

Placing Nichiren in the “Big Picture” Some Ongoing Issues in Scholarship

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This article places Nichiren within the context of three larger scholarly issues: definitions of the new Buddhist movements of the Kamakura period; the reception of the Tendai discourse of original enlightenment (hongaku) among the new Buddhist movements; and new attempts, emerging in the medieval period, to locate “Japan” in the cosmos and in history. It shows how Nichiren has been represented as either politically conservative or radical, marginal to the new Buddhism or its paradigmatic figure, depending upon which model of “Kamakura new Buddhism” is employed. It also shows how the question of Nichiren’s appropriation of original enlightenment thought has been influenced by models of Kamakura Buddhism emphasizing the polarity between “old” and “new” institutions and suggests a different approach. Lastly, it surveys some aspects of Nichiren’s thinking about “Japan” for the light they shed on larger, emergent medieval discourses of Japan’s religiocosmic significance, an issue that cuts across the “old Buddhism”/“new Buddhism” divide.

Keywords: Nichiren — Tendai — original enlightenment — Kamakura Buddhism — medieval Japan — *shinkoku*

FOR THIS ISSUE I was asked to write an overview of recent scholarship on Nichiren. A comprehensive overview would exceed the scope of one article. To provide some focus and also adumbrate the significance of Nichiren studies to the broader field of Japanese religions, I have chosen to consider Nichiren in the contexts of three larger areas of modern scholarly inquiry: “Kamakura new Buddhism,” its relation to Tendai original enlightenment thought, and new religiocosmological concepts of “Japan” that emerged in the medieval period. In the case of the first two areas—Kamakura new Buddhism and original enlightenment thought—this article will address how some of the major interpretive frameworks have shaped our view of Nichiren, and how study of Nichiren has in turn affected larger scholarly pictures.

Some assessment of current interpretations and alternative suggestions will also be offered. Medieval concepts of Japan, however, represents an area where the importance of Nichiren has yet to be fully recognized, and this final section of the article suggests the potential contribution to be made by an investigation of his thought in this regard.

Nichiren and Kamakura Buddhism

No era in Japanese Buddhist history has received more scholarly attention than the Kamakura period (1185–1333). This was the time when several of the Buddhist traditions most influential in Japan today—Zen, Pure Land, and Nichiren—had their institutional beginnings. Indeed, for many years, the study of Kamakura Buddhism was largely equivalent to the study of sectarian origins. The last two decades, however, have seen a dramatic methodological shift, which in turn has affected scholarly readings of Nichiren.

Beginning before the war, a major category in studies of Kamakura Buddhism was the “Kamakura new Buddhism” 鎌倉新仏教—that is, the movements beginning with Hōnen, Shinran, Eisai, Dōgen, and Nichiren (Ippen is also sometimes included). Especially in the postwar period, the older institutionalized Buddhism from which these founders had emerged was treated primarily as the backdrop for their religious innovations. “Old Buddhism”—Tendai, Shingon, and the Nara schools—was regarded in the dominant postwar model of Kamakura Buddhism as a moribund remnant of the state Buddhism of the *ritsuryō* 律令 system, elitist, overly scholastic, and unable either to respond to the religious needs of the common people in the face of an alleged sense of crisis accompanying the arrival of the Final Dharma age (*mappō* 末法) or to accommodate to rapid social change brought about by the rise of warrior power. In contrast, the new Kamakura Buddhist movements were seen as egalitarian and lay oriented, offering easily accessible religious practices. They were often represented in a “Protestant” light, as having rejected worship of the myriad kami and the apotropaic rites of esoteric Buddhism. And, unlike the commitment of “old Buddhism” to serving the state with its rituals of nation protection, the new Buddhism was deemed to have been concerned chiefly with individual salvation. Postwar “new Buddhism”—centered models of Kamakura Buddhism were represented by such scholars as Ienaga Saburō and Inoue Mitsusada, for whom the exclusive Pure Land movement was paradigmatic. This model often characterized Nichiren as an in-between figure who had not fully negotiated the transition from “old” to “new.” For Ienaga in particular, Nichiren’s belief in

the efficacy of ritual prayers (*kitō* 祈禱) and his concern with the Japanese kami placed him squarely in the lineage of “old Buddhism”; any “new Buddhist” elements in his teaching were due solely to Hōnen’s influence (IENAGA 1947, pp. 96, 63). In particular, Ienaga saw his emphasis on “nation protection” (*chingo kokka* 鎮護國家) as indistinguishable from that of Nara and Heian times, something that “presents a large obstacle to understanding Nichiren’s religion solely in terms of the so-called new Buddhism” (p. 68). Ienaga is an outstanding scholar, and his work on Kamakura Buddhism, read critically, is still useful today. Nonetheless, he was writing in the immediate post-war period, when conscientious scholars of Buddhism were just beginning to confront the troubling legacy of institutional Buddhism’s recent support for militant Japanese imperialism. In that context, Nichiren’s concern with the relationship between Buddhism and government could perhaps be seen only in a negative light.

A major challenge to “new Buddhism”-centered models of Kamakura Buddhism came about through the work of the late historian Kuroda Toshio (1926–1993), whose work is too famous to need much discussion here (see DOBBINS 1996). Kuroda conclusively demonstrated that the dominant forms of medieval Japanese Buddhism were not the Kamakura new Buddhist movements, which did not attain significant institutional presence until the late medieval period, but rather the temple-shrine complexes of “old Buddhism.” Kuroda found that, far from being an ossified remnant of Nara state Buddhism, these institutions had evolved distinctively medieval forms of organization, deriving their support, not from the imperial court, but from their own extensive private estates or *shōen* 莊園. As major landholders, together with the court and later the *bushi* 武士 (warrior) leadership, these temple-shrine complexes emerged as one of the powerful *kenmon* or ruling elites that formed the joint system of medieval governance (*kenmon taisei* 権門体制). As one of these powerful factions, the leading Buddhist temples joined across sectarian lines to form a distinctive ritual and ideological system that Kuroda called the *kenmitsu taisei* 顯密体制—a fusion of the exoteric doctrines of particular Buddhist schools with a shared body of esoteric ritual that provided both thaumaturgical support and religious legitimization for existing rule. *Kenmitsu* Buddhism, Kuroda argued, overwhelmingly represented orthodoxy (*seitō* 正統) for the period. Within this overarching system, the new Buddhist movements of the Kamakura period were mere marginal heterodoxies (*itan* 異端).

Kuroda’s work produced a revolution in scholarly approaches to medieval Japanese religion. He shifted attention away from the long-standing approaches of doctrinal and sectarian history to focus on the

political, economic, ideological, and other previously neglected dimensions of the field. He transcended an earlier emphasis on individual sects by noting underlying structures that cut across traditions, such as the exo-esoteric fusion (*kenmitsu*); discourse of the mutual dependence of imperial law and Buddhism (*ōbō buppō sōi ron* 王法佛法相依論); or the *honji-suijaku* 本地垂迹 logic that identified kami as the local manifestations of buddhas and bodhisattvas, thus enabling the incorporation of spirit cults and kami worship within the *kenmitsu* system. The implications of his work have yet to be fully explored. Kuroda himself did not study Nichiren in any detail, but his understanding of the new Buddhist movements of the Kamakura period as small heterodox movements defining themselves over and against the dominant religiopolitical establishment opened a new perspective from which Nichiren might be reconsidered. Here we will briefly consider some aspects of the work of Sasaki Kaoru and Satō Hiroo, two scholars who have focused on Nichiren in this light.

NICHIREN AS “ANTIESTABLISHMENT”

Sasaki Kaoru has built upon Kuroda’s work to clarify the nature of the dominant religious establishment against which the new movements, including Nichiren’s, were reacting. He argues that Kuroda’s category of *kenmitsu taisei* typifies the religious institutions of Kyoto aristocrats but is not adequate to describe the religious support structure of the Kamakura Bakufu, which developed its own religious policy. Sasaki accordingly introduces the concept of *zenmitsu shugi* 禪密主義, a religious ideology composed of Zen and esoteric elements stemming from the activities of those Zen monks and *mikkyō* ritual specialists who provided the Bakufu with religious support. The Buddhism bolstering the established system of rule (*taisei Bukkyō* 体制仏教) can thus be divided into that of the court aristocracy and that of the leading Kamakura *bushi*. Over and against this dominant “establishment Buddhism,” Sasaki sets up two further categories: antiestablishment Buddhism (*han-taisei Bukkyō* 反体制仏教), or those who defined themselves over and against the dominant religious system, and “transestablishment Buddhism” (*chō-taisei Bukkyō* 超体制仏教), or those whose religion was defined independently of the tension between the other two (SASAKI 1988, 1997).

One of the most striking features of Sasaki’s work on Nichiren is his analysis of how Nichiren gradually shifted, over the course of his life, from an “establishment” to an “antiestablishment” position. As others have noted, Nichiren in the early stages of his career was very much self-identified with “old Buddhism” or the *kenmitsu* of Tendai (KAWAZOE 1955–1956; IEGAMI 1976; SATŌ 1978). His criticism of Hōnen’s

exclusive *nenbutsu* was launched from this *kenmitsu* standpoint. Nichiren saw himself as a successor to Myōe 明恵 and others of the established Buddhist schools who had written critiques of Hōnen’s *Senchakushū* 選択集 (*Shugo kokka ron* 守護国家論, *STN* 1: 90) and, contra Hōnen’s exclusive *nenbutsu* doctrine, still spoke at this stage of the esoteric teachings and other Mahāyāna sutras, along with the *Lotus Sūtra*, as worthy teachings to be upheld. He also criticized the exclusive *nenbutsu* movement for undermining the Tendai economic base. But Nichiren’s early self-identification was with the Tendai of Mt. Hiei, and relations between the Bakufu and Mt. Hiei were anything but cordial. The Bakufu had a number of Tendai monks in its service; for example, of the seventeen successive chief superintendents (*bettō* 别当) of Kamakura’s Tsurugaoka Hachiman Shrine 鶴岡八幡宮 who served between 1180 and 1266, ten were Tendai monks. All, however, belonged to the rival Tendai lineage of Onjō-ji 園城寺, which had enjoyed a longstanding relationship with the Minamoto house. Bakufu religious policy, says SASAKI (1997, pp. 405, 421–22), was informed by anti-Hiei sentiment—one reason, in his estimation, why Nichiren encountered persecution.

Sasaki divides Nichiren’s thinking into three periods demarcated by his exile to Sado Island: pre-Sado (up until 1271), Sado (1271–1274), and post-Sado (1274–1282), or the years of his retirement on Mt. Minobu. He traces Nichiren’s shift from an establishment to anti-establishment perspective through an exhaustive reading of his works and collation of their internal evidence, focusing on Nichiren’s view of the emperor and the Bakufu, his criticism of the esoteric teachings (*mikkyō*), and his understanding of the kami (SASAKI 1997, pp. 287–415).

In his early writings, Sasaki says, Nichiren saw the emperor or *tennō* 天皇 as Japan’s actual ruler (*jisshitsuteki kokushu* 實質の国主) and the Bakufu as subordinate, an upstart in terms of pedigree and the ruler merely in name or form. While in exile on Sado, however, his thinking on this matter began to change, undergoing a radical transformation during the Minobu years. This becomes particularly evident in his understanding of the Jōkyū Uprising of 1221, in which the retired emperor Go-Toba sought to overthrow the Bakufu and restore full imperial authority but was defeated by the Kamakura forces under the command of Hōjō Yoshitoki. As a result, despite his imperial status, Go-Toba and two other retired emperors who had supported him were sent into exile. Nichiren interpreted this as due to Go-Toba’s reliance on *mikkyō* ritual rather than the *Lotus Sūtra* for his thaumaturgical support, as well as the spread of other, “inferior” teachings. This inversion of the proper hierarchy of “true” and “provisional” in the realm of Buddhism led to a corresponding upset in worldly rule:

Not only were estates dedicated to support the true sutra seized and stolen and converted into the domains of the provisional sutras of *shingon*, but because all the people of Japan had embraced the evil doctrines of the Zen and *nenbutsu* sects, there occurred the most unprecedented overturning of high and low (*gekokujō* 下剋上) the world has ever seen. However, the lord of Sagami [Hōjō Yoshitoki] was innocent of slandering the Dharma, and in addition, was master of both literary and military arts. Thus Heaven permitted him to become ruler (*kokushu* 国主). (*Shimoyama goshōsoku* 下山御消息 STN 2: 1329)

Nichiren also reconciled the fact of Go-Toba's defeat with the tradition that the bodhisattva Hachiman had vowed to make his dwelling on the heads of honest persons and in particular to protect one hundred honest sovereigns in succession. Nichiren interpreted "honest" in both the worldly sense, meaning free from falsehood, and in a religious sense, as according with the *Lotus Sūtra*, in which Śākyamuni Buddha vowed that he would "honestly discard skillful means" and "preach only the unexcelled Way" (T. no. 262, 9.10a). "The retired emperor of Ōki [Go-Toba] was in name the nation's ruler, but he was a liar and a wicked man." In contrast, Yoshitoki was "in name the vassal, but in his person a great sovereign and without falsehood"; hence Hachiman had abandoned Go-Toba, the eighty-second *tennō*, and transferred his protection to Yoshitoki (*Kangyō Hachiman shō* 諫曉八幡抄, STN 2: 1848). A similar logic informs Nichiren's reading, during the Minobu period, of the defeat of the Taira in 1185. Like Go-Toba four decades later, the Taira had relied on *mikkyō* ritual in their prayers for victory; hence the emperor Antoku, drowned in the battle of Dan-no-Ura, had been "attacked by the general Minamoto no Yoritomo and became food for the fish in the sea" (*Shinkokuō gosho* 神国王御書, STN 1: 881; see also pp. 884-85), while Yoritomo was able "not only to defeat the enemy but also to become the great general of the warriors of Japan, solely because of the power of the *Lotus Sūtra*" (*Nanjō-dono gohenji* 南条殿御返事, STN 2: 1175. Yoritomo's respect for the *Lotus Sūtra* is historically attested). Nichiren also says that, just as the bodhisattva Hachiman had shifted his allegiance from Go-Toba to Yoshitoki, so had he also earlier transferred his protection from Antoku to Yoritomo (*Shijō Kingo-gari onfumi* 四条金吾許御文, STN 2: 1824). Thus in Sasaki's view, during the Minobu period, Nichiren's view of who represented Japan's legitimate ruler completed a 180° turn. The emperor, whom he had looked upon before the Sado exile as the actual ruler, he now relegated to the status of ruler in name only. Clearly this view saw legitimacy of rule as deriving, not from the imperial bloodline, but from readiness to protect the *Lotus Sūtra*.

As Sasaki notes, Nichiren’s view of the shift of authority from Go-Toba to Yoshitoki was inseparable from his criticism of the esoteric teachings. This criticism begins from about 1269 and develops during the Sado and post-Sado years. It was from the Sado exile on that Nichiren began to interpret Go-Toba’s defeat as an example of the pernicious effects of relying on *mikkyō* ritual. This reflected not merely Nichiren’s interpretation of past events but was also intimately connected to his view of present Bakufu policy. Even before the arrival of the letter from the Mongols demanding that Japan enter into a tributary relationship, the Bakufu had sponsored esoteric rites: the position of chief superintendent of the Tsurugaoka Hachiman Shrine was dominated by *mikkyō* ritual specialists from the imperial capital, chiefly from the lineages of Tō-ji and Onjō-ji. Patronage had also been extended to prominent *mikkyō* ritualists of the Saidai-ji precept lineage: Eison 叡尊 (1201–1290) and his disciple Ninshō 忍性 (1217–1303). Now, in the face of the Mongol threat, the Bakufu was all the more eager to sponsor such rituals for thaumaturgical protection. Nichiren, however, saw the Mongol threat itself as the result of slander of the true Dharma, to be averted only by wholehearted conversion to the *Lotus Sūtra*; thus in his eyes, the Bakufu was in imminent danger of destroying itself in the same manner that Go-Toba had done decades earlier. In contrast to his early criticism of the exclusive *nenbutsu*, which was closely linked to the views of the Buddhist establishment, Nichiren’s criticism of Zen and especially *mikkyō* was developed from the standpoint of his growing Lotus exclusivism and antiestablishment outlook that culminated during the Minobu years. According to Sasaki, in this period of Nichiren’s life, all notions of worldly rule (*ōbō*) as a separate authority dropped from his worldview and only the authority of Buddhism (*buppō*) remained; Nichiren’s vision was now that of a transcendent “world of the *Lotus Sūtra*” (*Hokekyō no sekai* 法華經の世界) in which all legitimacy of rule was to be judged solely by the standard of whether or not the *Lotus Sūtra* was upheld (SASAKI 1997, pp. 309–10).¹

¹ While expressing admiration for Sasaki’s research, Satō Hiroo has offered some correctives and clarifications. First, Satō finds that Nichiren’s early writings distinguish between the sovereign (*kokūō* 国王), or head of the country, and the ruler (*kokushu* 国主), who carries out actual administration. Satō argues that Nichiren always identified the Hōjō with the *kokushu*, at least with regard to the Kantō provinces, though his earlier writings accord the *tennō* superior authority. Thus Sasaki’s claim that Nichiren before Sado saw the *tennō* as the “actual ruler” may have to be reevaluated. Second, Satō cautions that Nichiren’s references to Heaven allowing Yoshitoki to become ruler, or the transfer of Hachiman’s protection from Go-Toba to Yoshitoki, does not mean, as some scholars have suggested, that Nichiren endorsed ideas of overthrowing the imperial dynasty under a new mandate of Heaven, or that he saw the imperial line as having been abrogated. The emperor remained head of the country; it was the actual authority of rule that Nichiren saw as having shifted to the Bakufu.

The emergence in Nichiren's thinking of a transcendent "world of the *Lotus Sūtra*" can also be traced, Sasaki argues, through his changing views of the kami. An early letter (1264) to a female follower addresses her questions concerning menstrual taboos, which Nichiren dismissed as irrelevant from a Buddhist standpoint but accorded a limited local significance as something generally expected by the kami. "Japan is a land of the kami (*shinkoku* 神国)," he wrote, "and the way of this country is that, strange as it may be when they are manifestations (*suijaku*) of buddhas and bodhisattvas, [the kami] in many respects do not conform to the sutras and [Buddhist] treatises.... And yet we find men of wisdom who... forcefully insist that the kami are demonic and not to be revered, thus causing harm to their lay supporters" (*Gassui gosho* 月水御書, *STN* 1: 292; see also YAMPOLSKY 1996, p. 256). Sasaki sees this passage as reflecting uncritical acceptance of the Japanese kami and participating in the Buddhist establishment's criticism of exclusive *nenbutsu* practitioners for their refusal to worship them. On Sado, however, the Japanese kami, especially Tenshō Daijin (Amaterasu Ōmikami 天照大神) and Hachiman, undergo redefinition in his thought as protectors of the *Lotus Sūtra* and its practitioners. In other words, Nichiren divorced them from their specific association with Japan and relocated them within the world of the *Lotus Sūtra* as Buddhist tutelary deities who protect the true Dharma.² Sasaki finds that Nichiren's relativizing of the kami vis-à-vis the *Lotus Sūtra* continued during the Minobu period and took various forms. A letter dated soon after his reclusion declares furiously that Brahmā, Indra, the sun and moon deities, and the four deva kings are doomed to the Avīci hell for failing to protect him and his mission as the votary of the *Lotus Sūtra* (*Shinkokuō gosho*, *STN* 1: 893), while three years later he wrote that these same deities had commanded the Mongols to chastise Japan for its slander of the *Lotus Sūtra* and that "Tenshō Daijin and the bodhisattva Hachiman are powerless to help" (*Yorimoto chinjō* 頼基陳狀 *STN* 2: 1359). When a fire destroyed the Tsurugaoka Hachiman shrine in 1280, Nichiren wrote that Hachiman, who had vowed to pro-

Third, Satō argues that Nichiren never abandoned hope of finding some form of government support for his teaching. When he despaired of gaining endorsement from the Bakufu, he for a time entertained hopes of winning a hearing from the *tennō*; this, in Satō's view, is why his post-1278 writings show increased awareness of the emperor, and not, as some modern nationalists have argued, because he was a supporter of imperial rule (SATŌ 1998, pp. 253-304). While Satō does not address the issue, the *Sandai hihō shō* discussed by Sueki Fumihiko in this volume might, if it is genuine, be fruitfully considered in this light.

² It is in this rather minor role in the Buddhist hierarchy that Tenshō Daijin and Hachiman appear on Nichiren's mandala. During the last years of the Pacific War, the Ministry of Education, prompted by the complaints of shrine priests, demanded that the mandala be revised. The war ended before the issue could be resolved (see ISHIKAWA 1975).

tect "honest persons," had razed his own shrine and ascended to the heavens because there were no more honest persons in Japan, only Dharma slanderers (*Shijō Kingo-gari onfumi*, STN 2: 1823; see also *Kangyō Hachiman shō* STN 2: 1849). It is an error, Sasaki concludes, to label Nichiren's view of the kami a remnant of "old Buddhism," as Ienaga did. In his later thought, Nichiren came thoroughly to reject the *honji-suijaku* notions that bolstered the authority of establishment Buddhism and deemed the kami significant only insofar as they protect the "world of the *Lotus Sūtra*." This was in effect a denial of the kami in their original status as the deities of Japan and thus consistent with the rejection of kami worship said to characterize the new Buddhism.

THE "LOGIC OF EXCLUSIVE CHOICE"

Another reading of Nichiren and Kamakura Buddhism to build upon the insights of Kuroda Toshio is that of SATO Hiroo (1987, 1998). Satō's larger project has been to investigate the differences in the underlying "logic" of both *kenmitsu* orthodoxy and the heterodox *itan*, as well as in their respective cosmological visions. "Old Buddhist" institutions of the medieval period, Satō finds, were supported by what he terms a "logic of harmony" (*yūwa no ronri* 融和の論理). According to this logic, all Buddhist teachings are true. The differences among various teachings and practices are necessitated by the varying capacities of practitioners, so that no one will slip through the net of the Buddha's salvific intent. This assertion that "all Buddhism is true" did not, of course, preclude asserting the supremacy of one's own tradition by arguing that it was intended for persons of the most highly developed faculties. In Satō's view, the "logic of harmony" was by no means a medieval equivalent of modern ideals of religious tolerance or pluralism but rather was enlisted for various forms of social control. It served to maintain a loose unity among rival Buddhist institutions as the *kenmitsu* system; one could assert the superiority of one's own school or lineage but could not deny that others had their own validity. Additionally, the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, or kami enshrined as objects of worship in a particular temple or shrine were all seen as particular embodiments of universal truth. Thus the *shōen* attached to these institutions could be defined as "Buddha lands" and the taxes and labor of peasants employed on them, as "offerings to the Buddha"; similarly, peasant negligence or resistance in providing these services could be averted by the threat of divine punishment. Lastly, Satō claims, the recognition of distinctions of superior and inferior spiritual faculties inherent in the "logic of harmony" served by analogy to legitimize the existing social hierarchy.

In contrast, the new Buddhism, beginning with Hōnen and devel-

oped by Shinran and especially Nichiren, is characterized in Satō's view by a "logic of exclusive choice" (*senchaku no ronri* 選択の論理). This logic holds one form of Buddhism alone to be valid and denies the soteriological efficacy of all others. For Satō, this logic goes well beyond simple commitment to a single form of practice; he notes that even within the framework of the old Buddhism supported by the "logic of harmony," one finds practitioners who relied, for example, solely on the *nenbutsu*, arguing that it was the only teaching suited to their particular capacity. What distinguishes the "logic of exclusive choice" is its categorical rejection of all other forms as soteriologically useless. Satō sees this logic as backed by the absolute authority of a single, personified transcendent Buddha, from whom all other authority was seen to derive. The "logic of exclusive choice" in effect denied not only all other forms of religious practice but also the entire "logic of harmony" and, implicitly, the system it legitimized. This new concept, Satō writes, "aimed at a completely different sort of society, in which the worldly law was subordinated to the Buddha Dharma and in which, under the Buddha who held sovereignty over the land, all people were placed equally, without regard for origins or status" (SATŌ 1998, p. 40).

We have noted how postwar models that saw a focus on individual salvation as characteristic of "Kamakura new Buddhism" regarded the exclusive Pure Land movement as central, and Nichiren, with his concern for the nation, as having not yet fully emerged from the framework of "old Buddhism." But when the new Buddhism is redefined, as in the more recent, Kuroda-inspired models, in terms of resistance to the religiopolitical establishment, it is Nichiren who inevitably emerges as its paradigmatic figure. In Hōnen's case, for example, the potential of the exclusive *nenbutsu* to function as a critique of the *kenmitsu* system remains undeveloped. He discouraged his followers from criticizing the worship of other buddhas or kami and did not put forth a clear argument about the relationship of Buddhism to worldly authority; thus religion in Hōnen's teaching remains apart from worldly affairs. Nichiren's teaching, on the other hand, *requires* the believer to engage in such criticism as an act of compassion, even at the risk of one's life. This was because he saw the "exclusive choice" of the *Lotus Sūtra* as determining, not only one's personal salvation, but also the welfare of the country. He elaborated an entire concomitant discourse about fulfilling the mission of a bodhisattva by practicing *shakubuku*, the rebuking of attachment to provisional teachings, and eradicating one's past sins by encountering persecution as a result. Moreover, he was very clear about how Buddhism is related to worldly authority. In

contrast to “old Buddhist” discourse of the mutual dependence of Buddhism and worldly rule, Nichiren separated the two and radically relativized the latter. In his eyes it was the ruler’s duty to protect the true Dharma, and he ruled legitimately only so long as he fulfilled it (SATŌ 1978, pp. 22–23; see also Satō’s article in this volume).

Earlier postwar scholars of Nichiren, such as Fujii Manabu, Tokoro Shigemoto, Takagi Yutaka, and Kawazoe Shōji, had already noted his critical attitude toward the establishment and his subordination of worldly authority to the Buddha Dharma. Sasaki and Satō have further built upon the work of these predecessors and additionally placed Nichiren in a larger interpretive framework of Kamakura Buddhism, particularly of the *itan* or marginal movements, that draws upon the insights of Kuroda Toshio. Despite their innovative approaches, both have been criticized for reproducing “new Buddhism”-centered views of Kamakura Buddhism, excessively polarized between the new movements, seen as egalitarian, progressive, and liberating, over and against an oppressive Buddhist establishment (KURODA 1990, pp. 7–11; SUEKI 1993; see also the response to Kuroda in SATŌ 1998, pp. 439–51). A discussion of the strengths and shortcomings of their models in illuminating Kamakura Buddhism as a whole would exceed the scope of this article. Here, however, we may note their very substantial contributions to our understanding of Nichiren. By drawing attention to the long-neglected ideological side of his teaching, they offer new insight into how he saw the relationship of Buddhism to political authority, showing conclusively that it was by no means a mere continuation of earlier notions of nation-protection or the mutual dependence of Buddhism and worldly rule; rather, drawing on elements in these earlier systems, Nichiren constructed a different legitimizing approach that established the *Lotus Sūtra* as the sole source of authority and was in fact highly critical of the existing system. Needless to say, they have also driven some very large nails into the coffin of earlier images of Nichiren as a fervent supporter of the emperor who valued nation above all.

THE LIMITS OF RESISTANCE

Nonetheless, if it is inappropriate to see Nichiren as an imperial supporter and ardent nationalist, it is also possible to go to extremes in characterizing him as a figure of resistance. This aspect of his teaching emerges most dramatically when Kamakura Buddhism is defined in terms of a polarization between established institutions and new heterodox movements. Another approach might be—without losing sight of Nichiren’s “antiestablishment” side pointed out by Sasaki and

Satō—to see how he was at the same time embedded in the values and conceptual structures of the medieval period that were shared across the “new Buddhism”/“old Buddhism” divide.

In what sense was Nichiren’s Buddhism “antiestablishment”? Fundamentally, this has to do with how he understood the locus of authority. If all authority emanates from the *Lotus Sūtra*, then those who reject the sutra may wield illegitimate power but by definition can have no authority whatever. Thus in cases where government contravenes the *Lotus Sūtra*, there is no doubt but that Nichiren’s *Lotus* exclusivism—his “logic of exclusive choice”—established a basis for moral resistance. This was one of Nichiren’s most significant legacies. While often compromised by his later tradition in the interests of securing the institutional foundations of the Nichiren Hokkeshū, it was periodically revived by individuals and factions within the tradition in acts of exceptional courage, even martyrdom, in resistance to worldly rule (STONE 1994).

Nichiren’s investing of ultimate authority in the *Lotus Sūtra* works to undercut or even invert all hierarchies constructed on other bases. Buddhism is not in the ruler’s service; rather, the ruler is obligated to protect the Buddha Dharma. The Final Dharma age, widely understood as frightful and degenerate, is redefined as the most auspicious moment to be alive, because it is the very time when the *Lotus Sūtra* is destined to spread. Similarly the lowly, even the polluted, who embrace *Lotus Sūtra* are raised above those of lofty status who do not: “Rather than be great rulers during the two thousand years of the True and Semblance Dharma ages, those concerned for their salvation should rather be common people now in the Final Dharma age.... It is better to be a leper who chants Namu-myōhō-enge-kyō than to be chief abbot of the Tendai school” (*Senji shō* 撰時抄, STN 2: 1009). A similar logic holds true for gender hierarchy: “A woman who embraces this [*Lotus*] *Sūtra* not only excels all other women but also surpasses all men” (*Shijō Kingo-dono nyōbō gohenji* 四条金吾殿女房御返事, STN 1: 857) and for that of sacred and profane places: “A hundred years’ practice in [the Pure Land of] Utmost Bliss cannot equal the merit of a single day’s practice in this defiled world” (*Hōon shō* 報恩抄, STN 2: 1249). But this sort of hierarchy inversion is less a critique of authority per se than it is a regrounding of it in the *Lotus Sūtra* and, hence, a reversal of the position—from margin to center—that Nichiren and his followers occupy within the existing order. As he wrote late in life, envisioning a time when his teachings would be widely accepted: “Of my disciples, the monks will be teachers to the emperor and retired emperors, while the laymen will be ranged among the ministers of the left and right” (*Shonin gohenji* 諸人御返事,

STN 2: 1479). The “logic of exclusive choice” in Nichiren’s teaching worked as a critique of the system and was “antiestablishment” because it was launched from the margins of structures of religious and political power. There is little in Nichiren’s teaching that would make it critical of authority as such.³

This point becomes clearer in examining Nichiren’s teachings regarding social relationships. Here, too, authority is seen to derive from the *Lotus Sūtra*, and in cases where a social superior opposes the believer’s faith, resistance is mandated. Where the superior is committing slander of the *Lotus Sūtra*, then as stated in the Classic of Filial Piety, “A son must admonish his father and a vassal must reprove his lord” (cited in *Yorimoto chinjō* STN 2: 1355). Similarly, between husband and wife, “No matter what sort of man you may marry, if he is an enemy of the *Lotus Sūtra*, you must not follow him” (*Oto gozen goshōsoku* 乙御前御消息 STN 2: 1100). But where the individual’s faith in the *Lotus Sūtra* was *not* contested, Nichiren tended to uphold the values of loyalty and filial piety shared by the Kantō *bushi* society to which most of his followers belonged—even to legitimate such social relationships from a religious standpoint. As the late historian TAKAGI Yutaka notes: “Nichiren’s faith in the *Lotus Sūtra* has the two aspects of, in effect, rejecting the existing order and of positively affirming it (1970, p. 234; see also TAKAGI 1965, pp. 221–53). Further studies might examine, not only Nichiren’s subversive side, but this issue of how the “existing order” is reconstituted in his thought on the basis of the sole authority of the *Lotus Sūtra*.

³ This point is related to arguments put forth by the movement known as “Critical Buddhism” (*hihan Bukkyō* 批判仏教). Hakamaya Noriaki, its leading representative, has posited a fundamental opposition between “topical Buddhism,” which uncritically subsumes all positions within an ineffable, universal ground (“topos”), thus effectively swallowing its opposition without confronting it, and “critical Buddhism,” the reasoned choice of truth and rejection of falsehood, which is what he believes Buddhism should be (HUBBARD and SWANSON 1997). Readers familiar with Critical Buddhism will note a structural similarity between Hakamaya’s categories of “topical Buddhism” and “critical Buddhism,” and Satō’s “logic of harmony” and “logic of exclusive choice,” respectively. However, where Satō is concerned with how these two logics operated historically in the specific context of Japan’s medieval period, Hakamaya’s argument is universalizing and normative: the all-inclusive “topical” stance is by definition oppressive, while the critical stance that chooses one form and rejects all others is by definition liberative. Referring to *kenmitsu taisei* theory, HAKAMAYA (1998, p. 12) has even suggested that, from a normative standpoint, its terms should be reversed: it is the new movements, based upon exclusive choice, that represented orthodoxy (*seitō*), that is, what Buddhism should be, and the *kenmitsu* establishment that was heretical (*itan*). It would seem, however, that whether either of the two modes is oppressive or antiauthoritarian would depend on the specific social context. Nichiren’s “logic of exclusive choice” was critical of the system because he and his followers were outside the existing structures of religious and political power. Had his Buddhism ever dominated the religious establishment as he had hoped, one imagines that it could have become quite authoritarian in its own right.

Nichiren and Original Enlightenment Thought

One of the major discourses of medieval Japanese Buddhism involved the concept of original enlightenment (*hongaku* 本覚). While the term “original enlightenment thought” is today used very loosely to indicate any sort of innate Buddha-nature concept, in the medieval period *hongaku* had a more specific meaning as a particular Tendai reading of the *Lotus Sūtra*, especially of its latter fourteen chapters. The medieval Tendai tradition of “orally transmitted doctrines” (*kuden homon* 口伝法門) in which it was developed may be thought of as an attempt to reinterpret received Tendai/Lotus doctrine through the lens of an esoteric sensibility—although this tradition was defined as “exoteric,” distinct from *mikkyō*, by the lineages that transmitted it. From the perspective of this doctrine, all things, just as they are, manifest the true aspect of reality and are the Buddha of primordial enlightenment. Seen in their true light, all forms of daily conduct, even one’s delusive thoughts, are, without transformation, the expressions of original enlightenment. The purpose of religious practice is not to achieve a distant buddhahood in the future, but to realize that one is Buddha from the outset. This way of thinking soon spread beyond the confines of Tendai doctrinal formulations and influenced medieval aesthetics, especially poetics, as well as nascent theories about the kami. Scholars today are sharply divided in their evaluation of this discourse. Shimaji Daitō (1875–1927), who first popularized “original enlightenment thought” as a scholarly category in the early decades of the twentieth century, saw it as “the climax of Buddhism as philosophy.” Others have assimilated it to projects of cultural essentialism, purporting to find in it the expression of a timeless Japanese spirit of harmony with the natural world or the key to healing ecological problems said to derive from a perceived rift between humans and nature born of dualistic Western thought. Still others see it as a pernicious authoritarian ideology that legitimates discrimination and hierarchy by sacralizing the status quo. However, no aspect of original enlightenment thought has been more hotly debated than the nature of its influence on Kamakura new Buddhism. Nichiren, with his close ties to the Tendai tradition, has been absolutely central to this debate.

Since around the 1930s, the tendency within Nichiren sectarian scholarship has been to see Nichiren as a “restorer” of orthodox Tendai who rejected the *mikkyō*-influenced Tendai of his day, including its doctrine of original enlightenment. Representative, or rather formative, of this trend was Asai Yōrin (1883–1942), who pioneered critical textual studies of the Nichiren canon. Asai excoriated the many scholars of his own tradition, past and present, who interpreted

Nichiren’s thought from a *hongaku* perspective. “If it is as such scholars say,” he wrote, “then [Nichiren] Shōnin’s doctrinal studies... either lapped up the dregs of Tendai esotericism or sank to an imitation of medieval Tendai, and in either case possess neither originality nor purity. Can this indeed be the true pride of Nichiren doctrinal studies?” (ASAI 1945, p. 285). In Asai’s view, Nichiren was indebted to no one except the early Tiantai/Tendai tradition represented by Zhiyi 智顛 (538–597), Zhanran 湛然 (711–782), and Saichō 最澄 (767–822).

Asai was responding to Shimaji Daitō, Uesugi Bunshū, and other pioneering scholars of medieval Tendai who argued, often on the basis of texts now regarded as problematic, that Nichiren’s thought represented an offshoot of the medieval Tendai *kuden* (oral transmission) tradition that was grounded in a *hongaku* perspective. Asai, however, countered that Nichiren-attributed texts reflecting *hongaku* thought were not Nichiren’s work at all but the forgeries of later disciples who had fallen under the sway of this influential discourse. Indeed the controversy over problematic writings in the Nichiren canon (analyzed by Sueki Fumihiko in his contribution to this volume), is by no means a clear-cut, “scientific” matter of purely textual issues but is inextricably intertwined with debate over Nichiren’s relation to Tendai *hongaku* thought—a debate informed both by sectarian agendas of recovering a “pure” Nichiren doctrine and by larger scholarly readings of the opposition between “old” and “new” Kamakura Buddhism (STONE 1990). Asai Yōrin was to my knowledge the first scholar ever to characterize a founder of one of the new Kamakura Buddhist movements—Nichiren, in this case—as rejecting Tendai original enlightenment thought, a move which has by now become academic orthodoxy. In this reading, *hongaku* thought is represented as an uncritical affirmation of reality that, in regarding all phenomena as expressions of original enlightenment, endorses things just as they are. For Asai and the succeeding generation of scholars, in arguing the nonduality of good and evil and legitimating all phenomena, even human delusion, as original enlightenment, medieval *hongaku* thought exerted an antinomian influence, denying the necessity of religious discipline, undermining the moral force of the precepts, and contributing to clerical degeneracy (see ASAI 1945, pp. 80, 221; SHIGYŌ 1954, p. 45). Since Kuroda Toshio, however, the alleged “world-affirming” tendency of medieval *hongaku* thought has been more commonly interpreted as an authoritarian discourse that legitimated social hierarchy and the entrenched system of rule (see KURODA 1975, p. 443–45, 487–88; SATŌ 1987, p. 57). This position is also maintained by Critical Buddhists (HAKAMAYA 1989). In either case, Nichiren—

along with Hōnen, Shinran, and Dōgen—has been interpreted for some decades now as a teacher who either rejected, or at least radically revised, Tendai *hongaku* doctrine.

Asai Yōrin's standpoint has been refined by a number of scholars, of whom two can be mentioned here. Tamura Yoshirō (1921–1989) devoted much of his scholarly career to investigating the relationship of the ideas of the Kamakura new Buddhist founders—Hōnen, Shinran, Dōgen, and Nichiren—to original enlightenment thought; in this way, he uncovered vital continuities among the teachings of the various strands of “new Buddhism,” as well as a common intellectual foundation in the medieval Tendai tradition from which they had emerged (TAMURA 1965). Tamura recognized that Nichiren in his youth had been deeply influenced by the “absolute monism” of Tendai *hongaku* thought, in which all things just as they are are viewed as expressions of original enlightenment. For example, Nichiren's earliest extant essay, written at age twenty-one, states, “When we achieve the awakening of the *Lotus Sūtra*, then our own person—composed of body and mind and subject to birth and death—is precisely unborn and undying. And the same is true of the land. The oxen, horses, and others of the six kinds of domestic animals in this land are all buddhas, and the grasses and trees, sun and moon are all the holy sangha” (*Kaitai sokushin jōbutsu gi* 戒体即身成仏義, *STN* 1: 14). It was from this nondual viewpoint, Tamura notes, that Nichiren first criticized the dualistic, otherworldly Pure Land thought of Hōnen and his exclusive *nenbutsu*. Later, however, as Nichiren came into conflict with government authorities and experienced exile and persecution, in Tamura's view, he “descended” from the absolute nonduality of *hongaku* thought to focus increasingly on the relative categories of history and human capacity and the need for world transformation. TAMURA writes, “After age forty, Nichiren came to part with the Tendai original enlightenment doctrine's absolute monism and affirmation of reality” (1974, p. 142). Thus, works from this later period of Nichiren's life that assume a *hongaku* perspective were in Tamura's view most likely to be apocryphal.

By turning his attention to the process of Nichiren's intellectual development—an area of inquiry that he helped to pioneer—Tamura avoided Asai's problematic assumption of an originally “pure” Nichiren doctrine. Nonetheless, his theory about Nichiren's later retreat from nondual original enlightenment thought presents two major problems. First, it is based on a circular argument. Almost twenty of the texts in the Nichiren collection from the later period of his life that exhibit *hongaku* ideas are problematic, in the sense that they do not exist in holograph, and their authenticity as Nichiren's writings can be neither established nor refuted. In other words, they belong to

the category that Sueki Fumihiko terms “Nichiren B” (see his essay in this volume). Tamura treats them as apocryphal because he sees Nichiren’s mature thought as moving away from a *hongaku* perspective, but his very argument for this retreat rests on the claim that most of Nichiren’s later works dealing with *hongaku* thought are apocryphal.

A second problem is that a few works of unimpeachable authenticity from the Sado period and later, including two identified by Nichiren himself as his most important writings, contain passages that are very close to *hongaku* ideas. The *Kaimoku shō* 開目抄 (1272), for example, asserts that the nine realms of ordinary beings and the Buddha realm are originally inherent from the outset, and the *Kanjin honzon shō* 観心本尊抄 (1273) identifies the present *sahā* world with the constantly abiding pure land. This compels TAMURA to acknowledge that “even in the latter part of his life, Nichiren was at bottom sustained by this [doctrine]” (1965, p. 623). However, he goes on to say that, on close examination, such writings, “while maintaining nondual original enlightenment thought as their basis, nevertheless emerge from it” (p. 625). Tamura saw Nichiren, along with Shinran and Dōgen, as achieving a synthesis between the “absolute nonduality” of Tendai original enlightenment thought and a “relative duality,” most strongly asserted by Hōnen, between the Buddha and deluded beings, this world and the Pure Land. While maintaining the absolute nonduality of *hongaku* thought as his ontological basis, on a soteriological level, Tamura says, Nichiren “emerged” from it to confront the relative dualities of the phenomenal world.

A somewhat different argument for disjuncture between Nichiren and Tendai original enlightenment thought has more recently been advanced by Asai Endō. For ASAI, “The process by which Nichiren gradually distanced himself from *shingon mikkyō* also entailed a gradual widening of the gap between him and medieval Tendai in terms of both thought and faith” (1991, p. 286). Asai, too, acknowledges both the influence of nondual original enlightenment doctrine on Nichiren’s early thought, as well as structural similarities between key passages of Nichiren’s later writings and *hongaku* ideas. But in his view there is no clear thread in Nichiren’s intellectual development suggesting that *hongaku* ideas formed the basis of his thought, something particularly evident with regard to the *daimoku*, which is absolutely central to Nichiren’s teaching. Asai notes that the mainstream of Buddhist practice in premodern Japan reflects a gradual shift away from complex, introspective meditation toward concrete ritual performance and simple, symbolic acts; *hongaku* discourse helped legitimate this process by making it possible to identify even small, everyday

actions as the expressions of original enlightenment. Had Tendai *hongaku* thought indeed been the foundation of Nichiren's teaching, Asai argues, it would have been logical for him to argue from the outset that buddhahood is manifested in the simple act of chanting the *daimoku*. However, Nichiren did not initially argue the potency of the *daimoku* in this way. His early claims for the blessings of the *daimoku* are far more modest; he presents it simply as a practice for ignorant persons of the Final Dharma age that will save them from karmic rebirth in the lower realms of transmigration. "Those who take faith even slightly in the *Lotus Sūtra*, as long as they do not slander the Dharma in the least, will not be drawn down by other evil deeds into the evil paths.... Those who believe in the *Lotus Sūtra*, even without understanding, will not fall into the three evil paths. But escaping the six paths may be impossible for one without some degree of awakening" (*Shō Hokke daimoku shō* 唱法華題目鈔, *STN* 1: 184, 188), or "One who chants *Namu-myōhō-renge-kyō*, even without understanding, will escape the evil paths" (*Hokke daimoku shō* 法華題目鈔, *STN* 1: 393). Only after being exiled to Sado, from the time of the *Kanjin honzon shō*, does Nichiren speak of the *daimoku* as enabling the realization of buddhahood in this very body. "Until Nichiren could confirm it in terms of his own experience, he would not give voice to it.... I also believe this was because he departed from the theoretical Buddhism of medieval Tendai, which endlessly pursued the original enlightenment of living beings as an absolute perspective, and instead realized that Buddhism must be based on the reality of evil persons of inferior faculties in the Final Dharma age, making this the starting point of his religion" (Asai 1991, p. 292; see also 1974). From this standpoint, Asai also differentiates between medieval Tendai *hongaku* thought and passages in Nichiren's later writings that seem to resemble it. For example, he says, the *Kanjin honzon shō*'s identification of this world with the "constantly abiding pure land" is a statement made from the Buddha's perspective, drawing on the passage in the "Fathoming the Lifespan" chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*, "I have always been here in this *sahā* world, preaching the Dharma, and teaching and converting" (T. no. 262, 9.42b), and its interpretations found in the works of Zhiyi and Zhanran; it is not the absolutizing of the phenomenal world just as it is, as found in Tendai *hongaku* thought. In Nichiren's view, while this world may in principle be the Buddha's original land, in reality it is filled with strife and disaster; the Buddha land had to be actualized through the practice of *shakubuku* and the spread of faith in the *Lotus Sūtra*, even at the cost of one's life.

Few scholars are as capable as Asai of illuminating and analyzing the connections between early Tiantai/Tendai and Nichiren's thought,

and he reminds us that Nichiren was drawing on a received tradition of textual commentary. Yet from a historical perspective it is hard to imagine that Nichiren's indebtedness to Tendai derived purely from its earlier forms and that he remained unaffected by contemporaneous Tendai developments. Indeed, this argument bears a strong family resemblance to those sectarian readings of Nichiren that represent him as independent of *mikkyō* influence, criticized by Lucia Dolce in her contribution to this volume.

As the above summary indicates, both Tamura Yoshirō and Asai Endō participate in a larger academic discourse that regards Tendai *hongaku* thought as "theoretical" or "abstract," affirming the enlightenment of phenomena just as they are, and holds Nichiren, along with the other Kamakura new Buddhist founders to have "broken through abstraction" (ASAI 1974), reasserting the importance of practice and engaging the real sufferings and contradictions of this world. Such readings both mirror and reinforce "polarity models" of Kamakura-period religion that valorize the new Buddhism as liberative and reformist, over and against a corrupt and oppressive Buddhism of the establishment. In fact, this "theory versus practice" distinction between medieval Tendai and the new Buddhism may be more an artifact of the method of comparison than a description of medieval realities. "Original enlightenment thought" is a discourse drawn chiefly from doctrinal texts, often of uncertain date and authorship and whose contexts are virtually unknown, while the thought of Nichiren and other "new Buddhist" founders comes to us embedded in detailed life stories reconstructible from personal writings and the context of religious communities whose circumstances are comparatively well understood. To compare the two on the same plane and conclude that one is mere theory and the other a concrete engagement with the world seems problematic, to say the least. Recent research suggests that medieval Tendai monks were very much concerned with practice (GRONER 1995; HABITO 1995; STONE 1995 and 1999); thus the relationship between Nichiren and Tendai *hongaku* thought needs to be approached in a different way.

Moreover, Nichiren's thought could not have emerged from, nor reacted against, a reified "original enlightenment thought," for the discursive field indicated by that term was extremely fluid, interacting with other elements and undergoing development throughout the medieval period. It is more fruitful to consider both Nichiren's thought and the medieval Tendai *kuden hōmon* tradition as simultaneously engaged in working out new concepts about religion that were distinctive of the medieval period, appropriating them on their

respective sides to different institutional and social contexts and to different modes of practice. Such a perspective is not to deny the tensions—social, political, and ideological—between established Buddhist institutions and Nichiren’s marginal new movement, but to acknowledge both as inhabiting the same historical moment and sharing in developments that cut across the “old Buddhism”/“new Buddhism” divide. From this perspective, let us look at a few aspects shared between Nichiren’s thought and the Tendai of his day, as well as some noteworthy disjunctures.

MANDALIC TIME AND THE ASSEMBLY ON VULTURE PEAK

Nichiren shared with traditional Tiantai/Tendai thought the position that the *Lotus Sūtra* surpasses all others in its promise of universal buddhahood. Those who were denied this possibility in other Mahāyāna sutras—women, evil men, and persons of the two vehicles—are in this sutra all guaranteed the attainment of supreme enlightenment. Nichiren also shared with his Tendai contemporaries a particular respect for the origin teaching, or second fourteen chapters of the sutra. Zhiyi, the Tiantai founder, had divided the sutra for exegetical purposes into the “trace teaching” (*shakumon* 迹門) and the “origin teaching” (*honmon* 本門), their chief difference being in their respective views of the Buddha. The Buddha of the trace teaching is the historical Śākyamuni who achieved supreme enlightenment under the bodhi tree, while in the origin teaching, particularly its key chapter, “Fathoming the Lifespan of the Tathāgata,” Śākyamuni is revealed to have first realized buddhahood an unfathomable, staggering number of kalpas ago, measurable only by analogy to the innumerable particles yielded by reducing to dust countless billions of world systems (indicated in East Asian exegesis by the term *gohyaku jindengō* 五百塵点劫). “Ever since then,” Śākyamuni says, “I have always been here in this *sahā* world, preaching the Dharma, and teaching and converting” (T. no. 262, 9.42b). In Japan, the need to reconcile traditional Tiantai/Lotus teachings with esoteric Buddhism resulted in increased attention to the sutra’s *honmon* section. Rather than the historical Buddha of the *shakumon* section, the Śākyamuni who attained buddhahood in the inconceivably remote past and who ever since then has been present in this world was more readily identifiable with Mahāvairocana or Dainichi 大日, the cosmic Buddha of the esoteric teachings, who is constantly manifest in all phenomena. This led to the development in Japan of a distinctive “*honmon* thought” as a corollary of Taimitsu 台密, the Tendai/esoteric synthesis elaborated by Ennin 円仁 (794–864), Enchin 円珍 (814–891), and Annen 安然 (841–?) (see ASAI 1975). Thus the two divisions of the *Lotus Sūtra* came to be ranked hierarchically,

the latter being elevated above the former.

By Nichiren’s time, the origin teaching was also being appropriated by the “exoteric” branch of Tendai scholarship as the unique locus of the original enlightenment doctrine. The transmission texts of both the Eshin 恵心 and Danna 檀那 schools, the two major doctrinal lineages of medieval Tendai, give varying, often extremely complex, discussions of the distinction between trace and origin teachings (SHIMAJI 1976, pp. 497–500; HAZAMA 1974, pp. 196–201). Most agree, however, in reading the trace teaching as representing the perspective of “acquired enlightenment” (*shikaku* 始覺) and the origin teaching as that of original enlightenment. In other words, the first fourteen chapters of the *Lotus Sūtra* are seen as representing a conventional perspective in which the practitioner cultivates practice, accumulates merit, extirpates delusion, and eventually reaches enlightenment as the culmination of a linear process, “proceeding from cause (practice) to effect (enlightenment)” (*jūin shika* 從因至果). To enter the realm of the origin teaching is to dramatically invert this perspective, “proceeding from effect to cause” (*jūka kōin* 從果向因). It is to shift from linear time, in which practice is first cultivated and enlightenment later achieved, to mandalic time, in which practice and enlightenment are simultaneous. Nichiren makes a similar assertion:

When one arrives at the origin teaching, because [the view that the Buddha] first attained enlightenment [in this lifetime] is demolished, the fruits of the four teachings are demolished. The fruits of the four teachings being demolished, their causes are also demolished. The causes and effects of the ten realms of the pre-*Lotus Sūtra* and trace teachings being demolished, the cause and effect of the ten realms of the origin teaching are revealed. This is precisely the doctrine of original cause and original effect. The nine realms are inherent in the beginningless Buddha realm, and the Buddha realm inheres in the beginningless nine realms. This represents the true mutual inclusion of the ten realms, the hundred realms and thousand suchnesses, and the three thousand realms in one thought-moment. (*Kaimoku shō*, *STN* 1: 552)⁴

Here the “four teachings” indicate those other than the *Lotus Sūtra*. Their “effects” refer to the attainment of buddhahood as represented in those teachings, and their “causes,” to the corresponding practices for attaining buddhahood. Applied to the ten realms, “cause” indi-

⁴ This passage and the next quoted passage are among those forming the basis for Tamura’s conclusion that Nichiren was “at bottom sustained” by original enlightenment thought. Asai Endō, however, sees them as informed primarily by earlier Tiantai ideas.

cates all beings of the first nine realms, from hell dwellers to bodhisattvas, who have yet to realize supreme buddhahood, and “effect,” to the Buddha realm. “Demolishing” the causes and effects of the pre-*Lotus Sūtra* and trace teachings means to demolish linear views of practice and attainment, opening a perspective in which cause (nine realms) and effect (buddhahood) are present simultaneously. We can also see this in Nichiren’s description of the Buddha’s pure land:

Now the *sahā* world of the original time (*honji* 本時) [of the Buddha’s enlightenment] is the constantly abiding pure land, liberated 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 [reality] is [precisely]... the three thousand realms of one’s mind.”

(*Kanjin honzon shō*, STN 1: 712)⁵

In medieval Tendai, the image used for this mandalic reality is the assembly of the *Lotus Sūtra* itself, present in the open space above Vulture Peak where the two buddhas, Śākyamuni and Prabhūtaratna, sit side by side in the floating jeweled stūpa. This assembly was envisioned, not as a past event, but as a constantly abiding reality, as expressed in a phrase recurring in Tendai *kuden* texts: “The assembly on sacred [Vulture] Peak is still numinously present and has not yet dispersed.” Some medieval Tendai initiation rituals reenact the “transmission of the jeweled stūpa.” An example is the third, final, and most secret part of the *kai kanjō* (戒灌頂), the precept initiation conducted within the medieval Tendai precept lineage based at Kurodani on Mt. Hiei. Kōen 興円 (1263–1317), who compiled the earliest description of the ritual, explains that this initiation does not have the meaning of a sequential transmission: master and disciple share the same seat, like Śākyamuni and Prabhūtaratna in the stūpa, to show the simultaneity of cause and effect, and the mythic time when the *Lotus Sūtra* was expounded is retrieved in the present moment (*Enkai jūrokuchō* 円戒十六帖, TENDAI SHŪTEN HENSANJO 1989, pp. 88–91). Lotus assembly imagery for the realm of “original cause and original effect” is linked to Taimitsu ritual, such as the *hokkehō* 法華法 discussed in Dolce’s article in this volume, and is also depicted on Nichiren’s calligraphic mandala:

The “Jeweled Stūpa” chapter states: “All in that great assembly were lifted and present in open space.” All the buddhas,

⁵ Considerable controversy has occurred within the Nichiren tradition over whether the “three thousand realms of one’s mind” (*koshin sanzen* 己心三千) in this passage refers to the Buddha’s mind, the mind of the ordinary worldling, or the mind of one who embraces the *Lotus Sūtra* (see MOCHIZUKI 1958, p. 115).

bodhisattvas, and great saints, and in general all the beings of the two worlds [of desire and form] and the eight kinds of [non-human] beings... dwell in this *gohonzon*, without a single exception. Illuminated by the light of the five characters of the Wonderful Dharma, they assume their originally inherent august attributes. This is called the object of worship.... By believing undividedly in [the *Lotus Sūtra*, in accordance with its words,] “honestly discarding skillful means” and “not accept[ing] even a single verse from other sūtras,” my disciples and lay followers shall enter the jeweled stūpa of this *gohonzon*.

(*Nichinyo gozen gohenji* 日女御前御返事, STN 2: 1375–76)

Chanting the *daimoku* with faith in the *Lotus Sūtra* thus affords entry into the timeless realm of the Lotus assembly, where cause and effect are simultaneous and the Buddha and his disciples “constantly abide.”

CONTEMPLATION IN TERMS OF ACTUALITY

The original enlightenment doctrine associated with the origin teaching is just that, a doctrine. There must also be practice, by which the identity of the Buddha and ordinary worldlings is realized. Hence the category of *kanjin* 観心: “mind-contemplation” or “mind-discernment.” In traditional Tiantai, this term simply denoted meditative practice as opposed to doctrinal study. In Japan, like the term *shikan* 止観 (calming and contemplation), it was sometimes used to indicate the entire Tendai/Lotus system, as distinguished from Tendai esoteric teachings. By the late Heian period, *kanjin* had come to mean contemplation or insight associated specifically with the origin teaching (TAKE 1991, p. 409). Specific meditation methods in which the practitioner brings a focused mind to bear upon a particular object were regarded as linear in approach, “moving from cause to effect”; these were termed *rikan* 理観 or “contemplation in terms of principle” and associated with the trace teaching. In contrast, the contemplation associated with the origin teachings was called *jikan* 事観, contemplation in term of actuality, and was said to “move from effect to cause.” Rather than a specific meditation method, *kanjin* in medieval Tendai *kuden* texts often seems simply to denote the insight that all phenomenal things, just as they are, express the reality of original enlightenment (SHIMAJI 1976, pp. 502–3; HAZAMA 1974, pp. 203–4).

Nichiren also associated the origin teaching with “contemplation in terms of actuality,” but he used this term in a distinctive sense. In his famous treatise *Kanjin honzon shō*, he wrote, “*Kanjin* means to contemplate one’s mind and to find the ten realms in it.” Specifically, Nichiren was concerned with the Buddha realm implicit in the human realm; for him, this was the main purport of the mutual inclusion of

the ten realms (*jikkai gogu* 十界互具), itself an abbreviated expression of the three thousand realms in one thought-moment (*ichinen sanzen* 一念三千). These principles were central to Nichiren's reading of the *Lotus Sūtra* throughout his career. In the teachings of the Tiantai founder Zhiyi, *ichinen sanzen* indicates the mutual inclusion of all dharmas and the "single thought" that arises at each moment in ordinary worldlings; one's mind and all phenomena are at every moment inseparable and mutually encompassing. This is the "realm of the inconceivable" 不可思議境 to be contemplated as the first of ten modes of contemplation set forth in Zhiyi's meditation treatise, *Mohe zhiguan* 摩訶止觀 (Great calming and contemplation). Zhiyi grounded this concept in the second chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*, "Skillful Means," which belongs to the trace teaching. For Nichiren, however, this was merely *ichinen sanzen* in terms of principle 理の一念三千, the theoretical potential for buddhahood in human beings. What Zhiyi had not revealed was the "three thousand realms in actuality" (*ji no ichinen sanzen* 事の一念三千), which is "found only in the origin teaching, hidden in the depths of the 'Fathoming the Lifespan' chapter" (*Kaimoku shō*, *STN* 1: 539). This "practice in actuality" is "the five characters Namu-myōhō-enge-kyō and the object of worship of the origin teaching" (*Kanjin honzon shō*, *STN* 1: 719). *Kanjin* for Nichiren has the specific meaning of realizing buddhahood by embracing the *daimoku* of the *Lotus Sūtra*.

Thus Nichiren, like his Tendai contemporaries, taught *kanjin* and "contemplation in terms of actuality" as the practice uniquely associated with (although not explicitly stated in) the origin teaching. But in his case, *jikan* is not primarily the insight that all phenomena just as they are express original enlightenment, but that "contemplation" or practice entails specific religious forms: the *daimoku*, the object of worship (*honzon*), and the place of practice (the *kaidan* or ordination platform), which he defined as the "three great secret Dharmas" or "three great matters" of the origin teaching. This use of the term "actuality" may derive from *mikkyō*, where it indicates the "actual forms" (*jisō*)—*mūdras*, mantras, and mandalas—of esoteric practice. However, "actuality" for Nichiren also carried the meaning of encountering great trials in the course of spreading Namu-myōhō-enge-kyō (*Toki nyūdō-dono gohenji* 富木入道殿御返事, *STN* 2: 1522; see MOCHIZUKI 1958, pp. 118–22, and ASAI 1986). Moreover, as Asai Endō points out in his essay in this volume, there is a sense in which Nichiren's "*ichinen sanzen* in actuality" is not inherent from the outset but bestowed by the Buddha upon all beings of the last age.⁶

⁶ This of course begs the question of continuities and differences in conceptions of the

SIMULTANEITY OF PRACTICE AND REALIZATION

Mandalic readings of the origin teaching had important implications for practice. Since the beings of the nine realms (cause) and the Buddha (effect) are present simultaneously, practice and realization cannot be temporally divorced but must occur in the same moment. In the words of the *Sanjū-shi ka no kotogaki* 三十四箇の事書 (Notes on thirty-four items), an important medieval Tendai *kuden* text:

[According to the provisional teachings,] delusion and enlightenment are separate. One must first extirpate delusion and then enter enlightenment; thus one does not enter the stage [of enlightenment] from the outset. But in the perfect and sudden teaching [of the *Lotus Sūtra*], practice...and enlightenment are simultaneous.... All practices and good deeds are skillful means subsequent to the fruit.

(TADA 1973, p. 180)

For Nichiren, too,

The merit of all [other] sutras is uncertain, because they teach that one must first plant good roots and [only] afterward become a Buddha. But in the case of the *Lotus Sūtra*, when one takes it in one’s hand, that hand at once becomes Buddha, and when one chants it with one’s mouth, that mouth is precisely Buddha. It is like the moon being reflected in the water the moment it appears above the eastern mountains, or like a sound and its echo occurring simultaneously.

(*Ueno-ama gozen gohenji* 上野尼御前御返事, STN 2: 1890)

Buddha between Nichiren and medieval Tendai, a question too complex to be addressed in depth here (see STONE 1990, pp. 164–70; 1999, p. 274). Medieval Tendai texts celebrate the “unproduced triple-bodied Tathāgata” (*musa sanjin* 無作三身), who is manifested as all phenomena, and tend to regard Śākyamuni’s initial realization in the remote past, described in the “Lifespan” chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*, as a metaphor for the original enlightenment of all living beings. This sort of immanentist view was not lacking in Nichiren’s thought: “Śākyamuni of subtle awakening (*myōhaku* 妙覺) is our blood and flesh. Are not the merits of his causes and effects our bones and marrow?... The Śākyamuni of our own mind has manifested the three bodies since countless dust-particle kalpas ago; he is the ancient Buddha without beginning” (*Kanjin honzon shō*, STN 1: 711, 712). However, Nichiren treats Śākyamuni Buddha’s enlightenment in the remote past as an actual event, mediating the realization of buddhahood by all living beings, and also embraces more transcendent views of the Buddha as “sovereign, teacher, and parent of this threefold world.” Some commentators have for these reasons tended to distinguish medieval Tendai views of the Buddha as emphasizing the Dharma body, and Nichiren’s, the recompense body (see for example ASAI 1945, pp. 287–97, 304–15; TAMURA 1965, pp. 625–26; KITAGAWA 1987, pp. 190–278; ASAI 1991, pp. 299–300). What we do not know, however, is whether the “triple-bodied Tathāgata” of the medieval Tendai *kuden* texts accounted for the whole of their compilers’ views about the Buddha, or whether they, too, in other contexts, may have envisioned the Buddha as an external savior figure.

In both traditions, the moment of practice in which the Buddha and the ordinary worldling are united is associated with traditional categories of Tiantai/Tendai *Lotus Sūtra* exegesis celebrating the unfathomable merit to be gained from even the slightest inclination toward the sutra, such as “a single moment’s faith and understanding” (*ichinen shinge* 一念信解) or “a single moment’s appropriate rejoicing” (*ichinen zuiki* 一念隨喜). In medieval Tendai texts, the content of that moment is generally described as the realization that “all dharmas are the Buddha Dharma,” the traditional definition of the stage of verbal identity (*myōji-soku* 名字即), the initial stage of practice in the Tiantai/Tendai *mārga* scheme. Nichiren, too, stressed the realization of buddhahood at the stage of verbal identity, but for him, this was equated, not with a particular insight, but with embracing faith in the *Lotus Sūtra* and chanting its *daimoku* (see *Shishin gohon shō* 四信五品鈔, STN 2: 1295–96).

The simultaneity of practice and realization is not a denial of the necessity of continued practice but a reconceiving of it: practice is seen, not in instrumental, linear terms as a means leading to an end, but instead, as the expression, confirmation, and deepening of a liberation or salvation that in some sense is already present. It is true that, vis-à-vis the medieval Tendai *kuden* literature, which tends to stress the moment of realization, Nichiren’s writings place greater emphasis on the aspect of continued practice. However, this was not because he was reasserting the need for practice over and against a Tendai tradition that had lapsed into mere theoretical argument. Rather, it stemmed from the fact that he was in effect establishing a new religious community and needed to make clear its premises; that he had continually to exhort his followers to keep faith in the face of severe opposition; and because exclusive devotion to the *Lotus Sūtra* carried in his mind a mandate to propagate it. Broadly speaking, the perspective of practice (or faith) and realization (or salvation) as simultaneous can be said to characterize other forms of Kamakura Buddhism as well. Dōgen taught “practice on the basis of realization” and the “oneness of practice and realization,” while Shinran held that in the moment when faith arises in one’s heart, one is “equal to Tathāgatas”; the *nenbutsu* is recited in gratitude for a salvation that is already assured. This is an element shared by the new movements with the dominant Tendai tradition and is probably traceable, at least in part, to the influence of esoteric thought, in which the adept is said to realize the unity of self and Buddha in the act of ritual practice.

Thus we can see that Nichiren adopted a perspective similar to Tendai original enlightenment doctrine, in that it was grounded specifically in the origin teaching of the *Lotus Sūtra* and entailed the

simultaneity of practice and realization. Nonetheless, there is a vital difference between many medieval Tendai texts and Nichiren’s thought in the way this perspective is appropriated—not a practice/theory distinction, but another that has generally gone unrecognized. In the case of medieval Tendai *hongaku* texts, arguments against the linear perspective of “acquired enlightenment” in favor of that of inherent, original enlightenment often form the primary polemical agenda: instrumental views of practice as a means to an end, or constructions of buddhahood as something external to one’s immediate reality, temporally or ontologically, are condemned as provisional or even delusive. In Nichiren’s case, however, the primary polemical agenda is asserting the unique soteriological validity of the *Lotus Sūtra* in the Final Dharma age. Like every other element in his mature teaching, *hongaku* ideas are subordinated to this overriding concern. Original enlightenment doctrine—such as the mutual inclusion of the beginningless nine realms and the beginningless Buddha realm—thus becomes for Nichiren another ground for arguing the superiority of the *Lotus Sūtra*, since in his view it is found in the depths of the origin teaching of the *Lotus Sūtra* and in no other place. Tamura may well be right in asserting that Nichiren was “at bottom sustained” by this doctrine, but its recession from the central focus of much of his later writings is attributable, not to a departure or “descent” from a nondual *hongaku* perspective, but to the fact that exclusive faith in the *Lotus Sūtra* superseded it as the most important thing he had to convey.

The Cosmos, History, and Japan

The late twelfth through early fourteenth centuries saw the rise of a number of discourses that attempted, usually in religiocosmic terms, to locate Japan in the world and in history. The most famous of these is *shinkoku* 神国 thought, which encompasses a range of notions about Japan as a land uniquely under the guidance and protection of its kami, elaborated from different angles and with different aims in such well-known works as the *Gukan shō* 愚管抄 (c. 1219) of Jien 慈円 and the *Jinnō shōtōki* 神皇正統記 (rev. 1343) of Kitabatake Chikafusa 北畠親房. *Shinkoku* thought has recently been the subject of considerable revisionist scholarship. Countering the ideological agendas of scholars who have associated it with notions of an essentialized “Shintō” as the timeless spiritual basis of the Japanese or assimilated it to modern national consciousness, KURODA Toshio (1996) has sought to locate it in the historical specifics of medieval society. *Shinkoku* thought, he argues, originated largely as a reactionary ideological move within the Buddhist *kenmitsu* system aimed at bolstering the authority of the

temple-shrine complexes and other ruling elites and countering innovative, heterodox movements. It was also stimulated in part by external events, such as the failure of the Mongol invasion attempts and the Kenmu restoration. Kuroda's work has been developed by a number of other insightful studies (see for example RAMBELLI 1996; SASAKI 1997, pp. 28-62; and SATŌ 1998, pp. 307-47).

This new scholarship has identified *shinkoku* thought as an establishment discourse. SASAKI, for example, notes that it tended to be invoked in arguments against the exclusive *nenbutsu* movement, which rejected worship of the kami (1997, pp. 36-37). At the same time, however, *shinkoku* arguments can be seen as emerging from a still larger complex of discourses about Japan's place in the world, in which both "new" and "old," "establishment" and "antiestablishment" Buddhism participated. A figure whose work casts considerable light on such concepts of "Japan" in the medieval period is Nichiren. This strand in his thought has received little attention in postwar scholarship, probably because of lingering associations with nationalistic wartime Nichirenism. Nevertheless, now that Nichiren's ideas of the state and political authority have been reexamined by Sasaki, Satō, and others, it is appropriate that his views of Japan also be acknowledged and reconsidered in their medieval context.

One of the very few postwar scholars to address this subject is TAKAGI Yutaka (1982). Takagi did not take up the issue of *shinkoku* thought but rather focused on other Buddhist views of Japan in the Kamakura period, a topic to which he was led by his study of Nichiren. Central to Takagi's view of Kamakura Buddhism is consciousness of the Final Dharma age, to which both "old" and "new" Buddhism responded, and Takagi places medieval Buddhist discourses about Japan in this context. Takagi notes that Buddhist thinkers of the time generally accepted the traditional Buddhist cosmology of four continents, one in each of the four directions surrounding Mt. Sumeru: Pūrvavideha in the east, Aparagodāniya in the west, Uttarakuru in the north, and Jambudvīpa in the south. Among these, it is in the southern continent of Jambudvīpa that Buddhism appears and spreads. At least as early as the Nara period, Japan had been incorporated into this Indian world model as one of countless island countries scattered "like grains of millet" in the sea surrounding Jambudvīpa. This locus was not only geographical but also temporal, marking Japan as the terminus in the historical process of Buddhism's eastward dissemination through the "three countries" of India, China, and Japan.⁷ By the late twelfth cen-

⁷ The "three countries" no doubt represent imaginative and ideological space as much as geographical realities. The elision of Korea, historically so vital to the Japanese reception of Buddhism, is striking.

tury, Takagi suggests, influenced by awareness of the Final Dharma age, Japan’s status as a *hendo* 辺土 or marginal country on the edge of the Buddhist cosmos had additionally come to represent a projection into the spatial dimension of a perceived alienation from the Buddha and the possibility of salvation (TAKAGI 1982, pp. 275–78). Both new and older forms of Buddhism had to address Japan’s peripheral location in the effort to overcome the negative soteriological connotations of *mappō*. It is in this connection, Takagi argues, that we may understand an increased interest at the time in India, the source of Buddhism’s origin, as seen, for example, in the famous plans for a pilgrimage there by the monk Myōe (1173–1232). A renewed emphasis on lineage, firmly linking one’s own tradition to the orthodox transmission of Buddhism through the “three countries,” is also identified by Takagi as an important strategy for counteracting the assumptions of decline implicit in *mappō* thought. In the case of new movements, of course, such lineages were constructed *de novo*; Nichiren, for example, traces his lineage from Śākyamuni through Zhiyi through Saichō to himself—the “four teachers of three countries” (*Kenbutsu mirai ki* 顕仏未来記, STN 1: 743).

NICHIREN ON JAPAN

Nichiren’s views of Japan link the *mappō*-countering strategies noted by Takagi with the increased cosmological significance accorded Japan in medieval *shinkoku* thought, although the kami were not central to his teaching and his agenda was not that of the *shinkoku* theoreticians. What follows are a few preliminary observations that may serve both to shed light on his own thought and to link it to other medieval concepts of Japan.

(1) While he accepted the received view of Japan as situated on the edge of a horizontal Buddhist cosmos, Nichiren also placed Japan within a vertical Buddhist cosmos of his own devising. This cosmos is a feudal hierarchy, at the top of which stands Śākyamuni Buddha, lord of the threefold world. Beneath him are Brahmā and Indra, and beneath them, Vaiśravaṇa and the others of the four deva kings, “who rule over and protect the four quarters as their gatekeepers. The monarchs of the four continents are vassals to Vaiśravaṇa [and the others]. 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. (*Hōmon mōsarubekiyō no koto* 法門可被申様之事, STN 1: 448; see also FUJII 1959).

Nichiren’s concept of this world as Śākyamuni’s domain (*Shakuson goryō* 釈尊御領) bears structural similarities to other “feudal cosmologies” being elaborated during the same period. For example, Sannō Shintō transmissions of Mt. Hiei identify the *gongen* 権現 of the Hie

Shrine as the “landlord (*jinushi* 地主) of the country of Japan,” while Ryōbu and Ise Shintō transmissions identify Tenshō Daijīn as the absolute deity and sovereign of Japan, heading a feudal hierarchy of lesser, local kami. These notions of one deity as overlord of the country in turn represent outgrowths of *kenmitsu* thought in which the Buddha or kami of a particular temple or shrine was also seen as the “landlord” of its *shōen* (see KURODA 1975, pp. 266, 289–90). In Nichiren’s case, the feudal hierarchy serves not only to emphasize the supremacy of one’s own deity, but also to subsume Japan within the realm of Śākyamuni who expounded the *Lotus Sūtra*, and to relativize the authority of worldly rule by placing it beneath that of a transcendent Buddha. As with the case of original enlightenment doctrine, a more widespread idea is here assimilated in Nichiren’s thought to the supremacy of the *Lotus Sūtra*.

(2) Nichiren understood Japan not solely in terms of its cosmological location but as a member of a larger category of “country.” “Country” undergoes specific definition in Nichiren’s concept of the five guides (*gokō* 五綱) first developed during his exile to Izu (1261–1263). These are the teaching, human capacity, time, the country, and the sequence of propagation—five perspectives from which Nichiren argued the sole validity of the *Lotus Sūtra* as the proper teaching to be spread in his day. Concerning “country,” he observes:

There are cold countries, hot countries, poor countries, wealthy countries, central countries, peripheral countries, large countries, small countries, countries wholly dedicated to theft, countries wholly dedicated to the killing of living beings, and countries utterly lacking in filial piety. In addition, there are countries solely devoted to Hīnayāna, countries solely devoted to Mahāyāna, and countries in which both Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna are pursued. (*Kyōkijikoku shō* 教機時国鈔, STN 1: 243)⁸

It is worth noting here that he makes no reference to language, race, ethnicity, culture, or other categories by which modern national or ethnic identity is commonly defined. What is most important for Nichiren about a country (*kuni* 国 or *kokudo* 国土) is the nature of its affinity for a particular form of Buddhism.

(3) This then raises the question: “Now by mastery of what teaching can [the people of] the country of Japan escape birth and death?” (STN 1: 323). Proof texts that Nichiren cites in answer to this question

⁸ See also *Nanjō Hyōe Shichirō-dono gosho* 南条兵衛七郎殿御書, STN 1:323; trans. in YAMPOI-SKY 1996, p. 417. Nichiren derived these categories from Xuanzang’s 玄奘 *Record of the Western Regions* and Saichō’s *Kenkai ron* 顯戒論. See also the discussion in TAKAGI 1982, pp. 279–83.

include a remark attributed to Sūryasoma, teacher of the *Lotus Sūtra*'s famed translator Kumārajīva, that “this sutra is karmically related to a small country in the northeast” (*Fahua chuanji* 法華伝記, T. no. 2068, 51b–54b). He also cites Annen, who quotes Maitreya as saying, “In the east there is a small country, where people’s faculties are suited solely to the great vehicle,” and adds, “Everyone in our country of Japan believes in the Mahāyāna” (*Futsū jubosatsukai kōshaku* 普通授菩薩戒広釈, T. no. 2381, 74.757c), as well as Genshin 源信 (942–1017), who writes, “Throughout Japan, all people have the pure and singular capacity suited solely to the Perfect Teaching” (*Ichijō yōketsu* 一乗要決, T. no. 2370, 74.351a). Nichiren concludes, “Japan is a country where people have faculties related solely to the *Lotus Sūtra*. If they practice even a phrase or verse of it, they are sure to attain the Way, because it is the teaching to which they have a connection.... To the *nenbutsu* and other good practices, it is a country without connections” (*STN* 1: 324). Nichiren here invokes a longstanding Tendai tradition that the Japanese have faculties suited solely to the perfect teaching of the *Lotus Sūtra* (GRONER 1984, pp. 181–82). Spoken by earlier figures such as Annen or Genshin, this assertion served to legitimize Mt. Hiei as a leading cultic center for the rituals of nation protection. Made by Nichiren, however, the same claim worked to challenge the authority of Mt. Hiei and other leading cultic centers, and by implication, the authorities who supported them, by arguing that they had undermined the supreme position of the *Lotus Sūtra* by embracing Amidist, Zen, and esoteric teachings, and instead served to legitimize the position of himself and his followers.

(4) Despite Japan’s affinity for the *Lotus Sūtra*, in Nichiren’s eyes, this connection was not being honored. This view, first articulated in the *Risshō ankoku ron* 立正安国論 (1260) and other essays of the same period, grew stronger with the threat of foreign invasion. The year after the first demand for Japan’s submission arrived from the Mongol empire, Nichiren was writing:

Because all people of the land of Japan, from high to low without a single exception, have become slanderers of the Dharma, Brahmā, Indra, Tenshō Daijin, and the other deities must have instructed the sages of a neighboring country to reprove that slander.... The entire country has now become inimical to the Buddhas and deities... China and Korea, following the example of India, became Buddhist countries. But because they embraced the Zen and *nenbutsu* teachings, they were destroyed by the Mongols. The country of Japan is a disciple to those two countries. And if they have been destroyed, how can our country remain at peace?... All the people in the country

of Japan will fall into the Hell without Respite.

(*Hōmon mōsarubekiyō no koto*, STN 1: 454-55)

That Japan has turned against the *Lotus Sūtra* and become a land of slanderers, that the protective deities have therefore abandoned the country, and that the Mongol invasion is a deserved punishment for this threat and perhaps even a necessary evil to awaken the country from its slander, become recurrent themes in Nichiren's writing from this time on.

(5) Nichiren's understanding of Japan as a land of Dharma slanderers influenced the mode of proselytizing that he adopted. As is well known, drawing on scriptural sources and the commentaries of Zhiyi, Nichiren distinguished between *shōju* 摂受, literally to "embrace and accept," the mild method of leading others gradually without explicitly criticizing their position, and *shakubuku* 折伏, to "break and subdue," the harsh method of directly rebuking attachment to inferior or wrong views.⁹ He likened these to the two worldly arts of the pen and the sword. For the most part, Nichiren saw the choice between the two methods as temporally dictated: Where *shōju* had been suited to the True and Semblance Dharma ages, *shakubuku* was appropriate to the Final Dharma age. In one famous passage, however, Nichiren qualifies the choice according to the country. Even in the Final Dharma age, he argues, both *shōju* and *shakubuku* are to be used, because there are two kinds of countries: countries that are evil merely because their inhabitants are ignorant of the *Lotus Sūtra*, and countries whose inhabitants embrace heretical teachings and actively slander the Dharma. Japan in his view clearly belonged in the latter category (*Kaimoku shō*, STN 1: 606).¹⁰

(6) However, the deplorable state of Buddhism in Japan did not mean for Nichiren (as it had for Dōgen) that it was to be sought in

⁹ The *locus classicus* for these terms is the *Śrīmālā-devī-sūtra*, which says that the two methods "enable the Dharma to long endure" (*Sheng-man jing* 勝鬘經, T. no. 353, 12.217c). Zhiyi explicitly connects *shakubuku* with the *Lotus Sūtra*; see *Fahua xuanyi* 法華玄義, T. no. 1716, 33.792b; *Fahua wenju* 法華文句, T. no. 1718, 34.118c; and *Mohezhiqian* 摩訶止觀, T. no. 1911, 46.137c.

¹⁰ This distinction became an issue when Nichiren-based religious movements began to proselytize outside Japan. For example, Sōka Gakkai publications from that organization's early period of overseas expansion argue to the effect that the Japanese, having inherited a national tradition of "heretical" Buddhism, are distinguished by an exceptionally heavy karmic burden of Dharma slander; the religions of other, presumably Western, countries may be misguided and ineffectual but are not "heretical" in a strict sense. "Because overseas countries are ignorant of the Buddhism for the Final Dharma age, what is needed, of course, is *shōju* based on the spirit of *shakubuku*.... There is absolutely no need to use such words as 'heresy' (*jashū* 邪宗). Just teach them the benefits of the *gohonzon*" (SŌKA GAKKAI KYŌGAKUBU, 1968, p. 399).

purier form somewhere else. “By tasting a single drop, one can know the flavor of the great ocean, and by observing one flower, one can infer the coming of spring. One need not travel ten thousand leagues to reach Song [China] or spend three years journeying to Vulture Peak [in India]... to distinguish superior from inferior among the Buddha’s lifetime teachings” (*Kaimoku shō*, *STN* 1: 588–89). Nichiren revered the Tang-period Chinese Tiantai masters Zhiyi and Zhanran but did not regard contemporary Song China as a repository of Buddhist truth. In at least one writing, dating from the Sado period, Nichiren represents Japan as the only place where Buddhism survives:

The great teacher Miao-luo 妙樂 [Zhanran] said, “Has not the Dharma been lost in India, so that they are now seeking it throughout the four quarters?” This passage testifies that Buddhism no longer exists in India. In China, during the reign of Emperor Gaozong 高宗, northern barbarians captured the eastern capital, and it has now been more than a hundred fifty years since the Buddha Dharma and the ruler’s dharma (*ōbō*) came to an end. Within the great repositories of China not a single Hinayāna sutra remains, and the vast majority of the Mahāyāna sutras have also been lost.... Therefore Zunshi 遵式 said, “[These teachings] were first transmitted from the west, where the moon appears. But now they return from the east, where the sun rises.” (*Kenbutsu mirai ki*, *STN* 1: 741)

How far this alleged disappearance of Buddhism from the Asian mainland represents Nichiren’s genuine impression and how far it represents a rhetorical strategy is difficult to assess. Though he considered Zen an inferior form of Buddhism, he would certainly have been aware at least of the existence of contemporary Song Chan, as a number of refugee Chan monks had fled to Japan to escape the Mongols and some had taken up residence in Kamakura. Be that as it may, the polemical intent of this passage is clear enough. In their original contexts, the quotations from Zhanran and from the Tiantai master Zunshi (964–1032) refer only to specific texts. Zhanran refers to a request made by an Indian monk to Amoghavajra (705–774) for a translation of Zhiyi’s works—though Zhanran draws a similar rhetorical conclusion, that the Dharma has been lost in India and is being sought abroad (*Fahua wenju ji* 法華文句記, T. no. 1719, 34.359c). Zunshi for his part is commenting on the fact that Genshin’s disciple Jakushō 寂照 had brought back from Japan a work of the Tiantai master Huisi 惠思 that had been lost in China (*Dasheng zhiguan famen* 大乘止觀法門, T. no. 1924, 46.641c). Nichiren reads these statements synechdochically, so that the particular texts in question are made to stand

for the whole of Buddhism; he then assimilates this alleged disappearance of Buddhism, in the Chinese case, to invasion by the Mongols, the very situation then being faced by Japan. This leaves Japan as the only place where, in the persons of Nichiren and his followers, the teachings of the *Lotus Sūtra* are upheld. Here, as in the preceding quotation as well, an implied analogy is drawn between political realities and the state of Buddhism: Just as Korea has fallen, the great Song nation is beleaguered, and Japan now stands alone against the Mongols, so Buddhism has now been wiped out in these countries and exists only in Japan. Nichiren's famous three vows—"I will be the pillar of Japan, I will be the eye of Japan, I will be the great ship of Japan" (*Kaimoku shō*, *STN* 1: 601)—were no doubt made from this perspective.

(7) As an extension of this perspective, Nichiren began, also during the Sado period, to speak of Japan as the land where, through his own efforts and those of his disciples, a new Lotus Buddhism uniquely suited to the Final Dharma age would arise. In the Final Dharma age, he said, "the secret Dharma of the sole great matter shall be spread for the first time in this country" (*Toki Nyūdō-dono gohenji*, *STN* 1: 516). Elaborating on Zunshi's analogy of the sun and moon cited above and expanding the scope of its referent, he wrote, "The moon appears in the west and illuminates the east. The sun rises in the east and illumines the west. The same is true of Buddhism. 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.... It is now the beginning of the last [of the five] five hundred year periods [following the Buddha's nirvāṇa], and the Buddha Dharma will surely emerge from the eastern land of Japan" (*Kenbutsu mirai ki*, *STN* 1: 741-42; see also *Soya Nyūdō-dono gari gosho* 曾谷入道殿許御書, *STN* 1: 909). In a somewhat later text written in 1280, Nichiren expanded still further on this analogy by drawing a comparison between the Buddha Dharma of India, which he called "the land of the moon tribe," or Yüeh-chih 月氏, and the Buddha Dharma of Japan, the "land of the sun." Hitherto, he said, the Buddha Dharma of India had spread from west to east. But like the moon, its light was feeble; it could never dispel the darkness of the degenerate, Final Dharma age. Now it was time for the Buddha Dharma of Japan to rise like the sun, moving from east to west, and illuminate the world (*Kangyō Hachiman shō*, *STN* 2:1850). Nichiren's identification of Japan as the birthplace of a new Buddhism parallels his growing sense of himself as the bearer of a new Dharma, distinguished in important ways from his received Tendai tradition and intended specifically for the Final Dharma age.

Nichiren did not redefine Japan as the center of the cosmos, a move that would be made by some later *shinkoku* ideologues such as

Yoshida Kanetomo 吉田兼俱 (1434–1511), whose famous “tree metaphor” defines Buddhism as the fruit and flowers, Confucianism as the leaves and branches, and Shinto as the root. Nichiren’s Japan remains a tiny “millet grain” country on the periphery of the Buddhist cosmos in the last age. But it is precisely from this marginal land that the Buddha Dharma for the last age will emerge and spread west to illuminate the world. Thus, in another of Nichiren’s hierarchy inversions that result from investing all authority in the *Lotus Sūtra*, the periphery becomes more important than the center. This theme in his teaching, of the Dharma returning from Japan to the west, has been appropriated in a variety of ways in the twentieth century. Indeed, one suspects it may have been this element, as much as anachronistic notions of Nichiren as a modern patriot and imperial supporter, that first drew the attention of serious modern nationalistic thinkers. The image of the Buddha Dharma reversing its historical flow to return from the east to the west has also been an inspiration to those seeking to spread various forms of Nichiren Buddhism outside Japan.¹¹

Nichiren’s concept of Japan suggests the need, on occasion, to consider medieval Japanese religions in ways that cut across the polarity of old and new institutions. As Takagi Yutaka has noted, Nichiren’s views of Japan are tied to broader medieval Buddhist attempts, transcending sectarian affiliation, to overcome the negative soteriological implications of *mappō* seen by many to be reflected in Japan’s peripheral location on the edge of the Buddhist cosmos. At the same time, as we have seen, they are clearly linked to the “feudal cosmologies” emerging from *kenmitsu* institutions. Unlike some *shinkoku* ideologues, Nichiren did not see Japan as sacred in itself; its significance lies solely in its affinity with the *Lotus Sūtra*. Nonetheless, his is an attempt to define Japan’s place in the world and history, and as such, sheds light on other religious and cosmological concepts of Japan emerging in the medieval period.

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- STN* *Shōwa teihon Nichiren Shōnin ibun* 昭和定本日蓮聖人遺文, 4 vols. Rishō Daigaku Nichiren Kyōgaku Kenkyūjo, ed. Minobu: Minobusan Kuonji, 1988.

¹¹ For example, FUJII Nichidatsu 藤井日達, founder of the order Nihonzan Myōhōji 日本山妙法寺, described his proselytization efforts in Manchuria and his journey to India in terms of fulfilling Nichiren’s prophecy in this regard (1980, pp. 36–39, 40–42, 57, 78).

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