Nichiren

Jacqueline Stone

Subject: Buddhism Online Publication Date: May 2020
DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.575

Summary and Keywords

The Japanese Buddhist leader Nichiren 日蓮 (1222–1282) taught exclusive devotion to the *Lotus Sūtra*, a scripture widely revered as the Buddha's highest teaching. Nichiren asserted that in the present, degenerate age, other teachings, being provisional, have lost their efficacy; only the *Lotus Sūtra* is profound and powerful enough to lead all men and women to liberation. The form of *Lotus* practice that he taught—chanting the sūtra's title or *daimoku*題目 in the phrase *Namu Myōhō-renge-kyō*南無妙法蓮華経—was available to all, whether monastics or laity, and regardless of education, ability, or social level. Often celebrated as a man of action, Nichiren was also an innovative thinker who welded some of the subtlest Mahāyāna doctrines to a universally accessible form of practice. Nichiren held that faith in the *Lotus Sūtra* would enable practitioners to realize buddhahood with this very body (J. *sokushin jōbutsu*即身成仏) and that spreading that faith would transform the current world into an ideal buddha land. Nichiren's harsh criticisms of other Buddhist forms drew hostile responses from both government officials and leading prelates; he was twice exiled and attacked repeatedly, while some of his followers were imprisoned, had their lands confiscated, or were even killed. In his lifetime, he could claim at most a few hundred followers. But after his death, Nichiren's following—known first as the Lotus sect (Hokkeshū 法華宗) and later as Nichirenshū 日蓮宗—would grow to become one of Japan's major Buddhist traditions. Today, more than forty officially registered religious bodies, both traditional temple organizations and lay Buddhist movements, claim derivation from Nichiren. Some have a significant international presence. Modern critics have often labeled Nichiren intolerant on account of his *Lotus* exclusivism; at the same time, he set an example of principled resistance to worldly authority that continues to encourage dissenters. Nichiren's ideal of actualizing the buddha land in this world has also inspired multiple forms of Buddhist social activism.

Keywords: daimoku, gohonzon, Lotus Sūtra, mappō, nenbutsu, Nichiren, shakubuku, "slander of the Dharma,", sokushin jōbutsu, Tendai

Nichiren’s Career

Nichiren was born in 1222 in a small fishing village on the Pacific coast of eastern Japan, in Tōjō in Nagase District of Awa province (now Chiba prefecture), at the tip of the Bōsō peninsula. The temple Tanjōji 誕生寺 in Kominato commemorates his birthplace, but the coastline has altered over the centuries, and the exact location is not known. Nichiren described himself as “a fisherman’s son,” “a child of outcastes,” and “a child of commoners.” Scholars disagree about whether these statements point literally to Nichiren’s humble birth or should be taken metaphorically as underscoring his claim that the *Lotus Sūtra* saves even the lowliest of persons. Nichiren’s parents evidently enjoyed some form of patronage relationship with the local estate proprietor, which would have been unusual for ordinary fishermen. Some researchers suggest that Nichiren’s family may have belonged to the ranks of estate managers or lower-level samurai who served local lords as secretaries and overseers.[1]

At age twelve, Nichiren entered a nearby temple, Kiyosumidera 清澄寺 (also known as Seichōji) for study.[2] At sixteen, he was ordained by his teacher Dōzen-bō 道善房, taking the name Zeshō-bō Renchō 是聖房蓮長. While said to have been affiliated with the Tendai school, Kiyosumidera was home to several traditions. It was a major center in eastern Japan for esoteric ritual practice and also housed a substantial library. There Nichiren familiarized himself with traditional Tendai doctrine, esoteric Buddhism, and Pure Land teachings. He also prayed earnestly before the temple’s chief object of worship, an image of the bodhisattva Kōkūzō 虚空蔵 (Ākāśagarbha), to become “the wisest person in Japan.” This suggests that Nichiren may have practiced the *gumonjihō* 求聞持法, an esoteric rite directed to Kōkūzō to enhance one’s powers of study and memory. Later he wrote that the bodhisattva appeared before him as a venerable monk and bestowed on him “a jewel of wisdom like the morning star” that enabled him to grasp the essential doctrines of each Buddhist sect.[3]

Little is known of Nichiren’s life between the ages of sixteen and thirty-two. His earliest surviving essay, written at age twenty-one, finds him already engaged in a polemic that would continue throughout his life and profoundly shape his thinking. Here Nichiren argued passionately against the exclusive *nenbutsu* doctrine of Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212), revered as the founder of the Japanese Pure Land sect (Jōdoshū 浄土宗). Many people at the time, across social levels, aspired to birth after death in one of the “pure lands” of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, envisioned as both ideal postmortem realms and shortcuts on the long path to buddhahood. The most sought-after postmortem destination was the pure land of the buddha Amida 阿弥陀 (Skt. Amitābha, Amitāyus), said to lie countless world spheres away to the west. Once born there, it was said, one would never again fall back into the samsaric realms but was assured of attaining buddhahood. People dedicated the merit of their diverse practices—sūtra copying and recitation, upholding the Buddhist precepts, commissioning Buddha images, and other pious acts—toward the goal of birth in Amida’s Pure Land. The practice of chanting the *nenbutsu* 念仏, the name of Amida, was especially widespread, crossing both sectarian boundaries and social levels.

Hōnen had asserted that the chanted *nenbutsu* was not merely the most efficacious but the only practice by which deluded men and women of the present, degenerate Final Dharma age (*mappō* 末法) could escape saṃsāra and achieve birth in Amida's Pure Land. This exclusive claim, rejecting all other practices, at first drew hostility from both government officials and the Buddhist clerical mainstream. But by Nichiren's time, several decades later, the exclusive *nenbutsu* was steadily gaining acceptance. In persuading converts to abandon other teachings and embrace the *nenbutsu* alone, Hōnen's followers had to counter the popularity of the *Lotus Sūtra*—not only the central scripture of the influential Tendai school but a text broadly recited, copied, and worshipped for its promise of universal buddhahood. Hōnen's disciples charged, for example, that the *Lotus Sūtra* was too profound for benighted persons of the Final Dharma age; those who attempted to practice it, they said, were sure to fail in their efforts and end up falling into the hells. One would do better to set aside the *Lotus Sūtra* in this lifetime and instead rely upon the *nenbutsu* in order to achieve birth in Amida's Pure Land. Once born there, one could achieve the enlightenment of the *Lotus Sūtra* easily.

Nichiren vehemently disagreed. Drawing on the traditional Tendai classification of the Buddhist teachings—which identifies all other teachings as partial truths and the *Lotus* alone as instantiating the Buddha's full enlightenment—he argued that Hōnen's doctrine elevated provisional expedients over the Buddha's ultimate teaching. Urging people to set aside the *Lotus Sūtra* as beyond their capacity in the Final Dharma age was worse even than blatantly maligning the sūtra, because it discouraged people from embracing the one teaching able to save them. "To be born in a country where the *Lotus Sūtra* has spread, and not to believe in or practice it, is to slander the dharma," Nichiren insisted.[4]

During these early years, Nichiren made two extended trips for study, one to nearby Kamakura, seat of the Bakufu or shogunate established in 1185, and another to leading temples in western Japan in the vicinity of Kyoto and Nara. At the great Tendai center on Mt. Hiei, he is said to have stayed at the Yokawa precinct, a site of intense ascetic practice, and to have studied with the Tendai scholar-monk Shunpan 俊範, but these traditions cannot be verified. Shunpan also opposed Hōnen's teaching, and several extracts in Nichiren's possession from petitions and edicts against the exclusive *nenbutsu* could have come to him from Shunpan. During this time, Nichiren studied not only traditional Tendai, esoteric teachings, and a wide range of Buddhist scriptures and doctrines but also Confucian literature and other Chinese and Japanese classics.

By 1253, Nichiren had returned to Kiyosumidera. On the twenty-eighth day of the fourth month, 1253, he delivered his first public sermon, an event now celebrated as the founding of the Nichiren sect. While Nichiren had no intention of starting a new sect, his sermon very likely criticized the exclusive *nenbutsu* and asserted the supremacy of the *Lotus Sūtra* as the sole teaching that enables buddhahood in the Final Dharma age, themes he was to develop over the next several years. Nichiren's preaching seems to have polarized the temple community into supporters and opponents. Tensions between the two factions were exacerbated by a dispute between the hereditary proprietor of the private estate where Kiyosumidera was located—the lay nun Nagoe-no-ama 名越の尼, who may have

been Nichiren's patron—and the Bakufu-appointed steward, Tōjō Kagenobu 東条景信, an ardent *nenbutsu* practitioner who sought to impose this practice forcibly on the temple's clergy. Kagenobu also hunted on temple property, violating the sanctity of its precincts. Nichiren helped negotiate a successful lawsuit on Nagoe-no-ama's behalf, earning Kagenobu's enmity. Eventually he was forced to leave Kiyosumidera. From there he went to the neighboring province of Shimōsa, where he had some connection with one Toki Jōnin 富木常忍 (1216–1299), a learned warrior-bureaucrat who served in the administrative headquarters of the provincial constable. Nichiren remained in Shimōsa for a time, and Toki, along with several of his associates, became Nichiren's follower.[5]

First Remonstration

By 1257, Nichiren had moved to Kamakura. There in the surrounding hills he established a small hermitage at a place called Matsubagayatsu and began to spread his teaching. His writings from this early period develop his claims for the unique salvific power of the *Lotus Sūtra*. Against the position that the *Lotus* is too profound for ordinary persons of the Final Dharma age, Nichiren countered that, precisely because it is so profound, it can liberate all people. Saichō 最澄 (766/767–822), founder of the Japanese Tendai school, had understood *mappō* to be the time when the *Lotus Sūtra* would spread, an idea that Nichiren amplified. Nichiren also began to teach a form of *Lotus Sūtra* practice that would be accessible to all people, namely, chanting the sūtra's *daimoku* or title in the formula "*Namu Myōhō-renge-kyō*," discussed later in the section titled "THE DAIMOKU.[6]" To a limited extent, the *daimoku* had been chanted before Nichiren.[7] It was, for example, the mantra recited in the Lotus rite or *Hokke hō* 法華法, an esoteric Tendai ritual for realizing buddhahood and gaining worldly benefits and protection. In promoting the *daimoku*, Nichiren no doubt had in mind the logic of esoteric mantra practice, in which the identity of the practitioner and the buddha is realized in the act of ritual performance. At the same time, he may have recognized, in the exclusive *nenbutsu* teaching that he so vehemently opposed, the value of a single, universally accessible practice—the chanting of a single phrase, said to be uniquely suited to the Final Dharma age—and appropriated it to the very different logic of his *Lotus*-centered teaching. For example, Nichiren rejected the Pure Land doctrine that defers attainment of buddhahood to a postmortem realm apart from this world. "Wherever a practitioner of the *Lotus Sūtra* dwells should be considered the pure land," he asserted.[8]

In 1257, a major earthquake devastated Kamakura. It was the latest in a series of recent large-scale disasters, including famine, epidemics, and ominous celestial portents. For Nichiren, the country's troubles stemmed fundamentally from neglect of the *Lotus Sūtra*. Of several essays he wrote on this theme, the most famous is his *Risshō ankoku ron* 立正安国論 (Establishing the true teaching and bringing peace to the land), which he submitted through an intermediary to Hōjō Tokiyori 北条時頼 (1227–1263), former regent to the shogun and the most powerful figure in the Kamakura Bakufu. Nichiren's later tradition terms this his first act of "admonishing the state" (*kokka kangyō* 国家諫暁). In this admonitory treatise Nichiren argued that because so many people had cast aside the *Lotus Sūtra* and other profound Mahāyāna teachings in favor of the exclusive *nenbutsu*, the guardian

deities who protect the Buddhadharma had abandoned Japan, exposing it to the predation of demons, and he urged that government officials withdraw support from teachers of Hōnen's misguided doctrine. In so arguing, Nichiren stood squarely within a common understanding of his day that saw disasters not as adventitious but as cosmic responses to moral wrongdoing or religious error.

Prompt action, he continued, was urgent. The *Risshō ankoku ron* cites sūtra passages asserting that a country whose ruler fails to safeguard the true Dharma will suffer such calamities as drought, famine, and epidemics, predictions eerily corresponding to the current state of affairs in Japan. Of the disasters enumerated in these sūtras, only two had not materialized: internal revolt and foreign invasion. Were the situation allowed to persist, Nichiren warned, these two catastrophes would also surely occur. Conversely, if people redirected their faith to the one vehicle of the true teaching, the world would at once become a tranquil buddha land.

There is no record of the Bakufu's response. By this point, however, Hōnen's followers had won influential patrons in Kamakura, including Hōjō Shigetoki 北条重時 (1198–1261), a powerful member of the shogunate's regental family. Some disciples of Hōnen in Kamakura challenged Nichiren to debate; by his own account, he quickly defeated them. Their lay followers then complained of him to Bakufu leaders, and at one point a mob attacked his dwelling. Judging his life to be in danger, Nichiren left Kamakura, possibly taking refuge with Toki Jōnin in Shimōsa, but returned the following year. In the fifth month of 1261, he was arrested and exiled to the Izu peninsula. The reasons for this sentence are not clear. Slander and unauthorized violence were prohibited under the Bakufu's legal code, and the authorities may have felt that Nichiren's continued presence in Kamakura was a magnet for conflict. He would remain in Izu for nearly two years.

While little is known of Nichiren's circumstances in exile, his writings from this period reflect three significant developments. First, he refined his thinking about why the *Lotus Sūtra* alone was appropriate for Japan at the present time. He expressed his conclusions in terms of "five principles" (*gokō* 五綱) or five interconnected perspectives from which he saw the *Lotus Sūtra* as supreme: its teaching, which guarantees buddhahood for all; the time, that is, the Final Dharma age; the people's religious capacity; the country or place; and the sequence of propagation (meaning that one should not promote a Dharma inferior to those that have already been established).[9] Second, in keeping with his growing emphasis on the *Lotus Sūtra* as the sole vehicle of liberation in the *mappō* era, Nichiren also clarified what he meant by "slander of the Dharma" (*hōbō* 謗法), the one evil that could obstruct such liberation. Nichiren took "Dharma slander" not to necessarily mean verbal abuse or even malign intent but a rejection of the *Lotus Sūtra* in favor of provisional teachings. The *Lotus* itself warns about frightful punishments in the Avīci hell awaiting those who slander the sūtra, a fate that Nichiren now deeply feared awaited his fellow Japanese. This concern motivated his assertive proselytizing.

The *Lotus Sūtra* describes the hostility that its devotees will face in a future evil age and calls on them to give their lives if need be to uphold it. These passages may reflect the ex-

periences of the sūtra's compilers, as proponents of a fledgling Mahāyāna movement, of persecution by the Buddhist mainstream. For Nichiren, they mirrored his own experience. A third theme of his Izu writings is his growing self-identification as the "votary of the *Lotus Sūtra*" (*Hokekyō no gyōja* 法華経の行者), a practitioner who not only embraces the teachings of the *Lotus* but lives out its predictions by meeting great trials in propagating it.

Second Arrest and Exile

Nichiren was pardoned in the second month of 1263. For the next few years, he traveled in the eastern provinces to preach and encourage followers. In 1264, he returned briefly to his home province, Awa, to visit his ailing mother. He also renewed connections with those monks at Kiyosumidera who had been sympathetic to his message. During this visit, he and his party were ambushed at a place called Komatsubara by warriors in the service of Kagenobu, the Bakufu steward whose antagonism had forced him to leave Kiyosumidera a decade earlier. Nichiren suffered a broken arm and a sword cut across his forehead, and one of his disciples was killed defending him; two others were gravely wounded. The *Lotus Sūtra*'s prophecy that its devotees will be attacked by swords had materialized.

By 1266, he had returned to Kamakura. In 1268, envoys arrived from Kublai Khan, the Mongol ruler, who had launched a campaign of conquest against China and Korea. Now he demanded that Japan acknowledge Mongol overlordship or prepare to be subjugated. For Nichiren and his followers, this turn of events signaled the fulfillment of scriptural prophecy, cited in his *Risshō ankoku ron*: a country that abandons the true Dharma will suffer attack by foreign invaders. As the Bakufu began to mobilize the country's defenses, Nichiren redoubled his efforts to communicate his message, and his following grew. He had recently begun holding lecture services on the twenty-fourth of each month, the death date of the Chinese Tiantai (J. Tendai) patriarch Zhiyi 智顗 (538–597). These gatherings served to educate his followers and solidify their resolve. At the same time, Nichiren fired off letters to government officials and leaders in the Buddhist world, repeating the admonitions stated earlier in his *Risshō ankoku ron*. Zen now joined his polemical targets as a provisional teaching unsuited to the age, as did both Shingon and Tendai esoteric teachings, evidently in response to government sponsoring of esoteric rites for protection against the Mongols. Nichiren fully understood that his attacks on other teachings were provoking antagonism. Nonetheless, convinced that the threat to Japan stemmed from widespread neglect of the *Lotus Sūtra*, he felt compelled to speak out, in the sūtra's words, "without begrudging bodily life."[10]

Nichiren was arrested on the twelfth day of the ninth month, 1271, probably as part of Bakufu efforts to bolster the country's defenses by subduing unruly elements at home. By Nichiren's account, Hei no Saemon-no-jō Yoritsuna 平左衛門尉頼綱, deputy chief of the board of retainers for the Hōjō shogunal regents, privately intended to have him beheaded and ordered that he be taken to the execution grounds outside Kamakura. His life was spared, it is said, when a dazzling object suddenly streaked across the night sky, terrify-

ing his would-be executioners. While modern scholarship has questioned the historicity of the event, Nichiren himself clearly believed he had undergone a form of death and transformation on that night. He was then exiled a second time, to the bleak island of Sado in the Sea of Japan.

On Sado, Nichiren was initially assigned as living quarters a small, ruined chapel near a charnel ground; he suffered from cold, hunger, and the hostility of the locals. He also worried about his followers in Kamakura, several of whom had been had been arrested or imprisoned in the wake of his own exile. Many gave way to doubts and abandoned their faith. Nichiren himself wrestled with the question of why he and his followers should meet persecution when the *Lotus Sūtra* promises its devotees "peace and security in the present life."[11] His struggle with these doubts and their eventual resolution are related in his *Kaimoku shō* 開目抄 (Opening the eyes), written during the privations of his first winter on the island, which concludes with a renewed resolve to dedicate himself to faith in the *Lotus Sūtra* at all cost. "Let heaven forsake me. Let ordeals confront me. I will not begrudge bodily life. … Whatever trials we may encounter, so long as we do not cherish doubts, I and my disciples will naturally achieve buddhahood."[12] Gradually, Nichiren began to win converts among the island's inhabitants. He also maintained a steady correspondence with his followers and produced some of his most important works.

Nichiren's Sado writings show an increased identification with two figures in the *Lotus Sūtra*. One is the bodhisattva Superior Conduct (Skt. Viśiṣṭacāritra, J. Jōgyō 上行), leader of a vast throng of bodhisattvas who emerge from beneath the earth and receive Śākyamuni Buddha's mandate to propagate the *Lotus* in an evil age after his nirvāṇa. The other is the bodhisattva Never Despising (Skt. Sadāparibhūta, J. Jōfukyō 常不軽), who pays homage to everyone he meets as a future buddha, patiently bearing their scorn and abuse; by so doing, he is able to expiate his past wrongdoings and become a buddha himself. For Nichiren, the bodhisattva Superior Conduct represented his own mission to declare the truth of the *Lotus Sūtra* in the present age; Nichiren's later tradition has often identified him as Superior Conduct reborn. At the same time, the bodhisattva Never Despising represented Nichiren's understanding of his present trials as a form of exculpatory suffering that would eradicate his own past sins of slander against the *Lotus Sūtra* and ultimately assure his buddhahood.

Nichiren's major Sado writings include the *Kanjin honzon shō* (観心本尊抄, The contemplation of the mind and the object of worship), later designated, along with the *Risshō ankoku ron* and *Kaimoku shō*, as one of his three most important works. Dated 1273, this essay develops the doctrinal basis for chanting the *daimoku* as the form of "mind contemplation" (*kanjin* 観心) appropriate for the Final Dharma age. For Nichiren, *kanjin* was not a traditional meditation method requiring disciplined mental training. Rather, he asserted, all Śākyamuni Buddha's "causes and effects"—the practices he undertook since the inconceivably remote past in order to realize buddhahood and the merits he gained in consequence—are fully contained within the five characters of the *daimoku* and immediately transferred to the devotee in chanting it. Thus the practitioner can realize the merits of the six perfections comprising the entirety of the bodhisattva path without needing to cul-

tivate them as individual practices. Zhiyi had divided the *Lotus Sūtra* into two parts: the first fourteen chapters, or "trace teaching" (*shakumon* 迹門), present Śākyamuni Buddha as a "manifest trace" (*suijaku* 垂迹), that is, in his transient guise as a historical figure who attained awakening in the present life, while the latter fourteen chapters or "origin teaching" (*honmon* 本門)—and especially chapter 16, "Fathoming the Lifespan of the Tathāgata"—present him in his true aspect or "original ground" (*honji* 本地) as the primordial buddha, awakened since the remotest past and constantly active in this world and others for the sake of living beings. Nichiren now began to identify the *daimoku* as the heart of the origin teaching and the Dharma transmitted by this primordially enlightened Śākyamuni Buddha to the bodhisattva Superior Conduct and his followers as expressly for propagation in the Final Dharma age. The *Kanjin honzon shō* also lays the doctrinal groundwork for the calligraphic mandala, discussed in the section "THE GREAT MANDALA," that Nichiren devised as an object of worship for his followers, depicting the *Lotus* assembly where the ever-present Śākyamuni Buddha preaches.

In the second month of 1272, Hōjō Tokisuke 北条時輔, the shogunal regent's half-brother, was accused of plotting a coup, and many deemed to be collaborators were killed in Kyoto and Kamakura. Occurring just when the country needed to unite against the Mongols, this internecine struggle was alarming. It seemed to fulfill the second prediction of the *Risshō ankoku ron*, domestic rebellion, and perhaps for that reason Nichiren was transferred that spring to better quarters at the home of a local landowner. Two years later he was pardoned, possibly because he was thought to have special insight into the deepening Mongol threat. Returning to Kamakura in early spring of 1274, Nichiren was immediately summoned by Hei no Yoritsuna, the same Bakufu official responsible for his near execution and subsequent exile. Asked when the Mongols would attack, Nichiren replied—accurately, as it turned out—that they would strike within the year. Tradition says that Yoritsuna offered Nichiren official patronage if he would conduct prayer rites for the country's protection along with those being performed by other schools, but Nichiren refused. No doubt he again admonished Yoritsuna that reliance on prayer rites based on provisional teachings would invite still worse calamities; only by faith in the *Lotus Sūtra* could the disaster be forestalled.

Realizing that his admonitions would not be heeded, Nichiren left Kamakura and withdrew to Mt. Minobu in Kai province, where the local steward, Hakii (or Hakiri) Sanenaga 波木井実長, was his follower. His first dwelling there was primitive, and again he endured hunger and cold. Gradually, however, a community of followers formed around him. At this point Nichiren turned over the work of proselytizing to his chief disciples and devoted himself to writing and to training successors. The greater portion of his surviving works dates from the Minobu period and includes not only doctrinal treatises but also moving letters to his lay followers, praising their efforts, expressing gratitude for their material support, and encouraging their faith in difficult times. These letters display Nichiren's literary skills and offer insight into his perspective on the application of faith to real-world situations. From his remote retreat, Nichiren also actively supervised a network of disciples who maintained their own congregations in their respective provinces while traveling back and forth to Minobu. Through this network, Nichiren was able to re-

ceive news and communicate readily with his followers. It enabled him to guide them through critical junctures, including the two Mongol attacks of 1274 and 1281 and a local persecution of devotees in the Atsuhara area near Fuji in the late 1270s that resulted in multiple arrests and three executions.[13] However, Nichiren's health had been undermined by long years of privation. He passed away on the thirteenth day of the tenth month, 1282, after entrusting the task of propagation to his disciples.

Essentials of Nichiren's Teaching

Central to Nichiren's teaching is his claim that the *daimoku* or title of the *Lotus Sūtra* embodies the whole of Buddhist truth and that chanting the *daimoku* constitutes the only efficacious practice for the present era. Buddhist scriptures say that, after the Buddha's passing, his teachings will become distorted; correct practice will be lost; and liberation will become all but impossible to achieve. In East Asia, this decline process was divided into three consecutive periods: the True and Semblance Dharma ages (*shōbō* 正法, *zōbō* 像法), often said to last a thousand years each, and the Final Dharma age (*mappō*), lasting ten thousand years or more.[14] While chronologies varied, in Japan *mappō* was widely thought to have begun in 1052. Some Buddhist figures drew on notions of the Final Dharma age to urge renewed efforts in traditional disciplines of precept keeping and meditation; others, Nichiren among them, saw the *mappō* era as demanding a reformulation of Buddhist practice. Nichiren argued that provisional teachings such as *nenbutsu*, Zen, and the esoteric teachings had enabled their practitioners to achieve enlightenment during the True and Semblance Dharma ages but had lost their efficacy now in the Final Dharma age. Put differently, persons born in the *mappō* era lack the capacity to achieve enlightenment through provisional teachings. They must receive the "seed of buddhahood," the *daimoku* of the *Lotus Sūtra*, the vehicle of liberation expressly intended for the people of this age. That is why *daimoku* practice entails both chanting and propagation. Nichiren spoke of the buddhahood to be achieved in *mappō* from two perspectives: as immediately accessible in the act of chanting and as culminating over a lifetime's practice. Both are inseparably connected and grounded in the same principle.

Mutual Inclusion of the Ten Realms

Tiantai/Tendai tradition holds that Śākyamuni Buddha taught for fifty years. For forty-two years he preached expedient teachings suited to the diverse capacities of his audience, and in the last eight years he preached the *Lotus Sūtra* as the direct expression of his own enlightenment. Thus where earlier teachings are "provisional" (*gon* 権) and incomplete, the *Lotus Sūtra* is "true" (*jitsu* 実), meaning complete and perfect. Nichiren saw the *Lotus Sūtra* as complete and perfect because it enables all beings to become buddhas. While other sūtras might make this claim, they did not, in his view, embody the principle that makes universal buddhahood possible. Nichiren identified this principle in Tendai terms as the "mutual inclusion of the ten Dharma-realms" (*jikkai gogu* 十界互具). Buddhist cosmology represents saṃsāra, the realm of deluded rebirth, as a hierarchy of six paths: hell dwellers, hungry ghosts, animals, contentious *asura* demons, humans, and gods.

Above these are four more realms characterized by varying degrees of awakening: the two realms of the *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s, who cultivate detachment and cessation of desire as set forth in the so-called Hīnayāna teachings; bodhisattvas, who strive for the liberation of all; and fully awakened buddhas. In contrast to the buddha realm, which represents supreme enlightenment, the other nine realms represent delusion, or states not yet fully awakened. All ten interpenetrate, so that each realm contains all ten within itself; thus the buddha realm does not exist apart from oneself. “Some sūtras say that hell lies beneath the ground,” Nichiren wrote, “while others say that the Buddha dwells in the west. But close investigation shows that both exist within our five-foot body.”[15]

The mutual inclusion of the ten realms expands into the larger principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of thought, or *ichinen sanzen* 一念三千. In essence, *ichinen sanzen* means that the smallest phenomenon (a single thought-moment) and the entire cosmos (three thousand realms) are mutually encompassing: the one and the many; good and evil; delusion and awakening; subject and object; self and other; and all sentient beings from hell dwellers, hungry ghosts, and animals up through bodhisattvas and buddhas, as well as their respective environments, simultaneously interpenetrate and encompass one another without losing their individual identity. First set forth by Zhiyi, this complex, architectonic principle offers a sophisticated example of how Chinese Buddhist interpreters sought to articulate the holistic interrelation of the mind and all phenomena. Nichiren described the *ichinen sanzen* principle as “the father and mother of the buddhas.”[16] For him, it was what made the *Lotus Sūtra* unique and qualified it as the “Wonderful Dharma” (*myōhō* 妙法).

In Nichiren’s reading, the three thousand realms in a single thought-moment—or its condensed form, the mutual inclusion of the ten realms—designates both the potential for buddhahood in all beings of the nine realms as a theoretical principle (*ri no ichinen sanzen* 理の一念三千) and its actualization as the awakened state that the Buddha has realized (*ji no ichinen sanzen* 事の一念三千), which encompasses and illuminates the other nine realms. Nichiren associated these two aspects respectively with the two divisions of the *Lotus Sūtra*: the trace teaching or *shakumon*, which teaches that all beings can become buddhas, and the origin teaching or *honmon*, which reveals the Buddha’s original awakening in the remotest past and his constant presence in the world. “*Ichinen sanzen* as actuality” described for Nichiren both the primordial buddha’s enlightenment and its instantiation in a concrete form of practice that makes that enlightenment accessible to all. In the *mappō* era, he taught, that concrete form comprises “three great secret Dharmas” (*sandai hihō* 三大秘法): the *daimoku*, the object of worship, and the ordination platform.

The Daimoku

Myōhō-renge-kyō is the title, in Japanese pronunciation, of the celebrated 406 Chinese translation of the *Lotus Sūtra* by Kumārajīva (344–413), while “*Namu*” (from the Sanskrit *namas*) connotes praise, devotion, and the taking of refuge. Throughout his writings,

Nichiren discusses “the *daimoku* in five or seven characters” as far more than the title of a text; *Myōhō-renge-kyō* is itself the Wonderful Dharma, “the heart of the eighty thousand sacred teachings and the eye of all buddhas.”[17] Nichiren drew on a Chinese tradition of title exegesis, in which the entire meaning of a sūtra was thought to be contained within its title. Zhiyi, for example, had devoted almost the whole of his commentary *Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sūtra* (*Fahua xuanyi* 法華玄義) to interpreting the five characters *myō*, *hō*, *ren*, *ge*, and *kyō* that compose the sūtra’s name.[18] Just as the *Lotus Sūtra* is said to be all-encompassing, so too is its title. For Nichiren, the *daimoku*, as the embodiment of *ichinen sanzen*, encompasses all phenomena, including all beings and their environments in the ten realms of existence. Nichiren’s thinking about the *daimoku* also drew on widespread ideas about the efficacy of mantras, *dhāraṇī*s, and other invocations, which were believed to encapsulate enlightened states and spiritual powers and to elicit numinous responses. The *daimoku*, he taught, contains the whole of the Buddha’s enlightenment and makes it immediately accessible to the devotee. He expressed this idea in a famous passage from his *Kaṇjin honzon shō*: “Śākyamuni’s causal practices and their resulting virtues are all contained within the five characters Myōhō-renge-kyō. When we embrace these five characters, he will naturally transfer to us the merit of his causes and effects.”[19]

In general, the Mahāyāna sūtras teach that, in order to become a buddha, one must perfect the six *pāramitā*s, the practices of a bodhisattva—generosity, keeping the precepts, forbearance, assiduousness, meditation, and wisdom—over a period of three incalculable kalpas (eons). However, Nichiren, like other contemporary Tendai teachers, understood the *honmon* section of the *Lotus Sūtra*, with its revelation of the Buddha’s constant presence in this world, as opening a perspective from which “cause,” or practice (the nine realms), and “effect,” or enlightenment (buddhahood), are simultaneous. He taught that all the practices that the primordial Śākyamuni Buddha carried out over countless kalpas to achieve his awakening, and all the wisdom and merit that he attained in consequence, are contained within the *daimoku* and immediately opened to the practitioner who chants it. One could say that chanting the *daimoku* aligns or “syncs” the reality of the practitioner with that of the Buddha, so that the three thousand realms of the primordial buddha and those of the practitioner become identified. This is the “realization of buddhahood with this very body.” Of course, religious maturity comes only with continued practice, and Nichiren urged his followers to maintain their faith throughout life. But his concept of practice did not involve aspiring to buddhahood as a remote, external goal but as grounded in an enlightenment that is always accessible via the *daimoku*.

Because he understood the *daimoku* as all-encompassing, Nichiren stressed that chanting it would confer all the goods that religious practice in his day was thought to generate: this-worldly benefits such as protection and healing and assurance for the afterlife. Beyond such specific benefits, however, he saw faith in the *Lotus Sūtra* as establishing an inner freedom and stability, independent of whether one’s circumstances are favorable or adverse. “Recognize suffering as suffering, enjoy pleasures for what they are, and whether in suffering or joy, keep chanting Namu Myōhō-renge-kyō,” he wrote to a follower. “Then you will know the joy of the Dharma for yourself.”[20]

The Great Mandala

Buddhist practitioners in medieval Japan, like those of today, often enshrined a personal object of worship (*honzon* 本尊)—a painting or statue of a buddha or bodhisattva, or perhaps a mandala—as a focus of practice. *Honzon* were regarded not as merely symbolic but as actually embodying the powers and virtues of the Buddhist holy beings that they depicted. The object of worship most widely employed within the Nichiren tradition is a calligraphic mandala that Nichiren himself devised, written entirely in Chinese characters with two Sanskrit glyphs. It is known as the *daimandara* 大曼荼羅 ("great mandala") or *gohonzon* 御本尊 ("revered object of worship"). Nichiren widely inscribed these mandalas as personal *honzon* for his followers, and more than 120 of them survive in his own hand. Since his signature appears on the *gohonzon*, receiving one was proof of a master-disciple connection with Nichiren.

On Nichiren's mandala, the *daimoku* is written vertically as a central inscription, flanked by the names of the buddhas Śākyamuni and Prabhūtaratna (Abundant Jewels), just as they sat together at the assembly of the *Lotus Sūtra*, as well as the names of representative bodhisattvas, deities, and other beings, human and non-human, who were present on that occasion. These figures also represent the mutual inclusion of the ten realms. Illuminated by the central inscription of the *daimoku*, Nichiren explained, they reveal their enlightened aspect just as they are. Thus in doctrinal terms, the mandala embodies the nine realms encompassed by the buddha realm, or *ichinen sanzen* in actuality.

The logic underlying Nichiren's *gohonzon* resembles that of esoteric practice, in which the practitioner visualizes, often aided by use of a mandala, the union or interpenetration of oneself and the Buddha (*nyūga ganyū* 入我我入), thus realizing buddhahood with this very body. For Nichiren, however, the union of the devotee and the Buddha is manifested not by esoteric visualization or other meditative techniques but by faith in the *Lotus Sūtra*. By chanting the *daimoku*, the devotee "enters" the mandala, the realm of the original buddha's awakening, and participates in the enlightened reality that it depicts.

In devising his *gohonzon*, Nichiren drew on earlier visual representations of the *Lotus* assembly as well as other influences, especially from esoteric Buddhism.[21] It is also noteworthy that other Buddhist teachers of his day, such as Myōe 明恵 (1173–1232) and Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1262), similarly created calligraphic *honzon* for their followers. Nichiren's mandala resembles these examples in that it did not require a professional painter or sculptor or expensive materials to produce. Thus it represents a trend toward the popularization of Buddhist iconography, previously available only to very few.[22]

The Ordination Platform

Where Nichiren himself established the *daimoku* and the object of worship, he charged his future followers with establishing an ordination platform (*kaidan* 戒壇) as the last of the "three great secret Dharmas" for the *mappō* era. Traditionally, an ordination platform is a place for receiving the Buddhist precepts and becoming a monk or nun. However, Nichiren taught that the merit of keeping the precepts is already inherent in the *daimoku*,

and that embracing the *Lotus Sūtra* is the only valid precept in the Final Dharma age. Thus his intentions concerning the *kaidan* are not altogether clear. He specified that it would be the "ordination platform of the origin teaching" (*honmon no kaidan* 本門の戒壇), superseding the Tendai ordination platform on Mt. Hiei, whose precepts Nichiren understood as based solely on the *shakumon* or trace teaching of the *Lotus Sūtra* and no longer suited to the Final Dharma age. Only one writing in the Nichiren collection, the *Sandai hihō honjōji* (三大秘法稟承事, Transmission of the three great secret Dharmas), provides any detail, describing it as a great spiritual center for the people of the world, to be erected once the sovereign and his ministers have embraced the *Lotus Sūtra*. Since ordination platforms in premodern Japan were court sponsored, Nichiren may well have envisioned the eventual acceptance of his teaching in these terms. However, a state-sponsored *kaidan* conflicts with modern notions of the separation of religion and government, and the *Sandai hihō honjōji*'s authenticity has been hotly contested, perhaps as much on ideological as on textual grounds.[23] Some among Nichiren's successors have preferred to interpret the *kaidan* metaphorically as any place where the *daimoku* is chanted, based on the *Lotus Sūtra*'s teaching that wherever one upholds the sūtra "is itself the place of enlightenment."[24] Whatever Nichiren's intent, his inclusion of the *kaidan* among the three great secret Dharmas reflects his awareness that practice occurs in a concrete place and must engage the larger world.

The Mission of Propagation

Nichiren's aim in preaching devotion to the *Lotus Sūtra* was not only to guide individuals to enlightenment but to save the entire country, a task he came to see as his personal mission and responsibility. As the faith and chanting of the *daimoku* spread, he taught, the present world would become the buddha land. For that reason, he saw proselytizing as an integral part of practice.

The Choice of Shakubuku

Buddhist sūtras and commentaries specify two approaches to Dharma teaching: *shōju* 摂受, or leading others gradually in an open and accepting manner, without challenging their opinions, and *shakubuku* 折伏, or assertively rebuking attachment to wrong views. The choice between them, Nichiren said, should depend on the time and place. In his view, because Japan at the beginning of the Final Dharma age was a place and time where the *Lotus Sūtra* was being discarded in favor of provisional teachings, the confrontational *shakubuku* method should take precedence. "When the time is right to propagate the teaching of the one vehicle, the provisional teachings become enemies," he wrote. "If they are a source of confusion, one must refute them from the standpoint of the true teaching."[25]

Convinced that only the *Lotus Sūtra* leads to liberation in the *mappō* era, Nichiren understood *shakubuku* as a compassionate act, equivalent to bodhisattva practice. Whether others accepted the *Lotus* or rejected it, asserting its sole validity and urging them to take

faith in it would implant the seed of buddhahood in their hearts and thereby establish for them a karmic connection to the sūtra that would someday allow them to realize enlightenment, whether in this lifetime or a future one. However, Nichiren acknowledged that, even in the Final Dharma age, situations might arise that would call for a milder method, for example, in countries ignorant of the Dharma.[26] This acknowledgment allowed for flexibility but also opened the way for controversy within the later Nichiren tradition, which has periodically been divided over the merits of confrontational versus accommodating approaches.

The Soteriology of Meeting Persecution

Nichiren's combative approach invited censure and attack by powerful figures in both clerical and government circles. Over the course of his tumultuous career, he found deep meaning in enduring the opposition that his efforts drew forth. First, Nichiren believed that by encountering hostility in spreading the sūtra, one bears witness to its truth. The *Lotus Sūtra* itself says that those who uphold it in an evil age following the Buddha's nirvāṇa will be mocked, reviled, attacked, ousted repeatedly, and slandered to the ruling authorities by monks who are widely respected. The fact that these predictions were borne out by his own experience confirmed for Nichiren that his path was the right one. Nichiren termed this "bodily reading" (*shikidoku* 色読) of the sūtra—not merely reciting it verbally or mentally embracing its teachings but living out its words. Nichiren's "bodily reading" has been described as a "circular hermeneutic" in which sūtra and practitioner mirror and confirm one another: the sūtra's predictions that its devotees will encounter hardships legitimated Nichiren's actions, and Nichiren's experience of persecution, in fulfilling scriptural prophecy, legitimated the *Lotus Sūtra*.[27]

Nichiren further taught that enduring hardships to spread faith in the *Lotus* expiates one's offenses committed in prior lifetimes and repays one's indebtedness: to one's parents, to the ruler, to the "three jewels"—Buddha, Dharma, and sangha—and to all living beings. He also maintained that encountering great trials for the *Lotus Sūtra*'s sake guarantees one's future buddhahood. "You must each be resolved," he told his followers. "Offering your life for the *Lotus Sūtra* is like exchanging rocks for gold, or dung for rice."[28] Buddhism in general stresses the importance of breaking through egocentrism, surrendering attachments to a narrow idea of self, as a prerequisite for liberation. The sūtras often express the spirit of relinquishing self-attachment through stories of heroic bodhisattvas of the past who, in their quest for supreme enlightenment, plucked out their eyes, cut off their limbs, peeled off their skin on which to transcribe Buddhist teachings, or in some fashion willingly gave up life itself for the Dharma's sake. Nichiren saw such acts as beyond the capacity of ordinary people and no longer appropriate in the *mappō* era. Rather, in his view, being willing to meet harsh trials in the course of propagating the *Lotus Sūtra* is equivalent to "giving one's life" and results in supreme buddhahood. Nichiren's example has proved an enduring encouragement, both to his followers and to others outside his tradition, who have risked personal welfare, even life itself, to uphold convictions that contravened prevailing orthodoxy.

Actualizing the Lotus World

The *ichinen sanzen* principle posits a radical interrelation of the living subject and his or her environment, or, in more precise Buddhist technical language, the nonduality of direct and circumstantial karmic recompense (*eshō funi* 依正不二). Because the environment mirrors the life-condition of those inhabiting it, individual beings perceive and experience their surroundings differently; the world of a hell-dweller is hellish, while the world of a fully awakened person would be a buddha realm.

For Nichiren, the immanence of the buddha land in this world was not merely a truth to be realized subjectively in the faith or insight of individual practitioners; the practice of devotees would actually transform the outer world. Because all ten realms interpenetrate and encompass both living beings and their environments, manifesting buddhahood oneself in the act of chanting the *daimoku* would simultaneously draw forth buddhahood in one's surroundings. And, as the practice of the *daimoku* spread, the present world would become an ideal buddha land. Nichiren did not discuss in detail what this transformed world would look like, but in one passage he writes: "When the people all chant Namu Myōhō-renge-kyō as one, the wind will not thrash the branches nor the rain fall hard enough to erode the soil. The world will be as it was in the ages [of the ancient Chinese sage kings] Fuxi and Shennong. In this life, inauspicious disasters will be banished, and people will obtain the art of longevity," suggesting that faith in the *Lotus Sūtra* could bring about harmony with nature, just rule and, in some sense, a transcending of impermanence.[29] In his teaching, actualizing the buddha land in this world becomes a concrete goal of practice and the task of *Lotus* devotees. This gives his doctrine an explicitly social dimension. Over the centuries, Nichiren's followers have sought to realize his goal, although with widely varying interpretations of what an ideal society based on the *Lotus Sūtra* would look like. Nichiren's vision of manifesting the Buddha land in the present world speaks powerfully to the this-worldly orientation of today's Buddhist modernism and has motivated modern and contemporary Nichiren- and *Lotus*-based movements.

Nichiren opposed the idea, common in his time, of shunning this world as wicked and impure and aspiring to birth in a pure land after death. In his later years, confronted with the need to explain what happens to *Lotus Sūtra* devotees after they die, Nichiren taught that they go to "the pure land of Eagle Peak" (Ryōzen jōdō 霊山浄土), an apotheosis of Mt. Gṛdhrakūṭa (J. Ryōjusen 霊鷲山, also translated as "Vulture Peak") in Rājagṛha in India, where Śākyamuni Buddha is said to have preached the *Lotus Sūtra*. Nichiren was not the first to conceive this realm as a postmortem destination. But in his understanding, the pure land of Eagle Peak is not a distinct realm apart from the present world; it exists wherever one embraces the *Lotus Sūtra*. Accessible in the present, it also extends to encompass the faithful dead. This realm is precisely what Nichiren represented on his great mandala, using the *Lotus Sūtra*'s mythic image of the Eagle Peak assembly where the ever-present Śākyamuni Buddha preaches to his audience. This constantly abiding "pure land" is, in other words, a timeless reality, a spatial expression of the enlightened state.

Immediately accessed through faith and chanting, it is also to be manifested in the outer world through ongoing efforts in propagation.

For Nichiren, faith in the *Lotus Sūtra* collapses all temporal and spatial separation between the Buddha and the devotee; by upholding the sūtra and chanting its *daimoku*, one can immediately enter the *Lotus* assembly and dwell in the Buddha's presence. Thus the moment of chanting the *daimoku* becomes the point of intersection between linear, historical time and the timeless realm of the primordial buddha. In defining *mappō* as the historical moment when the *daimoku* of the *Lotus Sūtra*, the practice of direct realization, would spread, Nichiren in effect inverted the conventional gloomy connotations of this age and redefined it as the best possible time to be alive. "Rather than be great rulers during the two thousand years of the True and Semblance Dharma ages, those concerned for their salvation should rather be common people now in the Final Dharma age," he wrote. "It is better to be a leper who chants Namu Myōhō-renge-kyō than be chief abbot of the Tendai school," the highest position in the medieval Japanese religious world.[30]

Review of Literature

An immense body of scholarship on Nichiren's life and thought exists in Japanese, written from both sectarian and secular academic perspectives. To date, the Institute of Nichiren Buddhist Studies at Risshō University (Risshō Daigaku Nichiren Kyōgaku Kenkyūjo 立正大学日蓮教学研究所), which is affiliated with the denomination Nichirenshū, has played a major role in scholarly research on Nichiren.[31] The Institute publishes the journal *Nichiren kyōgaku kenkyūjo kiyo* 日蓮教学研究所紀要 and has edited primary texts and produced valuable reference works, including dictionaries.[32] Scholarly journals are also published by other sects, lay organizations, and independent research institutes within the larger Nichiren Buddhist tradition. In recent years, forums have emerged to promote scholarly exchange among the various sects and lineages of Nichiren Buddhism and to include outside academics. These forums include the Hokke Komonzu Bukkyō Gakurin 法華コモンズ仏教学林 ("Lotus Commons" Buddhist Study Institute) and the journal *Hokke bukkyō kenkyū* 法華仏教研究. Such broad collaborative efforts promise to raise Nichiren studies to a new level, as seen, for example, in the recent five-volume essay collection *Shirīzu Nichiren*.[33]

Nichiren has drawn little attention from Western researchers, especially in comparison to his near contemporaries, Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253) and Shinran, who have often been grouped with him as founders of the new Buddhist movements of Japan's Kamakura period (1185–1333). The influence of nationalistic readings of Nichiren during the Pacific War, along with his own claim for the exclusive truth of the *Lotus Sūtra*, contributed for a long time to uncritical stereotyping of Nichiren in Anglophone overviews of Buddhism as a militant, intolerant, or even fanatical figure. Such treatments have often conveyed more about modern normative assumptions regarding Buddhism than about Nichiren himself. In English, there are more studies of contemporary Nichirenist movements, especially Sōka Gakkai 創価学会, than there are of Nichiren.

Early examples in Western languages of serious engagement with Nichiren—although now requiring modification in light of later scholarship—include Masaharu Anesaki's *Nichiren, the Buddhist Prophet*, which, inspired by William James and the nascent field of religious psychology, depicted Nichiren as a prophet and mystic, then considered classic "types" of religious personalities.[34] Other examples are Gaston Renondeau's *La Doctrine de Nichiren*; Alicia Matsunaga and Daigan Matsunaga's *Foundation of Japanese Buddhism*; Bruno Petzold's (1873–1949) posthumously published *Buddhist Prophet Nichiren: A Lotus in the Sun*; and Laurel Rasplica Rodd's *Nichiren: Selected Writings*.[35]

Recent studies seek to understand Nichiren within larger historical and religious frameworks. Lucia Dolce's pioneering research has shed unexpected light on Nichiren's indebtedness to the thought, practice, and iconography of esoteric Buddhism.[36] Ruben Habito has placed Nichiren within the broader Buddhist use of *dhāraṇī*s and other incantations as methods of accessing spiritual power.[37] Jacqueline Stone's work examines Nichiren in his historical and intellectual contexts.[38] A landmark publication is *Revisiting Nichiren*, which also contains a bibliography of English-language work on Nichiren up until 1999.[39]

Primary Sources

Nichiren wrote voluminously, and the four-volume *Shōwa teihon* critical edition of his writings, edited by the Institute of Nichiren Buddhist Studies at Risshō University, contains nearly five hundred writings, including doctrinal treatises and letters to his followers, as well as charts and outlines; it also contains almost four hundred fragments from additional writings.**[40]** Nichiren's annotated copy of the *Lotus Sūtra*, in which he inscribed relevant passages of commentary, has been published separately.**[41]** Photographic collections of Nichiren's holographic mandalas have also been published.**[42]**

Two extensive collections of Nichiren's writings have appeared in English translation. Both are products of Japan-based translation committees working for the overseas propagation of Nichiren's teaching; while intended primarily for practitioners, they can, with appropriate care, be used as scholarly resources. One, supervised by Kyōtsū Hori with the assistance of other translators and editors, is the *Writings of Nichiren Shōnin*, now numbering six volumes, published by the Nichirenshū Overseas Propagation Promotion Association (NOPPA).**[43]** Each volume corresponds to one in the series *Nichiren Shōnin zenshū* 日蓮聖人全集, a collection of Nichiren's writings translated into modern Japanese and annotated by leading scholars of Nichiren in Japan.**[44]** The English translations are based on the *Shōwa teihon* critical edition of Nichiren's work. A second collection of Nichiren's works in English is the two-volume *Writings of Nichiren Daishōnin*, published by Sōka Gakkai and available online in searchable format.**[45]** It is based on the single-volume Sōka Gakkai edition of Nichiren's writings.**[46]** Assisting in its translation was Burton Watson (1925–2017), professor emeritus of Columbia University and an accomplished translator of Chinese and Japanese literature. Two volumes of Nichiren's writings, translated by Watson and edited for a scholarly readership by his colleague, Philip Yampolsky (1920–1996), have been published by Columbia University Press.**[47]** (Watson also translated the

Ongi kuden 御義口伝, a late medieval collection of oral teachings on the *Lotus Sūtra* attributed to Nichiren but almost certainly the work of later disciples.)[48]

Among Nichiren's writings, more than two hundred survive, completely or partially, in his own hand; others have been handed down as copies made by early disciples or as later transcriptions and woodblock editions.[49] As is the case with many premodern Buddhist figures, some of the works transmitted as Nichiren's may be those of later disciples, and considerable scholarly disagreement surrounds the authenticity of specific texts. Disputed works include, for example, the *Sandai hihō honjōji*—mentioned in the section on "**The Ordination Platform**"—which mandates the establishment of a state-sponsored ordination platform. Suspicion has also been cast on writings containing accounts of seemingly miraculous events in Nichiren's life or showing strong influence of medieval Japanese Tendai "original enlightenment" (*hongaku* 本覚) discourse. Some commentators insist that interpretations of Nichiren should be based only on fully authenticatable works—an approach made possible only by the rare historical accident that so many of Nichiren's holographic writings have survived. Others opt for a more flexible stance encompassing those writings that survive only in transcription but do not contain glaring textual problems that would mark them as obvious apocrypha.[50] While future research may illuminate these issues, in the end it may prove impossible to distinguish clearly in all cases among Nichiren's own writings, those produced by immediate disciples with his approval, and later compositions attributed to him retrospectively. In this regard, Nichiren's case should be understood as representing the rule and not the exception.

Links to Digital Materials

Nichiren's writings (in Japanese): The Nichirenshū Research Center for Contemporary Religion (Nichirenshū Gendai Shūkyō Kenkyūjo 日蓮宗現代宗教研究所) maintains an **online database** of Nichiren's writings. These are divided into those surviving in Nichiren's holograph (*shinseki ibun* 真蹟遺文), those transmitted as later transcriptions (*shahon ibun* 写本遺文), charts (*zuroku* 図録), and fragments (*dankan* 断簡). This database follows the numbering system used in the *Shōwa Teihon Nichiren Shōnin ibun* (see note **3**) and indicates its pagination. The *Chū Hokekyō*, Nichiren's annotated copy of the *Lotus Sūtra*, is also available at this site.

A more sophisticated electronic database, the **Nichiren Daishōnin gosho shisutemu**, has been made available by the research institute Kōfū Danjō 興風談所. Its use requires the installation of specialized Japanese software.

Nichiren's writings (in English): The two-volume *Writings of Nichiren Daishōnin*, published by Sōka Gakkai (1999–2006), is available **online**; see the section on "**Primary Sources**" for details. The translations are intended chiefly for Sōka Gakkai practitioners. English renderings of Buddhist terminology often differ from those used in the academic study of Buddhism, but the translations are generally clear and accurate.

A partial translation of vol. 1 of the *Writings of Nichiren Shōnin*, published by the Nichirenshū Overseas Propagation Promotion Association (NOPPA), is available at **GoogleBooks**.

Depictions of Nichiren's life: Scenes from the life of Nichiren as depicted by the woodblock artist Utagawa Kuniyoshi 歌川国芳 (1798–1861) and others have been made available **online** by the library of Risshō University.

Scholarly Studies of Nichiren in English: See "**Revisiting Nichiren**" (1999), a special issue of the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* co-edited by Ruben L. F. Habito and Jacqueline I. Stone. See also the university websites of **Lucia Dolce** and **Jacqueline Stone**, which include several articles on Nichiren and his tradition.

Further Reading

Dolce, Lucia. "Awareness of Mappō: Soteriological Interpretations of Time in Nichiren." *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, 4th ser., 7 (1992): 81–106.

Dolce, Lucia. "Criticism and Appropriation: Nichiren's Attitude toward Esoteric Buddhism." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 26, no. 3–4 (1999): 349–382.

Dolce, Lucia. "Between Duration and Eternity: Hermeneutics of the 'Ancient Buddha' of the Lotus Sutra in Chih-i and Nichiren." In *A Buddhist Kaleidoscope: Essays on the Lotus Sutra*. Edited by Gene Reeves, 223–239. Tokyo: Kōsei, 2002.

Dolce, Lucia. "Esoteric Patterns in Nichiren's Interpretation of the Lotus Sutra." PhD diss., University of Leiden, 2002.

Habito, Ruben L. F. "Bodily Reading of the Lotus Sūtra." In *Readings of the Lotus Sūtra*. Edited by Stephen F. Teiser and Jacqueline I. Stone, 186–208. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

Habito, Ruben L. F. and Jacqueline I. Stone, eds. "Revisiting Nichiren." Special issue, *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 26, nos. 3–4 (1999).

Lopez, Donald S. Jr. and Jacqueline I. Stone. *Two Buddhas Seated Side by Side: A Guide to the* Lotus Sūtra. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019.

Motai Kyōkō 茂田井教亨. *Nichiren no Hokekyō kan* 日蓮の法華経観. Tokyo: Kōsei Shuppan, 1980.

Nakao Takashi 中尾堯. *Nichiren* 日蓮. Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2001.

Ōtani Gyōkō 大谷行亨. *Nichiren Shōnin no kanjin ron* 日蓮聖人の観心論. Tokyo: Sankibō Busshorin, 1999.

Satō Hiroo 佐藤弘夫. *Nichiren: Ware Nihon no hashira to naramu* 日蓮 - われ日本の柱とならむ. Kyoto: Mineruba Shobō, 2003.

Stone, Jacqueline I. *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1999. (See especially chapter 6, “Nichiren and the New Paradigm.”)

Sueki Fumihiko 末木文美士. *Nichiren nyūmon: Gensei o utsu shisō* 日蓮入門 - 現世を撃つ思想. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2000.

Takagi Yutaka 高木豊. *Nichiren to sono montei* 日蓮とその門弟. Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1965.

Takagi Yutaka 高木豊. *Nichiren: Sono kōdō to shisō* 日蓮 - その行動と思想. Tokyo: Hyōronsha, 1970 (Reprint 1985.)

Tamura Yoshirō 田村芳朗. *Nichiren: Junkyō no nyoraishi* 日蓮 - 殉教の如来使. Tokyo: Nihon Hōsō Shuppan Kyōkai, 1975.

Watanabe Hōyō 渡辺宝陽. *Nichiren bukkyōron: Sono kichō o nasu mono* 日蓮仏教論 - その基調をなすもの. Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 2003.

Notes:

(1.) Takagi Yutaka 高木豊, *Nichiren: Sono kōdō to shisō* 日蓮 - その行動と思想 (Tokyo: Hyōronsha, 1970; repr. 1985), 13–15; and Nakao Takashi 中尾堯, *Nichiren* 日蓮 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2001), 18–26.

(2.) Ages are given according to traditional East Asian reckoning, by which people begin life at age one.

(3.) “Zenmui Sanzō shō” 善無畏三蔵鈔, in *Shōwa teihon Nichiren Shōnin ibun* 昭和定本日蓮聖人遺文, ed. Risshō Daigaku Nichiren Kyōgaku Kenkyūjo 立正大学日蓮教学研究所, 4 vols. (Minobu-chō, Yamanashi-ken: Sōhonzan Minobu Kuonji, 1952–1959; rev. ed. 1988), 1:473.

(4.) *Kaitai sokushin jōbutsu gi* 戒体即身成仏義, in Risshō Daigaku, *Teihon*, 1:12.

(5.) Takagi, *Nichiren*, 47–54; and Nakao, *Nichiren*, 54–66.

(6.) “*Namu Myōhō-renge-kyō*” represents proper scholarly romanization. In actual chanting, minor variations in pronunciation occur among practice groups as a matter of lineage convention. Some, for example, elide the “u” sound between “*Namu*” and “*Myōhō*.”

(7.) Jacqueline I. Stone, “Chanting the August Title of the *Lotus Sūtra*,” in *Re-Visioning “Kamakura” Buddhism*, ed. Richard K. Payne (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1998), 116–166; and Lucia Dolce, “Esoteric Patterns in Nichiren’s Interpretation of the *Lotus Sūtra*” (PhD diss., Leiden University, 2002), 294–315.

(8.) *Shugo kokka ron* 守護国家論, in Risshō Daigaku, *Teihon*, 1:129.

(9.) Jacqueline I. Stone, *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1999), 251–255.

(10.) *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經, *T* 262, 9:16a15, 36a5, and 43b23.

(11.) *T* 9:19b19–20.

(12.) *Kaimoku shō* 開目抄, in Risshō Daigaku, *Teihon*, 1:601, 604.

(13.) Jacqueline I. Stone, "The Atsuhara Affair: The *Lotus Sūtra*, Persecution, and Religious Identity in the Early Nichiren Tradition," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 41, no. 1 (2014): 153–189.

(14.) Jan Nattier, *Once upon a Future Time: Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline* (Berkeley, CA: East Asian Humanities Press, 1991), 65–118.

(15.) "Omonsu-dono nyōbō gohenji" 重須殿女房御返事, in Risshō Daigaku, *Teihon*, 2:1856.

(16.) "Shōmitsu-bō gosho" 聖密房御書, in Risshō Daigaku, *Teihon*, 1:822. See also Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 263–266.

(17.) *Hokke daimoku shō* 法華題目鈔, in Risshō Daigaku, *Teihon*, 1:392.

(18.) Partially translated in Paul Swanson, *Foundations of T'ien-t'ai Philosophy: The Flowering of the Two Truths Theory in Chinese Buddhism* (Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1989), 164–256.

(19.) *Kanjin honzon shō* 觀心本尊抄, in Risshō Daigaku, *Teihon*, 1:711; and see also Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 267–270.

(20.) "Shijō Kingo-dono gohenji" 四条金吾殿御返事, in Risshō Daigaku, *Teihon*, 2:1181.

(21.) Lucia Dolce, "Reconsidering the Origins of Nichiren's 'Great Mandala of the Lotus Sutra,'" in *Universal and International Nature of the Lotus Sutra: Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference on the Lotus Sutra*, ed. Rissho University Executive Committee for the Seventh International Conference on the Lotus Sutra (Tokyo: Sankibō Busshorin, 2013), 187–209.

(22.) Takagi, *Nichiren*, 168–171.

(23.) Sueki Fumihiko, "Nichiren's Problematic Works," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 26, nos. 3–4 (1999): 261–280, 264–273; and Jacqueline I. Stone, "'By Imperial Edict and Shogunal Decree: Politics and the Issue of the Ordination Platform in Modern Lay Nichiren Buddhism," in *Buddhism in the Modern World: Adaptations of an Ancient Tradition*, ed. Steven Heine and Charles S. Prebish (New York: Oxford, 2003), 193–219, 194–197.

(24.) *T* 9:52a25–26.

(25.) "Nyosetsu shugyō shō" 如説修行鈔, in Risshō Daigaku, *Teihon*, 1:735.

(26.) *Kaimoku shō*, 1:606.

(27.) Ruben L. F. Habito, “Bodily Reading of the *Lotus Sūtra*,” in *Readings of the Lotus Sūtra*, ed. Stephen F. Teiser and Jacqueline I. Stone (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 186–208, 198–199.

(28.) *Shuju onfurumai gosho* 種種御振舞御書, in Risshō Daigaku, *Teihon*, 2:961–962.

(29.) “Nyosetsu shugyō shō,” in *Teihon*, ed. Risshō Daigaku, 1:733.

(30.) *Senji shō* 選時抄, in *Teihon*, ed. Risshō Daigaku, 2:1009.

(31.) The name “Nichirenshū” is used to denote both a specific Nichiren Buddhist denomination, whose head temple is Kuonji at Mt. Minobu in Yamanashi prefecture, and the broader Nichiren Buddhist tradition as a whole. In this case, the first meaning is indicated.

(32.) Nichirenshū Jiten Kankō Iinkai 日蓮宗事典刊行委員会, ed., *Nichirenshū jiten* 日蓮宗事典 (Tokyo: Nichirenshū Shūmuin, 1981); and Risshō Daigaku Nichiren Kyōgaku Kenkyūjo, ed., *Nichiren Shōnin ibun jiten* 日蓮聖人遺文辞典 (Minobu-chō, Yamanashi-ken: Sōhonzan Minobu Kuonji, 1984).

(33.) *Shirīzu Nichiren*, ed. Komatsu Kuniaki 小松邦彰 and others. 5 vols. (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 2014–2015).

(34.) Masaharu Anesaki, *Nichiren, the Buddhist Prophet* (Harvard University Press, 1916; repr. Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1966).

(35.) Gaston Renondeau, *La Doctrine de Nichiren* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1953); Alicia Matsunaga and Daigan Matsunaga, *Foundation of Japanese Buddhism*, vol. 2: *The Mass Movement (Kamakura and Muromachi Periods)* (Los Angeles: Buddhist Books International, 1976), esp. chap. 3; Bruno Petzold, *Buddhist Prophet Nichiren: A Lotus in the Sun*, ed. Shotaro Iida and Wendy Simmonds (Tokyo: Hokke Jānaru, 1978); and Laurel Rasplica Rodd, *Nichiren: Selected Writings* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1980).

(36.) See for example, Lucia Dolce, “Criticism and Appropriation: Nichiren’s Attitude toward Esoteric Buddhism,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*26, nos. 3–4 (1999): 349–382. See also other articles on Nichiren listed at Dolce’s university website https://www.soas.ac.uk/staff/staff30872.php.

(37.) Habito, “Bodily Reading,” 186–190.

(38.) For example, Jacqueline I. Stone, “Nichiren and the New Paradigm,” in *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism*, by Jacqueline I. Stone (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1999), 239–299; and see also “Articles on the Lotus Sūtra, Tendai, and Nichiren Buddhism” at Stone’s university website.

(39.) Ruben L. F. Habito and Jacqueline I.Stone, eds., “Revisiting Nichiren,” special issue, *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 26, nos. 3–4 (1999).

(40.) See *Shōwa teihon Nichiren Shōnin ibun*, note 3.

(41.) Yamanaka Kihachi 山中喜八, ed., *Teihon Chū Hokekyō* 定本注法華經 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1980).

(42.) Yamanaka Kihachi 山中喜八, *Nichiren Shōnin shinseki no sekai* 日蓮聖人真蹟の世界, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 1992); and in English, see Luigi Finocchiaro and Nichiren Mandala Study Workshop, eds., *The Mandala in Nichiren Buddhism*, parts 1–2 (by the editors, 2013–2014), and http://www.lulu.com/shop/http://www.lulu.com/shop/the-nichiren-mandala-study-workshop/the-mandala-in-nichiren-buddhism-part-two-mandalas-of-the-k%C5%8Dan-period/paperback/product-23898444.html. These volumes are based chiefly on an earlier version of Yamanaka's collection, the *Nichiren Daishōnin goshinseki gohonzonshū* 日蓮大聖人御真蹟御本尊集 (Chiba: Risshō Ankoku Kai, 1975; revised 1981).

(43.) *Writings of Nichiren Shōnin*, ed. Kyōtsū Hori and others. 6 vols. (Tokyo: Nichirenshū Overseas Propagation Promotion Association, 2003–2010).

(44.) Watanabe Hōyō 渡辺宝陽 and Komatsu Kuniaki 小松邦彰, eds., *Nichiren Shōnin zenshū* 日蓮聖人全集, 7 vols. (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 2011).

(45.) Gosho Translation Committee, ed. and trans., *Writings of Nichiren Daishōnin*. 2 vols. (Tokyo: Sōka Gakkai, 1999–2006).

(46.) Hori Nichikō 堀日亨 (1867–1957), ed., *Nichiren Daishōnin gosho zenshū* 日蓮大聖人御書全集 (Tokyo: Sōka Gakkai, 1952; revised 2012).

(47.) Burton Watson and others, trans., Philip B. Yampolsky, ed., *Selected Writings of Nichiren* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); and Burton Watson and others, trans., Philip B. Yampolsky, ed., *Letters of Nichiren* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

(48.) Burton Watson, trans., *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* (Tokyo: Sōka Gakkai, 2004).

(49.) For details, see Suzuki Ichijō 鈴木一成, *Nichiren Shōnin ibun no bunkengakuteki kenkyū* 日蓮聖人遺文の文献学的研究 (Tokyo: Sankibō Busshorin, 1965), 3–10; and Yamanaka Kihachi 山中喜八, *Nichiren Shōnin shinseki no sekai* 日蓮聖人真蹟の世界, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 1993), 57–67.

(50.) For summaries of these arguments, see Jacqueline I. Stone, "Some Disputed Texts in the Nichiren Corpus: Textual, Hermeneutical and Historical Problems" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1990); and Sueki, "Nichiren's Problematic Works," 261–280. More recent work promises to shed new light on the processes by which Nichiren's works were compiled. See for example Emanuele D. Giglio ジッリォ・エマヌエール・ダヴィデ, "*Shohō jissō shō* no raireki: *Rokunai*, *Rokuge* no shūsei jijō to Sairen-bō den kara"『諸法実相抄』の来歴—「録内」「録外」の集成事情と最蓮房伝から, *Indo tetsugaku bukkyōgaku kenkyū* インド哲学仏教学研究 20 (2013): 106–144.

Jacqueline Stone

Department of Religion, Princeton University