

Studies on the Life and Thoughts of
Chishō Daishi Enchin (智證大師圓珍)

—A Collection of Articles Written to Commemorate
the 1100th Anniversary of His Death—

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Nichiren (1222-1282), one of the outstanding Buddhist figures of the Kamakura period, taught a doctrine of exclusive devotion to the Lotus Sutra as the sole path of salvation in the Final Dharma age. Nichiren emerged from the influential Tendai sect and inherited its reverence for the Lotus Sutra as representing Śākyamuni Buddha's ultimate teaching. In the course of developing his own thought, he called into question the conclusions of all those, contemporaries and predecessors alike, whose doctrines appeared in his eyes to undermine the supreme position traditionally accorded that sutra. Thus Nichiren criticized in turn the Pure Land teachers, especially Hōnen, who argued that the Lotus Sutra was too profound for the limited capacities of beings in the degenerate age; the exponents of "wordless Zen," who held that the Buddha's enlightenment had been transmitted apart from the text of the sutras; and the teachers of both Shingon and Tendai esotericism, who maintained that the Lotus Sutra was of the same essence, or even inferior, to the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*. Nichiren's critique of Tendai esotericism focused primarily on the work of Jikaku Daishi Ennin (794-866) and Chishō Daishi Enchin (814-891), respectively the third and fifth *zasu* or abbots of Mt. Hiei, whom he often attacked for corrupting the pure Tendai tradition based on the Lotus Sutra by adulterating it with the Shingon esoteric teachings that Kūkai had popularized. For example, we read:

As for these two men, though they rested their bodies on Mt. Hiei above the clouds, their hearts mingled with the dust of Tōji [Kūkai's temple] in the town. Though they appeared to have inherited the will of their original teacher [Dengyō Daishi Saichō], they in fact destroyed his correct doctrine. From the passage of the Lotus Sutra, "Among the various sutras, [the Lotus] stands

above them all,"²¹ they took the character "above" and inverted it, placing [the Lotus Sutra] below the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*. Not only did they become enemies of the Great Teacher [Dengyō], but contrary to what one might expect, they became the foes of all Buddhas, including Śākyamuni, Prabhūtaratna, the Buddhas of the ten directions who are Śākyamuni's emanations, and the Tathāgata Mahāvairocana.²²

From this and similar passages, one may at first receive the impression that Nichiren condemned both Ennin and Enchin categorically. However, an examination of his collected works soon reveals that, in Enchin's case, the matter is not quite so clear-cut. As Komatsu Kuniaki has pointed out,²³ we find two very different images of Enchin in Nichiren's writings. On one hand, Nichiren respected Enchin as an important teacher and predecessor in the Tendai / Lotus tradition to which he himself belonged, and he often quoted passages from Enchin's works in support of his own doctrine. On the other hand, Nichiren also criticized Enchin as the systematizer of Tendai esotericism who had relegated the Lotus Sutra to an inferior place.

The first image—that of Enchin as an outstanding teacher of the Tendai sect—appears most strongly in writings from the first part of Nichiren's career, roughly up until the time of his exile to Sado Island in 1271. Nichiren's famous essay "Risshō ankoku ron" (Treatise on bringing peace to the land by establishing the correct teaching), written in 1260, refers, for example, to the beneficent influence of "the sacred teachings brought back by such men as Dengyō, Gishin, Jikaku and Chishō, who journeyed ten thousand *li* over the waves. . . ."²⁴ During this early period, Nichiren confined his criticisms chiefly to Hōnen's Pure Land doctrine and the "wordless Zen" tradition, and took relatively little exception to the Tendai esoteric teachings. Up until the time of the "Kaimoku shō," written in exile on Sado in 1272, he frequently cited Enchin's works in his own writings, to support his teaching of exclusive commitment to the Lotus Sutra.

However, the "Kaimoku shō" (1272)²⁵ marks virtually the last time we find Nichiren citing Enchin in a positive sense. From the time of the Sado

exile on, Nichiren began increasingly to develop his interpretation of absolute devotion to the Lotus Sutra from a doctrinal standpoint independent of the Japanese Tendai tradition. In the process of clarifying his own distinctive stance, he shifted the focus of his criticism to the Tendai Buddhism of his day, especially to its incorporation of the esoteric teachings. The second image of Enchin—that of a man who slandered the Lotus Sutra and brought confusion to the Buddha-Dharma—begins to emerge in this context, especially from the time of Nichiren's retirement to Mount Minobu in Kai Province in 1274.

Although these two divergent images of Enchin thus clearly stem from shifts in the development of Nichiren's thinking, they may also be said to reflect a dual tendency found in Enchin's own doctrinal study. Enchin's writings fall broadly into two divisions: exoteric and esoteric. The writings of the exoteric group adopt the premise of traditional Tendai doctrinal studies in asserting the supreme position of the Lotus Sutra, and exhibit no particular esoteric overtones. The writings in the esoteric group, however, not only posit an essential unity between the esoteric teachings and the Lotus Sutra, but hold the esoteric teachings to be superior in terms of practice. This twofold character of Enchin's corpus may be seen as "the major distinguishing characteristic" of his thought in contrast to that of his predecessor Ennin.²⁶

For Nichiren, these two faces of Enchin, so to speak, were represented, on the Tendai / Lotus side, by the *Juketsu shū* (Collection of conferred decisions [on doctrinal issues]), and on the esoteric side, by the *Daibiru-shanakyō shiki*, or, as he more frequently referred to it, the *Dainichikyō shiki* (Indications to the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*).

The *Juketsu shū* is said to be Enchin's record, transmitted to his disciple Ryōyū, of the answers to various doctrinal questions he had received during his stay in China from Liang-hsü, abbot of the Ch'an-lin-ssu on Mt. Tien-t'ai. It consists of 54 "decisions" or sections and asserts the superiority of the Lotus Sutra and of the traditional Tendai teachings based upon it over the doctrines of other sects. The *jimon* branch of Tendai, which originated with Enchin's followers, revered it as containing the secret essentials of

his doctrine.

The special respect that Nichiren held for this work may be seen from the *Chā hokekyō* (Annotated Lotus Sutra), his personal copy of the Lotus Sutra in which he inscribed relevant passages from various commentaries that he thought essential to a correct understanding of the sutra. His additions include no fewer than eight "decisions" from the *Juketsu shū* in their entirety and excerpts from three more.⁸⁷ Asai Endō suggests that Nichiren may have kept this work beside him in much the same fashion that he did the three major commentaries of T'ien-t'ai Chih-i.⁸⁸ A letter even survives that Nichiren wrote from Sado to the mother of a senior disciple in Kamakura, requesting that the first volume of the *Juketsu shū* be sent to him in exile.⁸⁹

Of the work's 54 sections, Nichiren seems to have been especially impressed by section 52, the "Chōdagaku-ketsu" (Repudiating the [doctrinal] studies of other [sects]), which argues that the Lotus Sutra surpasses the teachings of the Shingon, Zen, Kegon, Sanron, Consciousness-Only, *vinaya*, Jōjitsu, Kusha, and various other schools, and that, in comparison with the Lotus Sutra, all the other sutras are mere provisional expedients. The "Chōdagaku-ketsu" is cited in fully eight works attributed to Nichiren.⁹⁰

The *Dainichikyō shiki*, on the other hand, clearly ranks the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* above the Lotus Sutra, and Nichiren saw it as representing Enchin's thorough compromise with esotericism. In this work, Enchin attacks Kūkai's assignment, in the *Jajūshin ron*, of the Tendai / Lotus teachings to third place—below those of Shingon and Kegon—in his *kyōhan* or system of doctrinal classification, and reasserts the Tendai position that the Lotus represents the "ghee" or finest of the five Dharma flavors, the fifth and final preaching period into which Tendai divides Śākyamuni Buddha's lifetime teachings. He also criticizes the opinion of the eighth Chinese T'ien-t'ai patriarch Kuang-hsiu (771–843) and his disciple Wei-chūan, which relegated the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* to the *vaipulya* or third period in the Tendai classification. The *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, Enchin insisted, was of the same Dharma essence as the Lotus Sutra itself. In this way, Enchin contrived to elevate the esoteric teachings to the supreme position traditionally

held by the Lotus Sutra, without departing from the traditional Tendai classification system.¹¹ By so doing, he was able to establish the theoretical basis for a distinctively Tendai esotericism.

The *Dainichikyō shiki* not only asserts the essential unity of the esoteric and exoteric teachings, but argues that the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* surpasses the Lotus in the realm of actual practice, because it contains descriptions of the three mysteries, including the secret *mudrās* and *mantras*. In other words, it further develops the doctrine, inherited by Enchin from Ennin, that the esoteric teachings were "equal in principle but superior in practice" (*ridō jishō*) to the Lotus Sutra. Nichiren, being committed to the supremacy of the Lotus Sutra, could only regard this as an unparalleled slander of the Dharma, one far worse, in his opinion, than the heresy committed by Kūkai who had ranked the Lotus Sutra in third place.¹²

Nichiren first mentions the apparent contradiction between the *Juketsu shū* and the *Dainichikyō shiki* just at the time when he was beginning to turn a critical eye upon Tendai esotericism. The discrepancy between the two writings evidently troubled him considerably, for he at first took pains to resolve it in a fashion that would absolve Enchin of any possible charges of self-contradiction—and also in a way that reflects his own characteristic awareness of textual problems. In an essay thought to have been written in the seventh month of 1271, just shortly before Nichiren's exile to Sado, we read:

It is doubtful that this commentary [the *Dainichikyō shiki*] could be Chishō's commentary. The reason is, the second volume of the *Juketsu shū* states, "When compared with such sutras as the Lotus, Flower Ornament and Nirvana [sutras, the other teachings] are merely introductory doctrines."¹³ But when criticizing [the judgment of] Kuang-hsiu and Wei-chūan, [who assigned the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* to the *vaipulya* period, the *Dainichikyō shiki*] states, "Not even the Lotus Sutra can approach [the *samādhi* gate of the esoteric teachings]"¹⁴. . . . These two interpretations contradict one another. If the *Shiki* is Enchin's work, then the *Juketsu shū* cannot be Chishō's commentary. Or, if the *Juketsu shū* is an authentic work, then the *Shiki* cannot be Chishō's

commentary. Now, on considering this matter, the *Juketsu shā* must be Chishō's commentary. Not only do the people throughout the realm all know of it, but it is mentioned in the diaries of the court nobles. As for the *Shiki*, people in many cases do not know of it, and the diaries of court nobles contain no reference to it. Considering things in light of such evidence, perhaps some later person produced this work and called it a commentary of Chishō's. This matter should be investigated thoroughly. The *Juketsu shā* is undeniably Chishō's own writing.¹⁵⁾

Eventually, however, Nichiren evidently found himself no longer able to deny that Enchin had in fact espoused the supremacy of the esoteric teachings. Thus in his last years in retirement on Mount Minobu, he criticized Enchin as someone who had "contradicted his own words,"¹⁶⁾ and remarked that "throughout life, the Great Teacher Chishō seems never to have made up his mind."¹⁷⁾

"For me, Nichiren, to voice doubts about Jikaku and Chishō... is like confronting one's parents and arguing about who is older, or challenging the sun god to see whose eyes shine more brightly," he wrote. "... it may seem disrespectful to criticize them in this way, but if I do not, then I know that the relative merit of the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* and the Lotus Sutra will become obscured. Thus I have ventured to criticize them, setting up my own life as a target [for attack]."¹⁸⁾

Yet, as suggested by his initial attempts to dismiss the *Dainichikyō shiki* as apocryphal, Nichiren seems to have found some difficulty in bringing himself to speak negatively of Enchin. Certainly he criticized him less harshly and at less length than he did Ennin. Komatsu suggests that this reluctance may have stemmed from residual feelings of goodwill toward Enchin, as well as from Nichiren's awareness of a doctrinal debt he owed to the Tendai master in formulating his own teachings.¹⁹⁾ It seems quite likely that for many years Nichiren had indeed held Enchin in the greatest respect. We know that at age 17, he transcribed the *Juketsu entaragi tōketsu*, an esoteric interpretation of Enchin's *Juketsu shā* attributed at that time to Enchin himself, and, as noted above, he frequently quoted in his

early works from the *Juketsu shā*, *Hokke ron ki* and others of Enchin's writings. It also seems probable that Enchin's thought exerted an influence on the development of Nichiren's ideas. Both Asai Endō and Komatsu Kuniaki, in the sources cited thus far, have done groundbreaking work in examining possible doctrinal connections between Enchin and Nichiren. A detailed discussion of these connections is beyond the scope of this article, but we can briefly mention a few of them here:

(1) Insistence on the *transcendent* position of the Lotus Sutra. Japanese Tendai prior to Enchin had for the most part emphasized the Lotus Sutra's function of *integrating* all other teachings within the one Buddha vehicle. Once grasped in light of the one-vehicle teaching of the Lotus Sutra, the other teachings were then said to participate in same Dharma essence as the Lotus Sutra itself. This doctrinal position was expressed in the term "absolute integration" (*zettai kaie*), and in practice translated into the attempt, carried out on Mt. Hiei since Saichō's time, to encompass the *shikan* meditation, observance of the precepts, Pure Land practices, esoteric rituals and a variety of other disciplines under the umbrella of the Lotus Sutra.

In contrast, Enchin developed the doctrinal position of "transcending the eight categories" (*chōhachi*), the notion that the Dharma essence of the Lotus Sutra is distinct from and in fact *transcends* that of all other teachings, i. e., the eight divisions into which Tendai doctrine classifies the body of sutras. This idea did not originate with Enchin and can be found occasionally in even Saichō's writings, but Enchin elaborated upon it to such an extent that it may be said to characterize his doctrinal study.²⁰⁾ He strictly distinguished, for example, between the perfect teaching as embodied in the Lotus Sutra (*Hokke no en*) and the perfect teaching embodied in the preceding teachings (*nizen no en*), holding the former to be superior to the latter.

A definite parallel exists in the thought of Nichiren, who also stressed that the Dharma essence of the Lotus Sutra transcends that of the provisional teachings, and further insisted that practices associated with other teachings should be set aside in favor of exclusive devotion to the Lotus Sutra. Nichiren frequently cited Enchin's interpretations of the Tendai *kyōhan*

to support his argument for the Lotus Sutra's transcendent position.²¹⁾

(2) A privileging of the "origin" section (*honmon*) of the Lotus Sutra. Tendai exegesis divides the Lotus Sutra into two halves, the "manifestation" section (*shakumon*) and the "origin" section. The first presents Śākyamuni as the incarnate Buddha who physically appeared in this world, renounced secular life, practiced austerities, and attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. The second reveals him as the original or primordial Buddha, awakened since the inconceivably remote past. Enchin, as part of his distinctive Tendai esotericism, stressed the "origin" section as a way of unifying esoteric and exoteric concepts of the Buddha. The Shingon sect regarded Mahāvairocana as a Dharma-body Buddha, and Śākyamuni, as a manifested-body Buddha, thus identifying them as two distinct Buddhas. Enchin countered by interpreting them as two aspects of the same Buddha. For him, the primordially enlightened Śākyamuni of the "origin section" of the Lotus Sutra represented that single Buddha's recompense body, while that Buddha's Dharma body (=Mahāvairocana), was what Śākyamuni was enlightened to.

The exegetical divisions of "manifestation" and "origin" originally represented only descriptions of content and were not differentiated in terms of their relative merit. In Nichiren's thought, however, these two become categories in a *kyōhan* or comparative classification of teachings, and the distinction between them is understood hierarchically. Nichiren's interpretation of the "three thousand realms in a single thought-moment" (*ichinen sanzen*) or the "five characters *myō-hō-ren-ge-kyō*," which he identified with the essence of the Lotus Sutra, is grounded entirely in the "origin" section. Nichiren and Enchin stressed the "origin" section for differing reasons, but the focus on this part of the sutra forms a point in common between them.

(3) Emphasis on faith. In section 27 ("Goju shin'i ketsu") of the *Juketsu shū*, Enchin states: "Of the stages of the bodhisattva, the stages of faith are most essential... Faith in the perfect teaching is the source."²²⁾ Asai Endō advances a detailed argument, based on a close

reading of various texts, that what Enchin meant by "the stages of faith" was not merely the first ten of the fifty-two stages of the bodhisattva career, but can be understood in a broader sense to indicate the stage of verbal identity (*myōji-soku*), the initial stage of practice at which one first hears the Dharma and takes faith in it.²³⁾ In Nichiren's case, faith represents the very foundation of his teaching, and he repeatedly stated that the wisdom of all Buddhas is contained in "a single moment's faith and understanding" (*ichinen shinge*) or "a single moment of rejoicing" (in the Lotus Sutra) (*ichinen zuiki*). Nichiren, too, like others of his contemporaries, stressed the stage of *myōji-soku* as the point where one achieves direct entry into Buddhahood, without passing through successive stages. If Asai's interpretation is correct, then this may constitute an important link between Enchin and Nichiren as well as several other teachers of the late Heian and Kamakura periods.

To what extent these elements of similarity may represent the direct influence of Enchin upon Nichiren's thought cannot, at this point, be said for certain. But the very existence of such correspondences, as well as Nichiren's frequent quoting of Enchin's works to support his teaching and his apparent initial reluctance to involve Enchin in his critique of Tendai esotericism, would seem to suggest that Enchin may have played a significant role in the development of Nichiren's thought.

Notes

- 1) *Miao fa lien hua ching* 5, T 262. 9:39a 18-19.
- 2) "Shimoyama goshōsoku," *Shōwa teihon Nichiren Shōnin ibun*, p. 1328.
- 3) "Nichiren Shōnin no Chishō Daishi kan ni tsuite," *Indogaku bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 13-1 (Jan. 1965) and "Nichiren Shōnin kyōgaku to Chishō kyōgaku no shisōteki renkan," *Osaki gakuho* 119 (June 1965).
- 4) *Shōwa teihon*, p. 216.
- 5) *Ibid.*, p. 584.
- 6) Asai Endō, *Jōko Nihon Tendai honmon shisō shi* (Kyoto: Heirakuji shoten, second printing 1983), p. 377.

Varying explanations have been offered for this dual character of Enchin's work, chiefly having to do with the demands of his position as *zasu* at a time when Mt. Hiei was facing increasing competition with the Shingon sect for

influence and patronage. Komatsu suggests that Enchin found it necessary to solidify the theoretical basis of a Tendai esotericism that would be distinct from Kūkai's Shingon teaching and yet capable of rivalling it. In his *Jājūshin ron* (Ten stages of mind), Kūkai had ranked the Lotus Sutra in third place in his comparative classification of the teachings, below the esoteric teachings and the teachings of the Kegon school. Enchin countered this by asserting the supremacy of the Lotus Sutra in his exoteric writings. Then, as his next philosophical step, he argued that the esoteric teachings and the Lotus Sutra are of the same essence, but that the esoteric teachings are superior in terms of practice. Thus in Komatsu's opinion, Enchin's emphasis on the superiority of Lotus Sutra in his exoteric writings was merely a first step in establishing a distinctive, Lotus-related Tendai esotericism. ("Nichiren Shōnin kyōgaku to Chishō kyōgaku no shisōteki renkan," pp. 69-70)

Asai, on the other hand, maintains that Enchin's esoteric and exoteric writings represent two truly distinct tendencies in his work. He points out that two years before Enchin's appointment to the position of *zasu* in 868, the imperial court promulgated an edict that reads in part, "We decree that henceforth, it shall be the established custom to appoint as *zasu* of Mt. Hiei a person who has penetrated and mastered both [esoteric and Lotus] teachings" (*Zasu ki* 1, also quoted in Nichiren's "Hōon shō," *Shōwa teihon*, p. 1214). Enchin was thus placed in the position of having to study and promote both traditions. (p. 377)

- 7) Ibid., pp. 379-80.
- 8) Ibid.
- 9) "Ben-dono-ama gozen gosho," *Shōwa teihon*, p. 752. This passage can also be interpreted to mean that the disciple should himself study the *Juketsu shū* and keep it with him. In either case, it testifies to the esteem in which Nichiren held this work.
- 10) "Shingon kenmon," *Shōwa teihon* p. 651; "Shingonshū shi kenmon," p. 2086; "Hōon shō" p. 1214; "Wakanō daiki," p. 2349; "Shuku jūshō shō," p. 2370; "Sanze shobutsu sōkanmon kyōsō hairyū," p. 1702-3; "Shaka ichidai goji keizū," p. 2467; and the *Chū hokekyō*. Recent scholarship has called into question the authenticity of the "Sanze shobutsu sōkanmon kyōsō hairyū"; however, the inclusion in this essay of the entire "Chōdagaku-ketsu," which Nichiren so admired, may be evidence, if not for Nichiren's direct authorship, then perhaps for some connection with his community.
- 11) See Komatsu Kuniaki, "Tendai mikkyō shisō to no renkan" in Kageyama Gyōō, ed., *Chūsei Hokke bukkyō no tenkai, Hokekyō kenkyū* v. 5 (Kyoto: Heirakuji shoten, 1974), pp. 90-92.
- 12) In several works, Nichiren answers this argument by asserting that *mudrās* and *mantras* pale to insignificance before the unique doctrines of the Lotus Sutra, such as the opening of Buddhahood to practitioners of the two vehicles (*nijō sabutsu*) and the revelation of the Buddha's original enlightenment in the

far distant past (*kuon jitsujō*). See for example "Hokke shingon shōretsu ji," *Shōwa teihon*, p. 306; "Shingon Tendai shōretsu ji," p. 482; and "Shōmitsu-bō gosho," p. 823.

- 13) *T* 2367. 74: 309 b 12-13.
- 14) *T* 2212. 58: 19 b 24.
- 15) "Shingon kenmon," *Shōwa teihon*, p. 651. An almost identical passage appears in the "Shingonshū shi kenmon," p. 2086, thought to have been written the same year.
- 16) "Hōon shō," *Shōwa teihon*, p. 1215.
- 17) "Shuku jūshō shō," *Shōwa teihon*, p. 2371.
- 18) "Hōon shō," *Shōwa teihon*, pp. 1215-16.
- 19) "Nichiren Shōnin no Chishō Daishi kan ni tsuite," p. 174, and "Nichiren kyōgaku to Chishō kyōgaku no shisōteki renkan," p. 65.
- 20) See Hazama Jikō, *Nihon bukkyō no kaiten to sono kichō* (Tokyo: Sanseidō, 1948), vol. 1, pp. 203-9.
- 21) Examples include the "Shoshū mondo shō," *Shōwa teihon*, p. 24; "Sanshū kyōsō," p. 2241-42; "Zōbō ketsugikyō tō yōmon," p. 2273-75; "Shō hokke daimoku shō," p. 201-2; and "Shaka ichidai goji keizū," p. 2454.
- 22) *T* 2367. 74: 299 c 7, 28-29.
- 23) *Jōko Nihon Tendai honmon shisō shi*, pp. 590-94.