

## Nichiren's *Risshō ankoku ron* and Canon Formation

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*Regardless of his own stated purpose or expected outcome for the *Risshō ankoku ron*, one of Nichiren's accomplishments in writing this treatise was the articulation of a canon, that is, a list of texts that were deemed true and authoritative from his perspective, as distinguished from other writings that were not. This essay explores the process of canon formation in Nichiren Buddhism, focusing on the structure and argument of the *Risshō ankoku ron*. Noting five notions present in the process of canon formation, namely, selectivity, hierarchy, closure, orthodoxy, and legitimation, it examines the particular way these elements are manifest in the treatise in question.*

**Keywords:** Nichiren — *Risshō ankoku ron* — canon formation — Tendai — legitimation

IN 1260, NICHIREN 日蓮 (1222–1282) presented his *Risshō ankoku ron* 立正安国論 (Treatise on the establishment of the true teaching for the peace of the country) to military leaders in Kamakura. It was especially directed toward Hōjō Tokiyori 北条時頼 (1227–1263), a former shogunal regent (*shikken* 執権) and Bakufu leader who, although living in retirement at a Zen temple, retained significant political power as Hōjō family patriarch. Nichiren's treatise is in the form of a dialogue between an erudite but unnamed Buddhist (the Master; *shujin* 主人) and an unnamed traveler (the Visitor; *kyaku* 客). The text is an impassioned argument asserting the urgent need for the nation to embrace the teachings of the *Lotus Sūtra*, central to Nichiren's interpretation of Tendai 天台 Buddhism. In his treatise, Nichiren attributes Japan's recent natural disasters to those who have turned away from the *Lotus Sūtra*, engaging instead in Buddhist practices centered on the worship of Amida Buddha and other modes of ritual praxis he considers unorthodox. With this agenda in mind, Nichiren employs quotations from the *Lotus Sūtra* and other associated Buddhist sutras that describe the disasters that will befall any country that violates what he considers true (*shō* 正) Buddhism. These quotes substantiate his claims

and support his vision of an ideal world lived according to *Lotus Sūtra* doctrine.

At the time the *Risshō ankoku ron* was presented to Tokiyori, Nichiren, trained in the Tendai tradition, was not a widely known or popular monk, nor did he have any particular influence with powerful Bakufu officials. His treatise, which condemned Pure Land and other Buddhist teachings as heretical, not surprisingly created enemies for Nichiren among Buddhists and laypersons who embraced Pure Land doctrines. What was so important to Nichiren that he risked generating such extensive antipathy? At least part of the answer can be found in Nichiren's stated intention for writing the *Risshō ankoku ron* in a text composed in 1268, the *Ankoku ron gokan yurai* 安国論御勘由来 (Rationale for writing the *Risshō ankoku ron*).

In the first year of the Shōka era (1257)... there occurred an earthquake of unprecedented magnitude. In the second year of the same era (1258)... there was a great wind. In the third year (1259)... a major famine occurred. In the first year of the Shōgen era (1259)... disease was rampant, and throughout the four seasons of the second year (1260)... the sickness continued to rage without abating. By this time more than half the ordinary citizens of the nation had been laid low by death. The rulers of the country, alarmed at this state of affairs, turned to the scriptures of Buddhism and the non-Buddhist writings for help, ordering that various prayers be offered. These, however, failed to produce the slightest effect. On the contrary, famine and disease raged more fiercely than ever.

I, Nichiren, observing this state of affairs, proceeded to consult the various Buddhist scriptures. There I discovered the reason why these prayers are without effect and on the contrary actually make the situation worse, along with passages of proof to support it. In the end I had no other recourse than to compile a work to present my findings, entitling it, *Risshō ankoku ron*. In the first year of the Bunnō era (1260)... I handed it to the lay monk Yadoya for presentation to His Lordship, the late lay priest of Saimyō-ji [Hōjō Tokiyori]. This I did solely that I might repay the debt of gratitude that I owe to my native land.

(YAMPOLSKY 1990, p. 43; *STN* 1: 421-22)

The main assertion Nichiren makes in the *Risshō ankoku ron*, which he claims to have discovered in his study of Buddhist sutras, is that the

*Lotus Sūtra* has been abandoned in favor of false Buddhist teachings. He states that recent disasters are a result of this abandonment of the truth, and maintains that they will continue until these heresies are repudiated and the truth embraced. The *Risshō ankoku ron* is Nichiren's attempt to convince the ruling powers to accept this vision and to embrace his agenda. But Nichiren's text had an additional effect, whether intentional or not: the articulation of a canon of authoritative texts.

Regardless of Nichiren's stated purpose or expected outcome, one of the things that the *Risshō ankoku ron* accomplished was to identify a canon, a list of sutras and other Buddhist texts that were true and correct from Nichiren's perspective. At the same time, he leaves little doubt as to which texts and ideas he sees as provisional.<sup>1</sup> While there is no explicit evidence to suggest that Nichiren was consciously attempting to craft a canon—as we see in the quote above, it seems he was primarily trying to direct attention to what he saw as the correct interpretation of the Dharma—it is nevertheless the case that Nichiren was asserting certain texts as authoritative and doctrinally correct. Nichiren was aware of the diversity of Dharma interpretations, but he claimed that his careful study of the various Buddhisms of his day yielded the insight that the *Lotus Sūtra* was paramount over all other sutras. While he acknowledged that other scriptures might be in accord with the *Lotus Sūtra*, the *Lotus Sūtra* was nevertheless the “king of sutras” (*shokyō-ō* 諸經王; *STN* 1: 219). In the process of advocating the *Lotus Sūtra*—and other doctrinally acceptable texts—he made it clear that certain Buddhist texts were erroneous and in fact detrimental to the future salvation of individuals and the nation itself.

When we consider the concept of canon in Buddhist traditions, we need to distinguish between canon as a compendium or catalog of texts and canon as “the arbitrary fixing of a number of ‘texts’ as immutable and authoritative” (SMITH 1982, p. 44). Historically, Buddhists have produced compilations of Buddhist texts or otherwise categorized the Buddha's teachings in ways that often have been referred to in English by the term “canon,” but that probably are better thought of as unfixed catalogs of Buddhist texts, consisting of both sutras and commentaries. Such catalog listings make no denominational distinction between texts deemed authoritative and those that

<sup>1</sup> Although Nichiren frequently cites some sutras as less important than others he is careful never to say that a sutra is itself heretical or false. However, he does not hesitate to condemn commentaries on sutras and other seminal Buddhist texts as fallacious and therefore heretical. This distinction would seem to be due to the fact that Nichiren is following the Mahāyāna Buddhist acceptance of all sutras as the words of the Buddha, even if some sutras are “provisional.”

are not. To further understand the distinction between canons and catalogs of texts, it is useful to investigate the role of collections of texts in Buddhist traditions both across Asia and in Japan.

Sutra catalogs have a long history, going back at least to the Indian notion of the *tripitaka*, or three baskets, which was a threefold classificatory system that divided Buddhist teachings into the three categories of sutras (Jpn. *kyō* 經), precepts (Skt. *vinaya*; Jpn. *ritsu* 律), and commentaries on Buddhist doctrine (Skt. *abhidharma*; Jpn. *ron* 論). Numerous sutra catalogs were produced in China. The earliest Chinese catalog of sutras translated into Chinese, no longer extant, was reportedly that of Daoan 道安 (312–385) in 374, the *Zongli-zhong-jing-mulu* 綜理衆經目錄 (Comprehensive catalog of the sutras). The *Kaiyuan-shijiao-lu* 開元釋教錄 (the Kaiyuan era Buddhist catalog), sponsored by the government, was compiled by Zhisheng 智昇 in 730 and provided the basis for subsequent sutra catalogs, including the early-twentieth-century Taishō edition of the *tripitaka* (*Taishō daizōkyō* 大正大藏經; MIZUNO 1982, pp. 106, 109). The Taishō *tripitaka* is often referred to as a “canon,” but this is misleading because no Buddhist school prizes this entire catalogue as normative for their particular sectarian doctrines. Rather, canons—in the sense of a restricted and authoritative collection of texts—are at work in other ways in the Buddhist tradition. One way in which canons are formed in Buddhist traditions is by privileging selected texts from among the many texts that comprise sutra catalogs. This is the process by which Nichiren formulates a canon in the *Risshō ankoku ron*.

Nichiren refers to Buddhist sutras and other texts collectively in the *Risshō ankoku ron* through the use of terms such as “scriptural passages” (*kyōmon* 經文), “sutras” (*kyō* 經), “sutra repository” (*kyōzō* 經藏), “sacred teachings” (*shōkyō* 聖教), “all the sutras and commentaries” (*issai kyōron* 一切經論), “Mahāyāna sutras” (*daijōkyō* 大乘經), “Buddhist sutras” (*bukkyō* 仏經), and “various sutras” (*shukyō* 衆經 and *shokyō* 諸經). Working from these general terms for sutras, Nichiren then focuses on specific texts, both sutras and commentaries, that are either doctrinally true or false from his perspective. In this manner, Nichiren forges a canon out of a catalog.

In order to be considered a canon and not simply a catalog, there must be some process of textual selection that includes some texts and excludes others. While some texts were purposely excluded from Buddhist catalogs, those involved in compiling these catalogs did little more filtering than deciding which works were Buddhist and which were not. Histories of local Buddhist communities suggest that a highly selective process was at work that more narrowly delineated what counted as texts worthy of inclusion. This process included, *inter alia*, some atten-

tion—whether explicit or implicit—to the following ideas: selectivity, hierarchy, closure, orthodoxy, and legitimation. All of these criteria were employed or suggested by Nichiren in the *Risshō ankoku ron* and will be discussed below.

It is not my intention to investigate the complexities of Buddhist canon formation as a whole, but rather to explore an example of the process of canon formation suggested by one particular text from Nichiren's extensive corpus, the *Risshō ankoku ron*. Focusing on this important text provides clues to the process Nichiren used to craft a canon of authoritative texts. Seen from this more limited perspective, we can conceive of canons in the Buddhist tradition as smaller sectarian canons, or "situated canons." By situated canon I refer to a localized, sectarian-based perspective on what constitutes the most important and authoritative texts for a particular Buddhist tradition. Implicated in this idea is the notion that the texts chosen reflect the goals and interests of those who promote them. The evidence from Nichiren's *Risshō ankoku ron* seems to bear this out for reasons I will outline below. Thus, although much has been written about the significance of the *Risshō ankoku ron*—what it has to tell us about Nichiren's Buddhist thought, about his ideas connecting Buddhism and the state, and about Nichiren the person—this essay will focus instead on the structure and argument of the *Risshō ankoku ron* and how it contributed, ultimately, to the articulation of a situated canon.

#### *Nichiren's Canon Articulated: Risshō ankoku ron*

The *Risshō ankoku ron* is a dialogue in question-and-answer form between a Buddhist Master and his Visitor. The dialogue takes the Visitor through an argument that is meant to lead to the correct interpretation of the connection between *ankoku* 安国 ("peace of the nation") and *risshō* 立正 ("the establishment of the true [Buddhist Dharma]"). According to Nichiren's text, if the true Buddhist Dharma is established—that is, if *Lotus Sūtra* faith as advocated by Nichiren is proclaimed the religion of the land—then the country will be at peace. This dialogue is presented in a ten-part sequence, in which the Visitor's questions or viewpoints are followed by a response (usually in the form of an argumentative proof of the veracity of the Master's doctrinal claims), concluding with the denigration of contrary, especially Amidist, views that are initially held by the Visitor. It is only the last, or tenth, statement by the Visitor that is not followed by the Master's reply. There, the Visitor accedes to the Master's viewpoint and takes up the Master's cause himself. What follows is a synopsis of the

*Risshō ankoku ron* divided into ten dialogue sequences, stating the Master's arguments, and listing the Buddhist texts (including sutras) he quotes in support of his vision of a Japan unified around the teachings of the *Lotus Sūtra*.

#### DIALOGUE 1

The Visitor observes that natural disasters and disease are rampant throughout the nation, and despite the fact that people perform various kinds of rituals, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, these disasters continue. The Visitor makes neutral reference, that is, without showing either approval or disapproval, to the following sutras and commentaries in relation to some of the rituals mentioned: Shandao's 善導 *Banzhouzan* 般舟讚, the *Yakushi-kyō* 藥師經, the *Lotus Sūtra* 法華經, two references to the *Ninnō-kyō* 仁王經, and the *Kyakuon-ōshinju-kyō* 却温黃神呪經. The Visitor asks why misfortune continues despite this ritual practice.

The Master provides the following reason, saying he has searched scriptural passages (*kyōmon* 經文) for the answer: people have turned their backs on the truth (*shō* 正) and have embraced evil (*aku* 惡). Here, and throughout the *Risshō ankoku ron*, the Master draws clear distinctions between what he perceives to be the truth (*shō* 正), and what he calls variously heresy (*ja* 邪) and evil (*aku* 惡). Thus, he says, disasters are occurring.

#### DIALOGUE 2

The Visitor asks what sutras (*kyō* 經) the Master bases his views on.

The Master replies that various scriptures attest to the fact that the gods and sages have abandoned the country because people, and especially national rulers, have turned their backs on the truth. Disasters and calamities occur as a result. The Master quotes supporting passages from the *Konkōmyō-kyō* 金光明經, *Daishū-kyō* (or *Daijikyō*) 大集經, the *Ninnō-kyō*, and the *Yakushi-kyō*. For the most part, the sutra passages quoted here argue that calamities result when rulers do not uphold or protect the Dharma. According to the Master, rulers and others have put their faith in heretical views (*ja* 邪說) and fail to recognize the true teaching (*shōkyō* 正教).

#### DIALOGUE 3

The Visitor counters by arguing that there have been many rulers and monks in the past who have upheld the Dharma—who, he asks, is abandoning the Dharma?

The Master replies that, nevertheless, rulers and monks are unenlightened (*fukaku* 不覺) as to the distinction between true (*shō* 正) and

heretical (*ja* 邪) teachings and lead the people astray—various scriptures attest to this fact: the *Ninnō-kyō*, the *Nehan-gyō* 涅槃經, and the *Lotus Sūtra*. The sutra passages the Master quotes argue that the world will fall into ruin in the latter evil age of *mappō* (末法; “the end of the Dharma”). Monks will lead the people astray because in this evil period they will be unable to grasp the truth and rulers will be taken in by the lies of the monks. This, says the Master, is exactly the condition the world is in now.

#### DIALOGUE 4

The Visitor, now angry, declares that there are virtuous monks and rulers who follow them—who, he asks, are these evil monks (*aku biku* 惡比丘)?

The Master provides the example of Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212), who established the Pure Land school of Buddhism in Japan, as one who has destroyed the sacred Buddhist teachings (*shōkyō* 聖教) and persuaded people to follow his false teachings. The Master names and quotes from Hōnen's *Senchakushū* 選擇集 (1198) as evidence for his view. The Master sets up his arguments against Hōnen's teaching and the sutras that support that teaching.

The Master quotes as problematic the *Senchakushū* passages that attempt to distinguish between the Sacred Way teachings (*shōdō* 聖道) and the Pure Land (*jōdo* 淨土) teachings. In Hōnen's view, we should abandon the Sacred Way teachings and turn to the Pure Land teachings. The Master quotes Hōnen's statement that the Sacred Way teachings include Tendai (and the *Lotus Sūtra*), Shingon, Zen, and other Mahāyāna schools. Excluded here are the three Pure Land sutras prized as foundational by Hōnen, which belong to the Pure Land teachings that Hōnen urges all to embrace because it guarantees birth in Amida's Pure Land.

The Master argues that Hōnen has followed the fallacious explanations (*byūshaku* 謬釋) of Chinese Pure Land teachers like Tanluan 曇鸞, Daochuo 道綽, and Shandao. The Master says that Hōnen has erroneously combined “the 637 works in 2,883 volumes that comprise the Mahāyāna sutras of the Buddha's lifetime, including those of the *Lotus Sūtra* and Shingon,” has labeled these Sacred Way teachings and “difficult practices” (*nangyō* 難行; in distinction to the Jōdo teachings, which are the easy practice [*igyō* 易行]), and has urged that these teachings be abandoned in favor of the Pure Land teachings (YAMPOLSKY 1990, p. 24; *STN* 1: 216).

The Master goes on to argue that Hōnen has misread and misinterpreted the three Pure Land sutras, “which contain Amida's vow to save everyone ‘except those who commit the five cardinal sins or slan-

der the True Law' (*hibō shōbō* 誹謗正法)" (YAMPOLSKY 1990, p. 24; *STN* 1: 216).

The Master continues, claiming that Hōnen "fails to understand the warning contained in the second scroll of the *Lotus Sūtra*, the most important sutra expounded in the five preaching periods (*goji* 五時) of the Buddha's life as formulated within Tendai doctrine, which reads: 'One who refuses to take faith in this sutra and instead slanders it... After he dies, he will fall into the hell of incessant suffering'" (YAMPOLSKY 1990, p. 24; *STN* 1: 216). The Master says that this situation is all the more troubling because the world has entered into the period of the latter age (*matsudai* 末代), a term synonymous with *mappō*. Part of the Master's criticism of Hōnen's text also revolves around the idea that Hōnen has kept the Amida sutras but thrown out the other sutras preached by Śākyamuni during the five periods of his preaching life (*goji*). The Master blames most of Japan's *mappō* ills on Hōnen, proposing that by outlawing his teaching the truth can be restored to Japan.

#### DIALOGUE 5

The Visitor defends the choice of texts prized by the Pure Land school. He names specific texts and asks if it is not true that many have achieved birth in the Pure Land of Amida as a result of following their teachings. In particular he prizes the three Pure Land sutras preached by Śākyamuni and the *Ōjōyōshū* 往生要集 (Essentials for birth in the Pure Land) of Genshin 源信 (942–1017). In the process he rejects Nāgārjuna's emptiness texts and the *Nehan-gyō*. The Visitor further argues that Hōnen studied all the Buddhist texts, including the *Lotus Sūtra* and Tiantai Zhiyi's 智顛 commentaries, and realized that the *nenbutsu* 念佛 practice was the sole necessary practice leading to salvation.

The Master counters this line of argument by explaining the five periods in which Śākyamuni preached both the provisional (*gon* 權) and true (*jitsu* 実) teachings. The Pure Land teachings, according to the Master, are the provisional teachings. Thus, he says, Hōnen spoke falsely when he said to reject all other teachings but the Pure Land teachings. The Master cites sutras and commentaries to illustrate his point that false teachings—Pure Land teachings in particular—have been spread and people do not realize that calamities and disasters occur as a result of this evil. To this end he quotes from Zhiyi (the *Mohezhi-guan* 摩訶止觀), and from Jikaku Daishi 慈覺大師 (Ennin 円仁) (the *Nittō junrei ki* 入唐巡礼記).



## DIALOGUE 6

The Visitor says he is beginning to understand the Master's teaching. Nevertheless, he challenges the Master, whom he calls a "person of humble position (*senshin* 賤身)" (YAMPOLSKY 1990, p. 29; *STN* 1: 219), saying that there are other learned monks who uphold the Dharma and yet do not preach what the Master has about Hōnen.

The Master replies that he is a humble monk, servant of the *Lotus Sūtra*, but he is justified in teaching as he does because the Dharma must be upheld. He quotes the *Nehan-gyō* to the effect that a good monk will defend the Dharma against its detractors. Hōnen is a detractor, thus the Master is justified in his criticism of Hōnen. He cites others who have criticized Hōnen, proving that the Master is not the first to do so.

## DIALOGUE 7

The Visitor is now mostly convinced of the Master's teaching, but ponders whether it is really true that Hōnen's teaching is the cause of the recent disasters and calamities. The Visitor asks how to end the calamities.

The Master replies by explaining that there are many texts in the world, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, that tell how to avoid calamities. In fact, there are so many such texts, one cannot even go through all of them. Thus, one must follow the Buddhist path. If one does this, it will become apparent that one must oppose those who slander the Dharma and respect those who uphold the true teaching. The result of this course of action will be a tranquil country and a peaceful world. He quotes sutra passages from the *Nehan-gyō*, *Ninnō-kyō*, and *Lotus Sūtra* that uphold this view. Several of the quoted passages are explicit about the fact that the ruling authorities have an important role to play in defending the Dharma from its detractors.

The Master makes a special point of discussing the *Lotus Sūtra's* view that those who denigrate the Mahāyāna sutras are committing a great sin and will be born into a horrible hell. He also mentions the view espoused in the *Nehan-gyō* that one must not give alms to those who slander the Dharma. The Master says that the *Lotus Sūtra* and the *Nehan-gyō* are the essence of the five-period teachings. One should, therefore, heed their warnings about upholding the true Dharma. The Master repeats that it is because of Hōnen that disasters occur in the world and people turn away from the true way (*shōdō* 正道).

## DIALOGUE 8

The Visitor asks if one must kill in order to eliminate those who slander

the Dharma as suggested by some of the sutra passages that the Master cited previously. The Visitor quotes the *Daishū-kyō* to the effect that it is prohibited to punish those who slander the Dharma.

The Master counters that he is only saying that one must forbid giving alms to those who slander the Dharma.

#### DIALOGUE 9

The Visitor acknowledges that Hōnen was in error and that the world will be a peaceful place if people will embrace the Correct Teaching.

The Master praises the Visitor's new-found understanding and says that if people will believe and follow his words, then the world will be at peace. The Master discusses the various disasters that the sutras say will occur if the True Dharma is not upheld. Some disasters have occurred or are already occurring; the others, he says, will no doubt follow. The sutras mentioned in this regard are the *Yakushi-kyō*, the *Daishū-kyō*, the *Konkōmyō-kyō*, and the *Ninnō-kyō*.

The Master then cites sutras to the effect that people—including rulers—will be born into an unhappy circumstance, or even a hell, if they do not give up false ideas and avoid slandering the Dharma. Sutras quoted in support of this claim are the *Daishū-kyō*, the *Ninnō-kyō*, the *Lotus Sūtra*, and the *Nehan-gyō*. The Master assures the Visitor that if the true Dharma is upheld, however, this world shall become a Buddha land (*bukko* 仏国).

#### DIALOGUE 10

The Visitor states that he understands how serious an offense it is to slander the Dharma and voices the hope that others will soon come to understand the Master's teachings.

#### *Canon Formation in the Risshō ankoku ron*

The *Risshō ankoku ron* dialogues suggest that rather than talk about “the Buddhist canon” as if it were singular, we must consider the possibility of more local, sectarian canons. These “situated canons” are multiple and generated out of the particularities of historical time and space. There is no neutral canon that represents most or all of the traditions that form the category “Buddhism.” Herbert LINDENBERGER has theorized that “the making, unmaking and remaking of canons... involve a struggle for power among competing interests” (1990, p. 144). Thus, we can understand canons as textual productions forged out of struggles over power and authority operating in particular cultural contexts, an observation that characterizes Nichiren's

struggle for power against the proponents of Pure Land Buddhism. What follows is an attempt to uncover at least some of the mechanisms by which Nichiren created a canon to deal with the realities of his day.

Nichiren made textual judgements and evaluations—thereby enacting a canon—not on the basis of some absolute source of Buddhist canonicity, but rather from within notions of authoritative texts located in the specific linguistic, conceptual, and cultural frameworks of his day. It is on the basis of this observation that I argue that Nichiren's canon is a “situated canon.”<sup>2</sup> Situated canons are authoritative texts selected from and located in particular contexts. We will not discover a universal Buddhist canon because there is no universal center or site of Buddhism in which to ground such a canon. There is no universal canon that can be found “out there,” existing apart from human subjectivities. Canons are disputed locally from the positions of those invested in their composition and implementation. Thus, we can best approach Nichiren's act of canon formation by recognizing that canons are *not* based on any utter certainty about what is most true and authoritative, but rather must be negotiated by human beings in the midst of their interpretative struggles.

Canon formation in the *Risshō ankoku ron* is articulated through the vehicle of a dialogue that narrates how the world has come to be in material and spiritual crisis. This dialogue isolates as evil those human activities that degrade the world and identifies actions based on the truth that will rectify the ills of the world. It is within this dialogical framework that Nichiren discriminates one kind of text from another in his delineation of the truth. The text most central to Nichiren's agenda is the *Lotus Sūtra*, but the *Risshō ankoku ron* dialogues indicate that Nichiren prized other sutras, and in fact needed them to support and justify his argument for the *Lotus Sūtra*'s supremacy. Nichiren views the *Lotus Sūtra* as superior, but there are other sutras that have, as Nichiren states in his *Hōonshō* 報恩抄 (1276; Repaying debts of gratitude), “passages that resemble those of the *Lotus Sūtra*” (YAMPOLSKY 1990, p. 255; *STN* 2: 1195). Nichiren's discourse requires these affiliated sutras because they speak to problems and issues that either support

<sup>2</sup> The concept of a situated canon, at least in Nichiren's case, might also be discussed in the plural, that is, in terms of multiple situated canons. The *Risshō ankoku ron* represents one discursive moment in which Nichiren draws upon specific texts to argue his point. In other treatises written at different points in his life, Nichiren utilizes other sutras and commentaries from the ones used in the *Risshō ankoku ron*. These other sutras and commentaries represent additional aspects of his canon. The situated canon established in the *Risshō ankoku ron* does not constitute Nichiren's complete canon (if we can talk about such a thing), but rather the canon necessary to his immediate argument.

the *Lotus Sūtra* or extend his rhetorical ability to defend his teaching. Thus, it is the *Lotus Sūtra* and its allied sutras that come to comprise Nichiren's situated canon. Other texts, especially the Pure Land sutras, are excluded as provisional.

In making his arguments, Nichiren selects and hierarchizes the Buddhist teachings. Not surprisingly, he focuses his analysis especially on the sutras and commentaries that were popular during his day. Thus, he deals with Tendai, Pure Land, and other teachings current during the Kamakura period. Nichiren's view of the truth or falsity of these Buddhist texts was not created outside of any context, but was rather a product of his study of Tendai Buddhism. For Nichiren, canon formation was both a continuation of and departure from traditions of sutra classification found in Tendai Buddhism. Thus, we can locate Nichiren's view of sutras, and especially his esteem for the *Lotus Sūtra*, in his study of Buddhist texts as a Tendai monk.

Although we now identify Nichiren as the founder of a new Buddhist sect, he saw himself as a reformer trying to return *Lotus Sūtra* teachings to primacy as part of the Tendai school—Nichiren's own tradition, which he believed had lost this focus. Nichiren viewed himself in a line of Tendai leaders: Zhiyi (Jpn. Chigi; 538–597; considered Tiantai's founder), Zhanran 湛然 (Jpn. Tannen; 711–782; sixth Tiantai patriarch), and Saichō 最澄 (767–822; founder of Japanese Tendai). Nichiren makes numerous references to these three, often quoting them and positively comparing himself to them.

Nichiren's Tendai training started when he was twelve with study at a local Tendai temple called Kiyosumi-dera 清澄寺 (or, Seichō-ji). The head monk of this temple was deeply interested in ritual practice involving the *nenbutsu* 念仏, recitation of the name of Amida Buddha, a practice that Nichiren would later deplore as heretical in the *Risshō ankoku ron*. Nichiren took the tonsure (*shukke* 出家) at sixteen. Subsequently he studied in Kamakura, and, from age 21, he studied for ten years at Mt. Hiei, the center of Tendai Buddhism in Japan, immersing himself in the various Buddhist practices then taught in Tendai temples. At Mt. Hiei, this study of the eclectic Tendai teachings led him finally to discover the truth located in the *Lotus Sūtra*. He declared, in effect, that other teachings were not only provisional but also irrelevant in light of knowledge of the most profound Buddhist teachings centered in the *Lotus Sūtra*. At 32, he began teaching what he had learned during his years of study, eventually taking up residence in Kamakura.

While residing in Kamakura, Nichiren questioned why, if people were faithfully practicing Buddhism, both natural and human disas-

ters continued to occur. His reflection and study on these matters led to a series of writings that culminated in the *Risshō ankoku ron*. He concluded that these disasters pointed to a national crisis requiring a national solution. He said that disasters would continue until everyone embraced the true Buddhist teaching, from the country's leaders to commoners. In the *Risshō ankoku ron* he forcefully and unambiguously asserts that the *Lotus Sūtra* is the truth and therefore central to the possibility of national salvation. Because Nichiren believed that a national embrace of the *Lotus Sūtra* must start with the example of national leaders and then spread downward through the social hierarchy to envelop all of Japan's citizens, Nichiren submitted the *Risshō ankoku ron* to Hōjō Tokiyori.<sup>3</sup>

As a Tendai monk, Nichiren accepted orthodox Tendai ideas such as notions about the hierarchy of sutras, particularly the Tendai valorization of the *Lotus Sūtra*. But his studies eventually led him in distinctive directions, such as his insistence on the absolute primacy of the *Lotus Sūtra* to the exclusion of other texts studied and practiced within Tendai, namely the Pure Land sutras. Regardless of his later innovations, Nichiren takes especially as his point of departure for the analysis of texts the Tendai sutra classification system known as the five periods (*goji*).<sup>4</sup> The five periods refer to the classification of the Buddha's earthly ministry according to the order in which he taught the sutras. This system ranks the multitude of Buddhist sutras into a hierarchy, asserting the superiority of the *Lotus Sūtra* and the *Nehan-gyō* above all other scriptures.

In the arrangement of the Buddha's teachings, Tendai proposes the superiority of the *Lotus Sūtra* at the same time that it accepts the expedient value of other Buddhist teachings. Tendai's classification of the Buddha's teachings was in part an attempt to systematize the entirety of Buddhist teaching under the framework of the *Lotus Sūtra*'s pronouncement that the apparent multitude and diversity of the Buddha's teachings are but expedient devices (*hōben* 方便) intended to lead sentient beings to the ultimate truth. Thus, the seeming conflict between teachings is attributed solely to the Buddha's preaching by expedient devices. Nichiren was well aware of the implications of the concept of *hōben*, but he nevertheless gave significant priority to the *Lotus Sūtra*, especially in relation to the eschatological idea of the end

<sup>3</sup> It is often suggested in secondary literature on Nichiren and the *Risshō ankoku ron* that the Master represents Nichiren and the Visitor represents Tokiyori.

<sup>4</sup> The many Buddhist teachings were classified by Tiantai tradition into the five periods (*goji*) and eight teachings (*hakkō*), but the *Risshō ankoku ron* focuses on the five periods. For a detailed discussion of the five periods and eight teachings see HURVITZ 1962 and CHAPPELL and ICHISHIMA 1983.

of the Dharma (*mappō*), which figures in the *Risshō ankoku ron*. Nichiren was certain that Japan had entered this time period, a temporal moment predicted by the *Lotus Sūtra*. In this sutra, the Buddha says that the *Lotus Sūtra* should be taught during *mappō* to all people. Nichiren was keen to teach the *Lotus Sūtra* and thereby fulfill its prophecies. Because Nichiren believed himself to reside in the period of the decline of the Buddha's teaching, he regards less profound teachings as not only unworthy of our attention, but in fact detrimental to our salvation. Nichiren effectively writes off these lesser texts in the *Risshō ankoku ron*.

Nichiren was familiar with the Chinese Tiantai doctrinal classification system known as *panjiao* (Jpn. *hankyō* 判教) developed by Tiantai's founder, Zhiyi, and subsequent Tiantai thinkers. Although Nichiren was indebted to the Tendai classificatory system, he also innovated it, transforming the Tendai canon from an all-inclusive, hierarchical catalog encompassing the least to most profound texts into a discrete, situated canon where some texts were rejected as provisional and others embraced as truth. Thus, when we observe Nichiren in terms of his relationship to the larger structure of Tendai thought, it is evident that he crafted his canon while mindful of his personal vision of returning Tendai to its proper state—a state that had been degraded by monks turning toward errant Amidist ideas and texts.

The sutras and treatises Nichiren uses to legitimate his ideas in the *Risshō ankoku ron* constitute at least part of his canon of authoritative texts. The citing of certain sutras to the exclusion of others evidences a selective process at work. As outlined in the Introduction, the process of canon formation includes not only methods of selection, but also ways of creating hierarchy, closure, orthodoxy, and legitimation. I will now turn to an analysis of these five processes in the *Risshō ankoku ron* and discuss their significance to the formation of a canon. By analyzing texts like the *Risshō ankoku ron* in terms of these processes, we can begin to locate the situated canon that Nichiren created in this text, as well as his other writings. This leaves us with a much more nuanced view of Nichiren than the prevalent analysis that he simply prized the *Lotus Sūtra*—which, though undoubtedly true, nevertheless obscures the significance of and necessity for discussion of other sutras in Nichiren's discourse.

Selectivity, hierarchy, closure, orthodoxy, and legitimation are not mutually exclusive. They operate together to forge a sense of the importance of the texts to which these ideas are applied. In order to flesh out their significance, though, I will deal with each in turn,

briefly explicating their significance to the idea of canon formation. I will then provide illustrations from the *Risshō ankoku ron* to demonstrate how these ideas were at work, at least implicitly, in Nichiren's thinking.

#### SELECTIVITY

The construction of a canon is a selective process, a product of choices made concerning which texts to prize and mark for inclusion, and which texts to reject and exclude. The omission of texts can be construed as the refutation of the communities that honor them and the ideas they invoke. Thus, at stake in the selection of texts is the representation of some voices to the exclusion of others. Texts are selected for inclusion in a canon because of the cultural, political, social, and religious needs of the times, *not* because they have some essence or intrinsic value that demands their inclusion.

The *Risshō ankoku ron* utilizes textual selection as a powerful mode of religious discourse that states what is to be construed as true and what is to be omitted as false. In short, Nichiren's text tells us what Buddhist ideas and teachings he believed constituted the expression of the highest truth. Selectivity is at work in the *Risshō ankoku ron* in, among other places, Dialogue 4. Here, Nichiren has the Master demarcate the kinds of text that cannot be considered canonical. The Master quotes *Senchakushū* passages that are themselves quotes or glosses of texts by famous Pure Land teachers, such as Daochuo, Tanluan, and Shandao. These texts are under censure by the Master in his refutation of their worth. In the same dialogue, part of the Master's criticism of Hōnen's text also revolves around the idea that Hōnen has kept the Amida sutras but thrown out the other sutras preached by Śākyamuni during the five periods of his life. Thus, there is a battle being fought over the canon—a disagreement over what is to be included and what is to be excluded. Clearly, Nichiren cannot enact his religiopolitical agenda if he accepts Hōnen's claims to canonical authority. Nichiren chose those texts that fit his agenda, or otherwise provided support for the tasks he hoped to accomplish. This helps to explain why, for instance, of the five-period teachings, he included Period 3 and Period 5 texts, but not the Perfection of Wisdom texts of Period 4.

#### HIERARCHY

Canons are hierarchical. For Nichiren (and any other Buddhist attempting to localize a set of authoritative scriptures) texts are not of equal value. Some texts are "better" than others, and the best are worthy for

inclusion in the canon. This is the case for Nichiren. For instance, in the *Risshō ankoku ron*, he makes continual reference to the hierarchical five periods of the Buddha's teaching. Of the sutras that the Master quotes, two—the *Lotus Sūtra* and the *Nehan-gyō*—are Period 5 teachings, the two sutras at the pinnacle of the Buddha's Dharma according to the five periods classification. The other four sutras Nichiren quotes are Period 3 sutras, the *Yakushi-kyō*, the *Daishū-kyō*, the *Konkōmyō-kyō*, and the *Ninnō-kyō*. The Master quotes or prizes Tendai interpretations when he quotes from texts other than sutras. But even this process is selective: he chooses Tendai writings that legitimate his interpretations, but he rejects, for instance, Genshin—also a Tendai priest—because he views Genshin's most noted writing as supportive of the Pure Land view that Nichiren rejects. Even Tendai writings are subject to hierarchical evaluation. Thus, Nichiren cannot simply include all writings by Tendai monks into his canon. Nichiren's regard for the hierarchy of texts also supports the observation that canon formation is always a selective process—canons, by definition, are selective.

In Dialogue 5, the Visitor states that many have gained birth in Amida's Western Paradise because they followed Pure Land teachings and the *nenbutsu* practice. He cites, in particular, the three Pure Land sutras and Genshin's *Ojōyōshū*. At the same time, the Visitor rejects the *Nehan-gyō* and texts by Nāgārjuna. It is also suggested by the Visitor that the *Lotus Sūtra* and Zhiyi's commentaries are rendered irrelevant by Pure Land practices. In order to counter these claims, clearly antithetical to Nichiren's vision, the Master invokes the five period classification in which, the Master argues, Śākyamuni preached both the provisional (*gon* 權) and true (*jitsu* 実) teachings. While in and of itself this treatment of the five periods classification is orthodox to Tendai notions, the Master takes the idea of the provisional a step further and equates the provisional with the heretical. To prove his point, the Master invokes what he believes to be true Tendai teachings (to be contrasted with the false teachings of Genshin), quoting from Zhiyi's *Mohezhi-guan* and Jikaku Daishi's *Nittō junrei ki*. Present disasters, which have been predicted to occur when false teachings are in the land, are proof of the Master's view. Through this line of reasoning, Nichiren effectively makes his canon appear more exclusive: while all the Buddha's teachings are metaphorically included in the notion of the five periods, Nichiren argues that it is a waste of time, especially when you know that the *Lotus Sūtra* is the one true teaching, to follow and practice the lesser teachings. For all practical purposes, he is narrowing the canon.



## CLOSURE

Canons require closure and fixity. Consequently, the words of the canon cannot be altered, but they can be reinterpreted. Canons suggest that the texts contained therein have a fixed significance whose meaning resides inherently in the text and is objectively observable. In the reinterpretation of a canon, the texts do not change, but their perceived significance does.

In the case of Nichiren and his departure from the Tendai textual classification, he is dealing with a rather inclusive canon that is only very broadly fixed. His interpretations remake the canon into a more closed and restricted entity. The canonical texts remain constant, as does their relationship to one another. But new interpretations, like Nichiren's, shift the canonical focus or redirect its significances, as in the case of the Tendai five-period classification. His new elaborations of meaning close off old ones. Thus, interpretation keeps the canon in a state of flux even if the canonical texts remain the same. Nichiren inherited a "pre-evaluated" Tendai canon, yet his revisions created a new view of the authoritative texts that comprised his canon. This new perspective also generated the impulse for what became a new religious movement separate from Tendai.

## ORTHODOXY

The creation of a canon is an assertion of orthodoxy, an attempt to secure control over what constitutes meaningful, important ideas and modes of being in the world. Canon formers and their subsequent supporters, in seeking to have their views recognized as orthodox, argue for the infallibility and certitude of their perspective. To argue convincingly for one's version of orthodoxy is to gain control over ideas that get disseminated in the world. To some extent, the canonization process tends to inhibit further investigations and questions about a text's value, or about its value in relation to other texts, canonical and noncanonical. In short, the canon tells us what it is good to think.

Dialogues 4 and 5 are a debate over orthodoxy. The Visitor argues for the verity of Pure Land teachings and the Master insists on the veracity of the *Lotus Sūtra* and Zhiyi's commentaries. There are significant social and political factors that ultimately adjudicate what counts as orthodoxy. In Dialogues 4 and 5, Nichiren delineates what he believes to be at least some aspects of the contours of that debate: the *Lotus Sūtra* is superior to the three Pure Land sutras, and the Sacred Way teachings (*shōdō*) are superior to the Pure Land (*jōdo*) teachings. The effective import of these statements is that Nichiren's

interpretations of the Dharma are orthodox and Hōnen's are not. The same texts that become the authoritative texts in Nichiren's canon are those cited to persuade the Visitor of the Master's contentions and claims to orthodoxy. In this sense, orthodoxy only makes sense in particular cultural contexts, not universally.

#### LEGITIMATION

Canons are legitimated. The collected texts are usually legitimated through reference to some natural, cosmic, or other authority that makes their inclusion justifiable. That is, canonical texts are legitimated to transcendent values, which in turn tend to mask the sociopolitical and ideological concerns and agendas residing in the text itself, or in the work to which the interpreter of the text is applying the text. The rhetoric that seeks to make canonical texts indisputable advances an essence that assures its canonical status (LINDENBERGER 1990, p. 147). For example, we find this rhetoric in words used to evaluate a text, words such as "immortal," "universal," "classic," "timeless," and "transcendent." Asserting the timelessness of a text suggests its eternal importance or relevance. Therefore, as Lindenberger argues, there is a need "to employ a rhetoric that suggests the permanence of the canons they advocate" (LINDENBERGER 1990, p. 147).

Like sacred texts found in other traditions, the sutras Nichiren quotes to uphold his agenda are self-legitimizing in the sense that they claim to be the universally true insights of a religious leader. The Master and Visitor in the *Risshō ankoku ron* participate in the culturally shared assumption that sutras are the authoritative words of the Buddha. Both believe that the sutras have the power, if interpreted correctly, to alleviate the ills of the nation. A "rhetoric of permanence" is implied in the *Risshō ankoku ron*'s use of the five-periods classification system to rank the *Lotus Sūtra*, the *Nehan-gyō*, and other sutras important to Nichiren's agenda as the truest teachings, superior to the provisional teachings of the Pure Land sutras. In Dialogue 7, the Master quotes sutra passages from the *Nehan-gyō*, *Ninnō-kyō*, and the *Lotus Sūtra* that uphold and legitimate his claims of doctrinal truth. Throughout the *Risshō ankoku ron*, the veracity of these claims to the legitimation of these prized sutras is tested by reference to the extent to which these sutras correctly predict the disasters happening in Japan.

A chart of the texts included and excluded in the *Risshō ankoku ron* dialogues clarifies the constitution of the canon Nichiren is constructing. Texts mentioned by the Visitor in support of Pure Land, except for the *Daishū-kyō*, are also texts that Nichiren condemns as false.

In this list of authoritative and heretical sutras, the offending texts are

### Texts Quoted by the Master in Support of His View

Text	Total	Dialogue number(s)
<i>Daishū-kyō</i> 大集經	4	#2/2x, #9/2x
<i>Hoke-kyō</i> 法華經 ( <i>Lotus Sūtra</i> )	4	#3/1x, #4/1x, #7/1x, #9/1x
<i>Konkōmyō-kyō</i> 金光明經	2	#2/1x, #9/1x
<i>Nehan-gyō</i> 涅槃經	12	#3/2x, #6/1x, #7/8x, #9/1x
<i>Ninnō-kyō</i> 仁王經	7	#2/3x, #3/1x, #7/1x, #9/2x
<i>Yakushi-kyō</i> 藥師經	2	#2/1x, #9/1x
Zhiyi's <i>Mohezhi-guan</i> 摩訶止觀	1	#5
Ennin's <i>Nittō junrei ki</i> 入唐巡礼記	1	#5

### Texts Quoted by the Master to Show Their Error

Text	Total	Dialogue number(s)
Hōnen's <i>Senchakushū</i>	1	#4
<i>Kanmuryōju-kyō</i>	1	#4

### Texts Mentioned by the Visitor

Text	Total	Dialogue number(s)
<i>Senchakushū</i>	1	#4
Nāgārjuna's emptiness texts	1	#5 (negative mention)
Amida sutras	1	#5
<i>Ōjōyōshū</i>	1	#5
<i>Nehan-gyō</i>	1	#5 (negative mention)
<i>Daishū-kyō</i>	1	#7

not objectively offensive or untrue. Rather, they are errant because of their association with particular Buddhists whom Nichiren deemed enemies to his conception of the true Dharma. The “establishment of the true teaching” (*risshō* 立正) was at once the establishment of a canon. This is the context in which Nichiren implies a canon through the repeated reference to the same sutras. He suggests a canon of prized texts that are authoritative and assert the agenda he wishes imposed on all of Japan. Because he has cited a “true teaching” that must be relied upon in order to avert further disasters, he thereby simultaneously asserts both the texts and the religious agenda that must be imposed throughout Japan.

### Conclusions

The *Risshō ankoku ron* can be understood as a text that incorporates aspects of the Tendai sutra classification system but concurrently creates a situated canon in order to promote specific ideas and practices central to Nichiren's vision of a Buddhist nation. Nichiren prizes the texts he does because they assist him in arguing his point. The operation of canon formation in the *Risshō ankoku ron* leaves us with a significant question: Was Nichiren forming a new canon (a Nichiren canon) or was he reforming an old one (the Tendai canon)?

Depending on our perspective, he was doing one or the other, or both. If we view Nichiren from the standpoint of his own time and place, he can be seen as reforming the old canon, and in the process clarifying and reasserting the centrality of the *Lotus Sūtra* to that system. If we view Nichiren from the standpoint of his subsequent history, and from the development of the history of Nichiren Buddhism, he can be seen as having created a new canon, one that jettisoned those aspects of the five-period system that did not fit his religious agenda for Japan. This new canon was to become the authoritative center of Nichiren Buddhist thought and practice.

If we view Nichiren not from a historical perspective, but rather from the theoretical perspective of canon formation, we can argue that he was both forming a new canon and reforming an old one. Canon formation and canon change function in similar ways because there is always a preexisting canon to which the canon former or reformer reacts. In the case of Nichiren, he was reacting to and informed by his perception that the true Buddhist teachings were being ignored or slandered, and that they had to be reasserted through the articulation of a canon of true and authoritative texts. Through this process of reassertion, he ended up modifying the Tendai canon and in effect created a new canon, one that we can think of as the Nichiren canon. LINDENBERGER (1990, p. 138) has argued that canon change gets initiated or that interpretations of the canon change when people perceive that the canon has lost its relevance for their particular situation. This is an apt description of the position that Nichiren apparently saw himself in.

In his reformulation of the Tendai canon, Nichiren redirects the status of the textual order originally given. As we have seen, he privileges the Period 5 and Period 3 teachings and texts, thereby altering the relationship and significance of these texts, and backgrounding the texts he deems insignificant to his mission or which he sees as heretical. For Nichiren to assert the religious authority of specific texts provides the possibility of achieving a new canonical status for

these prized texts, as well as status for his own agenda as legitimate and true. The act of canonizing texts that uphold one's view of the world provides support for the authenticity of one's worldview. Texts included in a canon automatically have status conferred on them. Nichiren's accomplishment—the forging of a new canon—serves his self-interest by legitimating his worldview.

The act of formalizing the canon reifies acceptable and unacceptable views and opinions. It also creates a normative interpretation that can be used to measure the conformity of other interpretations. Views that do not conform can then be censured on the basis that they violate the truth the canon articulates. This canonical truth is legitimated by transcendent structures or by views of ultimate reality that are understood to be inviolable. Dissension and conflicting interpretations can thereby be evaluated as untrue and dismissed, persecuted, or otherwise disregarded. Framers of canonical orthodoxy and their followers place themselves at the center of the universe and thereby wield great power and authority.

Nichiren's canon-making is, among other things, political. "Political" refers here to relationships and systems of power and authority that exist within a given cultural context. Nichiren's politics of canonization is concerned with who has control over what is acceptable speech and behavior, and who determines what is right and wrong. Crafters of canons like Nichiren are not innocently classifying texts; they are actively altering political and social relationships. In this sense, canonization is a rhetoric of thought and action that is situated within the parameters of culturally-specific religious discourses that can transform the relationships of power and authority existing within those particular contexts. Canonization transforms a text's status within the web of complex social and political relationships and rearranges the power and authority brokered within these relationships in culturally significant ways.

For example, part of Nichiren's ostensible agenda in writing the *Risshō ankoku ron* was to persuade the military leaders in Kamakura to declare the primacy of the *Lotus Sūtra* (and Nichiren's interpretation thereof) and to promote the notion that the nation's mission was to serve Buddhism. This was a significant rethinking of older Tendai (and other) Japanese Buddhist models whereby Buddhism was to be embraced and propagated because it ably fulfilled the role of protecting the nation. Early in Japanese Buddhist history the *Lotus Sūtra* was considered to be one of the three sutras that would protect the nation from harm (*chingo kokka* 鎮護国家).

Nichiren's implied canon contributed to this view of the relation-

ship between Buddhism and the state by postulating a single authority, the *Lotus Sūtra*, supported by other doctrinally-related texts. With the *Lotus Sūtra* as highest authority, the state must serve as Buddhism's protector, not the other way around. Ultimately, it is Nichiren's rhetoric of canonization that allows him to argue for the state as protector of Buddhism. This authoritative rhetoric is exemplified by the erudite but unnamed "Master" (Nichiren?) who represents the strategy of a dispassionate and objective viewpoint, lending further credence to the idea that he is merely revealing a truth whose source lies in the reality of the universe itself.

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