



Ōtani Eiichi 大谷栄一, *Nichirensnugi to wa nan datta no ka: Kindai Nihon no shisō suimyaku* 日蓮主義とはなんだったのかー近代日本の思想水脈

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NICHIRENSHUGI (“Nichirenism”) was a socially engaged movement of Nichiren Buddhism, inflected through nationalist aspirations, that flourished in modern Japan. Proponents sought to realize an ideal society or a this-worldly buddha land via a merger of Buddhism and government and the unification of the world based on the *Lotus Sūtra*, a holy task to be shouldered by Japan. Founded by the lay leader Tanaka Chigaku 田中智学 (1861–1939) and Honda Nisshō 本多日生 (1867–1931), sectarian reformer and eventually chief administrator of the Nichiren Buddhist denomination Kenpon Hokkeshū 顕本法華宗, Nichirensnugi

attracted not only Nichiren Buddhist practitioners but an astonishing range of intellectuals, literary figures, artists, business leaders, military officers, and, eventually, radical political activists. Postwar scholarship has often represented the movement as a form of militant nationalism that subverted Nichiren's teaching by catering to the imperialist state. But such blanket assessments, emanating from a postwar liberal condemnation of nationalism, are problematic as scholarship and fail to account for the movement's transnational, even universalistic, strands. So argues Ōtani Eiichi in this masterful study, which addresses Nichirenshugi in its own historical context. Ōtani asks: What kind of thought did Nichirenshugi represent? What accounts for its broad appeal, and what roles did it play in Japan's modern history? A specialist in the sociology of religion and the history of modern Japanese Buddhism, Ōtani has studied Nichirenshugi for more than a quarter century. In an earlier book (ŌTANI 2001), focusing on the 1880s through 1920s, he examined how Tanaka and Honda reformulated Nichiren Buddhism for the modern era. This new study widens his lens to encompass Nichirenshugi history from its Meiji-period beginnings through the immediate postwar era; it is the most thorough and nuanced account to date. As his chief theme, Ōtani directly addresses the issue of religion and the state (or its variants, such as religion and nationalism, or religion and the national polity [*kokutai* 国体]), the undercurrent that informed more than six decades of Nichirenshugi activity and, one might argue, much of modern Japanese religion.

Among the volume's key contributions is Ōtani's diachronic analysis of shifting patterns in the interpretation and application of Nichirenshugi ideals over three generations: that is, by figures born in 1860–1870, 1880–1890, and 1900–1910. In the first generation, Tanaka and Honda launched the movement, tirelessly traveled and lectured, developed their organizations (Tanaka's Risshō Ankokukai 立正安国会, later Kokuchūkai 国柱会, and Honda's Tōitsudan 統一団) and publishing enterprises, and cultivated networks of Nichirenshugi sympathizers. Tanaka articulated his vision for reform of the Nichiren sect, wholesale conversion of Japan, and the mission of world propagation. After the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), he also developed his distinctive theory of the *kokutai*, incorporating into Nichiren doctrine the emerging national mythos (*kokutai shinwa* 国体神話, in Ōtani's term) of Japan's founding by the legendary Emperor Jinmu and rule by an unbroken line of divinely descended sovereigns.

Bridging the first and second generations were the literary critic Takayama Chōgyū 高山樗牛 (1871–1902), and Anesaki Masaharu 姉崎正治 (1873–1949), who was known as the “father” of religious studies in Japan; their writings attracted many young people. (Nichirenshugi's appeal to “anguished youth” [*hanmon seinen* 煩悶青年] is but one of the many surprises that Ōtani uncovers.) The second generation saw increasingly diverse interpretations of Nichirenshugi ideals, impatience with the earlier generation as excessively theoretical, and a move, heightened in

the third generation, toward direct action. Ōtani investigates the divergent paths of several second-generation figures: Honda's disciple Seno'ō Girō 妹尾義郎 (1889–1961), founder of the Shinkō Bukkyō Seinen Dōmei 新興仏教青年同盟 (Youth League for Revitalizing Buddhism), who promoted engaged Buddhist socialism; Miyazawa Kenji 宮沢賢治 (1896–1933), poet, children's writer, and rural activist who worked to improve conditions for farmers in his native Iwate Prefecture; General Ishiwara Kanji 石原莞爾 (1889–1949), known for his role in the 1931 invasion of Manchuria, who later opposed war with China and advocated a pan-Asian league uniting Japan, China, and Manchuria to counter Western imperialism; and Inoue Nisshō 井上日召 (1886–1967), would-be radical social reformer, who sought to topple what he deemed a corrupt elite through political assassination.¹ In the postwar era, although having little connection to Tanaka, Sōka Gakkai 創価学会 initially embraced similar aspirations for merging Buddhism and politics.

NISHIYAMA Shigeru (1985, 187), also a scholar of modern Nichiren Buddhism, observed concerning Nichirenshugi that “between the Japanese *kokutai* as illuminated by the *Lotus Sūtra* (Japan as it ought to be) and the present, actual aspect of Japan lay a deep gulf, generating an acute sense of tension and continually prompting action to bridge it.” Ōtani amplifies Nishiyama's insight, examining how different Nichirenshugi figures envisioned an ideal Japan (or world) and what actions they advocated to bridge the gap separating that ideal from Japan's present reality. Seno'ō urged dissolution of the old sectarian system, along with its capitalist base, and the unification of Buddhism in the original Śākyamuni Buddha, as the basis for social equality and shared prosperity. Ishiwara anticipated an apocalyptic “final war” in which a Japan-led Asia would defeat the West, bringing about the worldwide spread of Nichiren's teaching and an era of absolute peace. Inoue sought a mystical merger of the individual with universal life, which he identified with the Japanese *kokutai*, to be realized in the direct union of the emperor and his subjects. Ōtani's use of letters, diaries, and other primary sources vividly conveys how, for these and other Nichirenshugi advocates, the imperative to action noted by Nishiyama translated into a compelling sense of mission as modern incarnations of the “bodhisattvas of the earth” (*jiyu no bosatsu* 地涌の菩薩) who appear in the *Lotus Sūtra*, as privileged actors shouldering the task of humanity's salvation.

“Nationalism” within Nichirenshugi was not monolithic. Takayama Chōgyū advocated what he termed “transcendence of nationalism” (*chōkokkashugi* 超国家主義),² which subordinates the nation to universal truth; Chōgyū greatly

1. Recent English-language studies of these figures drawing on and/or complementing Ōtani's work include SHIELDS (2012), HOLT (2014), and GODART (2015). Inoue has a complex religious background; VICTORIA (2020) treats him almost wholly as a Zen practitioner.

2. Not to be confused with *chōkokkashugi* (ultranationalism), as used by political theorist Maruyama Masao 丸山眞男 (1914–1996).

admired Nichiren's defiance of worldly authority and his reverence for the *Lotus Sūtra* above the ruler and even the kami of Japan. Tanaka described his own position as "religious nationalism" (*shussekenteki kokkashugi* 出世間の国家主義), which also maintains the superiority of religious truth but stresses its inseparability from the state. Drawing on traditional Tendai and Nichiren Buddhist exegesis in which the *Lotus Sūtra* "opens the provisional to reveal the true" (*kai-gon kenjitsu* 開権顯実), Tanaka maintained that only when "opened" and illuminated by the *Lotus Sūtra* could the Japanese *kokutai* become the *kokutai* for all humanity and the foundation for the buddhahood of the land. He, Chōgyū, and Honda all criticized what Tanaka termed "worldly (or secular) nationalism" (*sekenteki kokkashugi* 世間の国家主義) framed solely in political, economic, or military terms. While other "nationalisms" within the movement might be identified, Ōtani employs these three positions heuristically as categories of analysis to show how different interpretive possibilities overlapped and diverged within Nichirenshugi and even, at times, within the same person. Senō Girō's gradual shift from Nichirenshugi to Buddhist socialism, he argues, was mediated by Chōgyū's "transcendence of nationalism." Tanaka and Honda both asserted the primacy of the *Lotus Sūtra* over the *kokutai* ("religious nationalism") but in their later years increasingly supported government calls for religious, military, youth, and women's groups to aid in educating citizens against "dangerous ideas" such as socialism and democracy and to promote *kokutai* ideology, activities virtually impossible to distinguish from "worldly nationalism." Ōtani thus shows how Nichirenshugi doctrine could serve both to critique and legitimize state ideology and contained a transcendent, universal dimension that could support transregional, even international visions, as well as more particularistic strands that endorsed Japan-centrism and nationalist agendas. His insights have relevance well beyond the case of Nichirenshugi or even Japan.

Ōtani has synthesized a wealth of hitherto untapped primary materials, including difficult-to-obtain journals and newspapers, documents, firsthand accounts, and Nichirenshugi in-house publications. He also draws on relevant scholarship, Japanese and Western, in religion, sociology, and political and intellectual history. Specific figures, events, and ideas highlighted in each of the volume's thirteen chapters are instructively contextualized within the larger frames of contemporaneous developments in Japan, greater East Asia, and the world. *Nichirenshugi to wa nan datta no ka* will amply reward any reader interested in modern Buddhism or in religion-state issues.

For a volume of this size, an index and stand-alone bibliography would have been helpful; presumably, the publisher decided for some reason to omit them. As for its content, given the work's monumental scope, one can hardly complain about what wasn't addressed. Still, several questions recurred to this reviewer while reading it. The complex, overlapping Nichirenshugi networks that Ōtani

describes complicate a picture of modern Japanese religion as divided more or less neatly into traditional sects and new religious movements. How did Nichirenshugi, predominantly a lay movement, interact with clerics of the various Nichiren temple denominations, many of whom had their own visions of the role that Nichiren's teaching should play in modern Japan? Tanaka saw the nuclear family as the basis of national life and is known for inventing the Buddhist wedding ceremony; he and Honda both established women's groups within their organizations. What roles did women play in Nichirenshugi? Tanaka also rejected prayer for this-worldly benefits, a major departure from other modern *Lotus* and Nichiren-based movements. What can we know about the religious life of rank-and-file Nichirenshugi followers? And how should we understand the international face of Nichirenshugi, which expanded along with Japan's empire to include bases and activities in China and Korea? On reaching the afterword, it becomes clear that Ōtani has anticipated these questions, flagging them as topics still to be investigated. He also announces a collaborative project, *Ekkyō suru Nichirenshugi no kiso kenkyū: Toransunashonarū, jendā, supirichuariti* 越境する日蓮主義の基礎研究—トランスナショナル・ジェンダー・スピリチュアリティ (“Nichirenshugi Across Borders: Transnationalism, Spirituality, and Gender”), that he is conducting with Satō Hiroo and Clinton Godart (both of Tohoku University) and Yulia Burenina (Osaka University). Further innovative research may be anticipated to emerge from the rich ground that Ōtani has so ably broken.

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