase I mean, for example, those tensions brought into focus by the past presidency of Donald Trump and by Brexit. In response to this need, in my publications, I attempt to reconstruct Deweyan pragmatism in dialogue with other American voices: those of Emerson, Thoreau, and Cavell, all of whom show strains of Eastern thought in their work. Their moral perfectionism helps Dewey address more sensitively the problem of alterity in globalization and saves him from the limitations of American democracy.



How did you become an American philosopher?

Over the past thirty years I have been working as a mediator in cross-cultural settings, especially between Japan and Anglo-American and European cultures. My academic research, international research activities, teaching and professional work are inseparable from these experiences. My area of specialization is philosophy of education and American philosophy, especially insofar as this relates to intercultural understanding and education for citizenship in a globalized world.



These interests derive in part from my first degree, when I majored in American Studies. Postgraduate studies with Israel Scheffler and Hilary Putnam at Harvard led me to a deep interest in philosophy of education, especially in Dewey's democratic philosophy of education. Later studies with Cavell furthered my interest in the transcendentalism of Emerson, culminating in my Ph.D. from Columbia University in October 2000.

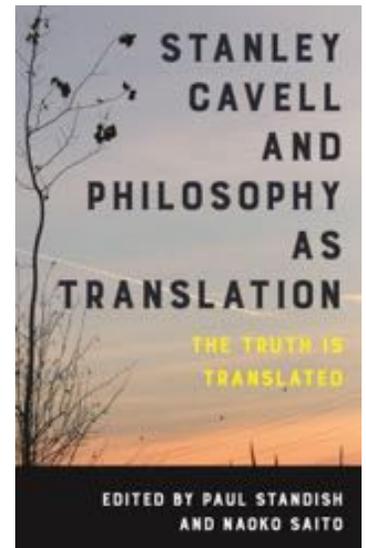
Since 2001 I have been working closely with Paul Standish at UCL IOE, which has enabled me to expand my research activities into continental philosophies and connections with European scholars. Most recently, I have developed close research connections on American philosophy with Richard Bernstein at the New School for Social Research and with Sami Pihlström at the University of Helsinki. These international connections are at the heart of my research and teaching activities in cross-dialogue in philosophy and education.

How would you describe your current research?

My book, *American Philosophy in Translation* (2019), is the product of many years spent reading and studying American philosophy. Mostly I have done this from a remote part of the world—far from America across the Pacific Ocean—and, like so many others, in a language that is not my own. I came to the idea of this book, and to thematizing these issues in terms of translation, partly through a sense that there was something still to be released in American thought and pragmatism, and that an outsider's viewpoint might actually be beneficial. It is through the experience of standing on the precarious border between inside and outside that I hit upon the related ideas of translation, transcendence and transformation—following Henry David Thoreau's closing remarks in *Walden*:

The light which puts out our eyes is darkness to us. Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star.

The account offered in my book is driven by my strong attraction to the best assets of American culture, assets that seem, to this outsider's eye and ear, to have been stifled in stereotypical forms of American discourse. The book is an endeavor to attend in a fresh way to the voices of Dewey, Emerson, Thoreau and Cavell.



What do you do when you're not doing American philosophy?

I suppose my "hobby" is international networking. Before the spread of COVID-19, I was traveling abroad to see people and organize conferences, involving people from different fields and across generations. Since traveling abroad has become difficult, I have been organizing and attending international meetings online.

What's your favorite work in American philosophy? What should we all be reading?

Definitely Stanley Cavell, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau! For example, Thoreau's *Walden*, and Cavell's *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (1979) and *The Senses of Walden* (1992).

