READINGS

OF THE *LOTUS SŪTRA*

EDITED BY

Stephen F. Teiser and Jacqueline I. Stone

Columbia University Press

New York

Columbia University Press
Publishers Since 1893
New York Chichester, West Sussex

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Readings of the *Lotus Sūtra* / Edited by Stephen F. Teiser and Jacqueline I. Stone.

p. cm. — (Columbia readings of Buddhist literature)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-231-14288-5 (cloth : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-231-14289-2 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Tripiṭaka. Sūtrapiṭaka. Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra—Criticism, interpretation, etc. I. Teiser, Stephen F. II. Stone, Jacqueline Ilyse. III. Title. IV. Series.

BQ2057.R43 2009
294.3'85—dc22 2008040137

Columbia University Press books are printed on permanent and durable acid-free paper.

This book was printed on paper with recycled content.
Printed in the United States of America

c 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
p 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

References to Internet Web sites (URLs) were accurate at the time of writing. Neither the author nor Columbia University Press is responsible for URLs that may have expired or changed since the manuscript was prepared.

[8]

REALIZING THIS WORLD AS THE BUDDHA LAND

Jacqueline I. Stone

THE *LOTUS SŪTRA* is famous for its promise that eventually all beings shall become buddhas. And, in the long history of its reception, the *Lotus Sūtra* has often been understood as related not only to the buddhahood or enlightenment of individual practitioners but also to the enlightenment of their larger, objective world: the land or realm. Although not fully elaborated in the sūtra itself, ideas about this world as a buddha realm represent an important strand of *Lotus Sūtra* thought, one that developed chiefly, although not exclusively, in Japan. In this chapter I consider how the *Lotus Sūtra* came to be read as teaching that the buddha land is inseparable from this present world and how some of its major interpreters understood this idea. Tracing this particular strand of the *Lotus Sūtra*'s interpretive history offers insight into both the astonishingly diverse readings that this single sūtra has inspired as well as the hermeneutical processes by which Buddhist texts undergo continual reinterpretation in different cultural contexts and historical circumstances.

THE NOTION OF THE BUDDHA'S CONSTANT PRESENCE AS SEEN IN THE *LOTUS SŪTRA*

It is basic to Buddhist cosmology that Gautama, or Śākyamuni, is the teacher for our own, Sahā World during the present world cycle; he is the Buddha who appeared here and taught the dharma for the liberation of all. The *Lotus Sūtra* affirms this understanding in the verse section of Chapter 3, "Parable," in which Śākyamuni states, "Now these three spheres [that compose the world] / Are all my possession. / The living beings within them / Are all my children" (Hurvitz, 67).[1] However, the *Lotus Sūtra* goes well beyond this traditional view in asserting that Śākyamuni Buddha is *still* here, constantly abiding in the present world. This remarkable claim occurs in connection with the dramatic revelation in Chapter 16, "The Life

Span of the Thus Come One" (hereafter, "Life Span"), of the Buddha's original awakening in the inconceivably remote past. Here Śākyamuni declares that he had not achieved supreme awakening for the first time during his present lifetime, as everyone had always thought, but countless, inconceivable *kalpas* (eons) ago. Ever since then, he continues, he has been "constantly dwelling in this Sahā world sphere, preaching the dharma, teaching and converting," as well as guiding and benefiting the beings in incalculable other worlds (Hurvitz, 220). From this perspective, the key events of the Buddha's biography—his renouncing the world, awakening under the bodhi tree, and entry into final *nirvāṇa*—were all "skillful means" designed to awaken in living beings a mind that would seek the Buddhist teachings. As the verse section of the same chapter explains, "For the beings' sake, / And as an expedient device, I make a show of nirvāṇa; / Yet in fact I do not pass into extinction / But ever dwell here and preach the dharma" (Hurvitz, 223). Deluded people will not see him, but when those with single-minded resolve desire to behold him, he will appear together with his assembly on Vulture Peak.

In the context in which the *Lotus Sūtra* was compiled, this refiguring of the Buddha as awakened since the remotest past and constantly teaching in both this and other worlds would appear to be one of several innovations in Mahāyāna thought, such as nonabiding nirvāṇa (Skt.: *apratiṣṭhitanirvāṇa*) or notions of the Buddha as an omnipresent dharma body (*dharmakāya*), that attempt to reinterpret the Buddha not as departed into final nirvāṇa, as the Indian Buddhist mainstream maintained, but as in some sense still accessible and responsive to devotees. In the case of the *Lotus Sūtra*, Śākyamuni's revelation of his awakening in the remotest past in effect transforms him from the traditional model of a buddha who appears, teaches, and then departs into a Mahāyāna bodhisattva who elects not to enter nirvāṇa at all but to remain active in this saṃsāric world for living beings' sake. At the same time, however, in its claim that this refigured Buddha constantly abides in this world, the "Life Span" chapter also introduces the notion of a buddha realm that is in some sense immanent in the present world, although radically different from our ordinary experience of it in being free from decay, danger, and suffering. As the verse section reads, "When the beings see the kalpa ending / And being consumed by a great fire, / This land of mine is perfectly safe, / . . . Variously adorned with gems, / As well as jeweled trees with many blossoms and fruits, / Wherein the beings play and amuse themselves; / . . . My pure land is not destroyed" (Hurvitz, 224). Some commentators have taken the "pure land" referred to in this passage to mean an ideal realm set apart from our own world, while others have understood it as immanent in this very world, although not experienced by those whose perception is deluded.[2] In the *Lotus Sūtra* itself, the idea of the immanent buddha realm is not developed doctrinally, nor is it linked to notions of an ideal Buddhist society. Nonetheless, it proved foundational for later readings of the sūtra as teaching the possibility of a "this-worldly" buddha land.

THE BUDDHA LAND AND UNIVERSAL NONDUALITY

A common theme in Mahāyāna philosophical thought is that this world and the pure land are not, ultimately, separate places but are in fact nondual: a deluded mind sees the world as a place of suffering, while an awakened person sees it as the buddha realm.[3] A related idea held that the specific pure lands of Amitābha (Ja.: Amida) and other buddhas were not only superior worlds in which devotees might be reborn but realms that could be accessed by accomplished meditators.[4] In East Asia, such thinking, while by no means confined to the *Lotus Sūtra*, came to be linked to the *Lotus* in specific ways by developments within the Tiantai tradition of Chinese Buddhism, which takes the *Lotus Sūtra* as its central scripture. As noted in chapter 1 of this volume, one problem that engaged medieval Chinese Buddhist exegetes across divisions of school and lineage was how to conceptualize the relationship of the mind or principle (*li*) with the concrete observable phenomena of the world (*shi*). An extremely sophisticated approach to this question was put forth by the Tiantai patriarch Zhiyi (538–597). Drawing on Mahāyāna notions of emptiness and nonduality, Zhiyi held that all phenomena, being devoid of independent substance, constantly interpenetrate and include one another without losing their individual identity, a concept succinctly expressed in the famous statement, "There is not a single color or scent that is not the middle way."[5] Zhiyi developed this concept, as an object for advanced meditation, into a complex, architectonic model of reality known as the "three thousand realms in a single thought-moment" (Ch.: *yinian sanqian*, Ja.: *ichinen sanzen*), according to which one's mind and the entire cosmos are mutually encompassing. In this model, good and evil, delusion and awakening, subject and object, and all the levels of sentient existence, from hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals up through bodhisattvas and buddhas, as well as their corresponding lands or environments, are inherent in every moment of consciousness.[6] Integral to Zhiyi's schema was the inseparability or nonduality of living beings and the realm of the insentient container world that they inhabit.[7]

The concept of the inseparability of person and land, or of the living subject and his or her objective world, was further developed by the sixth Tiantai patriarch Zhanran (711–782) as the "nonduality of primary and dependent [karmic] recompense," one of "ten nondualities" elaborated in his commentary on Zhiyi's analysis of the *Lotus Sūtra*.[8] The idea here is that the cumulative effects of one's deeds find expression both as "primary recompense"—the physical and mental workings that compose a person or living subject—and simultaneously as that individual's environment, or "dependent recompense," and that person and environment are ultimately nondual. Since the land is thus held to reflect the life state of living beings, the world of hell dwellers would be hellish, while the world of a fully awakened person would by definition be a buddha land. Commenting from this perspective on Zhiyi's principle, Zhanran wrote: "You should know that one's person and land are [both] the single thought-moment comprising three thousand realms. Therefore, when one attains the way, in accordance with this principle, one's body and mind in that moment pervade the dharma realm."[9]

Zhanran also contributed to thinking about the innate buddha realm by proposing that even insentient beings such as rocks and trees possess the buddha nature.[10] In so doing, he was participating in a broader effort on the part of Chinese Buddhist thinkers to extend the potential for buddhahood as universally as possible. More specifically, his doctrine may be understood as a development of Zhiyi's teaching that living beings and their objective environments, in all states of existence from hell dwellers to bodhisattvas and buddhas, are inherent in the mind at each thought-moment. "Every blade of grass, tree, pebble, and particle of dust is perfectly endowed with buddha nature," Zhanran wrote. "The practitioner of the perfect teaching, from beginning to end, knows that ultimate principle is nondual, and that there are no objects apart from mind. Who then is sentient? What then is insentient? Within the assembly of the *Lotus*, there is no discrimination."[11] Although the buddhahood of insentient beings had been proposed earlier, by the Sanlun scholar Jizang (549–623) and others, Zhanran's is the name most closely associated with this doctrine. Against the position of the Huayan and other rival schools, which generally confined the potential for enlightenment to sentient beings, Zhanran asserted that insentient beings also have the nature of suchness and, therefore, the potential for buddhahood—thus in effect claiming superior inclusivity for Tiantai. Zhanran played a critical role in the formation of Tiantai sectarian identity, and through him, notions of the potential buddhahood of the insentient environment became linked firmly to the *Lotus Sūtra* and the Tiantai school.

In this way, Tiantai scholars of medieval China elaborated sophisticated doctrines of the nonduality of the living subject and his or her objective container world, implying that the condition of the land mirrors the delusion or enlightenment of living beings: when the individual practitioner achieves awakening, that person's world becomes the buddha land. Such thinking remained largely at the level of theoretical speculation; buddhahood was not seriously envisioned as a goal most practitioners were likely to attain in this lifetime. Nonetheless, in principle, these ideas had the effect of valorizing the present, phenomenal world, not as a place of suffering to be escaped but as inseparable from the realm of ultimate principle.

Japanese commentators also read the *Lotus Sūtra* in terms of a nondual reality in which this world is inseparable from the buddha land, but they carried this line of interpretation in new directions. As noted in the first chapter of this volume, Tendai Buddhism in Japan quickly came to be differentiated from its parent, continental Tiantai, by its incorporation of esoteric Buddhism. The cosmic buddha of the esoteric teachings—Mahāvairocana in Sanskrit, or Dainichi in Japanese—is understood not as a person, whether historical or mythic, but as the dharma realm or universe itself: all forms are his body, all sounds are his speech, all thoughts are his mind. Or, alternatively, the same six elements of earth, water, fire, wind, space, and mind make up the body and mind of both the cosmic buddha and the practitioner; thus there is originally no distinction between them. This inherent identity of the practitioner's body, speech, and mind with those of the cosmic buddha could, it was said, be manifested in the performance of the "three mysteries"—the use of *mudrās*, or scripted symbolic gestures, the chanting of *mantras* (incantations), and visualization exercises—thus "realizing buddhahood with this very body" (Ja.: *sokushin jōbutsu*). In the Tendai esoteric teachings (Taimitsu), the cosmic buddha is identified with the primordially enlightened Śākyamuni of the "Life Span" chapter, and his realm—that is, the entire universe—is conceived in maṇḍalic terms as an ever-present, ongoing *Lotus Sūtra* assembly.[12]

Under the influence of Tendai esotericism, during Japan's medieval period (roughly, twelfth through sixteenth centuries), the *Lotus Sūtra* itself came to be read from the perspective of "original enlightenment" (*hongaku*), which was understood as the deep message of the origin teaching (*honmon*), or latter fourteen chapters of the sūtra.[13] According to

original enlightenment doctrine, buddhahood is not a potential to be realized as the final result of practice but the true state of all things just as they are, although ordinary, deluded people do not realize this. Thus practice is redefined not as a means to an end but as the vehicle for accessing an enlightenment that in some sense is already present. And of course, from this perspective, this world is already the buddha land, a concept sometimes expressed metaphorically in the phrase "the assembly on Sacred Vulture Peak is solemnly present and has not yet dispersed." Secret initiations into medieval Tendai monastic teaching lineages sometimes ritually enacted this metaphor. An example can be found in the "precept initiation" (*kai kanjō*), a transmission of the secret meaning of the precepts as conducted by the Tendai Kurodani lineage. In this initiation ceremony, master and disciple share the same seat and are of equal status, like the two buddhas Śākyamuni and Many Jewels (Skt.: Prabhūtaratna) seated together as described in the "Apparition of the Jeweled Stūpa" chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*. An early description of the rite says that, unlike the ordinary ceremony of conferring the precepts, this initiation does not have the meaning of transmission in a linear sequence from the Buddha through a line of successive patriarchs. Rather, in accordance with the teaching that "the assembly on Sacred Vulture Peak is solemnly present and has not yet dispersed," master and disciple are manifested as the two buddhas in the jeweled stūpa, and the mythic time when the *Lotus Sūtra* was expounded is manifested in the present.[14] This particular ritual provides but one instance in broader understandings of the realm of the primordially enlightened Śākyamuni of the *Lotus Sūtra* as an ever-present, maṇḍala-like reality that one can enter through ritual practice, meditative insight, or faith.

GROUNDING THE BUDDHA LAND IN NATURE, GEOGRAPHY, AND NATION

Whether understood as a potential to be achieved in the future or as an originally inherent reality to be realized in the act of practice, interpretations of the immanent buddha realm discussed thus far all rest on notions of a universal, nondual ground: when the individual realizes enlightenment, so does that person's land. At the same time, the *Lotus Sūtra* in premodern Japan was also grounded in more concrete ways that associated its teachings with specific sites. Like notions of nonduality, these interpretive moves were not confined to the *Lotus Sūtra* but nonetheless played an important role in its reception.

Buddhahood and the Realm of Nature

One way of grounding the immanent buddha land suggested in the *Lotus Sūtra* was by associating it with the natural realm, an idea often expressed via the doctrine of "the attainment of buddhahood by grasses and trees" (*sōmoku jōbutsu*). In both Shingon and Tendai circles, the claim that grasses and trees can attain buddhahood was at first asserted as a specific instance of the larger, universalistic position that all beings have the buddha nature. Kūkai (774–835), originator of the Japanese Shingon school, argued that insentient plants and trees are composed of the same five elements as the body of the cosmic buddha and are therefore indistinguishable from the dharma body, or ultimate principle. Saichō (766 or 767–822), who established the Japanese Tendai school, maintained—against the position of the Hossō (Ch.: Faxiang) school, which restricted the potential for buddhahood to sentient beings of particularly acute capacity—that grasses and trees can attain buddhahood. Thus, this claim, like that of Zhanran, began as an attempt to extend the implications of Mahāyāna inclusivism and originally had little to do with what we would call "nature" over and against the realm of culture and civilization. But where Zhanran and other Chinese exegetes had argued that insentient beings manifest enlightenment in response to the enlightenment of living beings, in Japan this doctrine assumed a more specific focus on plant life and the natural world. Japanese Tendai commentators after Saichō insisted that grasses and trees, of their own volition, can aspire to enlightenment, engage in practice, and realize awakening. "Grasses, trees, the land itself: all will become buddhas," wrote the Tendai thinker Annen (841–?), in a phrase echoed frequently in literary sources.[15] Annen never fully clarified what this assertion meant, but a later text explains it in this way: "Grasses and trees already have the four aspects of emergence, abiding, change, and extinction. These are [respectively] the awakening of aspiration, the cultivation of practice, the realization of enlightened wisdom [*bodhi*], and the nirvāṇa of grasses and trees. How could they not be sentient beings?"[16] Here the realization of buddhahood by grasses and trees is understood as their natural life cycle of sprouting, blossoming, maturing, and withering. This represents a reading from the position of original enlightenment, in which, to enlightened eyes, the arising and perishing of all phenomena just as they are is none other than the true face of reality.

Outside Buddhist scholastic circles, medieval poets and playwrights often understood the realization of buddhahood by grasses and trees as

an important teaching of the *Lotus Sūtra*. The spirit of a plant, tree, or flower achieving release from saṃsāric suffering and attaining buddhahood by the power of the *Lotus Sūtra* was a recurrent theme in Noh drama. Such plays were often linked thematically to Chapter 5 of the *Lotus Sūtra*, "Medicinal Herbs," in which grasses and trees of different kinds grow to different heights according to their capacity but are all nourished by the same rain. In the sūtra itself, this parable serves as a metaphor for the essential unity underlying the multiplicity of the Buddha's teachings. In Noh plays, however, it was taken literally to mean that plants can achieve liberation.[17] In the words of one scholar, literary appropriations of this theme "historically 'fixed' a lasting nexus between Buddhism and nature in the popular consciousness of the Japanese people" and helped to establish ideas of the natural realm as a site of unsurpassed religious value.[18]

The Lotus Sūtra *and Sacred Geography*

The *Lotus Sūtra* was also connected to the establishment of sacred sites. The term "flying mountains" has been used to describe the identification of particular mountains in Japan—usually important Buddhist practice sites—as equivalent, or in some sense even identical, to sacred mountains on the Asian continent; such mountains were often said literally to have flown to Japan.[19] Hiei, Ōmine, Kasagi, and other locations of mountain ascetic practice were all at times identified with Vulture Peak, where the ever-abiding Śākyamuni Buddha is said constantly to preach the *Lotus Sūtra*.[20] Mount Hiei, in particular, as the site of the head Tendai monastery Enryakuji, was frequently equated in medieval Tendai records of oral transmissions with both Vulture Peak in India and with Mount Tiantai, headquarters of the parent tradition, in China. All three sites, it was frequently noted, lay to the northeast of the capital in their respective countries and thus constituted centers of nation protection that could block the evil influences thought to gain ingress from that unlucky direction. "Therefore," to quote one such text, "the transmission [of the *Lotus Sūtra*] through the three countries [of India, China, and Japan] always takes place on Sacred Vulture Peak. Our mountain [Hiei] is to be understood as the site of 'the assembly on Sacred Vulture Peak [that] is solemnly present and has not yet dispersed.'"[21] Identifying Mount Hiei with the realm of the *Lotus* assembly not only transposed the world of the sūtra to Japan but also underscored the authority of this leading Buddhist center.

Another form of sacred place was the geographic maṇḍala, in which specific landscapes were identified with the realms of particular buddhas and bodhisattvas; to visit such sites was thus to enter a buddha realm. The

Yoshino and Kumano regions of Japan's Kii Peninsula, for example, both famed areas of pilgrimage and mountain ascetic practice, were identified, respectively, with the Diamond World (Skt.: Vajradhātu, Ja.: Kongōkai) and the Womb World (Skt.: Garbhadhātu, Ja.: Taizōkai) maṇḍalas of esoteric Buddhism. The *Lotus Sūtra* was also projected onto certain topographies in this fashion. For example, according to one tradition, Kunisaki Peninsula, in Kyushu, another major site for mountain ascetic practice, had twenty-eight temples representing the sūtra's twenty-eight chapters; its eight major valleys corresponded to the sūtra's eight scrolls; and it enshrined more than 69,380 buddha images, one for each character of the sūtra.[22] This spatializing of the *Lotus* in effect enabled the practitioner to "read" the sūtra corporally through the physical act of traversing the pilgrimage route.

The Lotus *as a Nation-Protecting Sūtra*

As early as the eighth century, well before the formation of medieval pilgrimage routes or scholarly arguments about the buddhahood of plants, the *Lotus Sūtra* was starting to be linked with another specific site—Japan itself. This began in connection with the adoption of the *Lotus* as a "nation-protecting sūtra" (*chingo kokka kyō*), a role it had never been assigned in any official way on the East Asian mainland. Nation-protecting sūtras, as the name suggests, were scriptures ritually recited for the protection of the realm. This practice was seldom explicitly linked to doctrinal concepts such as the nonduality of person and land but rather represented a thaumaturgical expectation of the protective power of Buddhist ritual, entertained by people at all social levels. Two of the sūtras most widely employed for this purpose in China and the Korean kingdoms were the *Sūtra for Humane Kings* (Ch.: *Renwang jing*) and the *Sūtra of the Golden Light* (Skt.: *Suvarṇaprabhāsa-sūtra*, Ch.: *Jinguangming jing*). Both have content relevant to the theme of nation protection. The *Sūtra for Humane Kings* deals with Buddhist statecraft and qualities of virtuous rule, while the *Sūtra of the Golden Light* promises that the four heavenly kings will guard over that country where the dharma is correctly upheld. In Japan, these two sūtras were integrated into court rites for the welfare of the realm and were lectured upon in the palace and the provinces for that purpose beginning in the late seventh century.[23] Unlike these two sūtras, however, the *Lotus Sūtra* has no content specifically related to issues of nation protection or Buddhist kingship. Why, then, was it adopted for this purpose?

One reason has to do with the establishment of provincial temples, especially provincial convents for nuns. In 741, Emperor Shōmu, a devout

Buddhist, gave orders to establish a network of provincial temples: one monastery and one nunnery to be built in each province for the welfare of the realm. He was actively assisted in this endeavor by his consort, Empress Kōmyō. The provincial monasteries were known as "temples for the four heavenly kings' protection of the country by the *Sūtra of the Golden Light*," while the nunneries were termed "temples for eradicating sin by the *Lotus Sūtra*." The monks and nuns of these temples were to perform recitation each month of the *Golden Light* and *Lotus* sūtras, respectively.[24] Until recently, scholars assumed that nuns were assigned to recite the *Lotus Sūtra* because of the connection between their status as women and the episode of the dragon king's daughter and her gender transformation described in Chapter 12 of the *Lotus*, "Devadatta" (see chapter 3 in this volume). Scholars also understood the provincial nunneries in terms of later, medieval Japanese views of women as carrying an especially heavy karmic burden that they needed to eradicate in order to attain liberation. However, recent scholarship has shown that in eighth-century Japan, the chapter on Devadatta and the dragon king's daughter was not well known. The story of the dragon girl and her change into male form began to attract sustained attention only from the ninth century on, and concepts of female gender as an obstacle to liberation had yet to gain currency. One theory suggests that Empress Kōmyō, who was instrumental in establishing the provincial nunneries, was inspired by news of a *Lotus* hall for practicing the *Lotus samādhi* (Ch.: *Fahua sanmei*, Ja.: *Hokke zanmai*)—a Tiantai contemplation ritual aimed at eradicating one's karmic hindrances—erected by imperial decree at the elite convent Anguosi in the capital of Tang China at Luoyang during the Kaiyuan era (713–741). If this theory is correct, then the sins that the nuns of early Japanese provincial convents were to expiate through their recitation of the *Lotus Sūtra* were not their personal "sins" as women but the transgressions of the people as a whole.[25] In any event, via the nuns' component of the provincial temple system, the *Lotus* came to be associated with the theme of nation protection.

The Tendai founder Saichō also played a role in establishing the *Lotus* as a nation-protecting sūtra. At the monastery he founded on Mount Hiei, Saichō instituted two courses of study: one curriculum grounded in esoteric Buddhism and the other in study and meditation based on the *Lotus Sūtra* and traditional Tiantai teachings. Those who followed the latter course, he stipulated, should be able to recite and lecture upon the *Lotus*, *Golden Light*, and *Humane Kings* sūtras for the protection of the nation.[26] At least in part as a result of Saichō's influence, the *Lotus Sūtra* soon formally joined the *Golden Light* and *Humane Kings* sūtras, forming a triad

of nation-protecting scriptures. By 877, a court edict required provincial lecture masters to know and be able to recite all three.[27]

A KARMIC LINK TO JAPAN?

Nation-protecting sūtras were thought to extend their protective power to any country where they were revered and recited. But there was a sense in which the *Lotus Sūtra* came to be thought of as specifically connected to Japan, an idea that may have originated with Saichō. On the one hand, Saichō saw the *Lotus Sūtra* as universal and all-inclusive. In establishing Tendai as an independent school, he sought to encompass esoteric ritual, Tendai meditation, precept observance, Zen practice, and indeed, the whole of Buddhism within the framework of the one vehicle of the *Lotus Sūtra*, which he understood as the only true perfect teaching. At the same time, however, in advocating the *Lotus Sūtra* and the Tendai teachings, he argued that the *Lotus* was particularly suited to his own time and place. "If we speak of the age," he wrote, "it is the end of the age of the Semblance Dharma and the beginning of the age of the Final Dharma [*mappō*]. If we inquire about the land we live in, it is to the east of China. . . . If we ask about the people to whom this teaching is to be preached, they are those born in a time of strife when the five defilements prevail."[28] Zhiyi and other Chinese exegetes had attributed differences among Buddhist teachings to the Buddha's accommodation of his preaching to the varying receptivities of his hearers. Saichō linked this issue of differences in receptivity to the country as a whole: the people of Japan, he asserted, have faculties according specifically with the perfect teaching, that is, the *Lotus Sūtra*. He wrote, "In our realm of Japan, faculties suited to the perfect teaching have already matured. The perfect teaching has finally arisen."[29]

The notion of a special connection between the *Lotus Sūtra* and a particular country might, on first encounter, seem peculiar, especially in light of the sūtra's universalistic assertion that "all shall attain the buddha way." However, from early on Japanese Buddhists were acutely conscious of their country's marginal position as a small island literally on the edge of the Buddhist world, far removed from Buddhism's birthplace in India and from the age of the historical Buddha, as seen in the recurring phrase "a peripheral land in the latter age" (*masse hendo*). Claims that particular scriptures, holy beings, or revered teachers had strong karmic ties to Japan are found throughout premodern Japanese Buddhist discourse. These Japan-centered representations work to overcome the sense of spatial and temporal separation from Buddhism's source by suggesting that the dharma still flour-

ishes and enlightenment can still be achieved—even (or at times, especially) in the distant land of Japan and in a latter age.[30] Saichō's argument for a particular relationship between the *Lotus Sūtra* and Japan must be understood in this light. This alleged connection served not only to overcome a sense of separation in time and space from the historical Śākyamuni but in effect also endowed Japan with a special status as the place where the *Lotus Sūtra*, the Buddha's most profound teaching, would flourish. "The age of the [other,] provisional teachings has already drawn to a close, [like the sun] setting in the west," Saichō wrote. Then, he predicted, "The sun of the true teaching will now arise in [this] eastern land."[31]

The idea that Japan enjoys a distinctive connection to the *Lotus Sūtra* was reiterated by later Tendai thinkers, including Annen and Genshin (942–1017).[32] Such claims served not only to promote the authority of the Tendai school, which claimed the *Lotus Sūtra* as its fundamental scripture, but also to accord Japan an important, even central place within the Buddhist world.

THE *LOTUS SŪTRA*, JAPAN, AND NICHIREN

Unquestionably the single most influential figure in that strand of interpretation associating the *Lotus Sūtra* with the buddhahood of the land is Nichiren (1222–1282). Originally a Tendai monk, Nichiren is famous for having initiated one of the so-called "single practice" movements of Japan's Kamakura period (1185–1333). The claim of these movements, that a single form of practice can liberate all, was strongly rooted in Tendai ideas about the one vehicle and, in Nichiren's case, was explicitly connected to the *Lotus Sūtra*. Nichiren inherited the Tendai position that regards the *Lotus Sūtra* as the Buddha's ultimate teaching and all others as provisional, and he maintained that only the *Lotus* leads to liberation now in the age of the Final Dharma, in which he and his contemporaries believed themselves to be living. Nichiren also advocated the universal chanting of the sūtra's *daimoku* (title), in the formula *Namu myōhō renge kyō*, grounding the practice doctrinally in the origin teaching (*honmon*), or latter fourteen chapters of the sūtra, which he understood as specifically intended by the Buddha for this age.[33] Nichiren eventually brought together virtually all preexisting associations of the *Lotus Sūtra* with the land or realm and assimilated them to his claim for the exclusive validity of the *Lotus* in the present age.

The nonduality of living beings and their container world was an important concept for Nichiren from the outset, one that he developed from

the perspectives both of traditional Tiantai/Tendai teachings about the interpenetration of the mind and all phenomena and of esoteric Buddhism. A passage from his first extant essay, written when he was twenty-one, reads in part: "When we attain the awakening of the *Lotus Sūtra*, our own person—composed of body and mind, and subject to birth and extinction—is precisely unborn and unperishing. And the land is also thus. [When we so awaken,] the oxen, horses, and six kinds of domestic animals in this land are all buddhas, and the grasses and trees, sun and moon, are all sage beings."[34] In his early writings, Nichiren deployed this idea against the Pure Land teachings of his day and their ethos of "shunning this defiled world and aspiring to the pure land" by seeking birth after death in the western realm of the Buddha Amida:

> QUESTION: Toward which pure land should one who practices the *Lotus Sūtra* aspire?
>
> ANSWER: The "Life Span" chapter, the heart and core of the twenty-eight chapters of the *Lotus Sūtra*, states, "I [Śākyamuni] have been constantly dwelling in this Sahā World." It also states, "I constantly abide here." And again it states, "This land of mine is secure and peaceful." According to these passages, the Buddha of the perfect teaching in his original ground, enlightened since the remotest past, abides in this world. Why should one abandon this world and aspire to another land? The place where one who practices the *Lotus Sūtra* dwells should be regarded as the pure land.[35]

Nichiren also developed the idea that the immanent buddha realm is an ever-present reality that one can enter through faith. In his major work, *On the Contemplation of the Mind and the Object of Worship* (*Kanjin honzon shō*), he writes: "The Sahā World of the present moment, which is the original time [of Śākyamuni Buddha's enlightenment in the remotest past], is the constantly abiding pure land, separated from the three disasters and beyond [the cycle of] the four kalpas. Its buddha has not already entered nirvāṇa in the past, nor is he yet to be born in the future. And his disciples are of the same essence. This [world] is none other than the three realms, which encompass the three thousand realms of one's mind."[36]

This constantly abiding pure land is the very realm depicted on Nichiren's great maṇḍala, the calligraphic object of worship (*honzon*) he devised, which represents in Chinese characters and Sanskrit letters the assembly of the *Lotus Sūtra* on Vulture Peak, where the ever-present Śākyamuni preaches to his auditors (fig. 1.1). For Nichiren, faith in the *Lotus Sūtra* thus collapses all temporal and spatial separation between the Buddha and the devotee;

by upholding the sūtra and chanting its daimoku, one can immediately enter into the *Lotus* assembly and dwell in the Buddha's presence.

Nichiren further drew on associations of the *Lotus Sūtra* with nation protection, linking them explicitly to Tendai thinking about the nonduality of person and land and adapting them to his exclusive advocacy of the *Lotus*. Since person and land are nondual, Nichiren held, the truth and efficacy of one's religious practice will be expressed in the outer conditions of one's land and society. Japan in his day was ravaged by a number of calamities, including famine, earthquakes, epidemics, and the threat of invasion by the Mongols. Nichiren saw these disasters as resulting from widespread slander of the dharma—willful rejection of the *Lotus Sūtra* in favor of what he viewed as inferior, provisional teachings no longer suited to human capacity in the Final Dharma age. Nichiren develops this theme in his famous treatise *On Bringing Peace to the Land by Establishing the True Dharma* (*Risshō ankoku ron*), submitted in 1260 to the government. In it he rebuked the Kamakura shogunate for its support of monks who promoted teachings that, from Nichiren's perspective, were no longer efficacious. The solution to the country's troubles was, to his mind, crystal clear: "Now with all speed you must simply reform your faith and at once devote it to the single good of the true vehicle. Then the threefold world will all become the buddha land, and could a buddha land decline? The ten directions will all become a treasure realm, and how could a treasure realm be destroyed?"[37]

The conviction that only the *Lotus Sūtra* could save the people as a whole underlay Nichiren's choice of the practice of *shakubuku* (cutting off and subduing attachments), a confrontational method of teaching the dharma by explicitly rebuking wrong views or attachment to provisional teachings. As discussed by Ruben L. F. Habito in chapter 7 of this volume, Nichiren's criticism of other forms of Buddhism—and of government officials for supporting them—provoked the anger of shogunal officials and influential religious leaders, and he and his community met with repeated persecutions. Nichiren stressed the need to defy even the ruler himself if he opposes the *Lotus Sūtra*.[38] In this context, Nichiren invoked traditional Buddhist cosmology and the idea of Śākyamuni Buddha as lord of the Sahā World to insist that the authority of the dharma, and of the *Lotus Sūtra* in particular, transcends worldly power: "[The Indian world-ruling deities] Brahmā and Indra govern the domain of our true father, Śākyamuni Tathāgata, and protect those who support monks of the true dharma. Vaiśravana and the others of the four heavenly kings who rule over and protect the four quarters serve as gatekeepers to Brahmā and Indra, while the monarchs of the four continents are vassals to Vaiśravana and the other heavenly kings. The ruler of Japan is not even equal to a vassal of the wheel-turning monarchs of the four continents. He is just an island chief."[39]

As we have seen, by teaching that establishing the true dharma would bring peace to the land, Nichiren explicitly united several distinct strands of Buddhist doctrine concerning the nonduality of sentient beings and the realms they inhabit, along with the perceived powers of Buddhist ritual to benefit the country, all in the service of his *Lotus* exclusivism. A striking characteristic of his approach was his insistence that the immanence of the buddha land in this world was not only to be realized subjectively, in the faith or meditative insight of individual practitioners, but also to be actualized in the outer world: "When all people throughout the land enter the one buddha vehicle, and the wonderful dharma [of the *Lotus*] alone flourishes, because the people all chant *Namu myōhō renge kyō*, the wind will not thrash the branches nor the rain fall hard enough to break the earth. The age will become like the reigns of [the Chinese sage-kings] Yao and Shun. In the present life, inauspicious calamities will be banished, and the people will obtain the art of longevity. . . . There can be no doubt of the sūtra's promise of 'peace and security in the present world.'"[40]

This seems to suggest a conviction on Nichiren's part that faith in the *Lotus Sūtra* could bring about an age of harmony with nature, just rule, and, in some sense, a transcending of impermanence. In his teaching, manifesting the buddha land in this world becomes a concrete goal of practice; to work for its realization is the responsibility of *Lotus* devotees. A marginal, often persecuted figure with only a small following in his own time, Nichiren himself had to abandon expectations that this goal would be achieved any time soon. Nonetheless, he introduced into the tradition of *Lotus Sūtra* interpretation what might be called a millennial element, a prophecy or vision of an ideal world, based on the spread of exclusive faith in the *Lotus Sūtra*, to be realized at some future time.

As noted, Nichiren inherited from Saichō and other Tendai predecessors the idea of a specific connection between the *Lotus Sūtra* and Japan. "Japan is a country where people have faculties related solely to the *Lotus Sūtra*," he wrote. "If they practice even a phrase or verse of it, they are certain to attain the way, because it is the teaching to which they have a connection. . . . As for the chanting of Amida Buddha's name [*nenbutsu*] and other good practices, Japan has no connection to them."[41] Especially later in his life, Nichiren assimilated the connection between the *Lotus Sūtra* and Japan to his claims for the exclusive efficacy of the daimoku. This trend paralleled his growing sense of himself as the bearer of a new teaching,

one suited for the age of the Final Dharma, grounded solely in the origin teaching and distinguished in significant ways from earlier Tendai. Elaborating on Saichō's analogy of the sunset and sunrise, noted previously, he wrote, "The moon appears in the west and illuminates the east, while the sun emerges from the east and shines toward the west. The same is true of the buddha-dharma. In the True and Semblance Dharma ages, it moved from west to east, but in the Final Dharma age, it will return from east to west." In that age, Nichiren added, "the buddhadharma will surely emerge from the eastern land of Japan."[42] Nichiren's understanding of Japan's connection to the *Lotus Sūtra*, like that of Saichō before him, was embedded in a premodern discourse about Japan's place in Buddhist cosmology, a discourse routinely deployed by Buddhist leaders to argue the superior relevance of their own practices, doctrines, or institutions. In the modern period, however, Nichiren's vision of Japan as the source of a new buddhadharma was appropriated in the service of a different agenda altogether, one no medieval figure could likely have imagined.

THE *LOTUS SŪTRA* AND MODERN JAPANESE NATIONALISM

For roughly six centuries after Nichiren's death, his vision of establishing the buddha land in this world through the spread of the *Lotus Sūtra* remained for his followers an abstract ideal, with little serious expectation of its imminent fulfillment. At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, that vision was for the first time assimilated to concrete social and political agendas, closely allied to that era's nationalistic and expansionist aims. Nichiren's conception also acquired a strongly millenarian character as a religious ideal that would actually materialize in the foreseeable future. The emphasis in modern Nichiren Buddhist thought on concrete social action owes much to Buddhist modernism, a broader trend among both Asian and Western Buddhist interpreters that rejected traditional emphases on detached self-cultivation and rites for the deceased and sought instead to reorient Buddhist practice toward practical social engagement. Japanese Buddhist modernizers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, faced particular challenges, as Buddhism came under attack from the new Meiji government (1868–1912), which promoted state Shinto as the nation's ideological basis. The nation's leaders were determined to forge the country into a modern state, able to hold its own against Western powers, and Buddhist leaders of all sects strove to refigure their tradition as compatible with the goals of modernizing and nation building, and in time, with Japan's own imperialist ventures.[43] Throughout Japan's modern imperial period (1895–1945), the majority of Buddhist and other religious institutions generally supported the expansion of empire by promoting patriotism and loyalty to the emperor among their followers, sending chaplains abroad to minister to Japanese troops, and missionizing in subjugated territories. In this sense, the nationalistic orientation of modern *Lotus Sūtra* or Nichiren Buddhist interpreters was not unique. Nonetheless, they had inherited, as part of their doctrinal tradition, Nichiren's teaching of establishing the buddha land in the present world and his prophecy that the true dharma would one day emerge from Japan. At the time, these elements were susceptible to interpretation in the light of nationalistic aims and in turn imbued those aims with a millennial fervor.

Modern readings of the *Lotus Sūtra* and of Nichiren that emerged at this time are often collectively termed "Nichirenism" (*Nichiren-shugi*), meaning not the traditional Nichiren Buddhism of temples and priests (although Nichirenism enjoyed some support from that quarter) but a popular Nichiren doctrine welded to lay Buddhist practice and modern national aspirations.[44] (This Japan-centered use of the term corresponds to the first of the three modes of Nichirenism discussed in chapter 7 of this volume.) Of the clerics, sectarian scholars, and prominent lay leaders who contributed to the formation of nationalistic Nichirenism, I consider here only one of the most influential, Tanaka Chigaku (1861–1939), who in fact coined the term.[45] Tanaka abandoned his training for the Nichiren sect priesthood to become a lay evangelist, and in 1881, he founded a society, later reorganized as the Kokuchūkai, or "Pillar of the Nation Society" (after Nichiren's words, "I will be the pillar of Japan") to promote his ideology of Nichirenism. Eventually he won support from ranking government officials, army officers, leading intellectuals, and members of the public.[46]

Tanaka may have been the first *Lotus Sūtra* devotee to formulate a modern reading of the "this-worldly" buddha land. His 1901 *Restoration of Our [Nichiren] Sect* (*Shūmon no ishin*) sets forth an astonishing plan, complete with a detailed fifty-year timetable, for converting first Japan and then the world to the *Lotus Sūtra* and Nichiren's teaching. Some aspects of Tanaka's vision described in this tract now strike us as far-fetched, such as his prediction that, in two or three decades, Nichirenist sympathizers would dominate both houses of the Diet and make Nichiren Buddhism the national religion.[47] Yet *Restoration of Our Sect* also shows that Tanaka, alert to the trend of the times, was a shrewd innovator in proselytizing

methods. His recommendations included moving preaching activities out of temples and into public auditoriums; organizing nursing corps and charitable hospitals to be run by the sect; publishing a daily newspaper and evangelical materials in vernacular Japanese; investing the sect's capital to make Nichiren Buddhism a significant economic force; and establishing colonies of Nichiren adherents in overseas countries as bases for global evangelizing.[48]

Tanaka's language in *Restoration of Our Sect* illustrates both his religious nationalism and the growing militancy of his Nichirenist interpretations: "Nichiren is the general of the army that will unite the world. Japan is his headquarters. The people of Japan are his troops; teachers and scholars of Nichiren Buddhism are his officers. The Nichiren creed is a declaration of war, and shakubuku is the plan of attack. . . . The faith of the *Lotus* [*Sūtra*] will prepare those going into battle. Japan truly has a heavenly mandate to unite the world."[49]

From around the time of the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), the *Lotus Sūtra* became increasingly fused in Tanaka's thought with the idea of the Japanese national essence or polity (*kokutai*), the ideological pillar of Meiji nationalism. "The truth contained in the *Lotus Sūtra* and the Japanese national essence form one another, like front and back, and are mutually dependent, like essence and function. Truly, this is the great way of nonduality," he wrote.[50] Tanaka even developed a Japan-centered hermeneutic by which he read the entire *Lotus Sūtra* as a revelation of the nation's destiny. For example, the word "thus" in "Thus have I heard" in the sūtra's opening passage he interpreted as the Japanese national essence, and "I heard" as practicing the great way of loyalty to the nation. Tanaka interpreted the "heavenly drums [that] resound of their own accord" when the Buddha begins to preach as heralding Japan's mission of world unification; the sūtra's reference, in Chapter 14, to the wheel-turning sage-king as foreshadowing the military might of the Meiji emperor; and the Buddha's demonstration of his supernatural powers as Japan's military victories against China and Russia.[51]

The buddhahood of the land, in the sense of peace, just rule, and the manifestation of the *Lotus Sūtra*'s blessings in all spheres of human activity, was something Nichiren himself had envisioned. But neither Nichiren nor his medieval followers had understood this goal as necessarily allied to any specific regime or form of government. For these earlier figures, any ruler—whether emperor or shogun—who upheld the *Lotus Sūtra* would serve its realization. For Tanaka, however, the buddhahood of the land was to be exemplified, mediated, and extended to all humanity by the modern

imperial Japanese state. And Tanaka's vision of a world united under the *Lotus Sūtra*—equated in his reading with the Japanese national essence—was congruent with that state's own imperialistic agenda of a world united under Japanese rule. In particular, by identifying the *Lotus Sūtra* with the Japanese national essence, Tanaka elevated a particular nation's polity to the status of universal truth. This philosophical move legitimated unreserved support for the imperial system and abolished the critical distance that Nichiren and his early tradition had maintained toward rulers who do not embrace the *Lotus Sūtra*. It also conflated the spread of the *Lotus Sūtra* by shakubuku with the expansion of Japanese hegemony and legitimated armed aggression on the Asian mainland. Wartime Nichirenism serves as a sobering reminder that religion has been used to legitimate some deeply troubling agendas, and Buddhism is no exception.

Chilling and repugnant as his views may seem today, Tanaka is nonetheless important to the history of the *Lotus Sūtra*'s reception as the first person to directly associate its teaching of the immanent buddha land with a specific social and political agenda. His nationalistic Nichirenism represents, one might say, an early form of modern *Lotus*-based "socially engaged Buddhism," although that term usually carries assumptions of Buddhist universalism and nonviolence. Tanaka may also have been the first religious leader in modern Nichiren Buddhist history to have conceived the worldwide spread of the *Lotus Sūtra* not as a remote ideal but as a target within actual reach. In this regard, his activities may have exerted a considerable if indirect impact on contemporary movements of lay Nichiren Buddhism, even those that vehemently reject his values.

THE POSTWAR *LOTUS SŪTRA*

Today, *Lotus*-inspired visions of a this-worldly buddha land continue to be linked to concrete agendas of social activism, as discussed in chapter 7 of this volume. Since Japan's defeat in 1945, however, these agendas no longer entail military conquest but rather urge nuclear disarmament and the establishment of global peace. The aim of a harmonious society based on Buddhist ideals is of course by no means confined to *Lotus Sūtra* devotees but is advocated by many Japanese religious bodies, including traditional Buddhist sects and new religious movements, several of which support the United Nations as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and promote international relief and local welfare work. However, world peace as a goal to be achieved through Buddhist practice has been most explicitly articulated in the Japanese context by movements associated

with the *Lotus Sūtra* and Nichiren. Like the Nichirenism of the earlier, modern imperial period, these movements draw creatively on Nichiren's doctrines of establishing peace in the realm through faith in the *Lotus Sūtra* and realizing a this-worldly buddha realm, but they refigure them in the light of postwar pacifistic ideals.[52] Different *Lotus*-related groups offer variations on this theme. As examples, let us look briefly at two prominent lay Buddhist movements that achieved their major growth in the postwar decades: Sōka Gakkai and Risshō Kōseikai, the two largest of Japan's so-called "new religions."

Both groups hold NGO status in the United Nations and also mobilize their members for volunteer welfare work: Kōseikai has been especially active in famine relief, while Sōka Gakkai has since the 1970s carried out grassroots efforts for "peace education" and, more recently, established the Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research to promote collaboration among peace researchers, policy makers, and activists. In 1964, in a highly controversial move, it also founded a political party, the Komeitō or Clean Government Party, to implement Buddhist ideals in politics.[53] Despite their activism, however, both groups hold social welfare activities to be secondary to the fundamental transformation of character—the "human revolution," in Sōka Gakkai terms, or "reformation of the mind," in Risshō Kōseikai parlance—said to come about through practice of the *Lotus Sūtra*, on which world peace in any real sense must depend. Both hold that war and other social evils have their roots in the greed, anger, and delusion of individuals. It is therefore individual efforts in self-cultivation and promoting harmony in everyday relations—rather than diplomatic or political efforts—that will fundamentally establish world peace. To quote Ikeda Daisaku (1928–), president of Sōka Gakkai International: "The individual human revolution will never stop with just that person. It represents a moment that surely encompasses all humanity. . . . As a single drop of water or speck of dust, each of you must win the trust of those around you, acting on the basis of our common humanity, and steadily advance the movement of a new awakening of life. Your own awakening will give rise to the next awakened person, who in turn will be followed by two, three, and ten in succession, becoming a great ocean of nirvāṇa and a great mountain of wondrous enlightenment, just as Nichiren teaches."[54]

Working to establish world peace is, in other words, conceived of as an integral part of each individual member's Buddhist practice. In the ethos of these lay movements, the humblest actions and interactions of daily life, performed conscientiously and with a sense of that greater purpose, all become bodhisattva practice and karmic causes linked directly to the

realization of a better world: what governments and diplomacy have failed to accomplish, ordinary believers are in fact achieving. It is here, in the heightened sense of personal meaning, with the conviction that one has a larger mission to fulfill, that these movements have exerted their chief appeal.

Interestingly, despite this shared ethos, these two groups embrace radically different understandings of what it means to practice the *Lotus Sūtra*. Sōka Gakkai's position is exclusivistic and maintains that only the spread of Nichiren's teachings, as interpreted by its own organizational lineage, can bring about world peace. Sōka Gakkai ultimately blamed the sufferings sustained during Japan's misguided militarist ventures and even Japan's eventual defeat on adherence to other, false religions. This conviction underlay the organization's aggressive missionizing in the postwar decades. Risshō Kōseikai, on the other hand, has taken an ecumenical approach. Its cofounder and longtime president Niwano Nikkyō (1906–1999) went so far as to claim that "*Lotus Sūtra*" is not a proper noun but the fundamental truth—God, Allah, or the one vehicle—at the heart of all great religions.[55] Niwano himself tirelessly promoted worldwide interfaith dialogue for peace.

Niwano's popular lectures on the *Lotus Sūtra* vividly show how the sūtra has become associated in the postwar and contemporary periods with the aim of global peace. "The whole *Lotus Sūtra* embodies an ideology of peace," he asserted.[56] From this hermeneutical perspective, Niwano read specific passages and parables from the sūtra as teaching how peace is to be achieved. For example, Śākyamuni Buddha's gratitude toward his vindictive cousin Devadatta for favors in a prior life teaches one to break the cycle of enmity by refusing to bear grudges. The parable of the medicinal herbs, which receive the same rain but grow to different heights in accord with their capacity, teaches that differences among nations must be respected; developing nations must not be arbitrarily expected to emulate the industrial model of developed nations. In the parable of the magically conjured city, the long, steep path represents "the long history of mankind's suffering caused by war, starvation, poverty, the violation of human rights, and so on." The conjured city itself symbolizes temporary peace—the physical cessation of war. The place of jewels, the real goal of the journey, is "the reformation of one's mind by religion" that must underlie lasting peace.[57] Niwano explains the envisioned results of this "reformation of the mind" in his interpretation of Chapter 21 of the *Lotus Sūtra*, "Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One," in which the Buddha opens unobstructed passage among the worlds in the ten directions, as though

they were a single buddha land (Hurvitz, 264). This foretells, Niwano writes, that "a world of great harmony will appear when all nations, all races, and all classes come to live in accordance with the one truth, so that discrimination among them vanishes, discord and fighting do not occur, and all the people work joyfully, enjoy their lives, and promote culture. In short, the whole world will become one buddha-land. Organizationally speaking, it can be said that the buddha-land means the formation of a world federation."[58]

Niwano is here interpreting the very passage that Tanaka Chigaku, earlier in the same century, had read as presaging world unification under the Japanese empire. Few examples could better illustrate how quickly, under the right circumstances, scriptural understandings can shift, and how the same text can be enlisted to support radically different agendas.

We have seen some of the ways in which the *Lotus Sūtra*'s references to this world as the realm of Śākyamuni Buddha have been understood: as an aspect of nondual reality to be discerned through meditation; in terms of thaumaturgical rites of nation protection; as a valorization of nature and sacred geography; in the light of claims for a specific connection to Japan; as a millennial vision of an ideal society; and in terms of a range of modern social and political agendas, from militant imperialism to world peace. What are we to make of so many different, even contradictory, readings of a single text?

As Chapter 1 of this volume notes, some scholars have argued that the *Lotus Sūtra*, lacking clear propositional content, is like an empty container that later readers have filled with their own interpretations. The *Lotus Sūtra*'s wealth of mythic imagery, and its relative paucity of explicit doctrine, may indeed have rendered it exceptionally open to multiple readings. But this is far from the whole story. Interpretation of the *Lotus Sūtra*—or of any scripture—does not take place solely in the encounter between reader and text but is also shaped by multiple, interrelated contexts. First, there is the complex diachronic context of received tradition: devotees, practitioners, and scholars bring to their reading elements drawn from the accretions of previous interpretations. Nichiren's understanding of the immanent buddha realm, for example, was not formed only by his personal reading of the *Lotus Sūtra* text but was mediated by Tiantai/Tendai doctrines of the nonduality of person and land and the buddhahood of the insentient. Similarly, later interpretations were influenced by Nichiren's own teaching and his prophecy that the ideal buddha land would one day be realized in this world. Such layers of interpretation do not necessarily

accumulate in a simple linear fashion. Some, like Zhiyi's concept of the three thousand realms in a single thought-moment, came directly out of the work of *Lotus Sūtra* interpretation, while others, such as notions of nation protection, emerged independently of the *Lotus Sūtra* and were only later assimilated to it. Over time, particular strands of the received interpretive tradition are internalized and naturalized, to the point that they become "obviously" what the sūtra is about. Indeed, for many devotees, the term *"Lotus Sūtra"* may serve less as the name of a scripture than as a referent for ideas or aims that may have little direct relation to the sūtra text but that later came to be associated with it.

Of the many received layers of sūtra interpretation, which elements are selected, which rejected, and how any individual element is understood at a given time are all shaped by synchronic contexts: historical and political circumstances, intellectual assumptions, social trends, and the hopes and desires of the sūtra's devotees. Thus, at different junctures, it has appeared obvious that the *Lotus Sūtra* foretells Japanese imperial conquest, or that it contains a blueprint for global peace. Particular readings cease to be obvious when the concerns, assumptions, or worldviews that once informed them no longer hold sway, although the possibility for their revival always remains. A literal reading of the "realization of buddhahood by grasses and trees," for example, more congruent with medieval sensibilities than with modern ones, has long since fallen by the wayside; nonetheless, one could readily imagine its being revived with a postmodern twist in the service of a Buddhist environmental ethic. To gain insight into why people have interpreted the *Lotus Sūtra*'s immanent buddha realm in so many ways, it is necessary to be familiar with not only the sūtra text itself but also the sūtra's history of interpretation and the circumstances that have shaped that process over time.

NOTES

1. The "three spheres" are the realms of desire, form, and formlessness that constitute the world in Buddhist cosmology, from the lowest reaches of the hells to the highest heavens.
2. Tsumori Kiichi, "Ryōzen jōdo shinkō no keifu," *Nichiren kyōgaku kenkyūjo kiyō* 15 (1988): 23–51.
3. This idea is vividly illustrated in the opening chapter of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*. See Robert A. F. Thurman, trans., *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti: A Mahāyāna Scripture* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976), 18–19.
4. Stephan Beyer, "Notes on the Vision Quest in Early Mahāyāna," in *Prajñāpāramitā and Related Systems: Studies in Honor of Edward Conze*, ed. Lewis Lancaster with Luis O. Gómez, Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series 1, 329–40 (Berkeley: Institute of

East Asian Studies, 1977); and Paul Harrison, "Mediums and Messages: Reflections on the Production of Mahāyāna Sūtras," *Eastern Buddhist*, n.s., 35, nos. 1–2 (2003): 115–47, especially 117–22.

5. *Mohe zhiguan*, Zhiyi (538–597), *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*, 100 vols., ed. Takakusu Junjirō, Watanabe Kaigyoku, and Ono Gemmyō (1924–1934; repr., Taibei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1974) (hereafter abbreviated as *T*) no. 1911, 46:1c24–25; Paul L. Swanson, trans., *The Great Cessation-and-Contemplation (Mo-ho chih-kuan)* (Tokyo: Kōsei, 2004), 21, CD-ROM, also available at Swanson's Web site under "Staff" at http://www.ic.nanzan-u.ac.jp/SHUBUNKEN/staff/staff.htm. See also Neal Donner and Daniel B. Stevenson, *The Great Calming and Contemplation: A Study and Annotated Translation of the First Chapter of Chih-i's "Mo-ho chih-kuan,"* Kuroda Institute, Classics in East Asian Buddhism (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1993), 112–13. This oft-quoted passage is actually from the preface by Zhiyi's disciple Guanding.
6. On the three thousand realms in a single thought-moment, see Kanno Hiroshi, *Ichinen sanzen to wa nani ka* (Tokyo: Daisan bunmeisha, 1992). In English, see Jacqueline I. Stone, *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism*, Kuroda Institute, Studies in East Asian Buddhism 12 (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 178–81.
7. *Mohe zhiguan*, *T* 46:54a3–6. Here Zhiyi explains that good and evil lands, like the beings who inhabit them, equally possess the ten suchnesses or universal characteristics into which he analyzes the "true aspect of the dharmas" (Ch.: *zhufa shixiang*, Ja: *shohō jissō*).
8. *Fahua xuanyi shiqian*, Zhanran (711–782), *T* no. 1717, 33:919a26–b10.
9. *Zhiguan fuxingzhuan hongjue*, Zhanran (711–782), *T* no. 1912, 46:295c23–24.
10. Zhanran developed this concept most fully in his *Diamond Scalpel* (*Jingang bei*, *T* no. 1932). An English translation and annotation appear in Linda Penkower, "T'ien-t'ai during the T'ang Dynasty: Chan-jan and the Sinification of Buddhism" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1993), 360–556.
11. *Jingang bei*, *T* 46:784b21, 785b8–9; trans., from Penkower, "T'ien-t'ai during the T'ang Dynasty," 510, 525, slightly modified.
12. The actual term "pure land of Sacred [Vulture] Peak" (Ja.: *Ryōzen jōdo*) may have first been used by the Tendai founder Saichō (766 or 767–822), who employs it to refer to the pure land of the primordially enlightened Śākyamuni and as equivalent to "the truth that is the highest meaning" (*Naishō buppō sōjō kechimyaku fu*, Saichō, in *Dengyō Daishi zenshū*, ed. Hieizan Senshūin fuzoku Eizan gakuin, 5 vols. [Tokyo: Sekai seiten kankō kyōkai, 1989] [hereafter abbreviated as *DDZ*], 1:215). From at least the ninth century, the "pure land of Sacred Vulture Peak" was also occasionally envisioned as a postmortem destination; see Tsumori, "Ryōzen jōdo shinkō no keifu," 33–37.
13. Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, especially 24–27, 170–72, 353.
14. *Enkai jūrokujō*, Kōen (1263–1317), in *Zoku Tendaishū zensho*, ed. Tendai shūten hensanjo (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1989), *Enkai* 1:88–91; see also Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 135–37.
15. *Shinjō sōmoku jōbutsu shiki*, Annen (841–?), reproduced in Sueki Fumihiko, *Heian shoki bukkyō shisō no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1995), 713. Annen presents this famous statement as a quotation from the *Zhongyin jing* (Zhu Fonian [fourth century], *T* no. 385), but it does not appear in extant versions of that text. See also Fabio Rambelli, "The Buddhist Philosophy of Objects and the Status of Inanimate Entities," in his *Buddhist Materiality: A Cultural History of Objects in Japanese Buddhism*, Asian Religions and Cultures (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007), 11–57. Rambelli's book provides a comprehensive bibliography on this topic.

16. *Sōmoku hosshin shugyō jōbutsu ki*, attributed to Ryōgen (912–985) but quite probably a later work (ca. twelfth to fourteenth centuries), in *Dainihon bukkyō zensho*, 151 vols. (Tokyo: Bussho kankōkai, 1912–1922), 24:345a. See Sueki, *Heian shoki bukkyō shisō no kenkyū*, 416–17.
17. Donald H. Shively, "Buddhahood for the Nonsentient: A Theme in Nō Plays," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 20, nos. 1–2 (1957): 135–61.
18. William R. LaFleur, "Saigyō and the Buddhist Value of Nature," *History of Religions* 13, no. 2 (1973): 93–128; 13, no. 3 (1974): 227–48. The quotation is in 13, no. 2 (1973): 93.
19. Allan G. Grapard, "Flying Mountains and Walkers of Emptiness: Toward a Definition of Sacred Space in Japanese Religions," *History of Religions* 20, no. 3 (1982): 195–221.
20. Tsumori, "Ryōzen jōdo shinkō no keifu," 30–31.
21. *Keiran jūyōshū*, comp. Kōshū (1276–1350), *T* no. 2410, 76:860a26–27.
22. Allan G. Grapard, "The Textualized Mountain—Enmountained Text: The *Lotus Sutra* in Kunisaki," in *The Lotus Sutra in Japanese Culture*, ed. George J. Tanabe Jr. and Willa Jane Tanabe (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1989), 172–73. East Asian tradition long maintained that Kumārajīva's *Lotus Sūtra* contains 69,384 characters. However, no extant version has precisely that number, although the sūtra does comprise approximately 70,000 characters; see Kabutogi Shōkō, *Hokke hangyō no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Daitō shuppansha, 1982), 322–25.
23. Marinus Willem de Visser, *Ancient Buddhism in Japan: Sutras and Ceremonies in Use in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries A.D. and Their History in Later Times*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1935), 1:13, 14, 116–17.
24. The imperial orders concerning the provincial temple system are summarized in De Visser, *Ancient Buddhism in Japan*, 2:646–48.
25. Katsuura Noriko, "*Hokke* metsuzai no tera to Rakuyō Ankokuji *Hokke* dōjō: Ama to amadera no Nittō hikaku kenkyū no kadai," *Shiron* 46 (1993): 1–18; Kazuhiko Yoshida, "The Enlightenment of the Dragon King's Daughter in the *Lotus Sutra*," translated and adapted by Margaret H. Childs, in *Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan*, ed. Barbara Ruch, (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2002), 304–5. A connection between the adoption of the *Lotus Sūtra* and its perceived powers of eradicating sin was also suggested by De Visser, *Ancient Buddhism in Japan*, 2:653. On the *Lotus* samādhi, see Daniel B. Stevenson, "The Four Kinds of Samādhi in Early T'ien-t'ai Buddhism," in *Traditions of Meditation in Chinese Buddhism*, ed. Peter N. Gregory, Kuroda Institute, Studies in East Asian Buddhism 4, 45–97 (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1986).
26. *Sange gakushōshiki*, *DDZ* 1:12; see also Paul Groner, *Saichō: The Establishment of the Japanese Tendai School*, Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series 7 (Berkeley: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, 1984; repr., Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 120–21.
27. *Fusō ryakki*, Kōen (?–1169), in *Shintei zōho kokushi taikei*, ed. Kuroita Katsumi and Kokushi taikei henshūkai, represented by Maruyama Jirō, 66 vols. (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1929–1966), 12:125, entry for 5/9; and *Ruijū sandaikyaku*, author unknown, ibid., 25:51–52.

28. *Hokke shūku, DDZ* 3:251; trans. Groner, *Saichō*, 170, modified. The *Lotus Sūtra* says that buddhas appear in a world stained by the five defilements—of the kalpa, the passions, the beings, views, and life span (Hurvitz, 30, slightly modified). On Saichō's views of the *Lotus Sūtra* and Japan, see Groner, *Saichō*, 170, 174–76, 181–82.
29. *Ehyō Tendaishū, DDZ* 3:343.
30. For an overview of such claims, see Mark L. Blum, "The *Sangoku-Mappō* Construct: Buddhism, Nationalism, and History in Medieval Japan," in *Discourse and Ideology in Medieval Japanese Buddhism*, ed. Richard K. Payne and Taigen Dan Leighton, 31–51 (London: Routledge, 2006).
31. *Shugo kokkai shō, DDZ* 2:234.
32. *Futsūju bosatsukai kōshaku*, Annen, *T* no. 2381, 74:757c24; *Ichijō yōketsu*, Genshin (942–1017), *T* no. 2370, 74:35123.
33. *Namu myōhō renge kyō* represents full scholarly transliteration of the daimoku, but slightly differing pronunciations are used among some contemporary groups; see chapter 1, n. 72, in this volume.
34. *Kaitai sokushin jōbutsu gi*, Nichiren (1222–1282), in *Shōwa teihon Nichiren Shōnin ibun*, ed. Risshō daigaku Nichiren kyōgaku kenkyūjo, 4 vols. (Minobu-chō, Yamanashi, Japan: Minobusan Kuonji, 1952–1959; rev. 1988) (hereafter abbreviated as *Teihon*), 1:14.
35. *Shugo kokka ron, Teihon* 1:129. For the quotations from the *Lotus Sūtra*, see Hurvitz, 220, 223, and 224, modified. In his later years, Nichiren interpreted Vulture Peak, where Śākyamuni Buddha continually preaches the *Lotus Sūtra*, as the postmortem destination of *Lotus* devotees. However, Nichiren posits this postmortem pure land not in opposition to the pure land to be realized in this world but as an extension of it, to encompass the deceased faithful; see Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 292–94.
36. *Kanjin honzon shō, Teihon* 1:712. The "four kalpas" are the eons of formation, stability, decline, and extinction. The "three realms" refer to the division of all phenomena into the five *skandhas*, living beings, and their lands, a fundamental component principle of the three thousand realms in a single thought-moment.
37. *Risshō ankoku ron, Teihon* 1:226.
38. See Jacqueline I. Stone, "When Disobedience Is Filial and Resistance Is Loyal: The *Lotus Sutra* and Social Obligations in the Medieval Nichiren Tradition," in *A Buddhist Kaleidoscope: Essays on the Lotus Sutra*, ed. Gene Reeves, 261–81 (Tokyo: Kōsei, 2002).
39. "Hōmon mōsarubekiyō no koto," *Teihon* 1:448. Parenthetically, between 1932 and 1944, at the height of militant nationalism, the Japanese Home Ministry and the Ministry of Education repeatedly demanded the deletion from Nichiren's writings of this and other passages—eventually totaling more than two hundred—that were deemed disrespectful to imperial authority; see Cheryl M. Allam, "The Nichiren and Catholic Confrontation with Japanese Nationalism," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 10 (1990): 35–84, especially 56–58.
40. *Nyosetsu shugyō shō, Teihon* 1:733; Hurvitz, 96, modified.
41. "Nanjō Hyōe Shichirō-dono gosho," *Teihon* 1:324.
42. *Kenbutsu mirai ki, Teihon* 1:741, 742; see also "Soya Nyūdō-dono gari gosho," *Teihon*, 1:909. A more detailed discussion of this topic would take into consideration Nichiren's mandate for the future establishment of an ordination platform of the origin teaching as a central place of practice for the entire world, to be erected by official edict once the rulers of Japan had embraced faith in the *Lotus Sūtra*. See

Pier P. Del Campana, trans., "*Sandaihihō-shō*: An Essay on the Three Great Mysteries by Nichiren," *Monumenta Nipponica* 26, no. 1 (1971): 205–24; and Jacqueline I. Stone, "'By Imperial Edict and Shogunal Decree': Politics and the Issue of the Ordination Platform in Modern Lay Nichiren Buddhism," in *Buddhism in the Modern World: Adaptations of an Ancient Tradition*, ed. Steven Heine and Charles S. Prebish, 192–219 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
43. On the Meiji-period refiguration of Japanese Buddhism, see James Edward Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan: Buddhism and Its Persecution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990).
44. On Nichirenism, see Gerald Scott Iguchi, "Nichirenism as Modernism: Imperialism, Fascism, and Buddhism in Modern Japan" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, San Diego, 2006); Ōtani Eiichi, *Kindai Nihon no Nichiren-shugi undō* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2001); and Tokoro Shigemoto, *Kindai shakai to Nichiren-shugi* (Tokyo: Hyōronsha, 1972).
45. On Tanaka, see Iguchi, "Nichirenism as Modernism," 67–121; Edwin B. Lee, "Nichiren and Nationalism: The Religious Patriotism of Tanaka Chigaku," *Monumenta Nipponica* 30, no. 1 (1975): 19–35; and George J. Tanabe Jr., "Tanaka Chigaku: The *Lotus Sutra* and the Body Politic," in Tanabe and Tanabe, *Lotus Sutra in Japanese Culture*, 191–208.
46. Some of the better-known figures influenced to some extent by Tanaka include the religious studies scholar Anesaki Masaharu (1873–1949), instrumental in introducing Japanese religion to the West; Inoue Nisshō (1886–1967), agrarian reformer, a lay Nichiren devotee, and founder of the civilian terrorist organization Ketsumeidan (League of Blood); and General Ishiwara (also read Ishihara) Kanji (1889–1949), operations officer of the Guangdong Army, whose role in precipitating the 1931 Japanese invasion of Manchuria seems to have been inspired by his apocalyptic reading of Tanaka's nationalistic teachings on Nichiren and the *Lotus Sūtra*. The literary figures Takayama Chōgyū (1871–1902) and Miyazawa Kenji (1896–1933) were also briefly drawn to Tanaka, though they eventually rejected his nationalistic views.
47. In 1923 Tanaka did in fact found a political party and ran, unsuccessfully, for a Diet seat, an early attempt to realize the aim of a *Lotus*-centered society via modern political processes; see Ōtani, *Kindai Nihon no Nichiren-shugi undō*, 297–98, 322–29.
48. Tanaka's appendix to *Shūmon no ishin* (1901), in *Shishiō zenshū*, ed. Shishiō zenshū kankōkai, 36 vols. (Tokyo: Shishiō bunkō, 1931–1938), 7:93–134; see also Lee, "Nichiren and Nationalism," 26–27.
49. *Shūmon no ishin*, 7:16; translation from Lee, "Nichiren and Nationalism," 26.
50. Tanaka Chigaku, *Honge kyōhan Hokke hakkō*, in *Tanaka Chigaku jiden*, 10 vols. (Tokyo: Shishiō bunkō, 1936), 7:163.
51. Ibid., 7:102, 103, 155, 107; see also the discussion in George J. Tanabe Jr., "Tanaka Chigaku," 202–4.
52. Robert Kisala, *Prophets of Peace: Pacifism and Cultural Identity in Japan's New Religions* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999); Jacqueline I. Stone, "Japanese *Lotus* Millennialism: From Militant Nationalism to Contemporary Peace Movements," in *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence: Historical Cases*, ed. Catherine Wessinger, 261–80 (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2000); and Stone, "Nichiren's Activist Heirs: Sōka Gakkai, Risshō Kōseikai, Nipponzan Myōhōji," in *Action Dharma: New Studies in Engaged Buddhism*, ed. Christopher

Queen, Charles Prebish, and Damien Keown, 63–94 (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

53. On Kōmeitō, see Hiroshi Aruga, "Soka Gakkai and Japanese Politics," in *Global Citizens: The Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in the World*, ed. David Machacek and Bryan Wilson, 97–127 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Robert Kisala, "Sōka Gakkai, Kōmeitō, and the Separation of Religion and State in Japan," *Bulletin of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture* 18 (spring 1994): 7–17; and Daniel A. Métraux, *The Soka Gakkai Revolution* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1994), 39–69.
54. Ikeda Daisaku, "Ikeda kaichō no gosho kōgi: *Senjishō*," *Daibyakurenge* 320 (November 1977): 170–71.
55. Nikkyō Niwano, *A Buddhist Approach to Peace*, trans. Masuo Nezu (Tokyo: Kōsei, 1977), 68, 71.
56. Ibid., 63; see also chaps. 2 and 3.
57. Ibid., 59–60.
58. Ibid., 65.