

Buddhism in the Life and Philosophy of Kazuo Inamori: Formative Influences of a Contemporary Japanese Entrepreneur

*Mahinda Deegalle¹
Bath Spa University
Kieko Obuse*

NCC Centre for the Study of Japanese Religions

“As a follower of the Buddha’s teachings, I believe that it is necessary for us to remember the 2,500-year-old philosophical and ethical teachings of the Buddha, which is “to know when one has received enough.” We need to learn to keep our endless desires under control and appreciate what we are given.”

Kazuo Inamori (2008b: 89)

Introduction

Kazuo Inamori (稲盛和夫1932-) is one of the most well-known and respected entrepreneurs in contemporary Japan. He is the founder and honorary president of Kyocera Corporation (京セラ, f. 1982). Inamori was appointed as the president of Japan Airlines in February 2010.² What makes Inamori stand out from leading business personalities in the contemporary Japan is that he has received ordination as a Rinzaï Zen monk. He writes and lectures as a Buddhist using Buddhist concepts to communicate his ideas.

Inamori publishes both in Japanese and English. His accumulated work exceeds over 50 publications. Some of them focus on business ethics and skill development while others explore his attitudes to life, his philosophical views of work and meaning of life and social criticism.³ Critically examining some of his major recent publications, this paper analyses what inspirations readers in and outside Japan can derive from Inamori’s economic and life philosophy for their productive engagement in socio-economic activities.⁴

In our present research, we have concentrated only on some selected Japanese

¹ Ven. Dr. Mahinda Deegalle teaches at School of Humanities and Cultural Industries, Bath Spa University, United Kingdom. He is the author of *Popularizing Buddhism* (SUNY 2006), the editor of *Dharma to the UK* (WBF 2008), *Buddhism, Conflict and Violence in Modern Sri Lanka* (Routledge 2006), and the co-editor of *Pāli Buddhism* (Curzon, 1996). Dr. Kieko Obuse has obtained a doctorate from the University of Oxford with a thesis on *Doctrinal Accommodation in Buddhist-Muslim Relations with Special Reference to Contemporary Japan*. She is the author of “Muslim Doctrine of Prophethood in the Context of Buddhist-Muslim Relations in Japan: Is the Buddha a Prophet?” *The Muslim World* 100 (2-3) 2010: 215-32.

² On the contrary to some media reports, Inamori is not the CEO of Japan Airlines.

³ For a full list of Inamori’s publications, see “Publications” in Kazuo Inamori’s Official Site, <<http://www.kyocera.co.jp/inamori/publication/index.html>> [accessed on 20/02/2011].

⁴ Though highly popular and influential in Japan, Inamori is not without critics. Some have seen Inamori’s attempt to spread his philosophy with much suspicion, criticizing him for ‘imposing’ his worldview on others and his company—Kyocera—for not treating employees fairly. This paper, however, does not purport to examine Inamori’s success in practicing his principles. Rather it examines the implications of these principles for the popular readership in Japan and beyond. For the latest criticism of Inamori’s ideas and activities, see Saito (2010).

publications⁵ in order to clarify major characteristics of Inamori's thought and worldview in its original Japanese cultural context and to generate an in-depth investigation of his work.

A few words are in order regarding how we approached the issues of translation. All English translations of Inamori's work in this paper are original translations made by the authors. At the editing and revising stage, we have improved and modified the initial translations for better communication by paying particular attention to the main argument and key emphases in Inamori's thinking.

This paper has three sections: Section I presents key life events in Inamori's early life, his early exposure to and experiences in Pure Land Buddhism in the context of *nenbutsu* practice, and the major socio-economic and religious factors that were significant and instrumental in the formation of his life and business philosophy.

Section II explores Inamori's spiritual journey that led him to seek ordination in the Rinzai Buddhist tradition in 1997. It aims to illustrate his dedication and commitment to Buddhism combined with an appreciation and experience of Buddhist practice.

Section III examines Inamori's life philosophy and his use of the Buddhist concept of *karma*. It illustrates a strong tendency in the development of Inamori's life philosophy, in which he appears to interpret rather freely basic Buddhist teachings in order to communicate his business philosophy. This can be clearly seen in Inamori's discussion of the concept of *karma*.

Section I: Formative Influences on Inamori's Thought

Inamori was born in 1932 in the Kagoshima (鹿児島) prefecture, located on the southern-most part of Kyushu in Japan. He was the second son of the family's seven children. His father had a small printing business and his mother brought up their seven children on a humble family finance. Despite his parents' opposition, Inamori continued education onto high school and then to the university level, obtaining a B.Sc. in Applied Chemistry from Kagoshima University in 1954. Upon his graduation, Inamori moved to Kyoto, where he was employed by Shōfū Kōgyō (松風工業), a small ceramic company, which was already heavily in decline. He worked there for six years before leaving it to establish his own enterprise, Kyoto Ceramic (f. 1959). It later became Kyocera Corporation, which is now one of the most prominent companies in Japan employing over 60,000 people worldwide.

What is most significant about Inamori's early life for our understanding of his business and life philosophy is that it was inflicted by a number of difficulties, misfortunes and 'failures.' There are number of aspects of Inamori's life that are extremely relevant to our discussion of socio-economic developments in other Asian Buddhist countries: his geo-cultural background, his war-experience, and the series of 'failures' that he suffered. Inamori grew up during the World War II. When he was 13 years old, the Kagoshima city suffered aerial attacks, and the family lost their business and property. This event made their life even harder and gave rise to Inamori's first experience of 'business' as he went around the city selling paper-bags (Inamori 2002: 36-8).

Also when he was 13 years old, Inamori contracted tuberculosis, a disease that

⁵ We hope to carry out further research on how Inamori's English publications present his Buddhist / religious ideas and how his life and business philosophy appeal to readers beyond Japan.

killed a few of his family members. On the educational front, too, he had bitter experience; although he was an extremely hard-working student, he failed to enter the middle school and the university he wished to attend. Inamori then struggled to find a job, ending up employed at a small, troubled ceramic company, Shōfū Kōgyō (Inamori 2002: 49).

The fact that Inamori was unable to enter Osaka University, one of the prestigious national universities in central Japan, became a significant blow for the development of his career. As a growing youth, Inamori aspired to study pharmacy. This shattering of childhood dreams meant that his living and learning experiences as a youth were limited to his birth place in the Kagoshima prefecture. In other words, this leading entrepreneur as a youth grew up in a rather remote region of Japan, far away from any major commercial, educational or cultural centers of Japan such as Tokyo, Kyoto or Osaka. It was a life spent without much exposure to the outside world and challenges of the complex business world of the post-war Japan. At the time the Kagoshima city, the capital of the prefecture, may have been somewhat commercialized. Yet, one cannot ignore that his geo-cultural background was far from a ‘mainstream’ one (Sato 1993: 36-7).

This series of disheartening experiences he had to go through as a child and subsequently as a young man became important factors in his later success as well as in the formation of his personal character and attitudes towards life. Looking back on his early life, Inamori observes:

If there is such a thing called good luck (J: 幸運 *kōun*) one grasps that in adversity... All the hardships that I experienced as a child and a young man became the foundation for my success in later life (Inamori 2008a: 77-8).

The fact that Inamori did not spend a particularly ‘fortunate’ early life, which he later came to regard as an important source of his success, has much relevance to the present discussion. Many people, who live in rural and even war-torn areas in other parts of Asia, may share Inamori’s humble background and may understand difficulties of childhood experiences and have sympathy on him. To those individuals, Inamori’s compelling story can provide inspiration showing them that it is possible to succeed in business, social development and personal improvements even when they do not have a privileged background.

As we have noted above, what makes Inamori’s life even more relevant to our investigation is that later in his life he came to speak publicly as a Buddhist. In order to understand his religiosity and his interpretation of Buddhist teachings, it is also essential to examine major early encounters that the young Inamori had with spiritual and religious teachings and how they have influenced his worldview. There are two key episodes from his childhood that Inamori recalls every now and then.

The first is the experience of *kakure nenbutsu* (隠れ念仏 *Nenbutsu* Recitation in Hiding). Inamori encountered *kakure nenbutsu* when he was six years old. The *kakure nenbutsu* practice dates back to the time when the Jōdo-shin School of Buddhism (浄土真宗 the True Pure Land School)⁶ was banned in a few regions of Kyushu⁷ from

⁶ Today Jōdo-shin School of Buddhism is known as Shin Buddhism.

⁷ The present-day Kagoshima prefecture in which Inamori lived was the southern most prefecture on the Kyushu Island.

the middle of the 16th century⁸ for about three centuries. This roughly corresponds with the period of national seclusion (J: *sakoku* 鎖国) under the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603-1867). Tokugawa rule also involved in the banning of Catholicism leading to the so-called *kakure kirishitan* (隠れキリシタン Christians in Hiding) movement.⁹ Escaping the state persecution, the Jōdo-shin followers maintained their faith by secretly performing their devotional practices in dark, secluded spaces of mountain caves.¹⁰

Inamori's childhood recollection is a proof that the *kakure nenbutsu* practice has remained in the area even after the persecution ended. As Inamori's parents were ardent followers of the Jōdo-shin Buddhism, he was introduced to that tradition early on in his life (Inamori and Umehara 2003: 102). Later in life Inamori recalls the mysterious and almost awe-inspiring experience of the *nenbutsu* session to which he was taken along with other children:

I was six years old. We visited the native village of my father, about three *ri*¹¹ away from the city of Kagoshima... After the sunset, we walked along a mountain path holding lanterns in our hands to a house in which the *nenbutsu* session was held. During the session, we sat up behind the monk (J: お坊さん *obōsan*), who was seated in front of the Buddhist altar (J: 仏壇 *butsudan*) placed in the closet (J: 押入れ *oshīre*). We listened to his recitation of the *sūtra* (J: お経 *okyō*). There were no lights on and it was very dark. After the *sūtra*-recitation, the children were told to offer incense (J: お線香 *osenkō*) to the altar and worship it one by one. After I worshipped, the monk remarked, "You have worshipped properly today. Well done!" He said to my father: "This boy does not need to come back again." The monk told me: "From now on, to thank the Buddha (J: 仏さん *hotokesan*) you must recite aloud 'nan-man nan-man arigatō' (なんまんなんまん、ありがとう) every day. As long as you live, you must continue to do just that and that will be sufficient" (Inamori and Umehara 2003: 103-4).

In Inamori's writings, there are two expressions—*Nan-man nan-man arigatō*¹² and *nan-man-dabu*¹³ *arigatō* (Inamori and Itsuki 2005: 131)—which he claims to have used to pray to the Amida Buddha. Both expressions, though corrupted, derive from the standard *nenbutsu* (念仏) practice of reciting the Buddha's name in the formula of *namu amida butsu* (南無阿弥陀仏). In this case, it is a contemplative practice in which the recitation is directed to the Buddha Amida, who is believed to be the savior figure in Pure Land form of Buddhism.

⁸ Following the persecution of Christians in 1587 for the first time, Japan entered the phase of national seclusion with an Edict appearing on 22 June 1636. During the period of national seclusion (1636-1853), Japan abandoned most of its contacts with foreigners and foreign countries.

⁹ For more details on 'Christians in Hiding' (*kakure kirishitan*) movement see Whelan (1996) and Tumbull (1998).

¹⁰ For more information on the *kakure nenbutsu* practice, see, for example, Kōrinji, "Satsuma no Kakure Nenbutsu o Tazunete" [Visiting the Places of Kakure Nenbutsu in Satsuma],

< <http://homepage3.nifty.com/kourinji/tour/kagoshima/n-index.htm> > [accessed on 20/02/2011].

¹¹ The Japanese distance counter *ri* equals approximately four kilometers.

¹² This expression is a corruption of the standard *nenbutsu* chanting of *namu amida butsu*. As an explanation of this corrupted version, one could argue that children might have adopted an easy method of remembering the standard Buddhist recitation formula this way. It is interesting that even in the adult life Inamori still keeps chanting the *nenbutsu* in the way he learned it as a child.

¹³ The expression *nan-man-dabu* is a common and shortened version of chanting the *nenbutsu*.

What Inamori was taught is a specific expression of gratitude towards Amida Buddha. This experience of *kakure nenbutsu* left a strong impression on Inamori's mind, becoming the basis of his religiosity. Although Inamori was eventually ordained in the Rinzai school of Zen, this *nenbutsu*-based phrase continued to stay on with him. He claims that he finds himself repeating this phrase—*nan-man-dabu arigatō*—even when he is visiting cathedrals and mosques (Inamori and Itsuki 2005: 131-132). For him, it is a “universal” (J: *bankoku kyōtsū*) expression of prayer and gratitude, unrestricted to a particular religion or sect (Inamori 2002: 103-4; Inamori 2004: 142; Inamori and Itsuki 2005: 132-3).

The next significant encounter that the young Inamori had with religious thinking took place when he was ill in bed with tuberculosis. Feeling sorry for the little boy suffering from high fever, a woman next-door lent him a book titled *Seimei no Jissō* (生命の実相 *The True Image of Life*) by Masaharu Taniguchi (谷口雅春 1893-1985), the founder of Seichō-No-Ie (生長の家). Seichō-No-Ie, which literally means ‘the house of growth,’ is a new religious movement established on 1st March 1930.¹⁴ It is based on the divine revelations that Taniguchi claims to have received. It derives its teachings from various sources such as Buddhism, Shinto and Christianity. It has a monotheistic focus on the Great Universe, or the universal God, that is behind all religions. It holds that ultimately there exists only the Perfect World created by this only and absolute God. In addition, the phenomenal world that human beings witness is entirely a reflection of their minds. As this ‘principal image’ (i.e., God) does not take physical manifestations or representations, its followers use a writing of the word ‘*Jissō*’ (the True Image) to worship it.¹⁵

The book *Seimei no Jissō* is the main work of Taniguchi. It explicates central teachings of Seichō-no-ie. Inamori read a passage from it, which explained how negative thoughts attract misfortune:

Turning the pages of *Seimei no Jissō*, I came across the following passage: “There is a magnet in our mind that attracts negative things to your life—such as swords, guns, misfortunes, disease, unemployment, etc.” Then I felt I knew how I got tuberculosis. I always ran passing the detached room where the sick uncle was residing, pinching my nose so that I won’t breathe in the contaminated air or contract the disease.... Neither my father who was taking care of our uncle nor my brother who was walking around without worrying about the contagion contracted it, but only I did, though I was more careful than anybody else... I wondered whether my negative thoughts about tuberculosis might have summoned the misfortune in... On the other hand, the virus did not even possess my father, who was full of love looking after his sick brother never worrying about potential health risks to himself even for a moment. As a small child, I regretted severely having such negative attitudes. This book—*Seimei no Jissō*—gave me the opportunity to reflect upon the nature and the way my mind works (Inamori 2002: 28-9).

¹⁴ By the end of 2009 Seichō-No-Ie had 1,784,158 members and 1,102,104 of them are in overseas countries with 309 facilities in operation abroad: http://www.seicho-no-ie.org/eng/whats_sni/index.html (accessed 22 February 2011).

¹⁵ A brief summary of Seichō-No-Ie's teachings can be found at their website, “What's SNI,” < http://www.seicho-no-ie.org/eng/whats_sni/teaching.html > [accessed on 16/02/2011].

As one can imagine from this vivid recollection, Inamori regards his experience of finding an explanation for catching tuberculosis formed a founding ground for the development of his attitudes towards life. Although he does not claim to be a follower of Seichō-No-Ie, Inamori openly acknowledges that his early awareness of death including his own near-death experience due to catching tuberculosis led him to ‘the field of spirituality’ (Inamori 2002: 12).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss in detail how the teachings of Seichō-No-Ie have influenced Inamori’s thought. It must be noted here that his worldview has a number of similarities to the teachings of the Seichō-No-Ie. For example, Inamori places much emphasis on the importance of mind, arguing that good thoughts bring about good results and bad thoughts bad results. Its focus on mind is highly resonant in his realisation discussed above. Inamori’s conviction that all major religions share basic teachings (although very broadly) does not sound too remote from the central message of Seichō-No-Ie. As an ordained member of the Rinzai Zen tradition, Inamori may be inclined to attribute these ideas and influences directly to Buddhism. Indeed, in general, they can be attributed to Buddhism. There is no doubt that the early encounters with Seichō-No-Ie served as the first stepping-stone towards Inamori’s appreciation of Buddhism. Inamori does acknowledge that his familiarity with Taniguchi’s thought facilitated his appreciation of Buddhism. Once he claimed Buddhist ‘teachings are pretty much the same as Mr. Taniguchi’s thought’ (Inamori 2001: 203).

Section II: Inamori’s Commitment to Buddhist Teachings and Practices

At the age of 65, Inamori was ordained as a novice in the Rinzai school (臨濟宗) of Zen in September 1997. For a long time Inamori aspired to ‘study Buddhism properly’ (Inamori and Itsuki 2005: 133). Zen ordination was the fulfilment of the long-awaited wish. In order to realize this religious objective, he was planning to retire from the forefront of business at the age of 60. Inamori’s decision to retire at the age of 60 in order to devote himself to religious training derives from a loose interpretation of the traditional Indian prescription of the four stages of human life (Skt: *āśrama*).¹⁶ Inamori adopts the Indian (Hindu) idea of four stages of life to his own version of three stages and interprets them as follows: (i) One should spend the first 20 years of one’s life for a period of learning thereby preparing oneself to enter the society. (ii) In the next 40 years, one devotes one’s life for a period of working in which one contributes to the society through work. And (iii) in the last period of 20 years, one makes preparations for the ‘departure’ of one’s own ‘soul,’ i.e., death (Inamori 2002: 233; Inamori and Itsuki 2005: 134; Inamori and Umehara 2003: 208-210).

The hectic business career that involved developing a robust and sustainable company did not allow Inamori an early retirement. In the early summer of 1997, Inamori finally decided to materialise his spiritual plan to focus on the practice of Buddhism. But as always, a new obstacle appeared in his life. Just before the planned ordination, a routine health check-up revealed a stomach cancer and he was forced to undergo an operation.

¹⁶ The Indian system regulated the life of the higher caste (i.e., Brahmins) by advocating four *āśramas* (stages of life): (i) the period of learning and purity marked by a *brahmachāri* with a focus on celibacy, (ii) the life of the householder that begins with marriage and raising children with achievements in work, (iii) the stage of maturity that leads to renunciation as a forest dweller, and (iv) the final stage of dedicating one’s entire life for the spiritual quest of seeking liberation by following the life-style of a renunciant.

In Inamori's case, the experiences of ill health and Buddhist ordination are closely connected episodes. He often talks about them in his writings as connected events. It is noted that his weak physical health made the special monastic training (J: 大接心 *dai-sesshin*) that occurred following the ordination in November of the same year an extremely arduous, demanding and challenging task. His state of physical fragility combined with rigorous monastic training led Inamori to a moment of 'conversion experience.' This series of experiences enabled Inamori to discover what the real 'faith' (J: 信仰 *shinkō*) was like. They subsequently enabled him to generate a deeper appreciation of the importance of spiritual matters that shaped his attitudes towards business practices.

Inamori recalls an event that occurred in a cold winter day when he was on alms-round fulfilling an important part of Buddhist monastic training:

In the dusk, I was walking and carrying the bag for alms. I was exhausted. Realizing that I was collecting alms, a middle-aged lady was sweeping fallen leaves on the roadside approached me. She gave me a 100 yen coin¹⁷ and said: "Training must be hard. You must be tired. Please buy some bread with this." When I received the donation, I was filled with such an incomparable sense of bliss. I almost started crying. The lady did not look particularly well off. But her beautiful and kind heart which made her giving me the alms (J: お布施 *ofuse*, offering) was the most refreshing and purest thing I have ever felt in my whole life. A feeling of happiness ran through my whole body. I was so moved. It convinced me that was the love of gods and Buddhas (J: 神仏 *shinbutsu*) (Inamori 2002: 235-6)... It is the human nature that one cannot always do good; at times, one may give into temptation. But if one sincerely endeavours daily to do good, *oshaka-sama* (お釈迦様, i.e., Śākyamuni) will notice one's attitude and save one with his compassion. I came to believe this wholeheartedly through my monastic training (Inamori 2002: 237).

This moving encounter that Inamori had during the monastic training added a deeply emotional dimension to his religiosity and appreciation of Buddhism. In particular, it strengthened in him a belief in the power of 'compassion.' Therefore, it is important to understand and evaluate Inamori's application of some of the Buddhist teachings to business and management practices not merely as an incorporation of a set of theoretical ideas assembled under the rubric of 'philosophy' but a more holistic way of life informed and supported by personal spiritual experiences.

Inamori's active involvement with the Myōshinji branch of the Rinzai Zen School, the biggest branch within the Rinzai School, goes back to the days when he founded Kyoto Ceramic in the late 1950s. One of his colleagues introduced Inamori to Master Tansetsu Nishikata (西片擔雪 d. 2006) of Enpukuji Temple, who became later the chief abbot (J: 管長 *kanchō*) of the Myōshinji branch (妙心寺派). Although Inamori was familiar with the '*nenbutsu*' practice through his involvement in the *kakure nenbutsu* as a child he 'knew nothing about Zen' (Inamori 2001: 205). However, once Inamori got to know Master Nishikata in a personal capacity, he became increasingly fascinated with

¹⁷ A different version of the same narrative gives as a 500 yen coin rather than a 100 yen (Inamori and Itsuki 2005: 139).

Zen. Inamori's interest in Zen deepened further as he observed the way Master Nishikata led his life in accordance with some important Buddhist principles such as celibacy and vegetarianism, which were becoming increasingly rare as religious practices even among Japanese Zen monks (Inamori 2001: 206).

Master Nishikata inspired and supported Inamori as he continued to develop and work as a Buddhist in the world of business. When Inamori received ordination under his guidance as a novice with a new name called "Daiwa" the Master encouraged him to return to the world of business rather than just stay in the temple practicing *zazen*. According to the convictions of Master Nishikata, continuing contributions to the society through work was 'the Buddha Way' (J: 仏の道 *hotoke no michi*). That is the most suitable path for a businessperson like Inamori (2002: 233).

As we have already seen, from childhood, Inamori was familiar with the Pure Land devotional practices such as the *nenbutsu*. Given the religious and cultural contexts of Kyushu, he may have been well aware of the saving grace of Amida Buddha. In his writings, however, it is ironic that Inamori does not usually mention Amida Buddha. In addition, it is more likely that Inamori had a fair amount of exposure to a variety of Buddhist practices and schools present in Kyoto during his adult working life. Inamori's presentation of Buddhism draws considerably from the Zen tradition. It clearly shows his close affiliation with the Rinzai school of Zen. As shall be discussed below, Inamori makes regular references to the Rinzai Zen master Hakuin (1685-1768). Moreover, in his writings, there are, of course, references to the historical Buddha Śākyamuni as the main object of reverence rather than records of other Buddhas such as Amida or prominent *bodhisattvas*. Inamori's focus on the historical Buddha is probably a reflection of his commitment to Zen, which claims to derive its teachings directly from Śākyamuni. It may also derive from his interest in early Buddhism. In Inamori's writings, there is plenty of evidence, which indicates his commitment to Zen and his familiarity with Japanese Buddhism. They reflect his commitment and subscription to the worldview set within a larger framework of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

There is no question that Inamori is appreciative of the Zen monastic training that he received later in his adult life. However, it is notable that he is rather critical of the hesitation or lack of initiative among religious leaders and experts in modern Japan. This critique of lack of initiative within Buddhist leadership is leveled even at the Zen tradition. The initiative that Inamori requires and expects from religious leadership includes going "out to the real world" and preaching¹⁸ "Buddhism outside the temples in the real social contexts" and contributing to the "enhancement of the society" (Inamori and Itsuki 2005: 109-110). Here Inamori is demanding an "engaged" form of Buddhism in which contemplative practices such as *zazen* are used in a wider social context in which social mission of the Buddhist teachings becomes the centre of action in enriching the welfare of many.

Master Nishikata seems to have understood the importance of the social mission of Buddhism. After Inamori's novice ordination, Master encouraged Inamori to fulfill this 'mission' of sharing some insights of Buddhist spirituality in the real world. Inamori's new mission was not to operate within temple walls but in the 'real' world guiding the general populace. This mission is not new to Mahāyāna Buddhism. The *bodhisattva* ideal

¹⁸ As a Zen monk, Inamori has preached in public contributing directly to raising awareness of Buddhist teachings and showing their relevance for the contemporary Japanese (Inamori 2007: 242f).

emphasized in Mahāyāna Buddhism has always placed great importance on the wider social welfare, which becomes the crux of the path towards Buddhahood.

Section III: Inamori's Life Philosophy and His Use of the Buddhist Concept of Karma

Inamori's life philosophy is closely connected with his business philosophy. They share same foundations and goals. The close relationship that Inamori sees between one's attitudes to life and work ethic becomes clearer in Inamori's application of the word *shugyō* (修行), which in Japanese means 'training,' often used in the sense of 'religious training' for genuine endeavors in life or struggles for business success. He emphasizes that benefits of such activities are similar to the results of religious training in Zen temples (Inamori 2008c: 108; Inamori 2007: 226).¹⁹

In the development of Inamori's life philosophy, there appears a strong tendency to interpret rather freely basic Buddhist teachings in order to communicate his business philosophy. This can be clearly seen in Inamori's discussion of the concept of *karma*. The concept of *karma* as generally understood by Buddhists is closely related with the principle of dependent origination. It is the primary determiner of development in the world. As the next section illustrates Inamori does embrace the principle of dependent origination regarding it as the main source of various unfoldings in life. A closer examination shows that Inamori's reference to the idea of *karma* focuses on what *karma* means to those who have been struck by misfortune. His account is not an explanation of how the universe operates on the basis of morally sound or unsound human deeds.

Inamori's understanding of the law of *karma* derives from the bitter experience of him being the target of public censure in 1984 when Kyocera was accused of infringing the Pharmaceutical Affairs Law (J: 薬事法 *yakujihō*) (Inamori 2002: 138-140; Inamori 2004: 234-7). Consumed with worry and frustration, Inamori visited Master Nishikata for counsel, hoping that he will console for the difficulty that he was going through. However, he received a rather unexpected response from Master Nishikata:

Well, it cannot be helped, Mr. Inamori. It is a proof of your existence that you are facing difficulty... When a misfortune occurs, the bad *karma* (J: 業 *gō*) that you produced in the past disappears. You should rejoice that the bad *karma* disappears. I do not know what kind of bad *karma* it was. You should rejoice as bad *karma* disappears thanks to a small misfortune like that.... We should celebrate this occasion (Inamori 2002: 140-1).

This is a rather unconventional interpretation of how past *karma* is written off. It is generally believed that the weight of bad deeds is balanced, hence paid off, with good deeds. This does not occur merely by experiencing misfortune or suffering. In Inamori's writings, he does not clarify where this line of interpretation of *karma* originally comes from.

Inamori associates this with a particular phrase of the prominent Rinzai Zen master Ekaku Hakuin (白隠慧鶴 1686-1768) who wrote the *Zazen Wasan* (坐禅和讃, *Hymn in Praise of Zazen*). Quoting Hakuin's phrase, Inamori attempts to support his own view. Hakuin's phrase that Inamori quote is: '[One sitting of meditation erases the countless sins accumulated in the past]' (J: 積みし無量の罪滅ぶ *tsumishi muryō no*

¹⁹ Inamori often encourages his employees to read religious books (Satō 1993: 77).

tsumi horobu) found in the *Zazen Wasan* (Line 22 in D.T. Suzuki's translation²⁰) (Inamori 2002: 141). The Japanese word, *tsumi* (J: 罪) in this case refers to sins, offences, crimes and guilt, which can be taken as a reference to *karmic* accumulations. In its original context of the *Zazen Wasan*, however, this phrase does not encourage one to rejoice on the fact that one's innumerable *karmic* deeds are erased and thus whole-heartedly accept any suffering that comes on one's way with fatalistic mind-setting. Rather it suggests that even one session of seated meditation (*zazen*) has the ability to erase one's negative past deeds, which are, of course, *karmic* from a Buddhist perspective. It is not clear why Inamori quoted this particular phrase from the *Zazen Wasan* to suggest a pessimistic theory of *karmic* forces as negative energies that need expiation. This may suggest and reinforce a fatalist interpretation of human suffering—that all things that happen to human beings are predetermined by *karma* and therefore are unalterable—which does not agree with dynamism and recognition of change proposed by the Buddhist theory of *karma*. To be fair to Inamori, however, it must be stated that on other occasions he sees *karma* in much more optimistic perspective.

Whatever may be the origin of this fatalistic view of *karma*, Master Nishikata's advice gave Inamori much strength to overcome the difficult situation that had arisen in relation to his company's alleged infringement of law and work with strong determination combined with an increased level of sincerity. As shown above, though Inamori sought to explain the unfortunate events related to Kyocera using some of the Buddhist ideas, on other occasions, he refers to the same difficult incident as 'a test God has kindly given' (Inamori 2002: 141).

From Inamori's explanations and rationalisations of the unfortunate events, readers can see that there is a particular way of thinking in operation in his thoughts. Inamori was able to perceive negative events that manifest in one's working life or family life as potent chances and opportunities to correct one's attitude, life-style and work ethics. He appreciated difficult situations as opportunities to go back to basic principles and come out of them with an even bigger success. If a 'misfortune' is presupposed as a cause that results in a positive attitude towards hardship, one could make slightly better sense of Inamori's account of the workings of *karma* and misfortune by thinking of a misfortune as the direct cause of good *karma*, which subsequently writes off bad *karma*.

It is possible to cite another occasion in which Inamori attempted to explain how bad *karma* disappears with a misfortune. The big earthquake that hit Kobe in 1995 caused much damage and suffering to a group of business people (Minagi 1999: 161f). Some criticized Inamori for his remarks that treated 'the victims of the quake as evil spirits (J: 悪霊 *akuryō*)' (Saito 2010: 33 and 116). There is no indication, however, that Inamori's words treated victims of the earthquake in such negative terms. Though it may be an unusual way of making sense of such misfortune, it is fairly clear that Inamori used the idea of *karma* simply to encourage those who suffered by this terrible natural calamity; his intention was to provide them a positive prospect so that they can overcome the traumas of the tragedy. The way Inamori rationalizes the effect of misfortune on its sufferers' lives through a loose interpretation of the Buddhist notion of *karma* illustrates the degree of importance that Inamori assigns to acts such as holding positive attitudes and staying calm while attempting to see difficulties as great opportunities.

²⁰ D.T. Suzuki, "Hakuin's Song of Practicing Dhyana." The electronic text is available at <http://www.zazen.or.jp/E-HOMEPAGE/wasan.html> (accessed 25 February 2011)

In his publications, in addition to *karma*, Inamori often discusses the goal of human life using the term ‘soul’ (J: 魂 *tamashī*). According to him, every human is born with a soul and it is the only thing that does not ‘perish’ through the course of life. As it is also the only thing that will carry on over to next life, it is for our benefit to strive to ‘purify’ it (Inamori 2008c: 30-32). Inamori’s reference to the concept of soul—a fixed unit of identity that transfers from one life to next without change—is foreign to the central teachings of the historical Buddha and is not recognized as such by prominent Buddhist teachers in both Theravāda and Mahāyāna traditions. His notion of soul perhaps may be more representative of the traditional Japanese worldview. Considering that Inamori uses the word *tamashī* almost interchangeably with *kokoro* (心 mind / heart), *jinkaku* (人格 personality, character) or even *ningensei* (人間性 personality, character), it is highly likely that by it he means broadly what is considered in Buddhism as the core of human existence that travels through rebirths.²¹

Conclusion

Kazuo Inamori is an unconventional figure on a variety of levels. As a highly successful entrepreneur, Inamori claims in public that he engages in economic and social activities as a Buddhist. In his publications, Inamori has interpreted some basic Buddhist teachings showing their relevance for his life philosophy and business practices. His worldview appears to be rooted in Buddhist principles.

Inamori has a broader vision—to show the relevance of some Buddhist teachings in resolving various economic, political, and social problems in today’s world.²² This vision makes Inamori’s standpoint even more relevant in the attempts to apply Buddhist ideas to deal with socio-economic concerns and needs of living Buddhist societies.

²¹ In publications focused on life philosophy, Inamori employs the word ‘tamashī’ more often than in business-orientated publications. In contrast, in business-oriented publications, he uses less religiously loaded terms such as ‘kokoro’ or ‘jinkaku.’

²² For a discussion of the relevance of Buddhist concepts and practices in dealing with contemporary issues such as sustainability see Deegalle (2008: 98-103).

Abbreviations	
J	Japanese
P	Pāli
Skt	Sanskrit

References

- Deegalle, Mahinda. 2008. “Sustainable Development and Buddhism,” in *Religion, Science and Sustainability*, ed. Takeshi Kimura. Osaka: Union Press, pp. 95-114.
- Eikawa, Kōki. 1998. *Inamori Kazuo no Seiwaajuku Keiei Hiden: Fukyō wa Chansu ni Kawaru* [*The Secret Management Technique of Kazuo Inamori’s Seiwaajuku: Recession can Turn into a Business Chance*]. Tokyo: Seishun Shuppansha.
- Inamori, Kazuo and Hiroyuki Itsuki. 2005. *Nanno tameni Ikirunoka* [*On the Purpose of Life*]. Tokyo: Chichi Shuppansha.
- Inamori, Kazuo and Takeshi Umehara. 2003. *Atarashī Tetsuaku o Kataru* [*Discussing a New Philosophy*]. Tokyo: PHP.
- Inamori, Kazuo. 2001. *Inamori Kazuo no Tetsugaku: Hito wa Nanno Tameni Ikirunoka* [*The Philosophy of Kazuo Inamori: What is the Purpose of Human Life?*]. Tokyo: PHP.
- Inamori, Kazuo. 2002. *Gaki no Jijoden* [*An Autobiography of a Rascal*]. Tokyo: Nippon Keizai Shinbunsha.
- Inamori, Kazuo. 2004. *Ikikata: Ningen toshite Ichiban Taisetsuna Koto* [*Life: What is the Most Important Thing for Human Beings*]. Tokyo: Sunmark.
- Inamori, Kazuo. 2007. *Jinsei no Ōdō: Saigō Nanshū no Oshie ni Manabu* [*The Royal Road of Life: Lessons from Nanshū Saigō*]. Tokyo: Nikkei BP.
- Inamori, Kazuo. 2008a. *Doshinken ni Ikiru* [*Living Dead Seriously*]. Tokyo: NHK.
- Inamori, Kazuo. 2008b. “My Life as a Follower of Buddha’s Teaching: Buddhism for the Scientific and Sustainable Society” (originally “Bukkyōto toshite no Watashi no Ikikata” [“My Approach to Life as a Buddhist”]) in *Religion, Science and Sustainability*, ed. Takeshi Kimura. Osaka: Union Press, pp. 87-94.
- Inamori, Kazuo. 2008c. *Seikō to Shippai no Hōsoku* [(*The Principles of*) *Success and Failure*]. Tokyo: Chichi Shuppansha.
- Inamori, Kazuo. 2009. *Hatarakikata: Naze Hatarakunoka, Ikani Hatarakunoka* [*Work: Why and How*]. Tokyo: Mikasa Shobō.
- Kotter, John P. 1997. *Matsushita Leadership*. Free Press.
- Minagi, Kazuyoshi. 1999. *Inamori Kazuo to Nakamura Tenpū: Ichidokirino Jinsei, Ikikata, Jibunryū* [Kazuo Inamori and Tenpū Nakamura: Unique Approaches to Only One Life]. Tokyo: President.
- Roebuck, Valerie J. (trans.). 2010. *The Dhammapada*. London: Penguin Books.
- Saitō, Takao. 2010. *Kyoei no Keieisha, Inamori Kazuo* [*Kazuo Inamori, the Manager of Vanity*]. Tokyo: Kinyōbi.

Satō, Seichū. 1993. *Dōki Zennariya, Shishin Nakarishika: Kyōsera Inamori Kazuo no Zaihyōjiku* [*Is My Intention Good, Is There Not a Selfish Motive? The Principles of Kazuo Inamori of Kyocera*]. Tokyo: Keizaikai.

Suzuki, D.T. "Hakuin's Song of Practicing Dhyana." The electronic text is available at <http://www.zazen.or.jp/E-HOME/PAGE/wasan.html> (accessed 25 February 2011)

Turnbull, S. 1998. *The Kakure Kirishitan of Japan: A Study of their Development, Beliefs and Rituals to the Present Day*. Richmond, Surrey: The Japan Library.

Whelan, C. 1996. *The Beginning of Heaven and Earth: The Sacred Book of Japan's Hidden Christians*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Wright, Dale S. 2009. *The Six Perfections: Buddhism and the Cultivation of Character*. New York: Oxford University Press.