

# DISCOURSE AND IDEOLOGY IN MIEVEAL JAPANESE BUDDHISM

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## “NOT MERE WRITTEN WORDS”

Perspectives on the language of the  
*Lotus Sūtra* in medieval Japan

Jacqueline I. Stone

As a text-focused tradition, devotion to the *Lotus Sūtra* has on the whole embraced a “language-positive” stance. The sūtra itself predicts eventual buddhahood for all who receive and keep, read, recite, teach, and transcribe it – practices that are explicitly text- and language-centered. As a pre-eminent example of what Gregory Schopen has termed the “cult of the book,” the *Lotus* was deemed interchangeable with the Buddha himself, as indicated in such statements as “If there is anyone who can hold it [this sūtra] / Then he holds the Buddha-body” or:

O Medicine King! Wherever it may be preached, or read, or recited, or written, or whatever place a roll of this scripture may occupy, in all those places one is to erect a *stūpa* of the seven jewels, building it high and wide and with impressive decoration. There is no need even to lodge *śāriṛa* in it. What is the reason? Within it there is already a whole body of the Thus Come One.<sup>1</sup>

In East Asia, we find *Lotus Sūtra* transcriptions in which each individual character is housed in a *stūpa* or seated atop a lotus pedestal, as though it were a “living buddha.” And in medieval Japan, verbal practice of the *Lotus* – transcription and recitation – was widely conducted as a meditative discipline, for worldly benefits, to expiate sins, to gain birth in a pure land, or for the salvation of the dead.

Nonetheless, the liberative powers of the *Lotus Sūtra* were not, generally speaking, argued explicitly in terms of its language. Scholastic claims for the supremacy of this particular sūtra were based on its discursive content; these include the assertions that the One Buddha Vehicle taught in the *Lotus* reconciles the disparate paths of the *śrāvaka*, *pratyekabuddha*, and bodhisattva

and thus “opens and integrates” all teachings within itself (Jpn. *ichijō kaie*); that the *Lotus* promises buddhahood to all, including those “difficult to save,” such as women and evil men; that it represents the “direct path” of realizing buddhahood in this very body; or that it reveals the original ground of the buddha who attained enlightenment, not under the bodhi tree in India, but in the inconceivably remote past. Such arguments drew on the doctrinal classification schemes (Chn. *panjiao*; Jpn. *hankyō* or more commonly *kyōhan*) and traditional commentarial literature of the continental Tiantai school, as well as the works of the Japanese Tendai founder Saichō (767–822). In other kinds of literature, such as didactic tales (Jpn. *setsuwa*), the sūtra’s superior magical powers were stressed. An example occurs in the eleventh-century tale of the two monks Kōshō and Hōren, devoted respectively to the *Sūtra of the Victorious King*<sup>2</sup> and the *Lotus*. They decide to test the relative powers of their respective sūtras by comparing who can obtain the higher yield from one *chō* of rice. Kōshō, the *Victorious King* devotee, ploughs and irrigates but plants no seed; nonetheless, rice seedlings sprout throughout his field. Hōren does not even plough or irrigate, but eventually, a gourd seedling sprouts in the middle of his field and grows to cover it entirely. Each gourd that it produces contains bushels of excellent rice, and the gourds never wither, even when winter comes. Thus the superior potency of the *Lotus Sūtra* is made clear to everyone in the province.<sup>3</sup>

In the medieval period, however, specifically in the latter half of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, new arguments began to appear specifically concerning the *language of the Lotus Sūtra*. These were chiefly sectarian discourses – emerging within the monastic lineages of medieval Tendai and of the Hokke-shū, as the new Buddhist movement initiated by Nichiren (1222–1282) was then called – and were prompted by several factors. These included internal developments within Tendai, such as the development of original enlightenment doctrine (Jpn. *hongaku hōmon*), which some scholars saw as demanding a rethinking of the status of language. Also influential was a felt need within various *Lotus*-based lineages either to appropriate or to critique newly introduced Zen claims to represent a “wordless transmission.” And, in the case of Nichiren, his assertion of the sole truth of the *Lotus Sūtra* over and against Pure Land, Zen, and the esoteric teachings required that he assimilate to his exclusive *Lotus* teaching the entire range of powers usually associated with the incantatory practices of other traditions, such as *mantras* and *dhāraṇīs*. In both Tendai and Nichiren circles, the scholastic device of the *kyōhan*, or scheme of doctrinal classification, was extended to address not only issues of doctrinal content and method of teaching – the traditional foci of such organizing systems – but also perspectives on language. These medieval discourses about the words of the *Lotus* are illuminating, not because of their sectarian claims per se, but because of the light they shed on what were probably more generally held but less explicitly articulated notions about religious language. Taking a

thematic approach, this chapter explores three arguments that developed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, concerning, respectively, the ontological status of scriptural language, the relationship of sūtra text to contemplative insight, and the thaumaturgical power of the words of the *Lotus Sūtra* to instill buddhahood in insentient objects. These three arguments also respectively highlight aspects of the doctrinal, institutional, and ritual contexts of medieval Japanese Buddhist discourses about language.

### Original enlightenment and two views of language

One major characteristic of Japanese Tendai thought in the Heian period (794–1185) was what Paul Groner has called “shortening the path,” a progressive reduction, in doctrinal interpretation, of the length of time and level of achievement thought necessary to realize enlightenment.<sup>4</sup> In the tradition of medieval Tendai, based on notions of original enlightenment, consensus held that awakening is realized at the stage of “verbal identity” (Jpn. *myōji-soku*; Ch. *mingziji*). *Myōji-soku* is the second of six stages in a traditional Tiantai *mārga* scheme.<sup>5</sup> First is the stage of *ri-soku* (Ch. *lijī*, or “identity in principle”), the state of the ordinary deluded person prior to practice, who has not yet heard the dharma. The next stage, *myōji-soku*, defines the moment at which, by means of “names and letters” (Jpn. *myōji*) – reading the words of the sūtra or hearing a teacher’s verbal explanation – one realizes that “all dharmas are the buddhadharma,” or the ultimate identity of the buddha and oneself. This stage is said to mark the beginning of the path, and the doctrine of original enlightenment collapses all subsequent stages into this initial stage. From this perspective, there could be no enlightenment unmediated by words; only by reading the characters of the sūtra or hearing an explication of doctrine could original enlightenment be realized. This seems to have led in some cases to a new interest in the status of “names and letters” and also to a desire to apply different understandings of original enlightenment to scriptural language. For, although the term “original enlightenment thought” (Jpn. *hongaku shisō*) has been used by modern scholars to refer comprehensively to the dominant interpretive trend of medieval Tendai, it was far from a unified discourse, and one finds considerable variation among individual transmissions (Jpn. *kuden*). As a sort of rough heuristic device, one could divide this discourse into two major strands.<sup>6</sup> One, whose roots can probably be traced to the *Dasheng qixin lun* (*Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith*), sees all phenomena as deriving from an originally pure mind, which, coming into contact with defilements, gives rise to the differentiated phenomenal world. The other strand, which is closer to traditional Tiantai threefold truth theory, does not recognize the mind as being prior to phenomena but holds the two to be simultaneous and mutually encompassing. This view valorizes all things, just as they are, as expressing the true aspect of reality: simultaneously void of substance (emptiness);

existing contingently in dependence upon conditions (conventional existence); and at once both empty and existing but never either exclusively (the middle). Let us consider two texts that respectively link these two understandings of original enlightenment to arguments about the *Lotus Sūtra*’s language.

### *The words of the Lotus and the “language of dreams”*

The first work we will consider bears the modest title *Sanze shobutsu sōkanmon kyōsō hairyū*, which translates roughly as “the hierarchical classification of doctrinal teachings endorsed by all buddhas of the three time periods”; that is, of the past, present, and future. It will be referred to here by its abbreviated title, *Sōkanmon shō*. This essay has been transmitted as part of the Nichiren canon, though some modern scholars have questioned Nichiren’s authorship and regard it as a medieval Tendai writing.<sup>7</sup> Here, however, we will bracket this issue and focus instead on the *Sōkanmon shō*’s content. The “hierarchy of doctrinal teachings” in the title refers to the traditional Tiantai/Tendai classification system that divides Śākyamuni Buddha’s fifty-year teaching career into four types of teachings and five chronological periods.<sup>8</sup> In particular, it focuses on the distinction between the “provisional teachings” (Jpn. *gonkyō*), said to have been taught during the first forty-two years of the Buddha’s teaching life, and the *Lotus Sūtra*, identified as the “true teaching” (Jpn. *jikkyō*) expounded in the last eight years. First preparing the way with provisional teachings and then revealing *Lotus Sūtra* is assumed in this work to be the common pedagogical pattern followed by all buddhas throughout space and time. This distinction between “provisional” and “true” is then assimilated to several other dichotomies: the provisional teachings are identified with the nine deluded realms of existence from hell-dwellers to bodhisattvas; being accommodated to their auditors’ understanding, these teachings are defined as preparatory, skillful means taught to “convert others” (Jpn. *keta*), while the *Lotus Sūtra* is said to represent the realm of buddhahood and the Buddha’s “self-practice” (Jpn. *jigyō*) or the spontaneous expression of his own enlightenment. Further, these two major categories, the provisional teachings and the *Lotus Sūtra*, are assimilated respectively to dreams and to the waking state, and to two contrasting views of liberation:

Dreams are termed provisional, while the waking state is termed true. The reason is that dreams are temporary phenomena and have no substantial nature; therefore, they are termed provisional. Waking reality constantly abides and is the unchanging essence of the mind; therefore, it is termed true. The various sūtras of [the first] forty-two years set forth matters of good and evil occurring in the dream of birth and death; therefore, they are called provisional teachings. They are the scriptural teachings of preparatory, expedient means, by which the Buddha sought to entice and lead the dreaming

beings, in order to startle and rouse them into the waking reality of the *Lotus Sūtra*. . . The model of genuine matters is waking reality. Because the dream of birth and death is provisional, without [self-]nature or substance, it is the model of transient things. Therefore, it is termed a false conception. The waking reality of original enlightenment is genuine; because it is the mind separated from birth and extinction, it is the model of true reality. Therefore, it is called the true aspect. Making clear the two words “provisional” and “true” in this light, one should understand the distinction within the sacred teachings of the Buddha’s lifetime between the provisional [teachings] expounded in order to instruct others and the true [teaching] that represents the Buddha’s self-practice.<sup>9</sup>

The *Lotus Sūtra*, being uniquely identified here with the perspective of original enlightenment (Jpn. *hongaku*), that all beings are buddha inherently, is thus deemed superior to all other sūtras, which are identified with the “inferior” perspective of acquired enlightenment (Jpn. *shikaku*), that buddhahood is attained through a long process of cultivation. In addition, the *Sōkanmon shō* characterizes the difference between these two categories of sūtras in terms of what it claims to be an inherent difference in how their language works soteriologically:

Living beings in the nine realms [i.e. the states of delusion] are in the midst of the sleep of ignorance at each thought-moment. Submerged in the dream of birth and death, they forget the waking reality of original enlightenment. Attached to rights and wrongs in a dream, they move from darkness into darkness. Therefore, the Tathāgata entered our dream of birth and death, placing himself on the same level as the deluded beings, and by means of the language used in dreams enticed the dreaming beings, leading them gradually by expounding matters concerning the distinction between the good and evil that occur in dreams.<sup>10</sup>

The “evil” distinguished in the language of dreams refers to deluded thoughts and attachments that are to be extirpated. The “good” identified by this same language is the notion of enlightenment as a gradual ascent through successive stages, or the idea that buddhahood is a distant goal to be achieved. Like most writings identified with the doctrine of original enlightenment, the *Sōkanmon shō* calls into question all linear models for attaining buddhahood in which one systematically extirpates defilements and cultivates virtues – that is, models based on the idea of acquired enlightenment. From the standpoint of original enlightenment, we read, such enlightenment is no different from delusion: “Though in the case of the provisional teachings one may exhaust himself in difficult and painful practices and think that one

has at last become a buddha, this is but a transient buddhahood obtained in a dream. When contrasted with the waking reality of original enlightenment, it is in fact not buddhahood at all.”<sup>11</sup> Thus the provisional teachings expounded in the “language of dreams” can in themselves do no more than induce one to transitory and insubstantial attainments. Their real soteriological value, the *Sōkanmon shō* tells us, is as a skillful means that prepares people to be mentally receptive to the *Lotus Sūtra*, whose language, it claims, functions in a very different way:

This sūtra expounds the original mind of waking reality. However, because the beings were habituated in thought to the mind-ground of dreaming, the Buddha borrowed the language used in dreams to teach the waking reality of the original mind. Thus the words [of the *Lotus Sūtra*] are the language used in dreams, but its intent is to teach the original mind, which is waking reality. Such is the intent of the *Lotus Sūtra* and its commentaries. One who fails to understand this clearly will surely go astray with respect to both the words of the sūtra and its commentarial texts.<sup>12</sup>

The sectarian slant of this writing emerges in the claim that this unique linguistic soteriological function applies not only to the *Lotus Sūtra* – which was assumed to represent the Buddha’s own words – but also to the Tiantai/Tendai commentarial tradition, which is thereby elevated to the same stature as the Buddha’s preaching.

Significantly, there is no “language of waking reality.” Words, as the *Sōkanmon shō* goes on to say, merely give verbal utterance to mental discriminations: “Good and evil, pure and defiled, the ordinary worldling and the sage, heaven and earth, large and small, east and west, south and north, the four intermediate directions, zenith and nadir” are all discriminative categories imposed on a reality that is ultimately beyond both words and concepts, “where the path of language is cut off and the workings of the mind are extinguished.”<sup>13</sup> Language is, by definition, dreamlike. Thus, according to the *Sōkanmon shō*, the difference between the language of the *Lotus Sūtra* and that of other scriptures is not their words per se – both were expounded in “the language of dreams.” But there is a vast difference in the underlying intent with which the Buddha preached them, which in turn, the *Sōkanmon shō* claims, directly translates into a difference in how their language works soteriologically. Thus, where the provisional teachings are said to guide beings from evil toward good within the dream of *samsāra*, the *Lotus Sūtra*, we are told, enables them to wake up.

An inherent danger of language, as the *Sōkanmon shō* sees it, is not so much the tendency to reify and cling to verbal categories in and of itself but that the shared “language of dreams” might lead one to confuse provisional and true teachings. As the text warns:

Their language is the same language; their words and letters are without difference. But when on this account people become deluded with respect to words and fail to discern the distinction between provisional and true, then this is termed the extinction of the Buddhadharmā.<sup>14</sup>

By defining the difference between the language of the *Lotus Sūtra* and that of other sūtras as a difference of intent and soteriological function, rather than as a difference in their language per se, the *Sōkanmon shō* rather cleverly manages to preserve traditional Mahāyāna ideas about the insubstantial and illusory nature of language while at the same time privileging the words of the *Lotus Sūtra* as uniquely liberative.<sup>15</sup>

*“Words and letters are liberation”*

Another strand of original enlightenment thought, as noted earlier, denied any distinction of prior or posterior between the mind and all dharmas, holding instead that all phenomena, just as they are, manifest the threefold truth, which is the true nature of reality. In fact, among the three truths, this strand of original enlightenment thought tended if anything to emphasize the truth of conventional existence, because it refers to the concrete actualities (Jpn. *jisō*) before our eyes.<sup>16</sup> Now let us consider a text that links this stance to a highly affirmative view of scriptural language: the *Kankō ruijū* (*Collection of the light of Han*), a Tendai collection of recorded oral transmissions (Jpn. *kirikami*), possibly concerning debate topics, and dating from around the latter part of the thirteenth century.<sup>17</sup> Specifically, we will consider two transmissions. The first addresses the topic “All dharmas are originally none other than the Buddhadharmā” (Jpn. *issai shohō wa moto kore buppō nari*) and poses the question of whether “gaining access to enlightenment through written words” is something confined to practitioners of inferior capacity or whether this also applies to practitioners of “the perfect and sudden calming and contemplation” (Jpn. *endon shikan*), who are of the most superior capacity and are said to be able to gain enlightenment on merely hearing that “all dharmas are the Buddhadharmā”:

Answer: This teaching should be passed on through oral transmission. First, the sūtra rolls with their visible form, produced after Buddha’s nirvāṇa, are not inferior to his verbal preaching while he was in the world. The reason is that the Buddha’s preaching can take the form of any of the six sense objects.<sup>18</sup> His preaching while in the world was audible sound, while the sūtra rolls are preaching in visible form. People ordinarily say that the Tathāgata’s preaching while in the world was superior while the visible sūtra rolls are inferior, but this way of thinking is gravely mistaken. . . . [Thus]

the great teacher Jikaku [Ennin, 794–864] said, “Śākyamuni’s preaching lasted only fifty years, while the teachings that Ānanda made visible in concrete form [by compiling them in sūtras] will endure until the human lifespan reaches sixty thousand years [in the upswing of the next world cycle]. Thus, Ānanda is superior to Śākyamuni.” When we inquire into the nature of the dharmas, the real Buddha (Jpn. *jitsubutsu*) has no [separate] aspect but merely benefits by pointing to all dharmas [as manifesting the true aspect in themselves]. This is the true form of the Tathāgata’s preaching. To say that those who attain the way through written words are not practitioners of the perfect and sudden [teaching] is a serious error.<sup>19</sup>

Here the written language of the sūtras is strongly valorized, first, because, like all phenomena, it is said to instantiate the true aspect of reality, and, second, because it endures considerably longer than the spoken words of the historical Buddha.

These themes are further extended in a second transmission in the same text, entitled “written words are not [mere] written words; words and letters are liberation” (Jpn. *mon wa mon ni arazu, moji soku gedatsu nari*).<sup>20</sup> Its argument is leveled against both “text-reciting monks” (Jpn. *jumon no hōshi*), who “understand written words to be only written words, and do not know that they are in their essence the inconceivable threefold truth,” and “meditation teachers of dark illumination” (Jpn. *anshō no zenji*) who “deny the doctrinal meaning of written words and do not understand that written words are precisely liberation.”<sup>21</sup> The passage continues, “The understanding of our school is that, because the teachings are none other than the true aspect, written words are precisely the unborn.” It goes on to explain that, among the three kinds of *tathāgata* bodies, written words represent the preaching of the unproduced manifested body (Skt. *nirmānakāya*, Jpn. *ōjin*) of the *tathāgata* of original enlightenment. Therefore, according to a secret teaching said to have been given to Saichō by his teacher Daosui when he was about to leave China and return to Japan, each written character necessarily displays the eight phases of that Buddha’s life. This last claim is developed through a series of eight associations by resemblance. The vertical orientation of written characters represents the Buddha first being born in the Tuṣita Heaven and then descending to this world. Written words abide on paper; this represents the Buddha entering the womb. Written characters have a clear form; this represents the Buddha emerging from the womb. The original nature of written words is pure and undefiled; this represents the Buddha renouncing the world. The fact that written characters have no obstruction [occupy their own space?] represents the Buddha subduing Māra. Because they instantiate the threefold truth, characters are perfectly endowed with enlightened nature; this represents the Buddha attaining the

Way. Written words have the outstanding function of eliciting human understanding; this is the form of the Buddha's originally inherent turning of the wheel of the Wonderful Dharma. And the essence of characters being ungraspable, unborn, and beyond conception is none other than the Buddha's entry into nirvāna:

Each word and phrase is in every case endowed with the eight aspects [of the Buddha's career]. Thus we speak of the principle that written words are precisely liberation. Ignorant persons do not know this meaning, and so they either cling to words and letters, or reject words and letters altogether. Neither way will do. . . . The *Denbōketsu* states, "The Great Teacher Nanyue [Huisi, 515–577] said, 'Words are none other than liberation. If one seeks liberation apart from words, there is no such place [where it can be found]'.<sup>22</sup>

Apart from the "originally inherent turning of the wheel of the Wonderful Dharma" (Jpn. *honnu no ten myōhōrin*), possibly a reference to the *Lotus Sūtra*, this text would seem to be about the language of sūtras in general, rather than the *Lotus Sūtra* specifically. The sectarian thrust comes in the identification of written language with the unborn as a teaching of "our school" and the invocation of a secret transmission handed down from the Tendai founder Saichō.

Both of the texts considered here, the *Sōkanmon shō* and the *Kankō ruijū*, are consistent with the medieval Tendai claim that awakening is achieved at the stage of verbal identity; one gains access to enlightenment through the verbal teachings of the sūtra. However, within that shared assumption, the *Kankō ruijū* takes a more ontologically positive view of language than does the *Sōkanmon shō*; where the *Sōkanmon shō* sees language only as a skillful means leading to awakening, in the *Kankō ruijū*, language is said actually to instantiate the originally inherent Buddha. In these two texts, that difference is linked, respectively, to the two streams of medieval Tendai original enlightenment thought mentioned above: one that sees phenomena as mind-produced and therefore ultimately illusory, and another that sees concrete phenomena as instantiating ultimate reality just as they are.

#### The hierarchy of scripture and insight and the Tendai "wordless" transmission

Another tension within medieval Tendai circles concerned the relation between doctrinal study (Jpn. *kyōsō*) and contemplative insight (Jpn. *kanjin*). The Tiantai patriarch Zhiyi (538–597) had deemed both to be equally important and mutually dependent, like "the two wheels of a cart, the two wings of a bird."<sup>23</sup> The mainstream position in medieval Japanese Tendai seems to have been similar: what is expounded in the scriptural text of the

*Lotus* and its commentarial tradition (Jpn. *kyōsō*) and what is discerned in meditative practice (Jpn. *kanjin*) were regarded as same truth, in the one case conceived intellectually and discursively, and in the other grasped intuitively. However, around the early fourteenth century, some Tendai scholars began to claim that "calming and contemplation surpasses the *Lotus Sūtra*" (Jpn. *shikan shō Hokke*), generating a controversy within Tendai circles as to whether enlightenment is accessed through the text of the *Lotus Sūtra* or transmitted independently of it.<sup>24</sup>

*Shikan shō Hokke* represents a "strong reading" of a new classification of teachings (Jpn. *kyōhan*) that had begun to emerge, under the influence of original enlightenment thought, within the Eshin school of medieval Tendai, known as the "fourfold rise and fall" (Jpn. *shijū kōhai*). This system of classification ranks the *Lotus Sūtra* above all other verbal teachings, and then, above the *Lotus Sūtra*, establishes "meditative insight" (Jpn. *kanjin*, literally, "contemplation of the mind") as a separate and ultimate category.<sup>25</sup> The first of these four hierarchical divisions in this classification is the pre-*Lotus Sūtra* teachings (Jpn. *nizen*), which, as seen in the *Sōkanmon shō*, were deemed mere provisional expedients. The second division is the trace teaching (Jpn. *shakumon*), or first fourteen chapters of the *Lotus Sūtra*, which sets forth the One Vehicle teaching and the "true aspect of the dharmas" but – in that it presents the Buddha as a historical person who achieved awakening in this lifetime as the culmination of many *kalpas* of effort – was still said to belong to the inferior perspective of acquired enlightenment, proceeding in linear fashion from cause (practice) to effect (enlightenment). The third is the "origin teaching" (Jpn. *honmon*), or second fourteen chapters of the *Lotus Sūtra*, which, in revealing the Buddha to have been awakened since the inconceivably remote past, was equated with the position of original enlightenment, a "mandalic" view in which cause and effect are present simultaneously. The Buddha's attainment in the remote past (Jpn. *ji kenpon*), described in this section of the *Lotus Sūtra*, specifically, in the sixteenth or "Fathoming the Lifespan of the Tathāgata" chapter, was interpreted in medieval Tendai as a metaphor for the timeless enlightenment innate in all (Jpn. *ri kenpon*). These first three divisions in the *shijū kōhai* taxonomy together represent *kyōsō* (doctrinal teachings). The fourth category is *kanjin*, literally "mind contemplation," and does not refer to a textual category.

What exactly did it mean to place this non-verbal, non-discursive category at the top of a hierarchy of teachings? Did it mean simply that doctrinal teachings were to be internalized through meditative practice, or that words were to be transcended altogether? This question is complicated by the fact that *kanjin* by this time had acquired a range of meanings. Like the term *shikan* (calming and contemplation), with which it was used almost interchangeably, it could denote not only meditative disciplines as such or the insight discerned thereby, but the essence of the Tendai-*Lotus* teachings.<sup>26</sup>

By the late Heian period, *kanjin* had also come to be understood as a “contemplation of actuality” (Jpn. *jikan*) associated specifically with the origin teaching, which simply denoted the contemplation (or discernment) that all things, just as they are, manifest original enlightenment.<sup>27</sup> This was contrasted with the “contemplation of principle” (Jpn. *rikan*), denoting those more traditional meditation methods in which a focused mind is brought to bear upon analysis of a specific object; these methods were deemed inferior and associated with the trace teaching. In later medieval Tendai texts, *kanjin* was frequently used to indicate less a specific contemplation method than insight into original enlightenment, conceived of as an *a priori* ground, “innate and self-luminous” (Jpn. *tenshin dokurō*),<sup>28</sup> “prior to the distinction of trace and origin” (Jpn. *honjaku mibun*) and “before the arising of a single thought.” *Kanjin* could also indicate a particular hermeneutical perspective, from which traditional texts, such as the *Lotus Sūtra*, the works of Zhiyi, and the commentaries of Zhanran (711–782), were “decoded” via such devices as word play, creative repunctuation of Chinese texts, and associations of resemblance to reveal the message of original enlightenment.<sup>29</sup>

Given this range of meanings, it was possible, at one end of an interpretive spectrum, to see “mind contemplation” as still dependent on and shaped by discursive understanding of the scriptural and commentarial texts; as noted above, this may even have been the dominant Tendai position. A passage from a *Lotus Sūtra* commentary compiled by the Tendai monk Sonshun (1451–1514) illustrates this stance by interpreting “words and letters” in terms of each stage of the fourfold rise and fall. First, from the standpoint of the pre-*Lotus Sūtra* teachings, words and letters are provisional designations, a skillful means for arriving at the truth that is the dharma nature. When it comes to realization of this ultimate truth, the provisional designations of words and letters must be set aside; this is what is meant by the transmitted saying that the teachings of the sūtras are like a finger pointing at the moon. The second standpoint is that of the trace teaching of the *Lotus Sūtra*: because all dharmas are shown to manifest the true aspect, words and letters are precisely liberation. That is, words and letters reveal all the 3000 realms that constitute phenomenal reality to be the single truth that is unchanging suchness (Jpn. *fuhen shinnyo*). From this perspective, the finger is itself the moon. From the standpoint of the origin teaching, the third standpoint, the “words and letters” of the *Lotus Sūtra* instantiate the mutual interpenetration of concrete particulars (Jpn. *jiji sōsoku*), each embodying the subtle essence that is suchness according with conditions (Jpn. *zuien shinnyo*). From the fourth standpoint, that of mind discernment (Jpn. *kanjin*), the “words and letters” of the entire *Lotus Sūtra* instantiate each concrete particular encompassing all 3000 realms. “Words and letters” are the concrete forms assumed by the moment-to-moment mental workings arising from the inner enlightenment of the practitioner’s mind, which is endowed with all 3000 realms in each thought-moment.

These “words and letters of mind contemplation” (Jpn. *kanjin no moji*) surpass even the golden body of the Buddha.<sup>30</sup> The key point for our purposes in this rather complex passage is that “words and letters” are accorded greater, not less, significance with each step up the hierarchy of teachings. The relegation of verbal expressions to the provisional status of a “finger pointing at the moon” is associated with the very lowest level. The oblique thrust at Zen is, as we shall see below, almost certainly no accident. Thus, for some Tendai thinkers, the establishment of “mind contemplation” as the highest category of a *kyōhan* did not in any way imply a transcendence of verbal expression.

At the other end of the spectrum, however, were the advocates of the “calming and contemplation surpasses the *Lotus*” position, some of whom went as far as to assert that *shikan* represents a separate lineage or school (Jpn. *shū*): the textual tradition of the *Lotus Sūtra* and its commentarial tradition formed the “Hokke-shū,”<sup>31</sup> while the “contemplation of the mind” transmitted from master to disciple represented the “Tendai-shū.” Two examples of this claim are cited below, both taken from collections of “orally transmitted doctrines” (Jpn. *kuden hōmon*) compiled respectively by Shinsō (fl. 1329) of the Gyōsen-bō branch of the Sugiu lineage of the Eshin school, and by the above-mentioned Sonshun, a later figure active in eastern Japan who also had Sugiu ties:

According to transmission, there is a secret matter that is the inner enlightenment of the Buddhas. This is calming and contemplation (Jpn. *shikan*). Śākyamuni did not divulge this during his lifetime, but after his preaching was concluded, he extended both feet from his golden coffin. This is calming and contemplation, and Kāśyapa understood it. This is the calming and contemplation that the Great Teacher Tiantai [Zhiyi] practiced in his own mind. Thus, of the two, doctrinal teachings and contemplation, the transmission of the doctrinal teachings is called the Hokke-shū, while the calming and contemplation practiced [by Zhiyi] within his own mind is called the Tendai-shū.<sup>32</sup>

With respect to calming and contemplation: The transmissions concerning doctrinal study and contemplative learning are not the same. The lineage of doctrinal study was passed from the Great Awakened World Honored One [Śākyamuni] to Kāśyapa, Ānanda, and the others of the twenty-three patriarchs down to [the Tiantai forebears] Huiwen and Nanyue [Huisi], who received the transmission of doctrine. This is the transmission of the Hokke-shū. [The transmission of the Tendai-shū] was conferred directly by the Lord Śākyamuni from within the *stūpa* of [the Tathāgata] Many Jewels [Prabhūtaratna] to Huiwen and Nanyue and to the present, latter

age. Opening the enlightenment of a single thought-moment being three thousand realms (Jpn. *ichinen sanzen*), [one sees that] the assembly on Sacred [Vulture] Peak is still solemnly present and has not yet dispersed; this transmission conferred directly upon us by Śākyamuni from within the jeweled *stūpa* is the lineage of contemplative learning and pertains to the Tendai-shū. . . . Calming and contemplation is the Tendai-shū, and thus Tendai could be called the Shikan-shū. . . . The Tendai-shū establishes its essentials where heaven and earth have not yet divided, where delusion and enlightenment are a single suchness.<sup>33</sup>

These passages invoke a number of mythic traditions in support of a “wordless” Tendai transmission. The first seems to conflate the tradition that Kāśyapa (Pāli: Kassapa) revered the Buddha’s feet on the funeral pyre with Chan/Zen claims for the origin of the mind-to-mind transmission in a nonverbal insight communicated to Mahākāśyapa by the Buddha. In this passage, “calming and contemplation” is given the status of the Buddha’s final teaching. The second passage draws on the tradition that the great Tiantai patriarchs first heard the preaching of the *Lotus Sūtra* from Śākyamuni on Sacred Vulture Peak – though usually Huisi and Zhiyi, rather than Huiwen and Huisi, are the two said to have been present in that assembly. This element appears in Zhiyi’s biography, by way of praise for his mastery of the *Lotus samādhi*, and was also incorporated by Saichō into his lineages for the Tendai Hokke-shū and the bodhisattva precepts.<sup>34</sup> In medieval Tendai, however, the “transmission on Vulture Peak” was used to legitimate the tradition of secret oral transmissions and was probably influenced by the tradition of Vajrasatta’s transmission of the esoteric (Vajrayāna) teachings to Nāgārjuna in the iron *stūpa* in southern India. Virtually all medieval Tendai lineages claim to derive from a direct transmission made by Śākyamuni on Vulture Peak. The notion that “the assembly on Sacred [Vulture] Peak is still solemnly present and has not yet dispersed” (Jpn. *Ryōzen ichie gennen misan*), which appears in a number of medieval Tendai transmission texts, reflects the shift from linear and historical to mandalic modes of thinking common to both esoteric thought and original enlightenment discourse.<sup>35</sup> Here, it is assimilated to the origins of a unique “Tendai lineage,” independent of the *Lotus Sūtra* and its commentaries, that is said to be prior, not only to the scriptural tradition, but to historical time or to any phenomenal distinction.

#### *The Zen connection*

Scholars have long suggested a connection between Tendai claims that “calming and contemplation surpasses the *Lotus Sūtra*” and the Chan/Zen rhetoric of a “wordless transmission” that had recently been introduced

from Song China.<sup>36</sup> And, indeed, there is some evidence to support the suggestion of Zen influence or appropriation. Sources both internal and external to medieval Tendai claim that Jōmyō (*fl.* latter thirteenth century), regarded as the founder of the influential Gyōsen-bō branch of the Tendai Sugi lineage, had received instruction from the prominent Zen master and abbot of the Tōfukuji, Enni (a.k.a. Bennen or Shōichi Kokushi, 1202–1280), who was also learned in the Tendai and esoteric teachings.<sup>37</sup> Sonshun, another of those who asserted an Enni–Jōmyō connection, even wrote: “The Zen teaching of a separate transmission apart from the sūtras is [simply] a different term for calming and contemplation (Jpn. *shikan*), one that has not been known in prior ages.”<sup>38</sup> While these sources postdate Enni, Enni’s own commentary on the *Darī jing* (Jpn. *Dainichi kyō*, Skt. *Vairocanābhisaṃbodhi Sūtra*) indicates that he did indeed see contemplative insight as transcending the sūtra text:

The trace teaching opens the provisional to reveal the true. The origin teaching opens the trace to reveal the origin. These are the unique properties of the *Lotus*, not found in other sūtras. But mind contemplation (Jpn. *kanjin*) surpasses both trace and origin in its depth and loftiness.<sup>39</sup>

Such statements in Enni’s own writing may have laid the foundation for later stories about him conferring the wordless Zen transmission upon Jōmyō. A connection between “wordless Zen” and claims that “calming and contemplation surpasses the *Lotus Sūtra*” is also assumed in texts critical of the *shikan shō Hokke* position. The most famous is a work called *Risshōkan jō* (On establishing correct contemplation) traditionally attributed to Nichiren, which reads in part:

Among those who study Tendai doctrine in the world today, there appear to be many who revere the practice of contemplating the mind and discard the origin and trace teachings of the *Lotus*. . . . Those who abandon the *Lotus Sūtra* and regard only contemplation as primary are guilty of a grave slander of the Dharma, a great perverted view, an act of devils. . . . The Tendai-shū today is so deplorable as to assert that because *shingon* [i.e. Taimitsu] sets forth both the principles and practices of the esoteric teachings, it surpasses the *Lotus Sūtra*; thus they find it reasonable that calming and contemplation (Jpn. *shikan*) also surpasses the *Lotus*. Next, with regard to the argument that, when applying the interpretation of *kanjin*, the origin and trace teachings are to be abandoned: based on what passage of the *Lotus Sūtra* are we to take commentaries from later teachers as fundamental and abandon the Buddha’s teaching? Even if this were the interpretation of Tiantai [Zhiyi], it

violates the golden words of Śākyamuni and goes against the *Lotus Sūtra*, and is absolutely never to be adopted. . . . If calming and contemplation is not grounded in the *Lotus Sūtra*, then the Tendai *shikan* becomes equivalent to the Daruma[-shū]'s diabolical and false teaching of a separate transmission outside the scriptures.<sup>40</sup>

There is no doubt that Nichiren thought contemplation, or faith, should be grounded in the *Lotus Sūtra* text, and he dismissed Zen claims to represent a "wordless transmission" as a dangerous absurdity.<sup>41</sup> The *Risshōkan jō* is traditionally dated 1274, and, if authentic, represents the earliest known reference to the *shikan shō Hokke* doctrine.<sup>42</sup>

Voices within Tendai critical of the claim that "calming and contemplation surpasses the *Lotus Sūtra*" also took pains to dissociate *shikan* from the Zen wordless transmission, as in this passage from a fourteenth-century *kuden hōmon* collection, which echoes the terms of the *Kankō ruijū* discussed above:

*Question:* Should calming and contemplation (Jpn. *shikan*) be understood in terms of "not establishing words and letters"?

*Answer:* According to transmission, this school teaches the principle of direct realization: therefore, we take as our basis the capacity to gain access [to enlightenment] through visible forms [such as written words]. Thus it is said that "words and letters are liberation," and accordingly, [the notion of] not establishing words and letters will not hold. This is because gaining access through form is our foundation. Only attachment to words [for their own sake] should be admonished.<sup>43</sup>

We also see criticism of the Zen "wordless" position in a passage from Sonshun's *Lotus Sūtra* commentary describing a mythical encounter between the founding figures of the Chinese Tiantai and Chan schools:

by perusing the words and phrases of the sūtras and treatises, we are able to distinguish shallow from profound and clearly understand the essential path of liberation from birth and death. If there were no words and letters, the all-pervading dharma essence would be impossible to realize. Therefore our [Tendai] school interprets words and letters to be none other than liberation. . . . When the Great Teacher Tiantai [Zhiyi] was lecturing on calming and contemplation [i.e. the *Mohezhi-guan*], Bodhidharma arrived in the air and said, "Words and letters are not truth. Why do you preach words and letters?" At that time, the Great Teacher replied, "You are foolish and understand neither the nature of words and

letters nor the truth of the dharma body." Whereupon Bodhidharma disappeared.<sup>44</sup>

Thus both proponents and critics of the *shikan shō Hokke* position equated it with the Zen transmission "independent of words and letters," a notion they valorized in diametrically opposite ways. Critics of the Tendai "wordless transmission" argued their case on two major grounds: first, that teachings cannot be communicated without verbal expressions; second, that words and letters, like all concrete phenomena, are inseparable from ultimate reality.

#### Shikan shō Hokke and lineage identity

Claims within medieval Tendai about meditative insight surpassing the *Lotus Sūtra* text and the existence of a separate transmission outside the textual tradition may have had less to do with a critique of the soteriological value of scripture and language than with asserting a unique identity for particular lineages and institutions. Two patterns of evidence suggest this. First, medieval sources – again both internal and external to Tendai – identify the *shikan sō Hokke* position specifically with the so-called provincial Tendai (Jpn. *inaka Tendai*) of the Kantō or eastern provinces and especially with the influential Senba *dangisho* (seminary) at Muryōjuji at Senba in Kawagoe in Musashi province, established by the Tendai scholar-monk Sonkai (1253–1332), who played a key role in the spread of Tendai in eastern Japan. Mt. Hiei, it is suggested, wanted little to do with this doctrine. Sonshun, who had close ties to Senba, writes:

On the mountain side [Hiei], they do not postulate a dharma of "contemplating the mind" (Jpn. *kanjin*) that transcends the origin and trace teachings. Hence they do not establish a difference between the Tendai and Hokke [lineages]. However, on the *inaka* side [the Kantō], since the time of Sonkai, they do generally say that there exists a dharma transcending the origin and trace teachings, postulating a variation of "mind contemplation" (Jpn. *kanjin*). The trace and origin teachings pertain to the Hokke-shū; above these is placed "mind contemplation," which pertains to the Tendai-shū. This [distinction] is in general not permitted on the mountain; it is taught only at Senba.<sup>45</sup>

The peculiarity of this doctrine to the Senba tradition, and its lack of attraction for scholars on Mt. Hiei, was also recognized by outsiders, namely scholar-monks of the emergent Nichiren Hokke-shū. An example is Shinnyoin Nichijū (1406–1486) of the Nichiren temple Hongakuji in Kyoto, who as a young man had studied on Mt. Hiei with the Tendai monk Jōgen of the Eastern Pagoda precinct. He writes:

Within the Tendai school, an interpretation is posited that *shikan* is superior, and the *Lotus* inferior. Of the two schools [of Tendai], Eshin and Danna, the Danna school has taken no account of this [position], but in the Eshin school, it is a valued doctrine.<sup>46</sup> Within the Eshin school, it is the particular doctrine of the Sugiu line, but even within the Sugiu line, scholars of the main lineage on the mountain [Hiei] do not assert it. Because it is a doctrine of the Sugiu lineage, scholars such as Zōjō-bō Jōgen and others at the Kitadani of the Eastern Pagoda speak of it when it is natural to do so, but while speaking, they do not place faith in it. In general, it is said to be asserted by [Tendai] scholars of the provinces. . . . It is a doctrine put forth by Sonkai Hōin of Senba.<sup>47</sup>

Similar themes had already emerged in a more detailed, and more critical, account of the origins of the *shikan shō Hokke* claim, in the *Hokke mondō shōgishō* (Judgments on questions and answers concerning the *Lotus*) written between 1333 and 1344 by Tōgakuin Nichizen (1294–1344) of the Nakayama branch of the Nichiren Hokke-shū. In this work, Nichizen records that he had formerly studied on Mt. Hiei at the Nishidani of the Eastern Pagoda precinct. There he was told that the doctrine of “calming and contemplation surpasses the *Lotus*” had first been articulated by one Seikai of the Tsuchimikado-monzeki lineage of the Eshin school, during a debate. According to Nichizen’s account, Seikai, who was acting as judge (Jpn. *shōgisha*), declared: “Because *shikan* is the doctrine that the great teacher [Zhiyi] practiced within his mind, he realized it without reliance on sūtras and treatises.” Pressed for the source of this radical assertion, Seikai confessed that it was not a transmission received from a teacher but his own realization, though he believed it to be a valid claim. Subsequently he was admonished that “scholar-monks of the mountain should not uphold a perverse doctrine such as this which slanders the Dharma.” In the east, however, Sonkai got word of this doctrine and inquired about it on Mt. Hiei from Seikai’s disciple Ikkai. Ikkai advised him that it was not an established teaching and should not be communicated to others. Nevertheless, Sonkai regarded it as a most profound secret teaching and transmitted it to his disciples.<sup>48</sup>

While not all Tendai scholars of the Kantō embraced the *shikan shō Hokke* position, and some scholarly disagreement remains about who first asserted it, it does seem unmistakably to have been associated with eastern Tendai and with the Senba dangisho and Sonkai’s lineage in particular. As reflected in the pejorative term “*inaka* Tendai,” Tendai of the eastern provinces was a new tradition, one that had emerged under warrior patronage only since the Kamakura period (1185–1333), and that depended on a very different socio-economic base than did the older and more aristocratic Tendai of the imperial capital (Jpn. *miyako Tendai*). By the claim that verbally

expressed doctrine (Jpn. *kyō*) and nonverbal insight (Jpn. *kan*) represent two independent dharma transmissions, Senba scholars arrogated to themselves the designation “Tendai-shū,” which they identified with their own signature doctrinal position that there exists an ineffable dharma known only through meditative insight – designated as *kanjin* or *shikan* – independent of and prior to the origin and trace teachings of the *Lotus Sūtra*. It is not hard to imagine that they deployed this doctrine to challenge the authority of Mt. Hiei, asserting an identity both independent of, and superior to, the parent tradition.

The second pattern of evidence suggesting that claims for the *shikan shō Hokke* position served to bolster Senba institutional identity has to do with the identity of its most vocal critics. In the first part of the fourteenth century, when this doctrine began to draw widespread attention, the most hostile criticisms of it emerged not from Mt. Hiei – where it may have been dismissed as a minor heterodoxy – but from the Nichiren Hokke-shū. Nichiren had absolutized the *Lotus Sūtra* as the only true teaching and held that contemplative practice (Jpn. *kanjin*) must be grounded in the sūtra text, so claims that “*shikan* surpasses the *Lotus*” were of course blasphemous to his followers. We have already cited Nichizen’s account of the origins of this doctrine as the arbitrary invention of the monk Seikai. Nor was Nichizen the only Hokke-shū scholar to express such views. Daien Ajari Nichiden (1277–1341), who held the position of chief of instruction (Jpn. *gaktō*) for the Hokke-shū communities of monks at Hikigayatsu and Ikegami in Kamakura, observed in 1322:

There is a perverted doctrine that makes contemplation of the mind the essence, abolishing the origin and trace teachings. . . . One should abide in Namu-myōhō-enge-kyō [the practice of chanting the *daimoku* taught by Nichiren], in which origin and trace [teachings] are inconceivably one.<sup>49</sup>

Nichizen’s teacher Jōgyōin Nichiyū (1298–1374), third in the Nakayama lineage of the Hokke-shū based in Shimōsa province, was also critical: “To say that when the great teaching of *kanjin* rises, the great teachings of the origin and trace teachings are superseded, is an extremely distorted view.”<sup>50</sup>

In contrast to their Tendai counterparts, who held that, properly understood, all teachings and practices could be understood as expressions of the “One Vehicle,” Nichiren’s followers embraced the strongly exclusivistic position that the *Lotus Sūtra* alone represents the truth and that all other teachings must be rejected as provisional. But such an assertion would become meaningless were insight into true reality to be something not based upon texts and independent of written teachings, even of the *Lotus Sūtra*. The entire Nichiren argument could be dismissed as one still pertaining to the

inferior level of textual transmission, transcended by the Tendai transmission of *shikan*. Thus it is not surprising that Hokke-shū scholars should vehemently oppose the *shikan shō Hokke* claim on doctrinal grounds. But there may also have been more at stake. In the first part of the fourteenth century, Kantō Tendai and the Nichiren Hokke-shū were both new movements based in the same eastern provinces and competing for patronage among the same social class, warriors and local landholders. One can easily imagine, as Ono Bunkō has suggested, that “calming and contemplation surpasses the *Lotus*” was asserted within the Senba lineage at least in part as a polemic against the position of its chief rivals in the Kantō, the Nichiren Hokke followers, who maintained that the *Lotus Sūtra* alone represents the true vehicle of salvation and that all other teachings must be rejected.<sup>51</sup> Given the status of Senba and the Kantō-based Nichiren Hokke-shū as institutional competitors in the same geographic area, it seems possible that these sharply contrasting doctrinal positions developed at least in part as statements of their rivalry and were reinforced as they defined their emerging traditions, not only with respect to Mt. Hiei, but over and against one another. This would then be a case in which a controversy explicitly concerning the relationship of discursive teachings and intuitive insight might implicitly have also been about institutions and lineage.

In closing this discussion of the *shikan shō Hokke* controversy, we may recall, as has often been noted, that rhetoric about “not relying on words and letters” did not prevent Chan/Zen practitioners from producing a vast corpus of written literature. Similarly, despite claims to represent a unique “Tendai-shū” transmission prior to verbal and conceptual distinctions, Tendai *dangisho* in the Kantō, and Senba in particular, became thriving centers of textual production and training in doctrinal study and debate. When Oda Nobunaga razed Mt. Hiei in 1571, destroying the monastery’s extensive libraries, they were restored by drawing on the archives of Tendai seminaries in the eastern provinces.<sup>52</sup>

### The words of the *Lotus* and the buddhahood of insentient beings

Let us move back now to the thirteenth century to consider another argument about the language of the *Lotus Sūtra*, this one from the Buddhist teacher Nichiren (1222–1282). Nichiren, for whom no authority superseded that of the *Lotus*, adamantly stressed the soteriological efficacy of the sūtra’s words in both discursive and ritual dimensions. The central practice that he taught, chanting the sūtra’s *daimoku* (title) in the formula “*namu-myōhō-renge-kyō*” is of course a verbal practice. In his teaching, the five characters of the title, “*myōhō-renge-kyō*” in Japanese pronunciation, contain the power and meaning of all the Buddha’s teachings; they are the seed of buddhahood

in the practitioner’s mind, the pre-eminent form of practice, and the object of worship toward which practice is directed.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, the calligraphic *mandala* that he devised as a focus of faith and practice for his followers depicts the assembly of the *Lotus Sūtra* as the enlightened dharma realm, not with images, but with written characters for names and phrases taken from sūtra text.<sup>54</sup> In denying the authority of any teaching except the *Lotus Sūtra*, Nichiren invested the sūtra’s words, especially the title, with all the benefits that religion in medieval Japan was thought to confer: protection, healing, worldly good fortune, the realization of enlightenment in this lifetime, and birth after death in a pure land.

Apart from his claim for the exclusive truth of the *Lotus Sūtra*, Nichiren’s own ideas about the powers of religious language were not unique, but broadly representative of his age. However, in asserting that ritual use of the *Lotus Sūtra* should in all cases replace other, often much more widely employed incantatory language, such as the *nenbutsu* or the *mantras* and *dhāraṇīs* of esoteric Buddhism, he was compelled to articulate exactly how he thought such powers worked. This gives us some explicitly theorized accounts on his part of the efficacy of verbal invocations, something that was often probably simply taken for granted.

It would be impossible, in a single chapter, to explicate fully Nichiren’s views on the language of the *Lotus Sūtra*. Instead, this section focuses on a specific strand of his thinking in this regard, namely the ritual efficacy of the words of the *Lotus Sūtra* in empowering inanimate objects, which Nichiren discusses in terms of the principles of both “the realization of buddhahood by grasses and trees” (Jpn. *sōmoku jōbutsu*) and “the realization of buddhahood with this very body” (Jpn. *sokushin jōbutsu*).

### Empowering icons: the buddhahood of grasses and trees

“The realization of buddhahood by grasses and trees” represents a distinctively Japanese development of broader East Asian concepts of the buddha nature of insentient beings. Modern scholarship has often regarded it as expressing the soteric value of “nature.” For Nichiren, however, *sōmoku jōbutsu* had the more specific meaning of empowering icons: buddha images, and also the calligraphic *mandala* that he devised. In elaborating on this topic, he provided a theoretical basis for conceptualizing the use of ritual language to consecrate or “open the eyes” of inanimate images to serve as *honzon*, objects of worship. Here we focus on a letter to a lay follower called Mokuie *nizō kaigen no koto* (“On consecrating wooden and painted images”),<sup>55</sup> whose thesis is that only the words of the *Lotus Sūtra* are efficacious in performing the *kaigen kuyō* (eye-opening) ceremony whereby a new buddha image is ritually empowered as an object of worship or contemplation. To summarize a rather long introductory passage, Nichiren’s argument begins as follows:

A living buddha has thirty-two distinguishing physical marks. From the Dharma wheels on the soles of the feet to the knot of flesh (Skt. *uṣṇīṣa*) on the crown of his head, thirty-one of these marks have visible form and can be iconographically represented. Nevertheless, a wooden or painted image of the Buddha is not equal to the Buddha himself, for it lacks one physical mark: the pure voice (Skt. *brahmasvara*, Jpn. *bonnonjō*) with which the Buddha preached the Dharma.<sup>56</sup> Not only does an image lack the Buddha's voice; it also has no mental dharmas and is therefore merely insentient form.

These twin lacks are supplied, Nichiren informs us, by the "eye opening" ritual, in which a text is placed before the image (and presumably also recited). Thereby, the image is endowed with all thirty-two marks and also with mind. However, the kind of "mind" or mental dharmas with which the image is endowed will depend upon what text is used. If one places before it a sūtra or treatise dealing with the five precepts or the ten precepts, the image will become equivalent, respectively, to a *cakravartin* or to the deity Indra. If one places before the image a treatise on achieving release from the realm of desire, it will become equivalent to Lord Brahmā. If one places one of the āgamas before the image, it will become equivalent to an *arhat*. Nichiren then begins to invoke categories specific to Tiantai/Tendai classificatory schema. If one places before the image one of the common *prajñā* teachings expounded during the "extended" (Skt. *vaipulya*) or *prajñā* periods of the Buddha's teaching career, it will become equivalent to a *pratyekabuddha*. If one places before the image the *Flower Ornament Sūtra* or a *vaipulya* or *prajñā* teaching of the distinct or perfect categories, it will become equivalent to a bodhisattva. Finally, "when the *Lotus Sūtra* is placed before a buddha [image] possessing thirty-one features, the image will surely become the Buddha of the pure and perfect [teaching]."<sup>57</sup> This claim clearly rests on a hierarchical classification of the Buddhist teachings in which the *Lotus Sūtra* ranks foremost. In other words, the level of "mind" with which a text can endow an image depends on its rank in the *kyōhan* or system of doctrinal classification; by implication, the degree of its magical power to animate an insentient image is qualified by its discursive content.

Such a claim has obvious polemical potential, and Nichiren quickly deploys it in criticism of *mikkyō* (esoteric Buddhism), which he saw as having displaced the centrality of the *Lotus Sūtra* in Tendai after Saichō's time, and whose *mudrās* and *mantras* – especially those of the cosmic buddha Dainichi (Skt. Mahāvairocana) and the esoteric deity Butsugen (Skt. Buddhalocanā) – were most commonly used for the *kaigen kuyō* ritual in his day.<sup>58</sup> Elsewhere, Nichiren had criticized the use of *mikkyō* ritual forms in this context, saying, for example, that "in India, China, and Japan, before the *shingon* teachings

were introduced, there were wooden and painted images that walked, preached the Dharma, or talked. But ever since *mudrās* and *mantras* have been used to open the eyes of buddha [images], the efficacy of such images has waned considerably."<sup>59</sup> His agenda was in part to deny the efficacy of esoteric *mantras* while assimilating their putative powers and functions to the *Lotus Sūtra*. In the *Mokue nizō kaigen no koto*, he goes as far as to suggest that esoteric invocations not only are without positive efficacy but actually imbue images with a malignant character:

Today, when the eye-opening ritual for wooden or painted images is conducted by a *shingon* master, the image becomes not a true buddha, but a provisional one. Indeed, it does not even become a provisional buddha. Though its form may resemble a buddha, its mind merely remains that of the insentient plant or tree from which it was made. In fact, it does not even remain an insentient plant or tree; it becomes a devil or demon. This is because the false doctrines of the *shingon* masters take form in *mudrās* and *mantras* and become the mind of the wooden or painted image. . . . Unless the eye-opening ritual for a wooden or painted image is conducted by one who has grasped the heart of the *Lotus Sūtra*, it will be like the case of a thief entering a masterless house or a demon taking possession of the body when someone has died. . . . Because the people are worshiping demons, they will bring the country to ruin in their present lifetime, and because they are revering devils, they will fall after death into the Hell without Respite.<sup>60</sup>

Here again we see an implicit claim that the power of ritual invocations to animate images directly reflects the doctrinal content (in this instance, negatively evaluated) of the teachings on which they are based.

Nichiren then proceeds to address two issues: first, how it is that the Buddha's voice and mind are contained in the *Lotus Sūtra*; second, how it is that, via the sūtra's words, the Buddha's mind can be embodied in an insentient painting or statue. He argues the first point in terms of classical Tiantai/Tendai doctrine of the nonduality of physical and mental dharmas (Jpn. *shiki shin funi*), as follows:

The written words of the *Lotus Sūtra* manifest the Buddha's pure voice, which is invisible and coextensive, in a form that is both visible and non-coextensive, having both color and form. The pure voice that once vanished finds expression again in changed form as written language, benefiting living beings. . . . Intent finds expression as voice. Intent is mind, and voice is form. . . . Physical dharmas express mental ones. Since form and mind, though nondual, nevertheless have these two aspects, the Buddha's intent took form

as the written words of the *Lotus Sūtra*, and these written words in turn become the Buddha's intent. Therefore, those who read the *Lotus Sūtra* must not regard it as mere written words, for those written words are precisely the Buddha's mind. . . . Since the *Lotus Sūtra* represents the [Buddha's] mental dharmas, when it is used to consecrate a wooden or painted image having thirty-one marks, that wooden or painted image becomes the whole body of a living buddha. This is what is meant by the realization of buddhahood by grasses and trees.<sup>61</sup>

We have seen similar claims in the *Sōkanmon shō*, which holds that the words of the *Lotus Sūtra* embody the Buddha's true intent, or in the *Kankō ruijū*, which asserts that the written language of the sūtras represents the Buddha's verbal preaching in more durable form. The interchangeability of the Buddha and the *Lotus Sūtra* text also appears in *Kankō ruijū*, which argues from a doctrinal perspective that written characters, being an embodiment of the threefold truth, instantiate the Buddha's presence. The *Mokue nizō kaigen no koto*, dealing as it does with ritual, claims that the words of the *Lotus Sūtra* not only instantiate the Buddha's presence but can also be ritually used to instill that same presence in paintings and statues. Nichiren develops this theme from different perspectives in other writings. For example:

As for the "eye-opening" ritual to consecrate a buddha image: the *Samantabhadra Sūtra* states, "This Mahāyāna scripture [the *Lotus*] is the treasury of the buddhas, the eye of all buddhas of the ten directions and three periods of time." It also states, "This *vaipulya* sūtra is the eye of the buddhas. It is endowed with the cause by which they obtain the five kinds of vision." The five kinds of vision are the fleshly eye, the *deva* eye, the wisdom eye, the dharma eye, and the buddha eye. One who upholds the *Lotus Sūtra* will naturally be endowed with these five types of vision, just as someone who ascends the throne is naturally obeyed by the entire country. . . . The [same] *Samantabhadra Sūtra* states, "The three kinds of buddha body [the dharma body, recompense body, and manifested body] arise from the *vaipulya*." . . . These teachings of the five eyes and three bodies exist nowhere apart from the *Lotus Sūtra*. The Great Teacher Tiantai [Zhiyi] said: "Throughout the three periods of time, the Buddha consistently possesses three bodies. But in the various teachings [other than the "Fathoming the Lifespan" chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*], this is kept secret and is not transmitted." . . . Thus the offering ritual for opening the eyes of wooden and painted images should be confined to the *Lotus Sūtra* and the Tendai school.<sup>62</sup>

In the above passage, we see that the *Lotus Sūtra* is regarded as the source of buddhas and therefore prior to them. Elsewhere as well, Nichiren suggests that living buddhas, no less than their iconic representations, are empowered or "produced" by the *Lotus Sūtra*:

The buddha is that which is produced (Jpn. *shoshō*). The *Lotus Sūtra* is that which produces (Jpn. *nōshō*). The buddha is the body, and the *Lotus Sūtra*, the spirit (Jpn. *tamashū*). Thus the eye-opening ritual for wooden and painted images should employ only the *Lotus Sūtra*.<sup>63</sup>

Finally, we see indications that *Lotus* recitation was actually used to consecrate images in Nichiren's community of followers:

As for consecrating this buddha image [that you have had made], you should quickly have [my disciple, the monk] Iyo-bō carry it out. Have him read the entirety of the *Lotus Sūtra* so that the image will be invested with the Buddha's six sense faculties and become the living teacher Śākyamuni, master of teachings, whom you may revere.<sup>64</sup>

To return to the *Mokue nizō kaigen no koto*, having first addressed the *Lotus Sūtra* as the Buddha's voice and mind, Nichiren moves to his second point, the conceptual basis on which the words of the *Lotus* can be said to endow an inert piece of wood or paper with the Buddha's mind. Nichiren grounded this claim in the Tendai doctrine of "the single thought-moment that is three thousand realms" (Jpn. *ichinen sanzen*) – that is, the interpenetration and mutual identification of the mind at each moment ("single thought-moment") with all dharmas, or the whole of phenomenal reality ("three thousand realms"). This doctrine, originally set forth by the Tiantai founder Zhiyi, was appropriated and innovatively interpreted by Nichiren and holds a central place in his thought.<sup>65</sup> A key structural component of this complex, architectonic concept is the division of all phenomena into three realms (Jpn. *san seken*): the realm of the five aggregates (Skt. *skandhas*), the mental and physical elements into which living beings can be analyzed (Jpn. *go'on seken*); the realm of living beings, i.e. a "temporary union of the five aggregates" considered as an individual being belonging to any of the ten dharma realms from hell to buddhahood (Jpn. *shujō seken*); and the realm of the land, the insentient container world on which living beings depend and which is shaped by their past and present deeds (Jpn. *kokudo seken*). This "realm of the land" is important to Nichiren's thought, in connection with both his aim of establishing the buddha land in the present world – a subject beyond the scope of this chapter – and with the consecration of buddha images. He writes:

Setting aside the first two, the third, the realm of the land, is the realm of grasses and trees. The realm of grasses and trees includes those plants from which are derived the five pigments used in painting. From these pigments, painted images are made, and from wood, carved statues are produced. It is by the power of the *Lotus Sūtra* that wooden and painted images are infused with a spirit (Jpn. *chinkon to mōsu tamashii o iruru*). This was the insight of the Great Teacher Tiantai [Zhiyi]. With respect to living beings, this doctrine is termed “the realization of buddhahood with this very body,” and, with respect to paintings and statues, it is called “the realization of buddhahood by grasses and trees.”<sup>66</sup>

Nichiren frequently interpreted the “buddhahood of grasses and trees” as grounded in the concept of *ichinen sanzen*, and legitimating the use of images and *maṇḍalas* in Buddhist practice, for example, in his most famous writing, the *Kanjin honzon shō* (On the contemplation of the mind and the object of worship).<sup>67</sup> However, where that text argues the case strictly on the basis of traditional Tiantai doctrinal concepts of *ichinen sanzen* and the nonduality of sentient and insentient, the reference in the *Mokue nizō kaigen no koto* passage, cited immediately above, to “infusing a spirit” into images suggests resonances with notions of *kami* and other numina that could ritually be made to descend and inhere in *goshintai* or other objects. From this perspective, investigation into the eye-opening ceremony as practiced in medieval Japan may offer some insight into the intersection of Buddhism with local religious culture.

*Pacifying the dead: the realization of  
buddhahood with this very body*

Nichiren makes one further point about the power of the language of the *Lotus Sūtra*, as the embodiment of the Buddha’s liberative intent, to animate insentient objects. Unlike the issue of consecrating buddha images, discussed in several of his writings, this one appears only in *Mokue nizō kaigen no koto* and is related to larger assumptions about the powers of sacred language to bridge the gap between this world and the next. The passage in question continues without interruption from the discussion of consecrating buddha images and goes as follows:

When someone dies and his spirit (Jpn. *tamashii*) departs, demons may enter his body in its place and destroy his descendants. This is what is meant by a hungry ghost (Skt. *preta*, Jpn. *gaki*) that devours [even] itself. If a person of wisdom praises the *Lotus Sūtra* and with it imbues the dead person’s remains (Jpn. *hone no tamashii to naseba*), then although that person’s body remains in human form, his mind

will become the Dharma body. This is the doctrine of attaining [the stage of] acquiescence [to the unbornness of the dharmas] in one’s present body (Jpn. *shōshin tokunin*). . . . If a person of wisdom awakened to the *Lotus* performs offerings over the remains, then the dead person’s body will at once become the Dharma body. This is the meaning of “with this very body” (Jpn. *sokushin*). [The officiant] will retrieve the departed spirit, place it back in the remains, and transform it into the Buddha’s mind. This is the meaning of “realizing buddhahood” (Jpn. *jōbutsu*). “This very body” refers to physical dharmas, and “realizing buddhahood,” to mental dharmas. The dead person’s body and mind will be transformed into the beginningless subtle object and subtle wisdom (Jpn. *mushi no myōkyō myōchī*); this is the realization of buddhahood in this very body. Thus the *Lotus Sūtra* speaks of “the suchlike aspect of the dharmas (the dead person’s physical body), their suchlike nature (his mind), their suchlike essence (his body and mind),” etc.<sup>68</sup>

Like the preceding discussion of instilling “mind” into insentient images, this passage provides an explicit rationale, assimilated in this case to the *Lotus Sūtra*, of a practice that was widely conducted, although without much theoretical explanation. This was the incantations of a *zenchishiki* (a Buddhist teacher or spiritual guide) at the bedside of a dying or newly dead person for that individual’s postmortem benefit. Deathbed ritual texts (Jpn. *rinjū gyōgisho*) of the Heian (794–1185) and Kamakura periods, such as the *Ichigo taiyō himitsu shū* of Kakuban (1095–1143) or the *Kanbyō yōjin shō* of Ryōchū (1199–1287), make clear that when dying persons have fallen unconscious and can no longer chant for themselves, or even when they have ceased to breathe, the power of the *zenchishiki*’s chanted *nenbutsu* or other invocations can redirect a dying or deceased person’s consciousness, which may be wandering in the interim state, causing it to achieve birth in the Pure Land.<sup>69</sup> The expression “*sokushin jōbutsu*” might seem odd in connection with the deceased; what, after all, does the realization of buddhahood with this very body entail, if the body in question is a corpse? But such usage was far from uncommon in referring to someone who had died in a state of great spiritual attainment. Instructions for deathbed practice in the Shingon tradition, for example, speak of the awakening to be realized at the moment of death in terms of *sokushin jōbutsu*.<sup>70</sup>

Some contemporary readers might see this passage as exhibiting an uneasy conflation of standard Mahāyāna nonduality thought, expressed in a Tendai idiom, with elements of a local religious culture involving shamanism and spirit possession. However, the sort of correlations drawn here by a logic of association and resemblance (the corpse = “this very body”; the spirit = “realizing buddhahood”) was probably not only unproblematic for medieval Japanese Buddhists but represented a widespread episteme in which

Buddhist and non-Buddhist elements could be associated, equated, and explained in terms of one another.

### Summation

Here we have reviewed some medieval arguments about the powers of language, specifically the language of the *Lotus Sūtra*. Being articulated in sectarian, polemical contexts, these arguments provide explicit theoretical bases for more general ideas about the soteriological functions of language that may often have gone unarticulated. Often they adapt the traditional scholastic device of the *kyōhan*, using the hierarchical categories of such schema to rank, not only specific teachings, but also views of language.

We have seen in these arguments a clear presumption of what in modern literary critical terms might be called "authorial intent." The Buddha's will to lead all beings to liberation is somehow fixed in the words of the sūtra text – freeze-dried, as it were – and can be reactivated either discursively (by "rousing the beings into the waking reality of original enlightenment"), or ritually, such as by empowering buddha images or saving the deceased. Some disagreement is in evidence about the ontological status of a sūtra's words themselves. The *Kankō ruijū*, for example, claims that written words actually instantiate the Buddha of original enlightenment. In contrast, the *Sōkanmon shō* indicates that, while the words of the *Lotus Sūtra* have the soteriological function of awakening people to original enlightenment, in themselves they still ultimately belong to the "dream of birth and death" ("waking reality" in this work would appear to be a non-discursive realm). In its extreme development, this latter view took the form of claims to a separate Tendai transmission prior to and apart from the sūtra and commentarial tradition, a transmission originating "where heaven and earth have not yet divided, where delusion and enlightenment are a single suchness." In this case, as we have seen, an argument explicitly about language might implicitly be also about lineage and institution; as Ono Bunkō has suggested, assertions about a separate "Tendai-shū" independent of and superior to written texts seems to have served Tendai scholars in the Kantō provinces, especially those of the Senba *dangisho*, at least in part as a polemical tool for asserting a unique sectarian identity over and against both their Tendai counterparts on Mt. Hiei and their Nichiren Hokke-shū rivals closer to home.

In contrast to these doctrinal or philosophical discussions of "words and letters," the ritual efficacy of language is addressed in Nichiren's claims for the power of the *Lotus Sūtra* to endow insentient beings with "mind" – both to empower buddha images and to bring the deceased to enlightenment. Unlike the story of the contest between Kōshō and Hōren mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Nichiren's *Mokue nizō kaigen no koto* is not simply an assertion that one sūtra has greater thaumaturgical power than

others. Instead, his claims for the unique ritual efficacy of the *Lotus Sūtra* are directly connected with its place in the traditional Tendai *kyōhan* (classifications of teachings), which, based on an assessment of its discursive content, rank the *Lotus Sūtra* as the supreme teaching of the Buddha's lifetime. There is a seamless continuum here between the sūtra's doctrinal content and the presumption of its magical powers; because (according to the Tendai tradition) only the *Lotus* teaches the unity of the three *tathāgata* bodies, its ritual use alone can transform an inert image into a living buddha. Although Nichiren is only one figure and not necessarily altogether representative of his age, his argument at least suggests the possibility that our own frequent distinction between discursive and magical uses of language either did not exist or was framed in very different terms in the medieval period. This in turn is related to the broader questions of the relationship, in pre-modern Japan, between exoteric and esoteric teachings, and between doctrine and ritual practice.

### Notes

- 1 Gregory Schopen, "The Phrase 'sa prthivīpradeśas caityabhūto bhavet' in the *Vajracchedikā*: Notes on the Cult of the Book in Mahāyāna," *Indo-Iranian Journal*, 17/3–4 (1975), 147–181. For the sūtra quotes, see *Miaofa lianhua jing* 4, T. no. 262, 9:34b12, 31b26–29, Leon Hurvitz, tr., *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1976, pp. 193, 178.
- 2 Ch. *Zuishengwang jing*, Jpn. *Saishō-kyō*, T. no. 665.
- 3 *Dai Nihonkoku Hokkekyō kenki* II:48, in *Ōjōden-Hokke genki*, *Zoku Nihon bukkyō no shisō* 1, new edition of the 1974 *Nihon shisō taikei* 7, Inoue Mitsusada and Oosone Shōsuke, eds, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1995, pp. 114–116; Yoshiko Kurata Dykstra, tr., *Miraculous Tales of the Lotus Sūtra from Ancient Japan*, Hīrakata-shi, Osaka-fu: Intercultural Research Institute, Kansai University of Foreign Studies, 1983, pp. 74–76.
- 4 Paul Groner, "Shortening the Path: Early Tendai Interpretations of the Realization of Buddhahood with This Very Body (*Sokushin Jōbutsu*)," in *Paths to Liberation: The Mārga and Its Transformations in Buddhist Thought*, Robert E. Buswell Jr and Robert M. Gimello, eds, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992, pp. 439–473.
- 5 These are explained in the *Mohezhiqian* 1a, T. no. 1911, 46:10b7–11a13; Neal Donner and Daniel B. Stevenson, trs, *The Great Calming and Contemplation: A Study and Annotated Translation of the First Chapter of Chih-i's Mo-ho chih-kuan*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993, pp. 207–18.
- 6 This has been noted, for example, by Sueki Fumihiko, *Kamakura bukkyō keisei ron: Shisōshi no tachiba kara*, Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1998, pp. 279–300 *passim*. Sueki refers to the two views respectively as "mind as absolute principle" (Jpn. *zettai no shinteki genri*) and the "affirmation of phenomena, just as they are, as absolute" (Jpn. *genshoku soku zettai no "ari no mama shugi"*).
- 7 The earliest reference to the *Sōkanmon shō* appears in the *Honzon shōgyōroku*, an index of Nichiren's works compiled by a disciple in 1344, sixty-two years after his death. *Shōwa teihon Nichiren shōnin ibun* [hereafter *Teihon*], Rishō Daigaku Nichiren Kyōgaku Kenkyūjo, ed., Minobu, Yamanashi Prefecture: Minobusan Kuonji, 1952–1959; rev. 1988, 3:2738. This notice occurs too early to dismiss the

- possibility of Nichiren's authorship out of hand, but also too late to accept it uncritically. The Japanese scholarship on the authenticity question is summarized in Jacqueline I. Stone, "Some Disputed Writings in the Nichiren Corpus: Textual, Hermeneutical and Historical Problems," PhD dissertation, UCLA, 1990, pp. 125–135. (An additional reference, unknown to me at the time of that writing, is Hanano Jūdō, "Sōkanmon shō no shingi mondai ni tsuite," *Watō*, 37 (1976), 108–136, which argues for Nichiren's authorship.) A full translation of the *Sōkanmon shō* is included in Stone, pp. 343–417. Translated excerpts have been published in *Buddhism in Practice*, Donald S. Lopez Jr, ed., Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995, pp. 232–236. Arguments for or against the authenticity of specific works attributed to Nichiren dealing with the doctrine of original enlightenment are often based as much on prejudgments about Nichiren's thought as they are on textual problems. Where a holograph is lacking, it is often impossible, at least in the current state of scholarship, to draw definite conclusions. On questions of authenticity in Nichiren's writings more generally, in addition to my "Some Disputed Writings," see Sueki Fumihiko, "Nichiren's Problematic Works," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 26/3–4 (1999), 261–280.
- 8 On traditional Tiantai classificatory schema, see Buddhist Translation Seminar of Hawaii, tr., *T'ien-t'ai Buddhism: An Outline of the Fourfold Teachings*, David W. Chappell, ed. and comp. Masao Ichishima, Tokyo: Daiichi Shobō, 1983.
- 9 *Teihon* 2:1686–1687.
- 10 *Ibid.*, pp. 1688–1689.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 1688.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 1690.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 1692.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 1689.
- 15 Although it praises the Buddha's "skillful means" in elaborating countless verbal teachings to lead living beings to enlightenment, in that it never articulates the content of the One Vehicle, the *Lotus Sūtra* itself could be read as acknowledging that all categories are ultimately empty, and the Buddha's awakening is beyond verbal expression. For an example of such a reading, see Michael Pye, *Skillful Means: A Concept in Mahayana Buddhism*, London: Duckworth, 1978.
- 16 For example, in this excerpt from the *Sanjū shika no kotogaki*: "From the standpoint of nonduality, there is no hierarchy whatsoever among the three truths, because one truth encompasses three truths, and the three truths are implicit in one. But from the standpoint of duality, the truth of conventional existence is superior, while those of emptiness and the middle are inferior. The truth of conventional existence is the realm before our eyes, the myriad phenomena, the body of what is originally unborn. . . . Emptiness and the middle are the adornments of conventional existence." Tada Kōryū et al., eds, *Tendai hongaku ron* [hereafter THR], *Nihon shisō taikai* 9, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1973, p. 177.
- 17 Fascicles 1 and 4 are included in THR, pp. 188–286. The complete text may be found in Bussho Kankōkai, ed., *Dai Nihon bukkyō zensho* (hereafter DNBZ), Tokyo: by the editor, 1912–1922, 17:1–114. For discussion, see Paul Groner, "A Medieval Japanese Reading of the *Mo-ho chih-kuan*: Placing the *Kankō ruijū* in Historical Context," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 23/1–2 (1995), 49–81.
- 18 Literally "six dusts." As the editor notes, in the *sahā* world, the Buddha's preaching can really be the object of only three sense faculties: the ears, the eyes, and the mind (THR, 201). (One can also imagine a braille version of a *sūtra* text, which could be accessed by touch.) This limitation was not necessarily assumed to hold true in other worlds, however; for example, the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-Sūtra* depicts a world called *Sarvagandhasugandh-ā*, whose Buddha teaches non-discursively, by means of fragrances. Robert A. F. Thurman, tr., *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti: A Mahāyāna Scripture*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976, pp. 78, 81.
- 19 THR, 201–202. This passage appears to be balancing or qualifying a preceding one, to the effect that, while persons of superior faculties need only hear that "all dharmas are the Buddha-Dharma" to realize enlightenment, those of lesser faculties do so by reliance on the scriptural rolls (THR, 200). Some other medieval Tendai texts similarly suggest that the greater one's faculties, the less exposure to written texts necessary to engender awakening, e.g. persons of superior faculties can realize enlightenment merely by encountering the preface to the *Mohezhi-guan*; those of intermediate faculties, by the "Dayi" or "Synopsis" chapter; and those of inferior faculties, by all ten chapters of the work. Tendai Shūten Kankōkai, ed., *Eshin-ryū naishō sōjō hōmon shū* [a.k.a. and hereafter *Ichijō shō*], *Tendaishū zensho*, 1935–1937; reprint, Tokyo: Daiichi Shobō, 1973–1974, 9:35b.
- 20 THR, pp. 207–208. *Moji* has been variously translated in this chapter as written words, written characters, words and letters, etc.
- 21 *Mohezhi-guan* 5a, T. 46:52b, mentions these as two types of persons unable to fathom the ten modes of contemplation. It is likely, however, that the *Kankō ruijū*'s compiler had a contemporaneous target of criticism in mind, such as Zen or Zen-like claims to wordless transmission. See the following section.
- 22 THR, pp. 207–208. The *Denbōketsu*, probably a fictive work, would seem to refer to a record of oral transmissions that Saichō received from his Tiantai teachers in China.
- 23 On this point, see Neal Donner, "Sudden and Gradual Intimately Conjoined: Chih-i's T'ien-t'ai View," in Peter N. Gregory, ed., *Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987, pp. 201–226.
- 24 See Hayashi Senshō, "*Shikan shō Hokke* shisō to Senba kyōgaku: Chūko Tendai to Nichiren kyōgaku to no kankei no issetsu," in Shimizu Ryūzan Sensei Kyōiku Gojūnen Kōki Kinenkai, ed., *Shimizu Ryūzan Sensei kōki kinen ronbunshū*, Tokyo: by the editor, 1940, pp. 230–261.
- 25 For a more detailed discussion of the *shijū kōhai*, along with a summary of arguments in Japanese scholarship concerning its origins, see Jacqueline I. Stone, *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999, pp. 168–175, and, more recently, Hanano Jūdō, "Shijū kōhai shisō no keisei," in Watanabe Hōyō Sensei Kōki Kinen Ronbunshū Kankōkai, ed., *Hokke bukkyō bunkashi ronsō*, Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten, 2003, pp. 201–224.
- 26 As Donner and Stevenson have noted, as used by Zhiyi, the term *zhiguan* (Jpn. *shikan*) can be understood in three ways. From the standpoint of cause, or practice, it can be understood as "calming and contemplation"; from the standpoint of effect, or attainment, as "tranquility and insight" (or "stillness and clarity"); and, when referring to the true nature of reality, as "quiescence and illumination." Donner and Stevenson, p. 8. The same is true of *kanjin*. Rather than make a choice in each case (which cannot always readily be done), I have somewhat arbitrarily rendered *shikan* here as "calming and contemplation," in accordance with the title of the Donner–Stevenson translation, and *kanjin* as "contemplation of the mind." In medieval Tendai texts, however, both terms are often used simply to refer to original enlightenment.
- 27 See Take Kakuchō, "Eizan, Mii to Nichiren monka to no kōryū: Shijū kōhai han no seiritsu o megutte," in Asai Endō, ed., *Hongaku shisō no genryū to tenkai*,

- Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten, 1991, pp. 408–409. The “contemplation of actuality” is discussed in Shimaji Daitō, *Nihon bukkyō kyōgakuishi*, Tokyo: Nakayama Shōbō, 1933; reprint, 1976), pp. 502–503, and Hazama Jikō, *Chūko Nihon Tendai no kenkyū*, vol. 2 of his *Nihon bukkyō no kaiten to sono kichō* (Tokyo: Sansaidō, 1948; reprint 1974), pp. 203–204.
- 28 The term “innate and self-luminous” is taken from Guanding’s preface to the *Mohezhiquan*, where it is used to suggest that Zhiyi’s wisdom was transcendent and not acquired through a teacher (T. 46:1a12). Donner and Stevenson translate it as “heavenly light of truth.” Donner and Stevenson, p. 100.
- 29 On *kanjin* as a hermeneutical style, see Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, pp. 156–167. *Kanjin* is also an important category in Nichiren’s thought, where it indicates manifesting innate buddhahood by chanting the *daimoku* or title of the *Lotus Sūtra*. Ibid., pp. 265–266.
- 30 *Mongu ryaku taikō shikenmon* 1, DNBZ 18:4a–b.
- 31 Hokke-shū in this case would mean not the Nichiren Hokke-shū, but the textual transmission of Tendai.
- 32 *Ichijō shō*, 9:40b. The reference to calming and contemplation as what Zhiyi “practiced within in his own mind” (Jpn. *koshinchū shogyō*) is taken from Guanding’s introduction to the *Mohezhiquan* (T. 46:1b13). Somewhat ironically – in view of how this phrase was used by proponents of a “Tendai-shū” transmitted independently of the *sūtra* and commentarial tradition – Zhanran’s commentary explicitly warns that it should not be taken as pointing to a separate transmission of mind essentials independent of inherited Tiantai texts. *Zhiyuan-fuxing chuanhong jue* 1a, T. no. 1912, 46:147b19–29; trans. in Donner and Stevenson, pp. 104–105, n. 39.
- 33 *Ichiryū sōden hōmonkenmon* (a.k.a. and hereafter *Nijōshō kenmon*) 3, *Tendaishū zensho* 9:249a–b. The thrust of both this passage and the one cited from Sonshun’s *Maka shikan kenmon tenchū* in n. 37 below are at odds with the passage cited from his *Mongu ryaku taikō shikenmon* in n. 29 above, which valorizes written language. Since all three works include Sonshun’s compilations of earlier transmissions, further study is necessary in order to determine which position represents his own view, or whether his views may have altered according to time and context.
- 34 For this element in Zhiyi’s biography, see *Sui Tiantai Zhizhe Dashi biezhuann*, T. no. 2050, 50:191c22, and also Xu gaoseng zhuan 17, T. no. 2060, 50:564b15–16. Taira Ryōshō discusses the tradition that Huisi and Zhiyi heard Śākyamuni’s direct preaching of the *Lotus Sūtra* on Sacred Vulture Peak in “Ryōzen dōchō ni tsuite,” *Tendai gakuhō*, 14 (1971), 1–11. For Saichō’s placement of these two patriarchs as auditors on Vulture Peak in his Tendai Hokke-shū and precept lineages, see *Naishō buppō sōjō kechimyakufu*, *Dengyō Daishi zenshū*, Hieizan Senshūin, ed., Tokyo: Sekai Seiten Kankō Kyōkai, 1989, 1:225, 232. For discussion, see Shioiri Ryōchū, “Dengyō Daishi no hongaku shisō: Busshinron o chūshin toshite,” *Indogaku bukkyōgaku kenkyū* (hereafter *IBK*), 9/1 (1961), 22–27.
- 35 See Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, pp. 102–103. The phrase *Ryōzen ichie gennen misan* is central to the symbolism of a number of medieval Tendai initiation rituals and has roots in the little studied area of Tendai-Zen interactions. The phrase first occurs in the recorded teachings of the Chan master Dahui (1098–1163), where it refers to the sublimity of Zhiyi’s enlightenment (see, for example, Dahui Pujiao Chanshi yulu 23, T. no. 1998, 47:907a23–24). Its first appearance in a Japanese text is Eisai’s *Kōzen gokoku ron* 2, T. no. 2543, 80:9a25–26.
- 36 Shimaji Daitō, *Nihon bukkyō kyōgakuishi*, Tokyo: Nakayama Shōbō, 1933, pp. 500–501; Yamakawa Chiō, “*Risshōkan jō ni taisuru gigi ni tsuite*,” *Seishin*, 24 (1938), 39–40; and Tamura Yoshirō, “*Nihon Tendai hongaku shisō no keisei katei*: Toku ni Sōchō Zen to no kanren ni tsuite,” *IBK*, 10/2 (1962), 661–672.
- 37 According to the *Genkō shakusho* compiled in 1322, Enni had taught “the singular transmission of the buddhas and patriarchs” to Jōmyō (DNBZ 101:218b–19a). The relevant passage is translated in Groner, p. 54. Sonshun’s *Maka shikan kenmon tenchū* 1a also claims a connection between the two (DNBZ 29:26a).
- 38 *Maka shikan kenmon tenchū* 1b, DNBZ 29:122b.
- 39 *Dainichikyō kenmon* 1, *Nihon daizōkyō* 14:69a.
- 40 *Risshōkan jō*, *Teihon* 1:844, 846, 849. For a translation of the entire text, see “A Treatise on Establishing the Right Way of Meditation,” in *Writings of Nichiren Shōnin, Doctrine 2*, Kyōtsū Hori, comp., George Tanabe Jr, ed., Tokyo: Nichirenshū Overseas Propagation Promotion Association, 2002, pp. 218–233.
- 41 For example: “[Patriarchal Zen] speaks of transmitting something apart from the teachings. But apart from the teachings there are no principles, and apart from principles there are no teachings. Don’t you understand the logic of this, that principles are none other than teachings and teachings are none other than principles? This talk about the twirled flower, the faint smile, and something being entrusted to Mahakashyapa is in itself a teaching, and the four-character phrase about its being “independent of words or writing” is likewise a teaching and a statement in words. . . . Even the followers of Zen, who advocate these views, themselves make use of words when instructing others. In addition, when one is trying to convey an understanding of the Buddha way, one cannot communicate the meaning if one sets aside words and phrases. Bodhidharma came to China from the west, pointed directly to people’s minds, and declared that those minds were Buddha. But this principle is enunciated in various places even in the provisional Mahayana *sūtras* that preceded the *Lotus Sūtra*. . . . To treat it as such a rare and wonderful thing is too ridiculous for words. Alas, how can the people of our time be so distorted in their thinking! They should put their faith in the words of truth spoken by the Thus Come One of perfect enlightenment and complete reward.” *Shōgu mondo shō*, *Teihon* 1:371–72; trans. from *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, The Goshō Translation Committee, ed. and tr., Tokyo: Sōka Gakkai, 1999, pp. 117–118.
- 42 However, subsequent references do not appear until the early decades of the fourteenth century. For this reason, several scholars have argued that the *Risshōkan jō* may be an apocryphon produced by a later disciple. See, for example, Asai Yōrin, *Nichiren Shōnin kyōgaku no kenkyū*, Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten, 1945; reprint, 1980), pp. 197–202; Hayashi, pp. 230–261; and Take, pp. 417–418. Its authenticity is upheld by Yamakawa, and Hanano Jūdō, “*Nihon chūko Tendai bunken no kōsatsu* (2): *Risshōkan jō* no shingi mondai ni tsuite,” *IBK*, 25/2 (1977), 830–835. Three early transcriptions exist, two made by Daishin Ajari Nisshin (1271–1346) of the Minobu lineage in 1325 and 1330 and another by Nitchō of the Fuji lineage in 1364. Given the tensions between the two lineages at that time, Hanano argues that, had Nisshin actually authored the *Risshōkan jō* (as Take, for one, has suggested), no Fuji scholar would have been given access to copy it; thus the existence of Nitchō’s transcription argues that the work already existed from an earlier period.
- 43 *Zōda shō*, *Tendaishū zensho* 9:75b.
- 44 *Mongu ryaku taikō shikenmon* 3, DNBZ 18:106–107.
- 45 *Nijōshō kenmon* 2, *Tendaishū zensho* 9:207a.
- 46 The Eshin and Danna schools represent the two major lineages of medieval Tendai. The *Risshōkan jō sōjō*, attributed to Nichiren, also represents the Danna school as rejecting the position that calming and contemplation surpasses the

- trace and origin teachings of the *Lotus Sūtra* (*Teihon* 1:870). The *Tendai meisshō guketsumo shō* similarly suggests a division between Danna and Eshin schools on this point (DNBZ 18:268b–70a). Ono Bunkō suggests that the term "Danna" in these texts may not necessarily refer to actual Danna lineages but rather indicates those Tendai scholars who favored a more textually based approach over an extreme emphasis on *kanjin*. "Senba to Nichiren monka to no kōryū: 'Kantō Tendai' to Kantō Nichiren kyōdan," in *Hongaku shisō no genryū to tenkai*, Asai Endō, ed., Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten, 1991, pp. 445–446.
- 47 *Goshō shō* (Kyoto: Honmanji, 1976), 2:1580.
- 48 Cited in Hayashi, pp. 242–243. See also Ono, pp. 437–444.
- 49 *Jūni innen shō, Nichirenshū shūgaku zensho*, Risshō Daigaku Nichiren Kyōgaku Kenkyūjo, ed., Tokyo: Sankibō Busshorin, 1968–1978, 1:302–303.
- 50 *Kanjin honzon shō shikenmon*, cited in Ono, p. 435.
- 51 Cf. Ono. This possibility has also been noted by Take, p. 418.
- 52 Ogami Kanchō, "Kantō no Tendai dangisho (1): Senba dangisho o chūshin toshite," *Kanazawa Bunko kenkyū*, 167 (1970), 3.
- 53 On the *daimoku*, see Jacqueline I. Stone, "Chanting the August Title of the *Lotus Sūtra*: *Daimoku* Practices in Classical and Medieval Japan," in *Re-Visioning "Kamakura" Buddhism*, Richard K. Payne, ed., Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998, pp. 116–166, and Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, pp. 267–272. Precedents for Nichiren's *daimoku* in Tendai esoteric ritual have also been investigated by Lucia Dolce, "Esoteric Patterns in Nichiren's Interpretation of the *Lotus Sūtra*," PhD diss., University of Leiden, 2002, pp. 294–315.
- 54 On Nichiren's *mandala*, see Lucia Dolce, "Criticism and Appropriation: Nichiren's Attitude toward Esoteric Buddhism," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 26/3–4 (1999), esp. 364–374, and Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, pp. 274–288. See also Dolce's more detailed discussion of the esoteric basis of Nichiren's *mandala* in "Esoteric Patterns," pp. 103–349.
- 55 *Teihon* 1:791–794. While Nichiren's authorship is well established, the exact date of this work is uncertain. *Teihon* gives it as 1273, though 1264, 1274, and even 1282 have also been suggested. See *Nichiren Shōnin ibun jiten*, Risshō Daigaku Nichiren Kyōgaku Kenkyūjo, ed., Minobu, Yamanashi Prefecture: Minobusan Kuonji, 1985, p. 1127a–c.
- 56 *Brahmasvara* means "pure voice" and also serves to liken the Buddha's voice to that of Great Heavenly Brahmā, said to resound throughout the ten directions. The Sōka Gakkai translation of this writing uses "pure and far-reaching voice" to convey both connotations. Cf. "Opening the Eyes of Wooden and Painted Images," *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, pp. 85–90, which I have consulted in translating passages from this work.
- 57 *Teihon* 1:792. The extended and *prajñā* periods are categories within a five-period division of the Buddha's teaching career. The distinct and perfect teachings are two divisions within a classification system known as the "four teachings of conversion" (Ch. *huafa sijiao*, Jpn. *kehō no shikyō*). On these and other Tiantai classification schema, see Chappell and Ichishima.
- 58 Nichiren notes the use of these particular *mantras* for consecrating images in *Mokue nizō kaigen no koto* (*Teihon* 1:791) and in other writings. For example, "When it comes to consecrating buddha images, all eight sects alike employ the *mudrās* and *mantras* of Dainichi and Butsugen [Buddha Eye]" (*Senji shō, Teihon* 2:1044). Hōnen (1133–1212) also says that, after the artist has painted in the eyes of an image (Jpn. *ji no kaigen*), "by means of the Buddha Eye *mantra*, a monk opens the eyes, and with the *mantra* of Dainichi, he completes [in it] all the Buddha's merits" (Jpn. *ri no kaigen*). *Ippyaku shijū gokajō mondō, Jōdoshū zensho*, Jōdoshū Shūten Kankōkai, ed., Tokyo: Sankibō Busshorin, 1970–1972, 9:586a. The esoteric deity Butsugen, or Butsugen Butsumo (Buddha Eye Buddha Mother), is regarded as mother of buddhas and personifies the buddha "eye" or wisdom.
- 59 *Senji shō, Teihon* 2:1044. The word *shingon* in Nichiren's work, transliterated here with a small "s," often refers not only to the Shingon sectarian tradition but to esoteric Buddhism in general, including both Tōmitsu and Taimitsu.
- 60 *Teihon* 1:793.
- 61 *Ibid.*, 1:792. The equation of the written words of the *Lotus Sūtra* with the voice of the living Buddha and with his soteriological intent was an important theme for Nichiren. For example, "The so-called pure voice is foremost among the Buddha's distinguishing marks. Minor kings, great kings and cakravartins all possess it in some degree. Thus by a single word of the king, a county can be either destroyed or governed peaceably. Imperial edicts represent a portion of the pure voice. All the talk of ordinary people cannot equal a single word of the ruler. . . . The governance of this small country, the fact that Great Brahmā is obeyed by the beings of the threefold world, and the fact that Great Brahmā and Indra both obey the Buddha is due to the power of the pure voice. This pure voice became the *sūtras* and thus benefits all living beings. And among the *sūtras*, it is the *Lotus Sūtra* in particular that gives expression, in the form of written words, to Śākyamuni Tathāgata's will. Its characters are endowed with the Buddha's mind. Seeds, sprouts, mature plants, and rice all have different forms, but their essence (Jpn. *kokoro*) does not differ. Śākyamuni Buddha and the written words of the *Lotus Sūtra* are different [in appearance], but their mind (Jpn. *kokoro*) is the same. So when you behold the written words of the *Lotus Sūtra*, you should think that you are encountering the living Śākyamuni Tathāgata." "Shijō Kingo-dono gohenji," *Teihon* 1:666.
- 62 "Shijō Kingo Shakabutsu kuyōji," *Teihon* 2:1182–1183.
- 63 *Honzon mondō shō, Teihon* 2:1575.
- 64 "Mama Shakabutsu gokuyō oijō," *Teihon* 1:457.
- 65 For a detailed and accessible explanation of this doctrine, see Kanno Hiroshi, *Ichinen sanzen to wa nani ka*, Tokyo: Daisan Bunmeisha, 1992. For overviews of its role in Nichiren's thought, see Asai Endō, "Nichiren's View of Humanity: The Final Dharma Age and the Three Thousand Realms in One Thought Moment," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 26/3–4 (1999), 239–259, and Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, pp. 263–288, *passim*.
- 66 "Shijō Kingo Shakabutsu kuyōji," *Teihon* 2:1183.
- 67 "Both inner and outer writings permit the use of wooden and painted images as objects of worship, but the reason for this has emerged [only] from the Tiantai school. If plants and trees did not possess cause and effect [i.e. the nine realms and the buddha realm] in both physical and mental aspects, it would be useless to rely on wooden and painted images as objects of worship. . . . Were it not for the buddha-seed which is the three thousand realms in one thought-moment, the realization of buddhahood by sentient beings and [the efficacy of] wooden and painted images as objects of worship would exist in name but not in reality." *Kanjin honzon shō, Teihon* 1:703 and 711.
- 68 *Teihon* 1:793–794. The famous *Lotus Sūtra* passage setting forth the "true aspect of the dharmas" in terms of the ten "suchlikes" is at T. 9:5c11–13.
- 69 See Kakuban's *Ichigo taiyō himitsu shū*, which stresses the benefit of the *zenchishiki*'s chanting at the deathbed on behalf of a dying person who is unconscious or of someone who has just died. Articles 8 and 9, *Kōgyō Daishi zenshū*, Tomita Kōjun, ed., 1935, reprint, Tokyo: Hōsenji, 1977, 2:1216–1219. Ryōchū also urges the *zenchishiki* to chant at the bedside of unconscious persons and

continue chanting for two to four hours after the breath has ceased, all the while transferring the merit of their *nenbutsu* to the dead person with the intent that, "by its virtue, [the deceased] will achieve *ōjō*, even from the interim state." *Kanbyō yōjin*, reproduced in *Nihon Jōdokyō bunkashi kenkyū*, Itō Shintetsu, Tokyo: Ryūbunkan, 1975, articles 17, 18, and 19, pp. 455–456.

- 70 See, for example, *Ichigo taiyō himitsu shū*, article 7, *Kōgyō Daishi zenshū* 2:1214. In the early modern period, successful cases of ascetic "self-mummification" were also spoken of as instances of *sokushin jōbutsu*. See Hori Ichirō, "Self-Mummified Buddhas in Japan: An Aspect of the Shugen-dō ('Mountain Asceticism') Sect," *History of Religions*, 1/2 (1962), 222–242.