

Nichiren Shōnin's View of Humanity The Final Dharma Age and the Three Thousand Realms in One Thought-Moment

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Nichiren, like others regarded as the “founders” of the new Buddhist movements of the Kamakura period, takes as his starting point belief in the Final Dharma age (mappō), when human capacity is said to have greatly declined, and liberation to be extremely difficult to achieve. Yet while mappō thought entails a recognition of human limitations, Nichiren also maintained faith in the possibility of human enlightenment, on the basis of his understanding of the Tendai concept of “three thousand realms in one thought-moment” (ichinen sanzen), which sets forth the potential for buddhahood in ordinary worldlings. This classic essay, first published in 1968 and translated here from its reprint in 1997, analyzes how these two concepts of human capacity—one negating, the other affirming—are maintained in a dynamic tension at the foundation of Nichiren’s thought. It also presents an illuminating comparison with the teachings of Hōnen, another of the new Buddhist founders who lived slightly before Nichiren and had addressed similar issues.

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SUFFICIENT MATERIALS EXIST to consider Nichiren’s view of humanity (*ningenkan* 人間観) in terms of both his thought and actual circumstances. Especially in terms of actual circumstances, we have the many letters he sent to his disciples and lay followers in response to the individual situations in which they were placed. I believe it would prove an extremely interesting enterprise to approach Nichiren’s view of the human state and of life as expressed in response to these concrete realities. Here, however, I will not write down the whole of what comes

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to mind about Nichiren's view of humanity but instead pursue only his fundamental ideas.

The basis for religious practice throughout the whole of Kamakura Buddhism lies in thought concerning the Final Dharma age (*mappō* 末法). Nichiren's religion, too, cannot be considered independently of his *mappō* thought.¹ At the same time, he valued as the ultimate principle of the *Lotus Sūtra* the theory of the three thousand realms in a single thought-moment (*ichinen sanzen* 一念三千) transmitted within the Tendai school,² to such an extent that, of the more than four hundred writings in his collected works, there are very few that do not refer to it. Thus Nichiren's religion is woven from the woof of *mappō* thought, as the intellectual current of the times, and the warp of *ichinen sanzen* theory, as traditional doctrine. These two together form Nichiren's fundamental view of humanity.

However, in general, *mappō* thought represents a negative view of humanity,³ while *ichinen sanzen* theory is a principle that affirms it.⁴ How these two are harmonized and unified in Nichiren's thought is, therefore, an interesting problem.

¹ Expressions in Nichiren's writings such as "more than two hundred years since the beginning of the Final Dharma age," "more than two thousand two hundred twenty years since the Buddha's nirvāṇa," "more than two thousand two hundred thirty years since the Buddha's nirvāṇa," and "the beginning of the Final Dharma age" occur too frequently to mention. In addition, statements such as "one who would spread the Buddhist teachings must of necessity understand the time" (*Kyōkijikoku shō* 教機時国鈔, STN 1: 242), or, "Those who would study Buddhism must first learn about the time" (*Senji shō* 撰時抄, 2:1003), show that Nichiren's religion cannot be considered independently of his view of *mappō*.

² For example, the *Shōjō daijō funbetsu shō* 小乘大乘分別鈔, which he wrote at age fifty-two, states, "The capacity of persons of the two vehicles to attain buddhahood and the Buddha's original realization of enlightenment in the distant past are the essentials of the *Lotus Sūtra* and are remarkable when compared to other sutras. But in the context of the *Lotus Sūtra* itself, they are not remarkable or wondrous; it is the doctrine known as the three thousand realms in one thought-moment that is the most remarkable and wondrous of things, not found anywhere in the *Flower Garland* or *Mahāvairocana* sutras..." (STN 1: 770).

³ As suggested, for example, in Nichiren's citation from the sixth fascicle of the *Dasheng fayuan yilin zhang* 大乘法苑義林章: "The age of the True Dharma possesses all three—teaching, practice, and realization. In the age of the Semblance Dharma, there are teaching and practice but no realization. Now that we have entered the age of the Final Dharma, the teaching remains but there is neither practice nor realization" (STN 2: 1480).

⁴ For example, the *Kaimoku shō* 開目抄 states, "The three thousand worlds in one thought-moment begins with the mutual inclusion of the ten realms"; "When one arrives at the origin teaching (*honmon* 本門), ...the cause and effect of the ten realms of the origin teaching are revealed. This is precisely the doctrine of original cause and original effect. The nine realms are inherent in the beginningless Buddha realm and the Buddha realm inheres in the beginningless nine realms. This represents the true mutual inclusion of the ten realms, the hundred realms and thousand suchnesses, and the three thousand realms in one thought-moment"; and "The ten realms each manifest the Buddha realm inherent in themselves" (STN 1: 539, 552, 570).

A Comparison with Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212)

In investigating Nichiren's idea of the Final Dharma age, it is convenient to define it provisionally as the antithesis of Hōnen's *mappō* thought. Nichiren did not know of Dōgen, and although Shinran lived for twenty years in Inada in eastern Japan, until around 1235—that is, when Nichiren was about twelve or thirteen—Nichiren's writings make no reference even to Shinran's name, let alone his teachings. He does refer to disciples of Hōnen other than Shinran, as well as to *nenbutsu* practitioners apart from Hōnen's following.⁵ But when criticizing the teachings of the chanted *nenbutsu*, which these people represented and which had spread throughout Japan at the time,⁶ Nichiren focused solely upon Hōnen—the reason being that Hōnen was himself the founder of the exclusive *nenbutsu* movement.⁷

It must be said that research conducted for the purpose of criticism exerts an ineradicable influence upon the researcher, and that in studying Hōnen in order to refute his views, Nichiren must have been influenced by him in the process. Nevertheless, because Nichiren repudiated Hōnen's teaching, the development of his *mappō* thought cannot have followed the same path as Hōnen's. And in reality, for that very reason, the direction in which Nichiren's religion aims is completely opposite to that of Hōnen's. Hōnen, taking *mappō* thought as his point of departure, denied self-power and relied on Other Power. He “discarded, closed, ignored, and abandoned” difficult practices

⁵ Nichiren's *Ichidai gojizu* 一代五時圖 and *Jodo kuhon no koto* 淨土九品之事 both give charts of Hōnen's followers (STN 3: 2287, 2309). As for Pure Land figures other than Hōnen's followers, we also find mention of Yōkan (or Eikan, 1033–1111), a Pure Land teacher of the Sanron school (STN 1: 813; 2: 1032, 1047, 1075, 1244, 1339, 1465, 1542, 1826).

⁶ “People of the world follow him [Hōnen] like small trees bending before a great wind, and his disciples value him just as the myriad devas revere Indra” (*Shugo kokka ron* 守護國家論, STN 1: 89); “[How, despite official prohibition,] have they come to travel about as they please, through every corner of the capital and the provinces [spreading the exclusive *nenbutsu*?]” (*Nenbutsusha tsūihō senjō* 念仏者追放宣狀, STN 3: 2272); “None of the monks of the various schools such as Tendai or Shingon go beyond Hōnen's wisdom. Though they may study the doctrines of their own school, at heart they are all alike *nenbutsu* believers” (age 39, *Ichidai gojizu* STN 3: 2288).

⁷ The name of Hōnen's major work *Senchaku hongan nenbutsu shū* 選撰本願念仏集 occurs repeatedly throughout Nichiren's writings (see the index in volume 4 of STN). In the introductory passage of the *Shugo kokka ron*, written in 1259, the year before the *Risshō ankoku ron* 立正安國論, Nichiren says that before him there had already appeared critiques such as the *Jodo ketsugi shō* 淨土決義鈔, *Dan senchaku* 彈撰撰, and *Saijarin* 摧邪輪, but these “had not yet revealed the source of Dharma slander in the *Senchakushū*”; therefore he himself had now “composed a work in one fascicle to expose the origins of the *Senchakushū*'s Dharma slander” (STN 1: 90). As for other works of Hōnen, we find mention in Nichiren's writings of Hōnen's *Shichikajō kishōmon* 七箇条起請文 (STN 1: 296) and a digest of the *Senchakushū* written in the Japanese syllabary by Hōnen's disciples (STN 1: 117).

and exclusively chose easy practice, relinquished the possibility of realizing buddhahood in this present world and aspired to birth after death in another world, and placed his confidence in the real existence of an absolute Buddha apart from relative human beings. Nichiren, however, while reflecting on the limited capacity of himself and others as ordinary worldlings of the last age, at the same time encouraged the exercise of self-power. While chanting the *daimoku* 題目 of the *Lotus Sūtra* is an easy practice in terms of its form, Nichiren called it a “difficult practice.” And while maintaining conviction in the Pure Land of Eagle Peak to be achieved after death, he believed without doubt in the possibility of establishing a Buddha land in the present world. In essence, if we regard Hōnen’s view of *mappō* as a negation of the present reality, then we can speak of Nichiren’s as an affirmation of it.

One opinion sees the points of divergence between these two teachers as originating in the difference between their respective eras and geographical locations.⁸ But we must also recognize the role played by the differences between the sūtras on which they relied.

Affirmation of the Sahā World

We living beings have faculties duller even than those of Śud-dhīpanthaka; ours are like the eyes of sheep, which cannot distinguish color or form. Greed, anger, and folly run especially deep in us, and we commit the ten evils daily. Even though we may not commit the five perverse offenses, we commit others that resemble them each day. And every single person is guilty of slandering the Dharma, which is worse than the ten evils or five perverse offenses.

(*Nanjō Hyōe Shichirō-dono gosho* 南条兵衛七郎殿御書, STN 1:321)⁹

In the world at present, even without a particular motivation, one must surely arouse the aspiration for the Way. You may loathe the way the world is, but you cannot escape it. The fact that the people of Japan are destined to encounter great suffering is apparent before our eyes. On the eleventh day of the second month of the ninth year of the Bun’ei era [1272, strife within the Hōjō clan] broke out violently, [so that men per-

⁸ See, for example, TOKORO 1967.

⁹ References to a category of sins “resembling the five perverse offenses” also occur in the *Ken hōbō shō* 顯謗法鈔 (STN 1: 254) and *Hōmon mōsarubekiyō no koto* 法門可被申様之事 (STN 1: 446).

ished] like blossoms scattering in a strong wind or silk being consumed in a great fire. Could anyone help but abhor this world? And in the tenth month of Bun'ei 11 [1274, the Mongols attacked the islands of] Iki and Tsushima, so that the inhabitants all perished at once. How could one regard this solely as other people's affair? (*Kyōdai shō* 兄弟鈔, *STN* 1: 925)

One can find other, similar passages in Nichiren's writings. In short, he represents the age as one of strife, and its people as profoundly sinful and evil, of inferior faculties and guilty of the five perverse offenses and of slander of the Dharma. Such was Nichiren's view of human capacity. Nonetheless, Nichiren did not on that account view the struggles of this world with resignation or teach aspiration to birth after death in a pure land. On the contrary, he claimed that, precisely because the place was this *sahā* world and the time that of the Final Dharma age, the most appropriate course was to practice in accordance with the *Lotus Sūtra's* teachings. This is most clearly expressed by the following words of his *Hōon shō* 報恩抄 (On repaying obligations):

A hundred years' practice in [the Pure Land of] Utmost Bliss does not equal the merit of a single day's practice in this defiled world. Surely propagation throughout the two thousand years of the True and Semblance Dharma ages is inferior to an hour's propagation in the Final Dharma age. (*STN* 2: 1249)

If we infer the reasons for this claim, we can say:

1. Nichiren wrote these words having in mind that the *Lotus Sūtra* rejects the propagation of its teaching in other worlds and exclusively designates the *sahā* world as its field of teaching. For example, the story in the Conjured City chapter of the sixteen sons of the Buddha Victorious through Great Penetrating Wisdom; the threefold transformation of the land and the removal to other places of humans and devas, referred to in the Jeweled Stūpa chapter; the words, "I am always here in this *sahā* world, preaching the Dharma, and teaching and converting" in the Fathoming the Lifespan chapter; and the image of all worlds being linked to form a single Buddha land, described in the Supernatural Powers chapter—all serve to emphasize the importance of the *sahā* world as the place where the *Lotus Sūtra* is to be spread. Moreover, it can also be said that the *Lotus Sūtra* designates the Final Dharma as precisely the proper time when its teachings are to be widely declared and spread. This is indicated, for example, by the words spoken by the Buddha in the Bodhisattva Medicine King chapter: "In the last five hundred years after my nirvāṇa, widely declare and spread [this teaching]" (T. 9.54c).

2. These words of Nichiren's also express a denial of Hōnen's *nenbutsu* belief. Elsewhere Nichiren cites a petition submitted by Mt. Hiei to the imperial court calling for the banning of Hōnen's teaching, which states: "In recent times, we have heard of the perverted doctrines of the [exclusive] *nenbutsu* followers, which go against the teachings for governing the realm and pacifying the people. Already [their *nenbutsu*] has become a sound of lamentation, a sound that shall destroy the nation" (*Nenbutsusha tsuihō senjō ji*, STN 3: 2261). This statement evaluates the exclusive *nenbutsu* as destructive of the country, an element also found in Nichiren's own criticism of the *nenbutsu*.¹⁰ For that reason, he had to take a stance opposite to that of Hōnen's, emphasizing this present, defiled world.
3. Nichiren's affirmation of the *sahā* world also derives from his own religious experience. The *Lotus Sūtra* states that when one practices just as the *Sūtra* teaches, three powerful enemies will appear and persecute him.¹¹ This scriptural message appears in the Exhortation to Steadfastness chapter and is reiterated in other chapters as well. In order to encounter persecution, the proof that one is practicing as the *Sūtra* teaches, one must as a necessary condition be born in this impure land, rather than in the Pure Land of Utmost Bliss, and during the Final Dharma age when slander of the Dharma prevails, rather than in the two thousand years of the True and Semblance Dharma ages. Thinking in this way, Nichiren went so far as to assert that those practitioners of the *Lotus Sūtra* who had not been born in *mappō*, such as Zhiyi 智顛, Zhanran 湛然, and Saichō 最澄, actually longed for the Final Dharma age.¹²

In this way, Nichiren was thankful for birth in the Final Dharma age, urged ordinary worldlings of the last age to practice as the *Lotus Sūtra* teaches, and taught that his followers should vow to carry out the task of establishing the Buddha land in this *sahā* world. For example, in the concluding section of the *Risshō ankoku ron*, he writes,

¹⁰ Traditionally, Nichiren is said to have expressed his criticisms in the formulas "*nenbutsu* leads to the Avici Hell" and "*shingon* will destroy the nation"; however, this formulation was established by some later person(s), based on the premise that the *nenbutsu* is related to the next life, and *shingon* [i.e., Mikkyō], to practical benefits in this life. Close analysis shows that Nichiren's own criticisms of these traditions are not necessarily expressed in any one fixed way. In particular, the *Shugo kokka ron* and *Risshō ankoku ron* both condemn the *nenbutsu* as a teaching that will destroy the country.

¹¹ The sixth Tiantai patriarch, Zhanran, commenting on the verse section of the Exhortation to Steadfastness chapter, defines these in his *Wenju ji* 文句記 as arrogant lay persons, arrogant clerics, and arrogant religious leaders of prominence who are revered by the public as holy men (T. no. 1719, 34.315a).

¹² On this point see ASAI Endō 1956.

Now you must quickly reform the faith that you hold in your heart and return to the single good that is the vehicle of the true teaching. Then the threefold world will all become the Buddha land, and could a Buddha land decline? The ten directions will all become a jeweled realm, and how could a jeweled realm be destroyed? If the country experiences no decline, and the land is not destroyed, then your person will be peaceful and safe and your mind will be calm. You should believe these words, respect my admonition! (STN 1: 226)

Striving to realize the Buddha land in the present world amounted to a vow that Nichiren maintained throughout his life.¹³

Nevertheless, it is a fact that, from the time he was exiled to Sado (1271) until his death about ten years later, Nichiren frequently taught birth after death in the Pure Land of Eagle Peak.¹⁴ However, this was not an other, postmortem world postulated on the basis of rejection of the *sahā* world or of this present life, but the land of Tranquil Light, accessible only to those practitioners who had maintained, throughout, a practice according with the *Lotus Sūtra's* teachings, as well as a land of recompense, whose existence is necessary to requite the unrewarded efforts of powerless human beings in the present world. We know this because, in Nichiren's writings, the Pure Land of Eagle Peak is always taught in order to encourage practice according with the *Lotus Sūtra's* teachings.

The Daimoku as a "Difficult Practice"

In his *Kanjin honzon shō* 観心本尊抄, Nichiren writes:

For those unable to discern the three thousand realms in one thought-moment, the Buddha, arousing great compassion, placed this jewel within the five characters [of the *daimoku*] and hung it from the necks of the immature people of the last age. (STN 1: 720)

As this passage suggests, with respect to the point of being "easy to

¹³ According to MIYAZAKI Eishū, Nichiren transcribed the *Risshō ankoku ron* at least five times during his life (1953). The medieval biography *Ganso kedōki* 元祖化導記 of Gyōgakuin Nichō 行学院日朝 (1422–1500) also says that just before he passed away at Ikegami, as his last sermon to his disciples, Nichiren lectured on the *Risshō ankoku ron* (NICHIRENSHŪ ZENSHO KANKOKAI 1974, p. 56). The three great vows expressed in the *Kaimoku shō* ["I will be the pillar of Japan, I will be the eye of Japan, I will be the great ship of Japan"] (STN 1: 601) and the ordination platform of the origin teaching (*honmon*) among the three great secret Dharmas (STN 1: 798, 815; 2: 1248) also reflect related ideas.

¹⁴ See ASAI Yōrin 1945, pp. 485–99, and MOCHIZUKI 1958, pp. 225–52.

practice in any of the four postures [walking, standing, sitting, and lying down]” (*STN* 1: 110), the practice of chanting the *daimoku* is indeed a simplified form of the practice of calming and contemplation (*shikan* 止觀), suitable to “immature people of the last age.” Prior to submitting the *Risshō ankoku ron* (1260), Nichiren did occasionally describe the *daimoku* as an “easy practice.”¹⁵ But from that point on, however, he never again spoke of it as an “easy practice” but instead called it a “difficult practice.”¹⁶ His reasons were as follows:

1. This claim derives from the teachings of the *Lotus Sūtra*. For example, the Skillful Means chapter says, “Difficult to understand and difficult to enter” (T. no. 262, 9.5b); the Dharma Preacher chapter reads, “Of all the sutras I [Śākyamuni] have preached, now preach, or will preach, [this *Lotus Sūtra*] is the most difficult to believe and difficult to understand” (31b); and the Jeweled Stūpa chapter says, “This sutra is difficult to uphold...” (34b), in the context of explaining the “six difficult and nine easy acts” (*rokunan kui* 六難九易), a set of comparisons emphasizing the difficulty of upholding and teaching the *Lotus Sūtra* in the age of decline after the Buddha’s nirvāṇa. Moreover, the Japanese Tendai founder Saichō (767–822), in commenting on the Jeweled Stūpa chapter in his *Hokke shūku* 法華秀句 (Excellent phrases of the *Lotus Sūtra*), writes, “It was Śākyamuni’s judgement that the shallow is easy while the profound is difficult. To abandon the shallow and take up the profound requires a stout heart” (HIEZAN SENSŪIN 1989, vol. 3, p. 273)—a passage Nichiren often quoted. In short, instead of saying that one should choose the *daimoku* because it is an easy practice, he argued that one should choose it because it is difficult. Although this seems

¹⁵ “The enlightenment of the *Lotus Sūtra* is the easiest among all easy practices” (*Kaitai sokushin jōbutsu gi* 戒体即身成仏義, *STN* 1: 13); “If one defines easy practice as meaning easy to cultivate, then the rejoicing of the fiftieth person in succession to hear the *Lotus Sūtra* [whose merit is described in the Merits of Appropriate Rejoicing chapter] is a hundred, thousand, ten thousand, hundred thousand times easier than chanting the *nenbutsu*”; and “Genshin Sōzu’s 源信僧都 meaning is that if one defines the *nenbutsu* as an easy practice because it is easy to carry out in any of the four postures and the *Lotus Sūtra* as a difficult practice because it is hard to practice in these four postures, then that person goes against the interpretations of Tiantai 天台 [Zhiyi] and Miaoluo 妙樂 [Zhanran]” (*Shūgo kokka ron* 1: 108, 110); “The *Lotus Sūtra* represents the path of easy practice” (*Shō Hokke daimoku shō* 唱法華題目鈔, 1: 198); “In the *Sūtra of Unfathomable Meanings* [the introductory scripture to the *Lotus Sūtra*], the Buddha defined his teachings of the more than forty preceding years as the way of difficult practice, and the *Sūtra of Unfathomable Meanings*, as the way of easy practice. This is the clear mirror of his golden words” (*Tōse nenbutsusha mūken jigoku ji* 当世念仏者無間地獄事, 1: 317).

¹⁶ For example, “To receive the [*Lotus Sūtra*] is easy; to uphold it is difficult. But the realization of buddhahood lies in upholding it.... From now on, you should bear in mind the phrase, ‘This sutra is difficult to uphold,’ and not forget it even for a moment” (*Shijō Kingō-dono gohenji* 四條金吾殿御返事, *STN* 1: 894-95).

a paradoxical mode of encouragement, it in fact follows the same logic as the Jeweled Stūpa chapter, in which Śākyamuni exhorts his auditors to embrace the *Lotus Sūtra* by expounding the six difficult and nine easy acts.

2. In light of the facts of what Nichiren and his followers experienced in carrying out their faith, chanting the *daimoku* was by no means an easy practice.
3. From the standpoint of doctrine, Nichiren asserts an idea opposite to Hōnen's rationale for the exclusive choice of the *nenbutsu* as set forth in his *Senchaku hongan nenbutsu shū* (Collection [of passages] on the *nenbutsu* chosen exclusively in the original vow). Here Hōnen argues from the standpoint of whether or not a particular teaching suits the people's capacity. On this basis, he says, one should abandon the difficult practice of the path of the sages (*shōdōmon* 聖道門) and instead embrace the easy practice of the Pure Land teachings (*jōdomon* 淨土門). In criticism of this approach, Nichiren says in his *Shugo kokka ron* (Treatise on protection of the nation), written at age thirty-eight:

When one defines the beings of the last age as lacking in aspiration for the Way, ordinary worldlings perpetually sunk in the realms of transmigration, and in accordance with their capacity chooses a method of easy practice, then the invocational *nenbutsu* is held to correspond to their capacity and the easy method of practice is established as superior to all other teachings. But this does not accord with the distinction of superior and inferior that exists between provisional and true or between shallow and profound.... Such a person has not yet understood the classification of doctrine. (STN 1: 107, 109).

Nichiren's *Shō hokke daimoku shō* (On chanting the *daimoku* of the *Lotus Sūtra* [age thirty-nine]), says, "The error of confusing the true and the provisional, in addition to being a great slander of the Dharma [will destroy the country]" (STN 1: 199). His *Kyōkijikoku shō* (On the teaching, capacity, time, and country [age forty-one]), sets forth the criteria of the five guides, placing the category of the "teaching" above that of the time or human capacity. And in the *Daimoku mida myōgō shōretsu ji* 題目弥陀名号勝劣事 (On the relative superiority of the *daimoku* and the name of Amida [age forty-three], he wrote metaphorically of Hōnen's method of selecting among the Buddhist teachings:

As for the Pure Land teaching, it is like planting the fields with sand in springtime and expecting to harvest rice in autumn, like rejecting the moon in the sky and seeking it in its reflection

on the water. As a great art of conforming to people's minds and destroying the *Lotus Sūtra*, no doctrine can compare to it.

(STN 1: 296)

That is, even though one may conform to the time (in terms of choosing an easy rather than a difficult practice), without a proper choice of the seed to be planted (i.e., correct discrimination of the relative depth of the teachings), a harvest cannot be obtained.¹⁷ In this way, through his study of Hōnen, Nichiren decided that the method of selecting a particular Buddhist teaching on the basis of ease versus difficulty of practice was to be rejected. As he had realized this point since the time he first declared his teachings, he never put forth ease of practice as a reason for encouraging the chanting of the *daimoku*.

Self-Power and Other Power

We find almost no attempt in Nichiren's writings to define the character of his religion in terms of the concepts of self-power (*jiriki* 自力) and Other Power (*tariki* 他力). The reason for this is indicated in his *Ichidai shōgyō taii* 一代聖教大意 (The cardinal meaning of the Buddha's lifetime of teachings [age thirty-seven]):

Now the *Lotus Sūtra* establishes self-power but is not self-power. Since the "self" encompasses all beings of the ten realms, one's own person from the outset contains the Buddha realm inherent both in oneself and in all other living beings. Thus one does not now become a buddha for the first time. [The *Lotus*] also establishes Other Power but is not Other Power, because the Buddha, the Other, is contained within the self of us ordinary worldlings. And Buddha who is Other, is, like ourselves, spontaneously present at the same time. (STN 1: 73)

As this passage suggests, in light of the principle that the ten realms are mutually inclusive (*jikkai gogu* 十界互具), the distinction between self-power and Other Power does not obtain. Nichiren may not have made use of the self-power/Other Power categories because the way of thinking of mutual inclusion was a recurrent theme for him. However, in the *Urabon gosho* 孟蘭盆御書, he writes:

This monk [Jibu-bō 治部房] is without precepts and without wisdom. He keeps not one of the two hundred fifty precepts, nor does he observe any of the three thousand rules of deportment.

¹⁷ For more detailed discussion, see ASAI Endō 1964.

His wisdom resembles that of an ox or horse, and his comportment is like that of a monkey. But the one he reveres is Śākya-muni Buddha, and the Dharma he places faith in is the *Lotus Sūtra*. It is like the case of a snake in possession of a jewel, or a dragon bearing relics on its head. Wisteria, by clinging to a pine tree, grows to a thousand feet, and a crane, relying upon its wings, can travel ten thousand *li*. This is not due to their own power. The same is true of Jibu-bō. Though in himself he is like the wisteria, by clinging to the pine of the *Lotus Sūtra*, he will ascend the mountain of wondrous enlightenment (*myōkaku* 妙覺), and by relying on the wings of the one vehicle, he will soar through the skies of [the land of] Tranquil Light.
(STN 2: 1775–76)

It appears here as though Nichiren is describing the *daimoku* as a form of faith in Other Power.

Nevertheless, one cannot simply conclude that Nichiren's teaching is one of Other Power. One can infer why it is not, in light of the passage from the *Ichidai shōgyō taii* quoted above. In addition we must note that chanting the *daimoku* entails devotion, not to a buddha, but to the Dharma. Hence the expression "clinging to the pine of the *Lotus Sūtra*."¹⁸

Generally speaking, in the case of the power of the Buddha (*butsuriki* 仏力), the Buddha's original vow to save sentient beings is taken as the basis of Other Power, so one need only rely on his original vow. However, in the case of the power of the Dharma (*hōriki* 法力), even though it encompasses all virtues, the Dharma itself does not entail the power of the vow (*ganriki* 願力). Therefore, receiving and upholding the Dharma through one's own effort (self-power) becomes a necessary condition for accessing the Dharma's power. Nichiren, who

¹⁸ Nichiren refers in many places to the power of the *Lotus Sūtra*. For example, he cites the sixth Tiantai patriarch Zhanran's comment from his discussion of the Devadatta chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*, "though one's practice is shallow, the merit gained is profound, thus demonstrating the power of the *Sūtra*" (STN 1: 68, 109, 111, 190, 594, 674). He cites Saichō's comment in the *Hokke shūku*, "Through the power of the *Sūtra* of the Wonderful Dharma, buddhahood is realized with this very body" (STN 1: 335, 389, 404; 2: 1528, 1541, 1634, 1755, 1781, 1798; 3: 2251, 2374). He himself refers to "the power of the *Lotus Sūtra*" (*Hokekyō no chikara* 法華經の力) (STN 1: 349, 389, 775, 777; 2: 1127, 1148, 1183, 1528); to "the august power of the *Lotus Sūtra*" (*Hokekyō no onchikara* 法華經の御力) (STN 1: 562, 674, 843; 2: 1148, 1276, 1437, 1537, 1610); to the "meritorious power of the *Lotus Sūtra*" (*Hokekyō no kuriki* 法華經の功力) (STN 1: 689, 751, 760; 2: 1634); and to the "beneficence of the *Lotus Sūtra*" (*Hokekyō no gorishō* 法華經の御利生) (STN 1: 926; 3: 2145). As such examples suggest, were we to put it in simple, clear-cut terms, we would have to say that Nichiren's religion emphasizes the power of the Dharma over the power of the Buddha. This excludes those cases in which the *daimoku* is interpreted as the Buddha's name, for example, in the *Ongi kuden* 御義口伝: "The honorific name of the unproduced triple-bodied Tathāgata is Namu-myōhō-engekyō" (STN 3: 2662).

relied on the power of the Dharma rather than that of the Buddha, never taught that, in order to perfect one's devotion to the absolute, one must contemplate one's own powerlessness in a self-absorbed fashion and deny the efficacy of one's own efforts.¹⁹ On the contrary, he stressed the importance of establishing proof of one's faith by outwardly demonstrating, in a positive manner, how earnestly one embraces the Wonderful Dharma. For example,

[If] even one with deep faith does not rebuke the enemies of the *Lotus Sūtra*, no matter what great good he may produce, even if he recites and copies the *Lotus Sūtra* a thousand or ten thousand times, or perfects the way of contemplating the three thousand realms in one thought-moment, if he fails to rebuke the enemies of the *Lotus Sūtra*, then it will be impossible for him to realize enlightenment. To illustrate, even if one has served the court for ten or twenty years, if, knowing of the ruler's enemies, he fails to report them or to oppose them himself, then the merit of his service will all be lost and he will instead be guilty of a crime. You must understand that the people of today are slanderers of the Dharma.

(*Nanjō Hyōe Shichirō-dono gosho*, STN 1: 321-22)²⁰

Even those who have renounced the world, if they study Buddhism but neglect to rebuke slanderers of the Dharma, vainly passing night and day solely in amusements and idle conversation, they are beasts wearing the skins of monks.... The trace teaching (*shakumon* 迹門) [of the *Lotus Sūtra*] states, "We do

¹⁹ Increasing one's faith in absolute Other Power requires a thoroughgoing sense of sin, leading to utter self-negation. In Nichiren's case, the repeated experience of persecution, especially his near-execution at Tatsunokuchi and exile to Sado, led him to a consciousness that he himself was guilty of the sin of slandering the Dharma in prior lifetimes. This sense of sinfulness, however, was of a different kind from that which discovers a profoundly evil and sinful self by observing one's present state as incorrigible, human, and therefore weak. In other words, the fact that Nichiren experienced persecution for the Dharma's sake, in spite of practicing as the *Lotus Sūtra* teaches, meant to him that he was able to summon into the present and experience in lessened form the karmic retribution for his past sins of slandering the true Dharma, which he would otherwise have experienced more heavily in the future. Thus his self-reflection on his own sinfulness was tied to a concept of eradicating the hindrances of sin, and not for the purpose of self-negation. In this way, Nichiren's sense of his sinful karma became the spur to his practice of *shakubuku*, which entails self-power. His thinking on this subject is reflected in such representative works as the *Tenjukyōju hōmon* 転重軽受法門 (age 50), *Kaimoku shō* (age 51), and *Nyosetsu shugyō shō* (age 52).

²⁰ Later, Nichiren would discuss this kind of thinking about *shakubuku* 折伏 in terms of avoiding the sin of complicity (*yodōzai* 与同罪) in slander of the Dharma (STN 1: 834; 2: 1358, 1735, 1739; 3: 2122). Among his lay followers, we also find the examples of the Ikegami 池上 brothers, who admonished their father, and Shijō Kingo 四条金吾, who admonished his lord, against slander of the *Lotus Sūtra* in order to avoid the sin of complicity (See MOTAI 1955).

not cherish bodily life. We value only the supreme Way.” The origin teaching (*honmon*) states, “...not begrudging their own lives.” And in the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* we read, “One’s person is insignificant but the Dharma is weighty. One should give one’s life to spread the Dharma.”... But as a lay person, the essential thing for you is simply to chant *Namu-myōhō-enge-kyō* single-mindedly and offer support to the monks. If we go by the *Sūtra* text, this corresponds to what is called “preaching in accord with one’s ability” (*zuiriki enzetsu* 随力演説).

(*Matsuno-dono gohenji* 松野殿御返事, *STN* 2: 1272–73)

In short, what is commonly known as *shakubuku* 折伏, the rebuking of attachment to provisional teachings, is presented here as the means of establishing proof of one’s faith and the proper mode of behavior for one who embraces the *Lotus Sūtra*. Moreover, since *shakubuku* inevitably incurs persecution, the readiness to withstand persecution to the end also becomes essential. In the concluding passage to his *Nyosetsu shugyō shō* 如説修行鈔 (On practicing as the [*Lotus Sūtra*] teaches), Nichiren writes:

A lifetime passes in but a moment. No matter how many powerful enemies may oppose us, never think of retreating or give rise to fear. Even if they should cut off our heads with saws, impale our bodies with lances, or bind our feet and bore them through with gimlets, as long as we have life, we must chant *Namu-myōhō-enge-kyō*, *Namu-myōhō-enge-kyō*. And if we chant up until the moment of death, then Śākyamuni, Many Jewels, and the other Buddhas of the ten directions will come to us, just as they promised at the assembly on sacred Eagle Peak... and surely escort us to the jeweled land of Tranquil Light. (STN 1: 737–38)

He also wrote, “[Even if you are ousted from your clan and must become a beggar,] you must not disgrace the *Lotus Sūtra*” (*Shijō Kingo-dono gohenji*, *STN* 2: 1362). At such a point, realizing buddhahood by chanting the *daimoku* is not a practice of relying on Other Power, but on one’s own power.

However, further consideration may call forth the reflection that, without the Buddha’s protection, practice according with the *Sūtra*’s teaching—such as “rebuking the enemies of the *Lotus Sūtra*” or “chanting up until the moment of death”—would be impossible for ordinary worldlings of the last age to carry out. Therefore Nichiren also states,

Only the *Lotus Sūtra* represents the subtle preaching from the

golden mouth of Śākyamuni, who is perfectly endowed with all three bodies. Therefore, even [bodhisattvas of provisional teachings, such as] Fugen 普賢 (Samantabhadra) or Monju 文殊 (Mañjuśrī) could not easily expound even a single phrase or verse of it. How much less would we, ordinary worldlings of the last age, be capable of upholding even one or two words of it!... You should know that, unless the Buddha's mind entered our bodies, we could not chant [the *daimoku*].

(*Myōmitsu Shōnin goshōsoku* 妙密上人御消息, STN 2: 1165-66)

Even if your estates are seized and you are driven off, you should profoundly trust that this is due to the plan of the ten female *rakṣasas* [who protect believers in the *Lotus*]. Had I not been exiled [to Sado] but remained in Kamakura, then I would surely have been killed in the fighting [during the insurrection of the second month of 1272]. This too... was surely due to the plan of Śākyamuni Buddha.

(*Shijō Kingo-dono gohenji*, STN 2: 1362-63).

Such expressions occur throughout Nichiren's writings. In short, it is only when protected by Other Power that ordinary worldlings of the last age are able to carry out the practice of chanting the *daimoku*. However, this is not an Other Power that entails denial of self-power, but a recognition and burning sense of gratitude for the Other Power that has enabled one to continue cultivation of practice through self-power. That is to say, since this Other Power is nothing other apart from the religious mind that encourages cultivation through personal effort, from this perspective, too, it is appropriate to consider Nichiren's religion a Buddhism of self-power.

As seen above, while basing himself on consciousness of the Final Dharma age, Nichiren nonetheless encouraged the exercise of self-power and perseverance in a world of strife with "service to the *Lotus Sūtra*" (STN 1: 756) as the basis of right mindfulness. Here, I believe that *mappō* thought, which began as a denial of the efficacy of self-power, has an aspect that allowed it to be merged in Nichiren's thought with the contemplation of the three thousand realms in one thought-moment, a teaching of human affirmation.

The Mutual Inclusion of the Ten Realms

Another pillar that supported Nichiren's view of humanity was the principle of the single thought-moment being three thousand realms. Japanese Tendai inherited the teachings of Chinese Tiantai, and on the basis of the Tiantai theory that the mind is by nature endowed

with all dharmas, additionally incorporated elements of original enlightenment (*hongaku* 本覺) thought as it had developed in the Huayan (Kegon 華嚴), esoteric (*mikkyō* 密教), and Chan (Zen 禪) traditions. In this way, the *ichinen sanzen* principle, which is not necessarily a part of original enlightenment thought, came to be elaborated in terms of it.²¹

For this reason, it need hardly be said that Nichiren doctrine, as a later development, was established on the basis of these various strands of original enlightenment thought. However, Nichiren himself drew a distinction between traditional *ichinen sanzen* thought and his own interpretation. This is the distinction between the three thousand realms in one thought-moment in principle (*ri no ichinen sanzen* 理一念三千) and the three thousand realms in one thought-moment in actuality (*ji no ichinen sanzen* 事一念三千).²² What did Nichiren mean here by “actuality” (*ji*)? Nichiren’s teaching of “actuality” corresponds on many fronts to his religious experience, so it is difficult to give an all-encompassing, fixed definition.²³ But the most appropriate approach is to inquire into its essence via the *Kanjin honzon shō* (On the contemplation of the mind and the object of worship), a writing that Nichiren himself identified as addressing “the most vital matter concerning me” (*Honzon shō soejō* 本尊抄副狀, *STN* 1: 721).

In the section of the *Honzon shō* dealing with the *daimoku* as the

²¹ In the history of Japanese Tendai doctrinal studies, the first person to develop original enlightenment thought as “the doctrine of original enlightenment” (*hongaku hōmon* 本覺法門) was Godai-in Annen 五大院安然 (841–?). See ASAI Endō 1967.

²² Nichiren’s *Honzon shō* states: “In the middle and end of the Semblance Dharma age, [the bodhisattvas] Kannon 觀音 and Yakuō 藥王 manifested themselves as Nanyue 南岳 [Huisi 慧思] and Tiantai [Zhiyi] and exhaustively set forth the meaning of the hundred realms, thousand suchnesses, and three thousand realms, placing the trace teaching (*shakumon*) to the fore and holding the origin teaching (*honmon*) in reserve. But although they expounded [the three thousand realms in one thought-moment] as inherent in principle (*rigu* 理具), they did not broadly establish it in terms of actual practice (*jigyō* 事行), that is, the five characters Namu-myōhō-rengē-kyō 南無妙法蓮華經 as well as the object of worship of the origin teaching” (*STN* 1: 719). We also find: “The great teacher Tiantai ... partially set forth contemplation in terms of principle (*rikan* 理觀) but withheld the three thousand realms [in one thought-moment] in terms of actuality” (*Ota Saemon-no-jō gohenji* 太田左衛門尉御返事, *STN* 2: 1498); and, “There are two ways of contemplating the three thousand realms in one thought-moment. One is that of principle, and the other is that of actuality. In the time of Tiantai and Dengyō 伝教 [Saichō], that of principle was appropriate, but now is the time for that of actuality. Since this contemplation is itself superior, the grave obstacles [attending its practice] have also increased. The former is *ichinen sanzen* based on the trace teaching, while this is *ichinen sanzen* of the origin teaching” (*Jibyō shō* 治病鈔, *STN* 2: 1522).

²³ MOCHIZUKI Kankō (1958, pp. 118–22) enumerates fourteen interpretations of the meaning of actuality (*ji*) in Nichiren’s writings.

mode of contemplation (*STN* 1: 702–12, up to line 8), in order to explain the realization of buddhahood by chanting the *daimoku* in terms of the *ichinen sanzen* principle, the Tendai concept of the three thousand realms is condensed into that of the mutual inclusion of the ten dharma realms, and here in turn the focus is narrowed to the central problem of how it is that the human realm includes the Buddha realm. The greater portion of the text is devoted to explaining why this is so, citing proof texts from the *Lotus* and *Nirvāṇa* sutras and also offering the support of logical argument and actual illustrations. Finally it concludes:

To impose my own interpretation might slight the original texts, but the heart of these passages is that Śākyamuni's causal practices (*ingyō* 因行) and their resulting merits (*katoku* 果徳) are inherent in the five characters Myōhō-rence-kyō 妙法蓮華經. When we embrace these five characters, he will naturally transfer to us the merit of his causes and effects. (*STN* 1:711)

This passage sets forth the realization of buddhahood by embracing (literally, “receiving and upholding”) the five characters of the *daimoku* (*juji jōbutsu* 受持成仏). Therefore, it must constitute the textual basis for the three thousand realms in one thought-moment as actuality. There are at least three points that require our attention with respect to this passage:

1. The inherence of the Buddha realm in one's own mind is not acknowledged apart from embracing the five characters of the *daimoku*. Hence the qualification, “When we embrace these five characters.” This amounts to a denial, from the standpoint of actuality, of the Tendai notion of the inherence of buddhahood in principle, even prior to practice (*ri-soku-butsu* 理即仏), as stated in the *Mohe zhiguan* 魔訶止觀, “If there exists even the slightest degree of mind, it possesses all three thousand realms” (T. no. 1911, 46.54a).
2. If the merits of Śākyamuni's causes and effects are naturally transferred to one who embraces the *daimoku*, then that must presuppose the constantly abiding presence of the Buddha who transfers them. This is supported by the argument that, of the three bodies of the Buddha, the recompense body was central to Nichiren's concept.²⁴ However, from the standpoint of the Tiantai notion that

²⁴ Passages supporting doctrinal argument for the primacy of the recompense body (*sambhogakāya*, *hōjin* 報身) in Nichiren's thought include: “The various Mahāyāna sutras preached before and after the *Lotus Sūtra* expound that the Dharma body has neither beginning nor end, but say not a word about the realization [by Śākyamuni Buddha in the distant past of the beginningless] manifested and recompense bodies” (*Kaimoku shō*, *STN* 1: 553),

all dharmas are by nature inherent in the mind, there is no necessity to postulate the constant presence of the Buddha.

3. In the Tiantai practice of calming and contemplation (*shikan*), all three thousand realms are assumed to be originally inherent in the human mind. However, Nichiren provisionally abstracts *ichinen sanzen*, the seed of buddhahood, from the human mind and, having encompassed it within the five characters of the Wonderful Dharma (*myōhō* 妙法), then restores it to human beings on the condition of their embracing the Wonderful Dharma. Hence the statement, “Śākyamuni’s causal practices and their resulting merits are inherent in the five characters Myōhō-rengē-kyō.” This point becomes clearer with reference to the concluding passage of the *Honzon shō*, cited earlier: “For those unable to discern the three thousand realms in one thought-moment, the Buddha, arousing great compassion, placed this jewel within the five characters and hung it from the necks of the immature people of the last age” (*STN* 1: 720).²⁵

However, in the same *Honzon shō*, we find a passage that appears to contradict the second point above. This occurs in the passage on realizing buddhahood by embracing the *daimoku*; it reads, “The Śākyamuni of our own mind is the ancient Buddha without beginning, who has manifested the three bodies since countless dust-particle kalpas ago” (*STN* 1: 712). Here, Śākyamuni is depicted not as a transcendent Buddha who forms the object of one’s faith, but as an inherent Buddha present within one’s own mind. Zhiyi, in commenting on the Buddha of the “Fathoming the Lifespan” chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*, said, “The present [*Lotus*] *Sūtra* perfectly expounds the three bodies of the Tathāgata that are neither vertical [i.e., attained through practice] nor horizontal [originally inherent]” (T. no. 1718, 34.128b). Thus one could resolve the apparent contradiction simply by saying that the Buddha in terms of principle (*ributsu* 理仏) and the Buddha in terms of actuality (*jibutsu* 事仏) exist in a relationship of nonduality. However, if we understand the matter in terms of the *Honzon shō*, we must consider the following:

[Question 17] It is clear that the mutual inclusion of the ten realms represents the Buddha’s words. Nevertheless, it is

and, “Śākyamuni Buddha is to us sovereign, teacher, and parent (*Shushishin gosho* 主師親御書, *STN* 1: 45). Other related statements occur at *STN* 1: 19, 34, 35, 320, 443–45, 446–47, 516, 525, 535, 676–77, 707, 724, 795–96, 811–13; 2: 992–93, 1075, 1254–55, 1277, 1340, 1557, 1849; 3: 2288–91, 2338–41, and 2358.

²⁵ Similar passages occur in the *Kyōdai shō* (*STN* 1: 931), *Ōta Saemon-no-jō gohenji* (*STN* 2:1498), and *Onkō kikigaki* 御講開書 (*STN* 3: 2592–93).

extremely difficult to believe that the Buddha-dharma realm could be contained in our inferior minds.... I beg that you arouse great compassion and cause me to believe it, saving me from the sufferings of the Avīci Hell. (STN 1: 706)

[Question 18] The lord Śākyamuni is a Buddha who has severed the three categories of delusion. He is the ruler of the worlds of the ten directions, and the lord of all bodhisattvas, persons of the two vehicles, devas and humans. When he proceeds, Brahmā attends him on the left, and Indra serves him on the right; the fourfold assembly and the eight kinds of lowly beings follow behind him, while the *vajra* deities lead in the vanguard. He has expounded the teachings of the eighty thousand Dharma treasuries, causing all living beings to obtain release. How could a Buddha such as this dwell in the minds of ordinary worldlings like ourselves? (STN 1: 707-8)

Since the passage on realizing buddhahood by embracing the *daimoku* is presented as a definitive answer to these questions, the reason why the ancient Buddha without beginning can be present in our own mind is because we embrace the five characters of the *daimoku*, which contain all the merits of Śākyamuni's practices and resulting virtues. In other words, the passage explaining that one realizes buddhahood by chanting the *daimoku*, and the passage stating that Śākyamuni Buddha is inherent in one's own mind, are not contradictory. Rather, embracing the *daimoku* and thus having Śākyamuni's causes and effects transferred to us is the condition that supports the presence of the eternal Śākyamuni in our mind. Thus, without postulating the compassion of the Buddha who transfers his merit to us, it is inconceivable that the ancient Buddha without beginning could exist in the inferior minds of ordinary worldlings of the last age.

Yet on the other hand, without the Śākyamuni of one's own mind, there would be no basis for establishing Śākyamuni as the object of worship. Moreover, without faith, that object of worship would be no more than an inanimate image. That is the meaning of the assertion, twice repeated in the *Honzon sho*: "Did grasses and trees not possess both physical and mental aspects as well as cause and effect, then it would be useless to rely on the painted or carved images [into which they are made] as objects of worship" (STN 1: 703); and, "In the end, without *ichinen sanzen*, the seed of buddhahood, the realization of buddhahood by sentient beings, and the painted and carved images used as *honzon*, would exist in name but not in reality" (STN 1: 711). Here is the reason why, while requiring the constantly abiding presence of the Buddha, Nichiren's religion does not lean solely toward a

theory of a concrete, external Buddha established as an object of faith in contrast to ordinary worldlings, as is characteristic of other new Buddhist movements of the Kamakura period. The establishment of Śākyamuni (the Buddha) as the one who transfers his merits to ordinary worldlings; the five characters Myōhō-rence-kyō (Dharma), which encompass the merits of all Śākyamuni's causal practices and resulting virtues; and the embracing of the Wonderful Dharma by the practitioner (Sangha)—only on the basis of these conditions is the presence of the Buddha realm in one's own mind acknowledged. It is with respect to these three points that Nichiren's standpoint differs from that of traditional *ichinen sanzen* theory. But what led him to this departure? I would like to suggest that it was the idea of the Final Dharma age. *Mappō* thought squarely confronts reality. Therefore, Nichiren abstracted the principle of the mutual inclusion of the ten realms from human beings and encompassed it within the Wonderful Dharma; and, on the basis of the condition of embracing the Wonderful Dharma, once again “hung it from the necks of the immature people of the last age.”

Here is where we can recognize the fusion of *mappō* thought and the theory of *ichinen sanzen*. While based on the notion of the Final Dharma age, Nichiren's religion trusts in the self-power of ordinary worldlings of the last age. This is because in the depths of his *mappō* thought lies the principle of *ichinen sanzen*, a principle of human affirmation. Moreover, while the three thousand realms in one thought-moment is regarded as the ultimate principle of the *Lotus Sūtra*, ordinary worldlings bound by delusion are not affirmed just as they are without embracing the Wonderful Dharma. This is because the principle of *ichinen sanzen* is limited by notions of the Final Dharma age.

Because the Dharma is Wondrous, the Person is Noble

When ordinary worldlings of the last age embrace the Wonderful Dharma, their minds are endowed with the eternal Śākyamuni. If we look for a corresponding idea phrased in terms of the *Lotus Sūtra*, we can point to the phrase “because the Dharma is wondrous, the person is noble” from the passage in Zhiyi's *Fahua wenju* 法華文句 (Words and phrases of the *Lotus Sūtra*) that states, in discussing the Dharma Preacher chapter: “Because the Dharma is wondrous, the person [who embraces it] is noble, and because the person is noble, the place [where that person dwells] is holy” (T. no. 1718, 34.110a). Nichiren frequently quoted this phrase in his writings.²⁶

²⁶ *Sanshu kyōsō* 三種教相 (STN 3: 2246); *Jimyō hokke mondō shō* 持妙法華問答鈔 (1: 281–82);

The *Risshō ankoku ron* seems to express an alternative view in stating, “The Dharma is respected because of the person” (*STN* 1: 220), which is followed by, “If the country is destroyed and its people are wiped out, who will revere the Buddha? Who will believe in the Dharma?” This is a reflection on the fact that, in practical terms, it is human beings who either can make Buddhism flourish or destroy it. However, it does not express the fundamental principle of Nichiren’s view of humanity, according to which persons are noble because of the Dharma they embrace.²⁷

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²⁷ As for why the passage in question does not represent Nichiren’s fundamental conviction, one must note that it occurs in a passage spoken by the guest, addressing the host.

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