

“Other Power” in Tibetan, Chinese, Korean and Japanese Buddhism III:
(Third Year: 2022)

Kenneth Tanaka

Musashino University, Tokyo
“Summarizing the Past Two Panels:
Focusing on the Main Thematic Issues”

Todd Lewis

College of the Holy Cross
“Dharma as Power in Buddhist Tradition”

Richard D. McBride II

Brigham Young University
“The Sinitic Buddhist Context of Wŏnhyo’s View
of ‘Other Power’”

Charles B. Jones

The Catholic University of America
“A Debate Over Self-Power and Other-Power: The *Nianfo yuantong* 念佛圓通 of Ogurusu Kōchō 小栗栖香頂 and Yang Renshan’s 楊仁山 Response”

Schedule

5:00 – 5:05:	Greetings from the sponsors, UBC and IASBS.
5:05 – 5:30:	Prof. Ken Tanaka: Presentation
5:30 – 5:55:	Prof. Todd Lewis: Presentation
5:55 – 6:05:	Break 1: 10 minutes
6:05 – 6:30:	Prof. Richard McBride: Presentation
6:30 – 6:55:	Prof. Charles Jones: Presentation
6:55 – 7:05:	Break 2: 10 minutes
7:05 – 8:00:	Open panel discussion and Q&A from the audience.
8:00:	Conclude

“Summarizing the Past Two Panels:
Focusing on the Main Thematic Issues”

Kenneth Tanaka

Some Perceptions about “Other Power” (他力)

1. Goes against the image of Buddhism as a monastic path based on rigorous self-cultivation.
2. Reminds many others of “grace” and “God” found in the monotheistic religions.
3. Often seen as a teaching found *only* in Pure Land and/or “devotional” forms of Buddhism.

Reinforced even by Pure Land School itself (as seen in an official publication of Hongwanji):

“Other Power, then, distinguishes Pure Land Buddhism from all other forms of Buddhism, which are based on self-power.”

(*Collected Works of Shinran*, Vol. 2, p. 198)

Our working definition of Other Power:

“A spiritual power/working that originates from the other (*para* 他) beyond the known self (*sva* 自) to play a vital role in the aspirant’s spiritual liberation (or awakening).”

Summarizing
Some of the Main Points from
the 2020 symposium:

“Other Power” in Indian, Chinese, Korean and Japanese
Buddhism:

Its Nature and Role in Buddhist Awakening

Ken Tanaka

Musashino Univ.

“The Other Power in Indian Tathagatagarbha Thought:
Reassessing the Dichotomy Drawn between Other Power
and ‘Buddha Nature’”

David Eckel

Boston Univ.

The Logic of Other-Power in the Philosophy of the Indian
Mahāyāna."

David Matsumoto

Inst. of Buddhist Studies & Graduate Theological Union

“Merit and Faith: the Transitional Nature of Tanluan’s Approach
to Other Power”

Charles Muller

Musashino Univ. & Prof. Emeritus, Univ. of Tokyo

A Korean Seon Master's Views on "Other Power":
The Case of Jinul 知訥 (1158–1210)

Mark Blum

Univ. of California, Berkeley

“Conceptions of Other-Power in Japan”

1) Three Questions

- 1) Doctrinal: In which doctrines are the dimensions of Other Power found?
- 2) Soteriological (spiritual liberation/awakening): In what manner and to what extent does Other Power contribute to the aspirant's spiritual liberation and practice?
- 3) Historical: When in Buddhist history does “Other Power” (他力) become the focus of controversy, especially in relation to “Self Power”?

1) Doctrinal and Soteriological (1):

1) Absolute body (*dharmakāya*) - *Avatamsaka Sutra* or *Flower Garland Sutra*

“The Absolute Body (*dharmakāya*) of the Tathāgata penetrates all living beings.”

1) Doctrinal and Soteriological (2):

2) Buddha's might (*anubhāva*) and sustaining power (*adhiṣṭhāna*) - The Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in Eight Thousand Lines

“Śāriputra says: Is it by the Buddha's might (*anubhāva*), sustaining power (*adhiṣṭhāna*) and help (*parigraha*) that bodhisattvas study the deep Perfection of Wisdom?”

1) Doctrinal and Soteriological (3):

3) The Absolute Body (*dharmakāya*) in Tathāgatagarbha or (Buddha embryo, nature, or matrix) doctrine

5th century Sāramati in his treatise, *Ratnagotravibhāga*:

“The Absolute Body (*dharmakāya*) of the Tathāgata penetrates all living beings.” ... [Thus,] there exists the nature (gotra) of Tathāgata [in every living beings.]”
(*discussion of Verse 28*)

1) Doctrinal and Soteriological (4):

4) Other Power (*tali* 他力)

Vasubandhu (4th or 5th c.) *Daśabhūmikasūtra Śāstra*
十地經論

“The rhetoric of *other-power* is informed by the the spiritual power of buddhas. What is the spiritual power of a buddha? It is the power of the wisdom of a tathagata to add [something].”

1) Doctrinal and Soteriological (5):

5) Previous vow (*pūrva-praṇidhāna*) Bhāviveka
(500-570) Madhyamaka school

“The ultimate Buddha ... because of a previous vow (*pūrva-praṇidhāna*), a Manifestation Body arises from it that is capable of assisting everyone.”

1) Doctrinal and Soteriological (6):

6) Buddha's majestic protective power Jinul 知訥 (1158-1210)

“Because their minds are impeccable as a result of their passionate reverence for the three jewels, they will acquire the Buddha's majestic protective power and be able to dissolve their karmic obstructions.”

3) Historical:

When in Buddhist history does “Other Power” (他力) become the focus of controversy, especially in relation to “Self Power”?

- 1) Vasubandhu India (4th or 5th c.): Recognized both but showed no preference.
- 2) Tanluan 曇鸞 China (476-542): Preferred Other Power but did not see Other Power as an exclusive practice that rejects other practices.

Tanluan is seen as a “transitional figure” between the paths of merit-based practices and reliance on Amida’s Vow-power.

3) Historical (cont.):


3) Jinul 知訥 Korea (1158-1210): Recognized both but revealed no preference, since they work together.

4) Seikaku 聖覚 Japan (1167 - 1235): Saw Other Power as exclusive practice and a symbol of orthodoxy for Hōnen's Jōdo school, which led to much controversy in relation to Self Power.

Summarizing

Some of the Main Points from
the 2021 Symposium:

“The Radical Other Power of Shinran (1173-1263):
a Normative or an Outlier Position in Mahayana
Buddhism?”

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- David Matsumoto Inst. of Buddhist Studies & Graduate Theological Union
“A Nonbinary Perspective on Self-power and Other
Power: Implications of Shinran’s teaching that “Other Power means
to be free of any form of calculation”
- Melissa Curley Ohio State University
Other Power and Vital Force in Modern Readings of Shinran
- Mark Blum Univ. of California, Berkeley
Shinran's Other-Power in Context
- Jessica Main:
(postponed) Univ. British Columbia
“Knowing What is Bad and How to Be Good?: Visual
Metaphors in Shinran’s Other Power”

Shinran's View of Other Power (Amida, Vow)

- 1) Not a creator of the world and its living beings.
- 2) A manifestation of ultimate spiritual reality (dharmatā, dharmakāya).
- 3) The “sacred story” of a Bodhisattva named Dharmākara to make the Vows to become Amida Buddha and to establish the Pure Land to save all beings is a “myth” (not historical), which expresses the workings of ultimate reality that is beyond rational understanding.
- 4) There is no judgment; only Shinjin (true realization and entrusting) is required. Thus, “Even a good person is born in the Pure Land [of enlightenment], how much more so an evil or incapable person.”

Shinran is, of course, in line with his teacher
Hōnen on many points but also goes further.
Here are three examples of Shinran's *radical*
Other Power position.

Shinran's More Radical Position (First example)

Honen: Emphasized Nembutsu (念仏 oral recitation of the Name, i.e., “Namu Amida Butsu”) as an exclusive practice.

Shinran: While Nembutsu is also practiced, he emphasized Shinjin (信心、true realization and entrusting) over Nembutsu.

This is a more radical position than Hōnen's, since Shinran did not recognize any efficacy in the aspirant's Nembutsu oral recitation for the aspirant's liberation.

Shinran's More Radical Position (Second example)

Honen: Nembutsu oral recitation nurtures faith that enables the aspirant to feel confident about realizing liberation.

Shinran: Shinjin is endowed by Amida and goes on to reinterpret a sutra passage by an unorthodox way of reading it.

Shinran's More Radical Position (Second example)

Sutra passage: All sentient beings, as they hear the Name, realize even one thought-moment of shinjin and joy, sincerely direct [their merit to others] (至心に廻向し), and aspiring to be born in that land, they then attain birth and dwell in the stage of nonretrogression.

Shinran's reading: All sentient beings, as they hear the Name, realize even one thought-moment of shinjin and joy, which is directed to them [from Amida's] sincere mind (至心に廻向せしめたまへり), and aspiring to be born in that land, they then attain birth and dwell in the stage of nonretrogression.

(The Collected Works of Shinran, p. 296-297)

Shinran's More Radical Position (Third Example)

Honen: Remained a celibate monk through his life.

Shinran: He abandoned his monastic life and got married, eventually having seven children.

This reveals his complete trust in Other Power, allowing him freedom in lifestyle even to reject the monastic life that the Buddhist tradition considered the best path for enlightenment. After all, he saw himself as being “neither monk nor lay.”

Prof. David Matsumoto

I will suggest that Shinran moves beyond Tanluan's transitional approach to a stance of absolute Other Power.

Shinran's apparent casting of Other Power and self-power calculation into polar opposition (within the context of the arising of *shinjin*) makes it possible, paradoxically, to overcome the binary oppositions of practice and not-practice, mind and no-mind, self and other, and other and Other.

Prof. Matsumoto quotes a passage from Shinran's letter.

“Other Power is entrusting ourselves to the Primal Vow and our birth becoming firmly settled; hence it is **altogether without one's own working**. Thus, on the one hand, you should not be anxious that Tathagata will not receive you because you do wrong. A foolish being is by nature possessed of blind passions, so you must recognize yourself as a being of karmic evil. On the other hand, you should not think that you deserve to attain birth because you are good. You cannot be born into the true and real fulfilled land through such self-power calculation.”

Lamp for the Latter Ages, 2, CWS 525-6

Prof. Mark Blum

This brief historical overview shows a number of salient developments

- 1) Other-power rhetoric is unique to Japan.
- 2) It begins right after Hōnen's death, motivated by a felt need among his students to clarify his views in the face of criticism by his critics, especially Myōe (1173-1232) and Jōkei (1155-1213)
- 3) This discourse was active before Shinran got involved after his return from Kanto to Kyoto (around age 62).
- 4) It goes thru a strong sectarian phase until the early 19th century when it starts to turn toward a universalism.

Prof. Melissa Curley: “Other Power and Vital Force in Modern Readings of Shinran”

Slogan of Higashi Honganji “Now, Life is living you.”



Higashi Honganji Main Temple, Kyoto, c. 2018; photo credit @ashsnapem

Other Power seen as *Jinen* 自然 (Naturalness)

It taps into the domain of vitality, life, or life force (vital force, *seimei* 生命) of the natural world.

We are called to renew “natural tendencies toward spontaneous activity,” “return to a rhythm of natural activity,” “realize experientially the state of obedience to nature,” and rediscover one’s “intrinsic desire for life” (*honrai no sei no yokubō* 本来の生の欲望)

Jinen 自然 (Naturalness)

Jinen means to be made to become so. “To be made to become so” means that without the practitioner’s calculating in any way whatsoever, all that practitioner’s past, present, and future evil karma is transformed into the highest good. . . . We are made to acquire the Tathagata’s virtues through entrusting ourselves to the Vow-power; hence the expression, “made to become so”.

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This Year's Panel

In this third panel in the series on “Other Power in Buddhism,” we shall further expand our scope to include materials from Tibetan Buddhism while continuing to include new topics from the East Asian Buddhist sphere. The first presentation will summarize the main points from the previous two panels, focusing on thematic issues related to Other Power.

It will be followed by a paper that expands the paradigm of Other Power by embracing broader Mahayana ritual practices that incorporate, for example, special words (*mantras* and *dhāraṇīs*) that can generate both transcendental and pragmatic blessings.

Aim of This Year's Panel (2)

The third presentation on Korean Buddhism analyzes Other Power within a larger exegetical context that includes the issues of the arousal of the aspiration to enlightenment (*bodhicitta*) and the objective of reaching a state of non-retrogression. The last presentation reports on an international debate that took place on the “self-power Other Power” controversy between the Chinese and Japanese intellectuals in the early part of the 20th century.

Thank You!

.... For not falling asleep.