

Book Review

By

Jérôme Ducor

KANAMATSU, Kenryo: *Naturalness, A Classic of Shin Buddhism; Introduction by Reverend Tetsuo UNNO* (The Library of Perennial Philosophy, Spiritual Classic Series); Bloomington, World Wisdom, 2002; 132 pp. (ISBN 0-941532-29-1).

KANAMATSU, Kenryo: *Le Naturel, Un classique du bouddhisme Shin*, suivi d'un commentaire de Reza SHAH-KAZEMI, traduits de l'anglais par Ghislain CHETAN, préface de Françoise BONARDEL; Paris, L'Harmattan (Collection *Théôria*), 2011; 121 pp. (ISBN 978-2-296-13070-8).

Naturalness is a handy book which made its way as a convenient introduction to Jōdo-Shinshū beside more difficult academic works and translations of the scriptures. Evidence of its success is the recent – and remarkable – translation of it into French, with a preface by Françoise Bonardel, professor of philosophy of religions at Paris-Sorbonne University, and a commentary by Reza Shah-Kazemi, a specialist in comparative mysticism.

Naturalness was published for the first time by Higashi-Honganji in 1949, under the more explicit title *Amitābha, The Life of Naturalness*. A revised and enlarged edition appeared in 1956 as *Naturalness* (Los Angeles, The White Path Society), with a « Note by a Nisei Youth » by UNNO Tetsuo. It was reprinted in Japan under the same title (Kyōto, The Bummeido Press, 1978)¹, and eventually reedited as *Naturalness, A Classic of Shin Buddhism* in 2002.

Born in Kyōto, Kanamatsu Kenryō 金松賢諒 (1915-1986) was raised in a Jōdo-Shinshū temple and studied philosophy at Ōtani University (1938), once the seminary of Higashi-Honganji. He did a specialisation at Kyōto University (1943) and became assistant teacher at Ōsaka Prefectural University (1950), before spending two years under a Fulbright scholarship at Cornell University and the University of Chicago (1952-1953). Having received his doctorate (1962), he became professor at Ōtani University (1964), where he was also involved in Esperanto studies. A specialist of Plato, he is, with Mitsui Kō 三井浩 (1905-1980), the co-translator in Japanese of *Phaedrus*, *Lysis* and *The Symposium* (*Sekai kyōiku hōten* 世界教育宝典, 18; 1959), as well as of *The Republic* (1982). He also published a study on the theology

¹ It has been translated into Japanese by the late BANDŌ Shōjun 坂東性純 (1932-2004) : *Jinen* 自然 (Kyōto, Bunmeidō, 1988). There is also a translation into Portuguese: *Naturalidade* (São Paulo, Aquarius e Templo Budista Higashi Honganji, 1983).

and cosmology of Plato (*Puraton no shingaku to uchuron* プラトンの神学と宇宙論; Kyōto, Hōzōkan, 1976).

In his Preface to *Naturalness*, Kanamatsu expresses his indebtedness to Suzuki Daisetsu 鈴木大拙 (1870-1966) and Sasaki Gesshō 佐々木月樵 (1875-1926), two famous figures of Ōtani University. By so doing, Kanamatsu places himself in the spiritualist trend (*seishin shugi* 精神主義) which this university developed in the field of Buddhist studies in general, and Jōdo-Shinshū in particular. This trend emerged towards the end the 19th century following the confrontation between modern astronomy and traditional Buddhist cosmology². One of the precursors of this *aggiornamento* is Inoue Enryō 井上圓了 (1858-1919), but its most emblematic figure is certainly Kiyozawa Manshi 清沢満之 (1863-1903). Besides Suzuki and Sasaki, other important figures include Soga Ryōjin 曾我量深 (1875-1971), Kaneko Daiei 金子大栄 (1881-1976), Yasuda Rijin 安田理深 (1900-1982)³, as well as Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 (1870-1945), a philosopher who is at the origin of what is usually called the “Kyōto School” (*Kyōto gakuha* 京都学派).

Most of those thinkers were censured both by Higashi-Honganji and Ōtani University for having left traditional Jōdo-Shinshū scholasticism (*shūgaku* 宗學), which had systematized Shinran’s teaching over the past centuries through a somewhat dry reading of his works, crossed with the Pure Land sūtras as well as the commentaries of his predecessors and successors. Instead, Kiyozawa and his epigones began a free and original reflection by rediscovering the freshness of the famous *Tannishō*⁴, and by drawing largely on the idealist Buddhist traditions such as Vijñānavāda, Zen, Kegon and the equally famous *Daijō-kishinron* 大乘起信論, which was translated for the first time by Suzuki⁵. However, in their eagerness to facilitate convergences with Western thought and Christianity, they could not avoid some ambiguities, including the notion of “sin”. In the same way, they dealt with the Buddha Amida and his Pure Land as a “myth”, without explaining sufficiently to which of the

² See OKADA, Masahiko 岡田正彦: *Visions and Reality, Buddhist Cosmographic Discourses in Nineteenth-Century Japan*, Ph.D. Stanford University, 1997.

³ See Mark L. Blum & Robert F. Rhodes (ed.): *Cultivating Spirituality: A Modern Shin Buddhist Anthology* (Albany, SUNY Press, 2011).

⁴ See IMADATE, Tosui 今立吐醉 (1855-1931): *The Tannishō (Tract on Deploring the Heterodoxies)*, Translated with the assistance of D.T. SUZUKI, with an introduction by Shūgaku YAMABE 山辺習学 (1882-1944), and “The Life of Shinran Shōnin” by Gesshō SASAKI (Kyōto, Eastern Buddhist Society, 1923); rpr. Suzuki, *Collected Writings on Shin Buddhism* (1973), p. 193-222.

⁵ *Açvaghosha’s Discourse on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna* (Chicago 1900). There are two valuable new French translations of this treatise: GIRARD, Frédéric: *Traité sur l’acte de foi dans le Grand Véhicule* (Tōkyō, Keio University Press, 2004); and DESPEUX, Catherine: *Traité de la naissance de la foi dans le Grand Véhicule* (Paris, Fayard, 2005).

numerous definitions of this term they were referring to – a vagueness which can be traced back to Kanamatsu's *Naturalness* as well (2002 ed., p. 23-24).

[*Newsletter of the IASBS*, p. 5]

The spiritualist reflection of Kanamatsu lead him to write that the Buddha Amida is “the Eternal Spirit” (p. 5), “the Supreme Spirit from whom all spiritual revelations grow” (p. 63), or “the Absolute One” (p. 91). Touching on “Amida-consciousness which is the Eternal and Perfect Consciousness”, Kanamatsu states that “The key to this Perfect Consciousness, to this Cosmic Consciousness, is in the spirit – the *world-man* we have in us – who is immortal” (p. 63-64). As far as the Pure Land method is concerned, it would amount to this: “man becomes true by being one with Amida. (...); we are ever to become Amida. There is the eternal play of love in the relation between this being and becoming” (p. 55); “Man becomes perfect man (...) when his heart realizes itself in the Infinite Being who is Amida” (p. 58-59).

Clashing as it does with the canonical Pure Land scriptures, Kanamatsu's interpretation expresses a freedom which has a charm of its own, and actually made his success. But his endeavour appears more fragile as soon as he attempts to refer to the Jōdo-Shinshū doctrine itself: “Shinran refers to Amida as “Thou” revealed in the enlightened consciousness of Shakyamuni, and to Shakyamuni as the revelatory “I” ” (p. 68); “the basis of *Shinshu* is firmly laid upon the blending of “Thou” and “I” in the selfsame enlightened consciousness of Shakyamuni, the Human Buddha” (p. 72). Here at least one would like to see Kanamatsu providing some light on how this understanding of his is related to Shinran's teaching. But there is little space for Shinran in *Naturalness*. All that is quoted is a single extract from the first chapter of his *Kyōgyōshinshō* (p. 67-68)⁶ and seven loosely collected passages from the *Tannishō* (p. 45-47, 105-110)⁷. At this point, it should however be emphasized that Shinran's own teaching is clearly based on a specific Pure Land Chinese line: the Shandao tradition (*Zendōryū* 善導流); and this tradition is categorical in rejecting any idealistic or spiritualist interpretation such as “Amida in our own mind” (*koshin no Mida* 己心の彌陀), or “the Pure Land in mind only” (*yuishin no jōdo* 唯心の淨土)⁸, which are springing up in Kanamatsu's thought.

⁶ Kanamatsu (p. 45) states that the *Kyōgyōshinshō* is a collection of 143 passages culled from 21 sūtras. It should be added that it also includes extracts from 42 treatises and commentaries by Indian, Chinese and Japanese masters, amounting to a total of 376 quotations, constituting about 90 % of Shinran's work.

⁷ Passages are from chapters 2, 3, 1, 7, 6, 9 and 16 respectively, the last one being not Shinran's words, but a comment by the anonymous author of the *Tannishō*.

⁸ See Ducor: “Some Remarks on Amida and his Pure Land”, *Kagaku jidai ni okeru ningen to shūkyō* 科学時代における人間と宗教 / *Humanity and Religion in an Age of Science*, Festschrift in Commemoration of the Retirement of Professor Ryūsei Takeda 武田龍精 (Kyōto, Hōzōkan, 2010), p. 217-231.

Kanamatsu and D. T. Suzuki were sufficiently close that Suzuki entrusted Kanamatsu with the task of proof-reading and publishing his *A Miscellany on the Shin Teaching of Buddhism*⁹. It was only natural that Suzuki's book should exercise significant influence on Kanamatsu's *Naturalness*, even in the choice of scriptural quotations, including the two from the *Anjin-ketsujō-shō*¹⁰.

A general comparison of Suzuki's text with Kanamatsu's reveals the particular qualities of *Naturalness*: "existential, intuitive and poetic" (Introduction by Rev. Unno, p. xi). In his preface, Kanamatsu states how much he has been "helped, as regards wording and illustration" by the book *Sadhana, The Realisation of Life*, published by the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) in 1913, the very year he received the Nobel Prize in Literature. What Kanamatsu means by "help", however, needs to be looked into further. Let us return to the above-quoted extract from *Naturalness* about the Pure Land method, which states that "Man becomes perfect man (...) when his heart realizes itself in the Infinite Being who is Amida". This sentence appears at the end of a paragraph which reads in full:

"Man's cry is to reach his fullest expression. It is this desire for self-expression that leads him to seek wealth and power. But he has to discover that accumulation is not realisation. It is the *inner light* that reveals him, not outer things. When this light is lighted, then in a moment he knows that man's highest revelation is Amida's own revelation in him. And his cry is for this - the manifestation of his heart, which is the manifestation of Amida in his heart. Man becomes perfect man, he attains his fullest expression, when his heart realizes itself in the Infinite Being who is Amida whose very essence is expression." (p. 58-59)

Let us turn now to Tagore's *Sadhana*, which says¹¹:

"Man's cry is to reach his fullest expression. It is this desire for self-expression that leads him to seek wealth and power. But he has to discover that accumulation is not realisation. It is the inner light that reveals him, not outer things. When this light is lighted, then in a moment he knows that Man's highest revelation is **God's** own revelation in him. And his cry is for this - the manifestation of his **soul**, which is the manifestation of **God** in his **soul**. Man becomes perfect man, he attains his fullest expression, when his **soul** realises itself in the Infinite being who is *Āvīh* whose very essence is expression." (p. 32-33)

Except for the words in bold, Kanamatsu is thus simply duplicating Tagore. Other examples would be too long and numerous to quote in full here. The 155 words of Kanamatsu from "That we cannot absolutely possess the Infinite Being is not a mere intellectual proposition" to "her final freedom" (p. 53-54) are word for word identical with Tagore's 155 words (p. 121), with this one exception: where Tagore has "soul", Kanamatsu writes "heart". Even in the case

⁹ Kyōto, Shinshū Ōtaniha, 1949; rpr. in SUZUKI, *Collected Writings on Shin Buddhism* (1973), p. 33-128.

¹⁰ Cf. Kanamatsu, p. 93-95, and Suzuki's *Collected Writings*, p. 54 and 53. This anonymous text is posterior to Shinran and may come from the Seizan'ha branch of Jōdoshū. See the full translation by Dennis Hirota: "On Attaining the Settled Mind", *The Eastern Buddhist*, New Series, Vol. XXIII, No. 2 (1990, p. 106-121) and XXIV, No. 1 (1991, p. 81-96).

¹¹ BookSurge Classics, No. 808 (2003).

of the typically Japanese “*oyasama*” (Parent) – which Suzuki would make famous¹² - Kanamatsu draws from Tagore:

Naturalness: “Therefore it is the self of man which the Great Parent of the Universe has left free. In his self man is free to disown his Parent. There our Amida must win his entrance. There he comes as a guest, not as a Parent, and therefore he has to wait till he is invited. (...) Indeed, Amida has stood aside from our self, where his watchful patience knows no bounds, and where he never forces open the doors if shut against him. For this self of ours has to attain its ultimate meaning, which is the *spirit*, not through the compulsion of Amida's power, but through *love*, and thus become united with Amida in freedom.” (p. 60-61)

Sadhana: “Therefore, it is the self of man which the great **King** of the universe **has not shadowed with his throne** - he has left it free. In his **physical and mental organism, where man is related with nature, he has to acknowledge the rule of his King, but** in his self **he** is free to disown **him**. There our **God** must win his entrance. There he comes as a guest, not as a **king**, and therefore he has to wait till he is invited. (...) For this self of ours has to attain its ultimate meaning, which is the **soul**, not through the compulsion of **God's** power but through love, and thus become united with **God** in freedom.” (p. 33)

One could also compare the poetical Chapter II of *Sadhana* (p. 34-35), with *Naturalness* (p. 61-62) and so on. Is it not disappointing to find more of Tagore than Shinran in *Naturalness*? Of course we may explain it away by saying that Kanamatsu is writing out of “tremendous urgency and bodhisattvic compassion” as the Introduction tells us. Nevertheless, it does not seem possible to qualify this as representative of Shinran’s teaching. As a Hindu, Tagore is inspired by Vaishnavism and is quoting at length from the *Upanishads*. But it does not seem appropriate to introduce Jōdo-Shinshū by simply exchanging at will the names Brahma and Amida. Is not the following just plainly confusing?

Tagore : “**So** it cannot be said that we can find **Brahma** as we find other objects (...). We do not have to run to the grocer's shop for our morning light; we open our eyes and there it is; so we need only give ourselves up to find that **Brahma** is everywhere. (...) So our daily worship of **God** is not really the process of gradual acquisition of him, but the daily process of surrendering ourselves, removing all obstacles to union and extending our consciousness of him in devotion and service, in **goodness** and **in** love.” (p. 118).

Kanamatsu: “It cannot be said that we can find **the Universal** as we find other objects (...). We do not have to run to the grocer's shop for our morning light; we open our eyes and there it is; so we need only give ourselves up to find that **the Universal** is everywhere. So our daily worship of **Amida** is not really the process of gradual acquisition of him, but the daily process of surrendering ourselves, removing all obstacles to union and extending our consciousness of him in devotion and service, in **goodwill** and love.” (p. 51-52)

It should not then be a surprise to find that the original commentary by Reza Shah-Kazemi in the French edition (p. 85-119) is devoted to drawing parallels between *Naturalness*,

¹² See his *Mysticism, Christian and Buddhist* (1957; Routledge, 2002).

Christianity and Islam, with references to the Gnostic Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998). In his own preface, Kanamatsu expresses the hope that “the western reader will have an opportunity of coming in touch with the *true* spirit of Buddhism as revealed in the sacred texts of *Shinshu*” (p. xvii). Although *Naturalness* doesn’t provide an introduction to Shinran’s thought, this book will remain as an original testimony of a quite personal reflection on religion.