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Nichirenism, Utopianism, and Modernity

Rethinking Ishiwara Kanji's East Asia League Movement

The East Asia League Association (*Tōarenmei kyōkai*, or East Asia League Movement, *Tōarenmei undō*), a Pan-Asianist organization formed in 1939 and active throughout the war and well into the 1950s, can also be seen as one important variant of the modern lay Nichiren Buddhist organizations that sprung up in Japan in the first half of the twentieth century. This article explores the character, history, world view, and practical goals of this movement, and argues that it was committed to an alternative course of modernization that can be characterized as a Nichiren Buddhist utopianism. While the theory of the final war propagated by its leader, Ishiwara Kanji, is relatively well known, this article analyzes several less known—though central and distinct—elements of the East Asia League: its emphasis on the harmony of religion, science, and technology, as well as the roles of Koreans and women in the movement. This analysis shows how the East Asia League Movement engaged with particular elements of modernity: the nation-state, national identity and minorities, urbanization and the countryside, gender inequality, and religion and science, and hoped to replace the differentiations of the modern era with the unity of the *Lotus Sutra*.

KEYWORDS: Ishiwara Kanji—Nichirenism—Nichiren Buddhism—East Asia League Movement—utopianism—science and religion—women in Buddhism—*Lotus Sutra*

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NICHIRENISM (*Nichireنشugi* 日蓮主義), a current of lay Buddhist movements in early twentieth century Japan, has a reputation of being the *bête noire* of modern Japanese Buddhism. Its main proponent, Tanaka Chigaku 田中智学 (1861–1931), merged a belief in the *Lotus Sutra* with the Japanese “national polity” (*kokutai* 国体), the Japanese imperial line, and endorsed expansionism abroad. Not surprisingly, it has most often been described in terms of a nationalist “distortion” of religion, and as a Buddhist legitimization of the emperor system in support of the ruling class, and a form “militant nationalism” or Japanese “fascism.”¹ Over the years, this characterization has come to be somewhat modified, and the phenomenon of Nichirenism has been gaining more attention from specialists in Buddhism, the sociology of religion, as well as literature, who take the religious aspects more seriously and approach Nichirenism more in the context of the modernization of Buddhism from the Meiji period.² In this article, I will investigate the history of Ishiwara Kanji’s 石原莞爾 (1889–1949) East Asia League Movement (*Tōa renmei undō* 東亞連盟運動 or *Tōa renmei kyōkai* 東亞連盟協會, hereafter abbreviated as EAL), active during the Asia-Pacific war and immediate postwar era, and rethink how this movement should be understood as one important variant in the history of modern Nichirenism.

Ishiwara, as a major architect of the Manchurian incident of 1931, for his Pan-Asianist ideology, and for his prediction of a “final war” between Asia (led by Japan) and the West (led by the United States), has in the traditional postwar interpretations fitted the image of the militarist or “fascist” Nichirenist.³

1. See for example TOKORO (1972), and in English, LEE (1975). Helen HARDACRE (1984, 12) wrote that “The sympathies of those who subscribed to *Nichireنشugi* were with the ruling class. Their main concern with respect to the rest of society was that it be orderly, obedient, and loyal. They were not interested in its problems,” and that the right wing of this movement was a fascist notion of unconditional subordination to the emperor.

2. See especially the work of ŌTANI (2001), and in English, among others, Jacqueline STONE (2000 and 2009). Several dissertations have also appeared, most notably the historian Gerald Scott IGUCHI’s exploration of Nichirenism in terms of forms of modernity (2006), and Yulia BURENINA (2013) has written a dissertation (in Japanese) on Tanaka Chigaku and Honda Nisshō from the perspective of religious studies. Also notable is that the writer and poet Miyazawa Kenji (1896–1933) has been treated less *sui generis* and more in terms of his position within Nichirenism; see IGUCHI (2006), BURENINA (2013), and among others HOLT (2014). The life and thought of the socialist Nichirenist Senōō Girō (1889–1961) has also received attention, in English by SHIELDS (2012), and in Japan by ŌTANI (2001).

3. See for example HATA Ikuo (1962), who treats Ishiwara and the EAL in terms of “military fascism.”

While Ishiwara is a well-known figure whose seeming iconoclasm as a military thinker is a never-ending object of fascination, illustrated by the large number of biographies of him that have appeared over the years, his religious and philosophical ideas have remained less examined. Meanwhile, his movement, the EAL, has received even less attention, and has usually been characterized in terms of Pan-Asianist support for the state, and has been taken much less seriously as a religious organization.⁴ One problem has been that in understanding the EAL's program and world view, the focus has been largely on Ishiwara himself. In understanding the EAL, Ishiwara's life and ideas are essential, since he was undoubtedly the leading figure, but scholars have not examined the various motivations of why other figures joined the EAL and what impact they had on the movement. As I will show, there were many other important members of the EAL, including women, farmers, and Koreans, who also played formative roles, often with their own and differing agendas. Also, amid a general tendency to treat Nichirenism as predominantly a prewar phenomenon, Ishiwara and the EAL's post-1945 thought and activities received much less attention despite the movement's growth in the postwar period. And while a nationalist dimension is undeniable, in understanding the EAL, the challenge is to balance this with the fact that several key aspects of its vision do not fit the characterization of nationalist ideology or a fascist legitimization of the state, and that in practice, the EAL was heavily criticized by many ideologues, and suppressed by the wartime as well as the postwar Japanese state.

In this article, I will focus less on Buddhist doctrinal aspects, but more on how the EAL attempted to put Buddhist Nichirenist ideals into practice. Ishiwara and the EAL were, I believe, much less concerned with doctrinal subtleties than the actual practical realization of Buddhism in this world, the creation of a Buddhist utopia in response to the wider crisis of modernity in the 1930s and 1940s. I will identify and analyze what I believe are some of the most salient characteristics of the EAL's Buddhist program, focusing on the movement's religious engagement with questions of modernization, such as the nation-state, war, science and technology, and the role of women and minorities. While I will discuss

4. Mark PEATTIE, in his biography on Ishiwara (1975), discusses the East Asia League in terms of Pan-Asianism and Ishiwara's theory of the final war, but not its more religious aspects; see PEATTIE (1975, chapter 9, 311–37). KOBAYASHI (1998), a historian of the Second Sino-Japanese War, has characterized the EAL primarily as a tool that, when faced with an unwinnable war in China, was used to deflect the energy of Chinese nationalism towards a pan-Asian ideal and thus in support for Japanese rule over Asia. MORI and ŌKADO (1996) discuss the EAL as a “special kind of fascism” and discuss this movement purely in terms of agricultural reform. For an interpretation of Ishiwara's application of Nichiren's ideas, see ŌTANI (2002, 147–67). MATSUDA's excellent study (2015) discusses in detail the role of Koreans in the EAL, but pays scant attention to the role of religion.

the EAL's postwar role in detail elsewhere, the elements of this movement I bring up here were largely consistent from the prewar to postwar periods, and allow the formulation of some hypotheses concerning the characteristics of this movement. I will argue that, in contrast to much of the earlier research and references to Ishiwara, categories such as "nationalism" or Pan-Asianist "expansionism" understood as an ideological support of the program of the state, have limited usefulness for understanding this movement, since it was committed to a radically Buddhist utopian vision that was very different from both that of the wartime and postwar Japanese state. The EAL, I believe, is better understood through investigating its engagement with particular elements of modernity: the nation-state, national identity and minorities, gender inequality, and science and technology. The EAL, I will argue, in so far as it was a religious movement, should be understood as committed to the realization of a specific Buddhist utopian vision that promised the overcoming of the ills of modernity. This study thus hopefully contributes to the growing body of research on modern Buddhism, and in particular Nichirenism, and the larger field of study on the relation between Buddhism and modernity.

Ishiwara Kanji

The East Asia League is intrinsically connected with its key figure, Ishiwara Kanji, so it is suitable to begin this article with him. Born in Tsuruoka in Yamagata prefecture in 1889, Ishiwara went to one of the cadet schools of the Imperial Japanese Army, and later the elite Army Academy (*Rikugun daigakkō* 陸軍大学校). His intellectual capabilities recognized, he was groomed for the top positions. In 1920, Ishiwara joined Tanaka Chigaku's Nichirenist organization Pillar of the Nation Society (Kokuchūkai 国柱会). He was an observer in Hankow in China in 1920, and after that went to Berlin, returning to Japan in 1925. In these crucial years in the wake of the First World War, Ishiwara came to formulate his theory of the "final war" (*saishū sensō* 最終戦争) after which the world would be one, peaceful, and Buddhist. Essentially, Ishiwara's theory combined Nichirenist eschatology on the *mappō* era and Nichiren's prediction of a large war after which Buddhism would spread worldwide, with Ishiwara's own technical studies of military history, which predicted an inevitable world war.⁵ Ishiwara believed history was inevitably moving humanity towards larger political entities, resulting in the nation-state, which was to be superseded by regional blocks. Eventually, he predicted a final war between Western civilization, led by the United States, and Asia, led by Japan. After this final war, the world would be unified with the Tennō as the spiritual Buddhist figurehead.

5. For a detailed discussion see PEATTIE (1975).



FIGURE 1. Ishiwara Kanji in the fields of the Shōnai plain in Yamagata prefecture. Courtesy of Tsuruoka City Library.

Ishiwara joined the Kwantung Army's staff in Dairen in 1928, and became one of the planners of the army's takeover of Manchuria in September 1931. His name is therefore still to a large degree identified with the "Manchurian incident." In 1935, he was appointed Chief of Staff of the Operations Division of Army General Staff, and oversaw the draft of the five-year plan for 1937–1941. During the 1937 crisis over the outbreak of war in China, Ishiwara was the key figure of the "non-escalationist" faction in the army, and attempted to stop the conflict, but he was sidelined by the hardliners, who included, among others, Tōjō Hideki 東条英機. Ishiwara continued to criticize Tōjō and oppose the China war, and in response was put on the reserve, and eventually forced to leave the army. It was under the circumstances of the impasse of the war in China that the East Asia League was formed. After lecturing for a while at Ritsumeikan University, Ishiwara returned to his home province of Yamagata, from where he remained active in the East Asia League Movement.

In the postwar period, assessments of Ishiwara have been divided. Interpretations range from Ishiwara as a frontrunner for Japanese "military fascism" and expansionism, to a genius of military theory, one of the last voices of reason in the descent towards war, to an idealist visionary of Asian solidarity and world

peace, or a combination of these. In the English-language scholarship, Ishiwarā's image has balanced towards the negative side. In the middle, the historical assessment of Ishiwarā hinges to a large degree on how to balance on the one hand his idealism and critical position towards Japan's imperialist practices, and on the other, his willingness to use military force and his advocacy of total mobilization for a cataclysmic war.⁶ It is not my intention here to take a firm position with regards to the figure of Ishiwarā, but, by highlighting Ishiwarā's role as a religious thinker and leader, I hope to contribute to providing a more complex image of Ishiwarā and his network centering around the EAL.

Short Historical Overview of the East Asia League

The East Asia League was officially founded in Tokyo on October 1939 as *Tōarenmei kyōkai*, with Kimura Takeo 木村武雄 (1902–1983), who was a member of the House of Representatives at the time, as secretary. The movement's core members consisted of Ishiwarā's allies from Manchuria, such as Miyazaki Masayoshi 宮崎正義 (1893–1954), who were disillusioned with what they saw as a forsaking of ideals and a descent into colonialism; ex-military figures, and a number of academics. Kimura also brought into the movement a number of members from Nakano Seigō's 中野正剛 (1886–1943) right-wing Tōhōkai 東方会 who disagreed with the latter's insistence on expanding the war in China and Southeast Asia, as well as farm union activists from Northeastern Japan, and several politicians. It is important to note that while I am discussing the EAL as a religious movement, the EAL began as a political movement, and its initial focus was to a large degree a product of the impasse of the China war: a forum to attempt to bring the war to an end.

The EAL's core ideology was the "Showa restoration" (*Shōwa ishin* 昭和維新): similar to how the domains came together to form the nation-state in 1868, the aim now was that the different nation-states should come together in a Pan-Asian block, shedding off the yoke of Western imperialism in Asia. The East Asia League would be based on the three principles of political independence, economic integration, and common defense. All this was in anticipation of the coming "final war." While these aims sound close to some of the aims of the Japanese government, including the Konoe declaration of 1938, and the later Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere, this should be balanced by the facts that the

6. Ishiwarā has been the subject of a large number of studies and biographies, and too many to sum up here. For a more conservative (or revisionist, depending on one's interpretation), but valuable appreciation of Ishiwarā, see FUKUDA (2001). A recent and balanced biography by ABE (2005), is one of the most detailed and valuable. In English, PEATTIE'S (1975) outstanding work has been the standard, focusing largely on his military theories. Ishiwarā's key writings are published in IKZ, and TAMAI (1985); see also IKSS.

EAL was one of the few opposing voices against the war in China, suffered from heavy criticism from right-wing groups and the Japanese government, and later police surveillance and even arrest and torture of its members.

The EAL also set up branches in China, first in Beijing (May 1940) as the China East Asia League branch, in September in Guangzhou (*Chūka tōarenmei kyōkai*, 中華東亞連盟協會), and on 24 November in Nanjing, the East Asia League China Comrades Association (*Tōarenmei chūgoku dōshikai* 東亞連盟中國同志會). Among others, Wang Jingwei 汪精衛 (1883–1944), the second-most important figure of the KMT, who had fled Chongqing to seek accommodation with the Japanese and set up the collaborationist government in Nanjing, became a key member. It is most likely that Wang was sympathetic to the EAL because he agreed with its Pan-Asianist principles, and because he saw to advance the position of the Nanjing government through the EAL. It is uncertain if the Buddhist dimension played any role in the Chinese branches of the EAL.⁷ In China, Ishiwara and the EAL did not, as one would expect, strongly emphasize Buddhism as a shared cultural heritage that binds Asia together. They instead promoted the benevolent “Kingly Way” (*ōdō* 王道) as Asian, in contrast to the “Way of force” (*hadō* 霸道) of the imperialist Western powers, a trope not unique to the EAL.

Meanwhile, in Japan itself, the EAL set up twenty-nine branches in different prefectures in the period 1940–1941, and it published a journal, titled *Tōarenmei*. Its membership reached around 16,000 by the end of the war (although some claimed a membership of 100,000).⁸ This means that the EAL was in terms of numbers a larger organization than the more well-known Kokuchūkai, which reached around 7,000 members at its peak.⁹ The EAL experienced a moment of crisis in January 1941 when influential factions in the Army (Tōjō Hideki, Ishiwara’s nemesis, was Minister of the Army at the time) moved against Ishiwara and the EAL and the government officially denounced the EAL on 14 January 1941. The direct background was that Kimura Takeo had assembled a delegation of members of both houses of parliament to go to China in early 1941 in order to pursue peace objectives. In March of that year, Ishiwara was put in the reserve, ending any further prospects of a career in the army.

The long-term background of this clash was Ishiwara’s earlier opposition to the China war and his rivalry with hardliners in the army. But outside of army politics, right-wing “Japanists” groups such as the *Genri nippon* 原理日本 society and others criticized the EAL for betrayal of the Kokutai, defeatism in the war with China, and for attempting to turn Japan Chinese and communist. The EAL was very critical of the Army, the government, and especially Japanese businessmen

7. For Wang’s ideas on the East Asia League, see WANG (1941).

8. See for example, KOIZUMI (1992, 23).

9. This is ŌTANI’s estimate (2001, 404) of the Kokuchūkai at its height in 1924.

and adventurers in China, and was too much committed to political independence of the new Chinese government in Nanjing. It also came to advocate a genuine independence of Manchuria and later a form of self-rule of Korea, but within a larger Asian federation. A second problem was that the EAL's proposals called for a supranational entity in East Asia, and one in which the nation of Japan would *not* necessarily play a leading role. This was in line with Ishiwara and the EAL's idea of the nation-state as a temporary stage of history, an idea that ran counter to the nationalist ideas of its opponents.

In October 1941, Ishiwara Kanji took on the direct intellectual leadership of the East Asia League, and emphasized that the movement had failed in the Diet, and from now on should be considered “not a political movement, but a true cultural, moral, and ‘semi-religious movement’ (*junshūkyō undō* 準宗教運動),” that should serve as a force that the nation could employ “to cease the war in China and form an East Asian block,” and in society, “to become a motivating force for the organization of the people” (NOMURA 2007, 42). Ishiwara also presented the movement as an “antiwar movement” (NOMURA 2007, 60). He further implemented a number of reforms in the movement, such as a mandatory membership fee (1 *yen* and 20 *sen* per year), which, despite the risk of alienating poorer farmers, Ishiwara thought would raise the level of determination and membership consciousness. A second important reform was the establishment of branches “adapted to the local circumstances, and not limited to one branch per prefecture” (NOMURA 2007, 42). This meant that local branches would have considerable autonomy and could reflect local concerns and culture. This was a measure that was to prove very important and stimulating, in particular for its largest branch in the Shōnai 庄内 region, which comprises the western part of Yamagata prefecture, which is culturally and linguistically distinct from the eastern part, and separated from it by high mountains.

Despite the adverse circumstances, the EAL continued to operate during the war years. It was during this time too that the EAL can be said to have deepened its roots in the Tōhoku region, especially in Shōnai, and expanded its membership among farmers. The EAL also began to place more emphasis on local reform and agricultural techniques (see below).

The end of the war in 1945 brought some profound changes. In practice, any possibility for an Asian League rapidly dissolved with Japan's defeat and the development of the two power blocks and the cold war. The possibility that Japan would ever lead in a war against the United States vanished under the reality of defeat and the dissolution of Japan's armed forces. Japan also faced a general spiritual crisis, food shortages, and huge problems of how to rebuild the country. The EAL tried to remain true to its core principles by advocating some radical solutions for reform of the country (see below). However, in January 1946, the postwar Japanese government and the GHQ ordered the EAL to disband, to

which the EAL responded by changing its name from *Tōarenmei dōshikai*, first to the “Self-supporting Fertilizer Propagation Association” or *Jikyū hiryō fukyūkai* 自給肥料普及会, then to the National Party (*Kokumintō* 国民党), which in turn was disbanded on 14 August 1951, on the day before the third anniversary of Ishiwara’s death, before his grave. The next day, members formed the *Kyōwatō* 共和党. The East Asia League’s postwar existence and activities should not be treated as less important than the pre-1945 period. In the postwar period, the movement grew in membership, found new goals, adjusted its visions, and the time during which it was active in the postwar period was at least as long as its pre-1945 existence. Throughout the late 1940’s and 1950’s, the organization remained active and published journals to spread its ideas.

The East Asian League as a Religious Movement

The above description can give the impression that the EAL was a political organization and had little to do with Buddhism. Indeed, considering its wider platform and nonreligious activities and members, it is open to debate whether the EAL qualifies as a religious movement. (Especially compared to the *Seikakai* 精花会, a more explicitly religious Nichirenist organization that was born out of the *Kokuchūkai*, with many of its members also in the East Asia League, and that functioned as a supporting organization to the latter.) But this undecided nature is also what makes this organization interesting and important for the history of Nichiren Buddhism in modern Japan. But there should be no doubt that the EAL was by Ishiwara and the key figures intended as a Nichirenist organization. Ishiwara’s designation of the movement as an “intellectual,” “cultural,” or “quasi-religious” (*junshūkyō* 準宗教) movement can possibly be explained by his wanting to avoid the movement being characterized as a political party, which would have required amalgamation into the *Taiseiyokusankai*, the government’s overarching political organization. But this designation also avoided the 1939 Religious Bodies Law (which required registration to meet certain criteria and be put under state supervision). But apart from these external factors, presenting itself as openly “religious” could have given a one-sided impression of the movement as involving itself with solely with “religious” matters in a narrow sense, whereas the EAL’s ambitions reached much further, encompassing all aspects of life and society. The EAL’s self-designation as “quasi-religious” reflects well its hybrid nature as both a religious, political, and social movement.

Ishiwara himself, as noted above, was an absolutely devout Nichiren Buddhist, and accepted Tanaka Chigaku’s beliefs. Ishiwara went to Germany partly in order to help Satomi Kishio 里見岸男, the son of Tanaka Chigaku, with his proselyzation efforts. In Germany, he was involved with the translation and printing of Satomi’s Nichirenist texts into English and German, and seemingly

having succeeded in converting several Germans, the experience might have reinforced his belief that Nichiren Buddhism would be accepted worldwide. Ishiwara's theory of the "Showa restoration," the realization of Asian unity under the Tennō, followed by world unity and eternal peace after the final war was a religious utopian vision in which Buddhism prevailed over the world, fulfilling Tanaka Chigaku's interpretation of Nichiren's prediction. This was to remain the central dogma of the movement (with some significant modifications made overtime), and was referred to in most of the EAL's publications. The East Asia League Movement thus added a concrete political and geopolitical, pan-Asianist program to earlier versions of Nichirenism. In the words of one member, Ichiji Norihiko 伊地知則彦, "The path to Nichiren's *risshō ankokuron* is the path to the harmony between peoples, to the East Asian League" (IRIE 1982, 85).

At the time perhaps the single most controversial and unique aspect of the EAL, and one that can only be understood in its Nichirenist context, was the proposal that the Tennō, with the realization of the "national ordination platform" (*koku-ritsu kaidan* 国立戒壇), would essentially become a Buddhist figurehead presiding over the Asian federation and eventually world unity, and that therefore the Tennō would become a "global Tennō." For the EAL this meant that "when the world becomes one family, it will not only be the Japanese who have the right to be the "upper retainers" (*hatamoto* 旗本) of the Tennō," and it would logically involve a "separation of the Tennō from the nation of Japan" (ISHIWARA KANJI HEIWA SHISŌ KENKYŪKAI 1994, 39). Unsurprisingly, it was this element that was denounced by the EAL's critics as anti-Japanese and as violating the Kokutai.

In retrospect, one can discern a tension between the idea of the Tennō as the Buddhist King and a global figure, thus professing genuine universalism, and the fact that the Tennō and Kokutai was an institution particular to Japan. From today's standpoint it is also hard to imagine how people outside of Japan could be attracted to this institution. But Ishiwara and EAL members seemed to have genuinely believed that the Tennō from the beginning was endowed with a divine mission to unify the world under the *Lotus Sutra*, thus possessing a reality and universality that somehow transcended its historical roots in Japan. Ishiwara and others took strength from the presence of outspoken Nichirenist Koreans in the EAL, thus validating his belief in the universality of the Tennō. Also, Ishiwara and the EAL did not seem to have been discouraged that the modern Japanese emperors did not give any sign to have subscribed to Nichiren Buddhism, let alone the modern variant.¹⁰

Ishiwara and the leading members, with some variety, treated the EAL as a Nichirenist movement. There was some resistance to the idea of the EAL as a

10. Ishiwara did seem to have been startled upon reading in 1943 a report from one of the Meiji emperor's aides who claimed the emperor was a believer in the *Lotus Sutra*; see IKZ 7: 192.

Nichirenist Buddhist movement, which came to the fore in May 1942 when one member, Fukushima Masao 福島昌夫, declared that “The East Asia League is not the same as Nichirenism,” provoking anger by several of the other leading members (NOMURA 2007, 112–14, and 686–87). While the EAL did not seem to have made conversion to Nichiren Buddhism a condition for membership, the movement’s whole ideology was based on, and steeped in, a Nichirenist eschatological world view. The “Showa restoration” too, while advocating an end of liberalism, went beyond political goals, calling for a restoration not only on the level of politics and economics, “but also on the level of the individual, his clothing, housing, and food, and his mental attitude. In other words, in the process of the great transformation” (*Shōwa isshinron*, IKSS 4: 52).” The EAL also called for a restoration of “the unity of rite and rule,” in other words, of religion and politics (ISHIWARA KANJI HEIWA SHISŌ KENKYŪKAI 1994, 21).

Overtime, Ishiwarā’s charismatic leadership of the movement also can be said to have taken on a religious character. Members often remembered how much they were struck by Ishiwarā’s sincere belief in Buddhism, and he was treated with a kind of deference similar to that of religious leaders. Ishiwarā’s grave illustrates this. Located close to the town of Yuza in Northern Yamagata prefecture, the grave itself has the shape and the size of a small *kofun*. It is also a site with several memorial stones, one which is engraved with “eternal peace” and the “three principles” (*san gensoku*, discussed below). Another monument has the inscription of Ishiwarā’s words “I simply believe in the Buddha and in the spirit of Nichiren,” the phrase that seemed to have resonated strongly with EAL members. The site is still actively maintained by volunteers, who keep flowers and incense at the grave, which is visited regularly by people from all over the country. Here, as in the many biographies that have appeared over the years, Ishiwarā is remembered as a visionary for world peace.

In the following I will discuss in more detail several characteristic elements of the EAL that reveal its complex engagement with modernity. And while not all of these aspects can be considered as grounded in Buddhism, it should be remembered that for the members these aspects were all part of the path to the attainment of religious ends in this world.

Buddhism, Science, and Technology

In order to understand the EAL’s vision of Buddhism in the modern world, a look at how it engaged with modern science and technology is very illuminating. After all, while the meaning of “modernity” is not exhausted by science and technology, it is hard to imagine modernity without it. The degree to which the philosophy and the religious program of the East Asia League was committed to, and in a sense depended on, scientific thought and especially technology (here

used in a very broad sense, including, for example, urban planning and agricultural techniques) is striking. While many modern Buddhist thinkers since the Meiji period have expressed the compatibility of Buddhism with modern science, this was usually argued with a general idea of modern scientific rationality in mind, in the context of attempts to show how Buddhism did not contradict new scientific knowledge, thereby demonstrating Buddhism's modernity and/or its superiority to Christianity.¹¹ From the interwar period we see more attempts to critique or limit scientific rationality from a religious standpoint (such as also happened later in the "Overcoming Modernity" debates). But the EAL's engagement with science and technology was of a different dimension from other Buddhist engagements with science in modern Japan. In contrast to many other Buddhist groups and thinkers, the EAL had a fascination with science and technology, with historical change almost reduced to technological progress, and even placing great faith in concrete technological developments that would enable their religious visions. In other words, modern science and technology was not an external factor in the movement's environment to which it responded, but was an integral and essential component of its religious program.

Apart from the general trend in modern Buddhism to emphasize scientific knowledge, the commitment to science and technology in the EAL can be said to originate from several sources: first, there was Ishiwara's own military background and his concern for practical planning and modernization of both the armed forces and the nation of Japan (and East Asia) in an age of total war. Second, Ishiwara's mentor, Tanaka Chigaku too, ever since his employment as a photographer, had been keen on the latest developments in technology, manifesting itself among others in the use of radio to disseminate his ideas (ŌTANI 2001, 32). Third, the movement's commitment to implement and create a Buddhist world, or at least the conditions for this to come about, also created practical interests and interests in technology as a means to achieve this.

TECHNOLOGY OF THE FINAL WAR

Following Tanaka Chigaku's belief in a future war that would unify the world under the *Lotus Sutra*, Ishiwara Kanji's theory of the final war was based on a combination of Nichiren's predictions and his own analysis of the history and future of warfare, including developments in strategy, tactics, and weapon technology.¹² For this reason, his followers praised it for being a perfect match of religion and science. For Ishiwara, the history of warfare determined history itself, and warfare changed mainly due to technological changes. The final war, he pre-

11. See for example LOPEZ (2010).

12. Tanaka Chigaku first developed his vision for world unification in his outline for the Kokuchūkai in 1902; see ŌTANI (2002, 149).

dicted, would take place almost entirely in the air. Aircraft with yet unknown energy sources and other unprecedented possibilities would allow for almost unlimited time in the air and the capability of striking along long distances, with new weapons that could strike devastating blows at other nation's capitals. Perhaps navies and ground armies would become completely obsolete. Thus in the theory of the final war, the technological development of air power, new energy sources, and new weapons was a prerequisite for world unity and the realization of Nichiren's prediction. The imagination of new technology enabled new religious visions.

While this all sounds rather like far-fetched futuristic fantasy from our perspective today, with the prediction of the aircraft transforming war and the world, Ishiwara and the EAL were not as exceptional as one would expect. Predicting ultimate total wars was a popular interwar genre, spurred by the unprecedented scale of the First World War. Aircraft technology was an utterly new and extremely rapidly developing technology, of which the limits were unknown, giving rise to imaginative predictions. The interwar period was the era of the great visionaries of air power, such as the Italian Giulio Douhet (1869–1930), and William (“Billy”) Mitchell (1879–1936) in the United States, who made similar predictions. In political terms, the establishment of the League of Nations certainly made the creation of a world government much more conceivable than ever before, and the idea that aviation technology would enable world unity and a new utopian era after a catastrophic war was also the subject of popular works such as H. G. WELLS's (1933) *The Shape of Things to Come*. Ishiwara's theory of the final war can thus also be characterized as a Nichirenist variant of interwar air power and world conflict prediction theories.

URBAN PLANNING AND AGRICULTURE

A second aspect where the EAL's interests in scientific thought and technology merged seamlessly with visions of a religious future was that of urban planning. Ishiwara and the EAL made grand plans for a reorganization of the urban environment, including the “dismantling of the cities” (*toshi kaitai* 都市解体), something that was deemed necessary because of the spectre of large-scale aerial bombing. Hence the theory of the final war and its vision of air power and the reorganization of urban space were like two sides of the same coin.

Let us look more in detail to how the EAL came to these plans. Ishiwara, perhaps characteristic of his ambivalent attitude towards modernity, had something of an aversion to large city life, one reason why he, for example, chose to live in Potsdam rather than in Berlin during his stay in Germany. Ishiwara, who had joined Tanaka Chigaku's Kokuchūkai, had been extremely interested in TANAKA's (1921) *Tōkyō shin toshiron*, and this text probably provided one source for



FIGURE 2. Envisioning the reform of the Shōnai region, from right to left: the ideal farmer's house, the farmer's village, the Shōnai region, within the country and the wider world. From *Shōnai kokudo keikaku sōan* (1943).

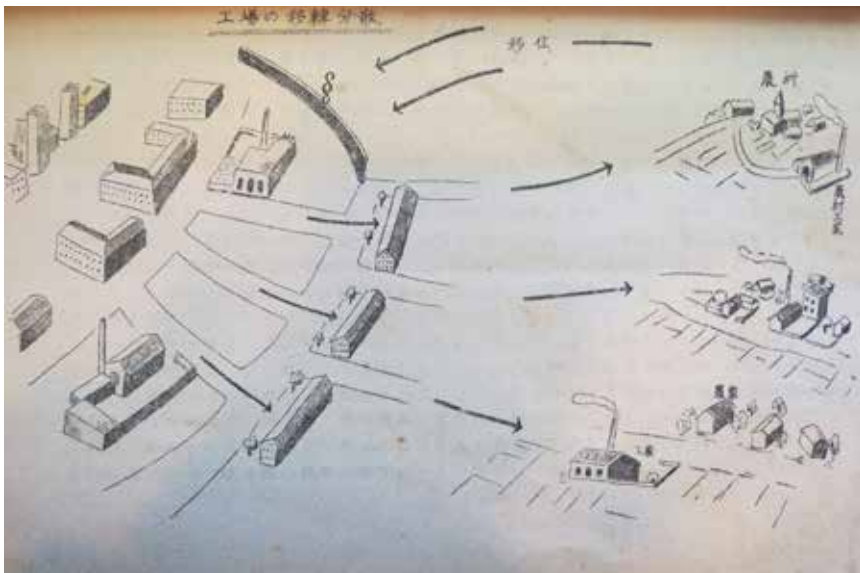


FIGURE 3. “Dismantling the cities” (*toshi kaitai*) and dispersing industry by integration into agricultural communities, resulting in the “unity of agriculture and industry” (*nōkō ittai*). From *Shōnai kokudo keikaku sōan* (1943).

ideas for how to rethink the urban environment. In this work, Tanaka gives a dire assessment of modern city life in Tokyo as congested, unhealthy, inconvenient, uneconomical, and the cause of psychological damage. Judging reform of the city to be hopeless, Tanaka suggested the construction of a whole new city in Tokyo bay, called New Tokyo (*Shintōkyō* 新東京). The outline for this city, in the shape of a giant swastika, merged religious ends with science and technology. Tanaka envisioned a city connected by waterways (which would solve the problems of congestion and air pollution) and rooftop gardens for urban gardening, which provided food or extra income, healthy farming activity, and protection against aircraft crashes. The center of the city was taken up with public buildings surrounding a park with at the center a sacred space devoted to the imperial family (TANAKA 1921, 26–31). *Tōkyō shin toshiron* was thus a critique of modern city life, while, in contrast to nostalgic calls for a return to the land, it formulated a *hypermodern* alternative, integrating farming into city life, thus also restoring an element of tradition into modern life. This combination of integrating farming within a space that transcends contemporary modern life and thereby provides spiritual and religious well-being can also be found in Ishiwara and the EAL's programs for urban reform.

Ishiwara and the EAL, however, went further than Tanaka by arguing that the era of the cities had come to an end altogether. The Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923 confirmed for Ishiwara the idea that cities were something like an undesirable by-product of modernization, too vulnerable to natural disasters. Ishiwara's apocalyptic vision of future air war and the specter of large-scale air bombing reinforced the idea that cities were too vulnerable to air attacks, and therefore obsolete. Later, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki only confirmed the idea of the obsolescence of the city. Eventually, Ishiwara came to advocate a type of dialectical history, in which humanity evolved from agricultural life to a separation of city and industry versus the country and agriculture, with the next stage in history involving humanity again integrating city and country, industry and agriculture.

These ideas of Ishiwara eventually became an essential part of the EAL. After 1941, while the EAL did not give up its larger ideological visions, faced with the loss of influence over the course of events in East Asia and facing repression from the government under Tōjō Hideki, the EAL's focus turned more and more to concrete proposals for reforming the regions.

To gain a fuller understanding of how technology and religion interacted in the specific *local* context of the activities of the EAL, let us look more in detail at one text with plans for urban and village reform produced by local branch members of the EAL, the *Draft for the Land Planning of Shōnai* (*Shōnai kokudo keikaku sōan* 庄内国土計画草案, or SKKS), of 1943. This text, written by members of the EAL's Shōnai branch, provides a rationale and plan for the social and

economic reform of the Shōnai region. While it can hardly be labeled a religious text, the reform plans are explained in the context of Showa restoration, Ishiwaras theory for preparation of the final war, and quotes from Nichiren's "Opening of the Eyes" (*Kaimokushō*) when introducing the EAL's Shōnai branch. While the text focuses on concrete reforms of Shōnai, this is thus placed within a larger religious and cosmic vision. Also, the reform of Shōnai is presented as one step in the reform of Japan and East Asia, and that Shōnai will be a "model" for reform, and thus "the pioneer of the Showa restoration" (SKKS, 3).

However, despite these grand goals, the text is also strongly colored by the local identity of the Shōnai region and local concerns, allowing a window into a sense of discontent concerning the situation in the farm villages in this period, and also why these farmers saw the EAL as a vehicle to formulate new solutions for their situation. What is interesting is how these local EAL members situated Shōnai's history in the path of modern Japan's development and the "path of the Japanese economy," which has followed "since the Meiji restoration consistently a resistance against Western capitalism" (SKKS, 7). Japan's industry, it stated, developed two types: 1. heavy industry, which was necessary for the military, and which relied on tax money; and 2. light industry, which relied on cheap labor. Both industries thus in the end relied on the farm villages for the extraction of taxes and cheap labor. "It is in reality the farming villages that have allowed Japan's industry to develop and allow it to resist Western capitalism" (SKKS, 10). The war too, had placed a heavy burden on the farm villages, especially in Tōhoku, and that it might have been Yamagata farmers that had been forced more than any other area to sell girls into prostitution in the crisis years of the early Showa period (SKKS, 36). The villages were the victim of, and provided the sacrifice for, capitalism, while the cities reaped the rewards. In other words, the EAL placed the need for the reformation of the Shōnai region not only in larger religious terms, but also in a narrative of Pan-Asianism (Asia as the victim of Western capitalism) and the exploitation of the farm villages on the level of the nation. Here, the EAL thus emerged as a local reform organization critical of the government's path of modernization that in their view exploited the countryside.

The blueprint for this EAL branch's local reform consisted of a series of measures, centered around dismantling the cities and rebuilding the farm villages, in order to "abolish the division between city and farm village, a policy of uniting agriculture and industry" (SKKS, 19). Concretely, it proposed communal factories in the center of the villages, introducing electricity in the farm houses, and more use of mechanized agriculture. In terms of social reform, the EAL proposed a form of conscription named the Army for Public Service (*kuyakugun* 公役軍), to work for all kinds of public good. It proposed the development of infrastructure in the Shōnai region and the reclamation of new farm land. The diet would

be changed, and instead of rice, more milk and butter would be consumed. All the while, living in the farming villages, in contrast to the cities dominated by “hedonism” and “American culture,” would purify man’s life and develop with respect for the gods and ancestors (SKKS, 71).

Towards the end of the war, and especially after 1945, the EAL continued to grow as a local reform movement within the larger goal of the spiritual reform of Japan. It emphasized the use of enzyme fertilizers (*kōso* 酵素) as a way to dramatically increase agricultural yield. At a time when Japan was experiencing food shortages and a shortage of fertilizer, agricultural output was a matter of even more pressing concern than usual, and the promise of larger output seems to have been a large draw to the EAL.

The core postwar formula of Ishiwara and the EAL was formulated in the so-called “three principles” (*san gensoku* 三原則):

1. the dismantling of the cities (*toshi kaitai* 都市解体)
2. the unity of agriculture and industry (*nōkō ittai* 農工一体)
3. simple living (*kanso seikatsu* 簡素生活)

The idea behind this was firstly, that the bombing of the cities and the atomic bomb had proven that cities were obsolete, and secondly, that (after the loss of the colonies as a major source for food) this was the only way forward for Japan to achieve self-sufficiency and feed its people. All people would have to engage in agriculture in some form (“everybody a farmer”), ending the division of labor between agriculture and industry, city and countryside. (The EAL proposed the resettlement of four million people from the Tokyo/Yokohama area to Tōhoku, four-and-a-half million to Niigata and Hokuriku, and six-and-a-half million from Kansai to western Japan.) While the EAL envisioned essentially a decentralized web of self-sufficient communities, the farming villages would be provided with technology, electricity, and connected by high-speed rail and airways. It was not a return to the past but a proposal that through locating science, technology, and especially machinery and electricity in the farming villages, it would be possible to make “all citizens farmers” (*Shōwa isshinron*, IKSS 4: 58)

Theoretically, Ishiwara and the EAL’s ideals envisioned the dismantling of the cities and the integration of industry and farming as a final stage in a circular (or better, dialectical) historical movement, where human societies lived in agricultural villages before moving to the cities and industry, and then returned to the villages and farming, but without foregoing the fruits of industry and technology. Important to mention here is thus that while the EAL shared with interwar Japanese agrarianism (*nōhonshugi* 農本主義) a certain romantic vision of the wholesome life of the farmer and an aversion to the ills of the modernity of the city, since it advocated the integration of modern industry, communication technology,

electricity, and infrastructure in the villages, it was not an agrarianist movement, and the EAL explicitly distinguished its vision of the future from *nōhonshugi*.¹³

While these were practical solutions to achieve self-sufficiency, for the EAL, there was a strong religious dimension to these proposals. In contrast to the cities that were dominated by “American culture” and “hedonistic consumerism,” a return to the land and farming held the promise for a new communal life and a spiritual regeneration and the ideal village would be developed centered on “reverence for the gods” (SKKS, 71). A simple life was “the way to eternal life of the people, the revival of the long-lost powers of intuition, and the absolute condition for the nurturing of a character of humility” (ISHIWARA KANJI HEIWA SHISŌ KENKYŪKAI 1994, 28). Also, while the proposed reform of Shōnai was born out of concrete problems the region was facing, the program, which included communal living and leadership by moral individuals, was presented as something more akin to the function of utopian communities functioning as “intentional communities”: the building of an alternative system that should serve as a model for the reform of the country, and ultimately the world.

After the war, Ishiwarara and members around him began the construction of such a community—a village called Nishiyama 西山—located in the northern part of the Shōnai plain in Yamagata prefecture, where today the small town of Yuza 遊佐 is located. The village was based on the “three principles” and had a short “constitution” (*Nishiyama mura tsukuri kenpō* 西山村つくり憲法), written by Kimura Takeo in 1947, beginning with article one stating that, “We build, based on the faith in Nichiren, an ideal farming village, that should be the pioneer for the revival of Japan and the world” (ABE 2005, 597). The village had a communal hall, reminiscent of communal buildings for the youth volunteer groups in Manchuria, called Nichirin kōdō 日輪講堂, which still exists today.

It was probably no coincidence, as others have pointed out, that this project by the East Asia League shared some similarities with the writer and poet Miyazawa Kenji’s 宮澤賢治 (1896–1933) ideal farming community. Miyazawa, from Iwate prefecture in northeastern Japan, was an avid reader of the *Lotus Sutra* and also a member of Tanaka Chigaku’s Pillar of the Nation Society, although he did not seem to have been very interested in the latter’s more nationalistic aspects. In 1926, Miyazawa, who had been teaching agriculture at the Hanamaki Agricultural High School, set up a private school/community for farmers called the *Rasu Chijin Kyōkai* 羅須地人協会 in Hanamaki. The community’s practices centered around agriculture with improved but natural fertilizers, and cultural activities, especially music. MIYAZAWA’s *Outline of the Peasant Arts* (1973, 377–78), which, similar to the EAL’s program, expresses a new ideal of farming life, and talks of farming and work as having to regain a kind of mean-

13. For Japanese interwar agrarianism, see HAVENS (1974).

ingfulness and wholeness, a unity of religion and science, and situated within a larger religious and cosmic world view. Miyazawa's program ran into problems and resistance by the local farmers and closed down in 1928. Miyazawa's project was short-lived and it is uncertain if there was any direct influence from Miyazawa to Ishiwaras' community, although both projects probably stem from Tanaka's belief in the necessity of the concrete realization of Nichiren Buddhism in Japan.¹⁴

UNIFYING SCIENCE AND RELIGION

In the postwar era, the EAL came to advocate more than before explicitly a unity of science and religion as part of their vision for the future. Noteworthy is the key text *Introduction to the Teachings of Nichiren* (*Nichirenkyō nyūmon* 日蓮教入門; see ISHIWARA KANJI HEIWA SHISŌ KENKYŪKAI 1994) which opens with a treatise on science and religion, putting the unification of science and religion at the center of the EAL's expression of Nichirenism: "...through the perfect harmonization of science and religion the highest culture of the human species can be created" (*Nichirenkyō nyūmon*, 219). Important is that in this text, Christianity and Marxism (here called the "Marx-sect," or *Marukusushū* マルクス宗) were seen as the most important competitors of Nichiren Buddhism in the postwar era, but Christianity lacked in scientific spirit, while Marxism relied too one-sidedly on science. Only Nichiren Buddhism had the capacity to truly unite religion and science, and was therefore superior to both.

Ishiwara and the EAL mentioned the unity of religion and science and the unity of religion and politics in one breath as part of one single large unification in the Showa restoration. This "unity of rule and rite" (*saisei icchi* 祭政一致) encompassed a unity of "science," which was based on the "five senses" and on which politics was also built, and "faith," which was based on intuition, and on which religion (*shūkyō* 宗教) was based (IKZ 7: 418). These aspects were originally one, but had gradually differentiated, first through changing diets (cooked food) which had caused the loss of intuition, and then through the "renaissance" (which Ishiwara argued began in the period of Oda Nobunaga), and which entailed the "liberation of science from religion" (IKZ 7: 418–19). The Japanese had since drifted into irreligion, but the time to restore this unity was coming

14. It is quite possible that both Ishiwara's and Miyazawa's vision of an ideal utopian community as model for religious reform were inspired by TANAKA Chigaku, who in his 1904 *Nichirenshugi kyōgaku taikan* discussed his desire to create a community (giving Hokkaido, Taiwan, or Korea as possible locations) as the "realization of an ideal life," meaning the harmonization of the Buddhist law and man, and that, when it would be established in one place, its model could be replicated, and could "become the model for [the rest of] the country [to follow]" (1904, 2982). I am indebted to Yulia Burenina for showing me the importance of this section of Tanaka's work; see BURENINA (2013, 144).

near: “From the unity of rite and rule [religion and politics] to the divorce and strife between the two, the unity of rite and rule will again be restored. That will [also] be the day of the unity of religion and science. Buddhism intuits the cosmos as one grand body of life, and all individual things are microcosms, and all are a body of life. The progress of science today has led to the recognition that all things are alive, and has finally come to underwrite the intuition of Buddhism. I feel keenly that the greatest turning point in the history of mankind is coming near” (ISHIWARA KANJI HEIWA SHISŌ KENKYŪKAI 1994, 21). This shows that the EAL’s idea of the Showa restoration, unlike other contemporary usages, was not solely a political program, but an encompassing integrative and religious program, overcoming a modern and reductionist (materialist) secular world view.

As the above quote of all things being “alive” shows, in terms of accepting a scientific world view, Ishiwara and the EAL did not accept a world view based on materialism, or physicalist reductionism. Ishiwara and the EAL fused the idea of the Buddhahood (*Busshō* 仏性) permeating all beings with the modern philosophy of vitalism (*seimei shugi* 生命主義), holding that life was the fundamental “stuff” of the universe, not blind and dead matter. One contemporary source for Ishiwara’s vitalism is probably Henri Bergson’s *L’Évolution créatrice* (*Creative Evolution*) of 1907.¹⁵ But in this respect, Ishiwara and the EAL were heirs of a longer pattern of modern Japanese Buddhists rejecting materialist reductionism.¹⁶ MIYAZAWA too (1973), it should be noted, shared a similar cosmic vitalism, as he writes, “As long as the world as a whole has not gained happiness, the happiness of the individual is impossible,” before continuing to describe an evolution towards a world unifying consciousness: “The consciousness of the self gradually evolves (*shinka*) from the individual, [through] group, society, and [finally into the] cosmos. Isn’t this the path that the sages of the past have walked and taught? In the new age, the world is becoming a single consciousness and an organism [using the word for plants and animals, *seibutsu* 生物].” And similar to Ishiwara and the EAL, he critiqued the modern condition as lacking in religious spirit: “Religion has become tired and replaced by science, but science is cold and dark,” and expressed the hope for a restoration of a kind of integration of work, religion, and science (MIYAZAWA 1973, 377).

Speculative about the future prospects of science and technology, the EAL predicted that a return to the healthy and simple life of the farmer would also regenerate powers of intuition that had since long become dormant during the course of modernization. What exactly these powers were or what insight they would bring was not made entirely clear, but the argument was that regeneration of the

15. Ishiwara’s library in Sakata contains a Japanese translation of this popular book, with Ishiwara’s handwriting in the margins.

16. On vitalism in interwar Japanese culture, see SUZUKI (1995).

intuitive powers would propel science forward to a degree we can now only imagine (ISHIWARA KANJI HEIWA SHISŌ KENKYŪKAI 1994, 28). However, at times, Ishiwara made it clear that he believed that in the ancient past, people had intimate contact with the “spiritual world” (*reikai* 靈界) and the gods. Ishiwara did not elaborate on what this “spiritual world” exactly entailed, nor did he discuss contact with the gods in detail, but he argued for example that the ancient tale of the government official Wake no Kiyomaro’s 和氣清麻呂 (733–799) receiving a message from the gods at the Usa shrine should be taken literally. A change in diet and simple living would regenerate this intuition, and thus make possible the restoration of the “unity of rite and rule” (*saisei icchi*), which encompassed both a unity of religion and science, and religion and politics (IKZ 7: 418–20).

Ishiwara and the EAL used evolutionary theory (combined with vitalism) to argue for the unity of all human races, and all living beings: “To put this further in a nutshell, the whole of humanity is ultimately of one blood. No, all living beings, the whole cosmos, everything is one life-system (*seimei taikai* 生命体系). According to the latest research, the oldest place where the human race has emerged—and this is what professor Shirayanagi calls “The Heavenly Reed Plain” (*Takamagahara* 高天原)—is in central Asia.” Humanity branched out into different peoples, but now the time has come to “return again to the one ancient house of the Takamagahara era” (IKZ 7: 187). “The Heavenly Reed Plain” appears at the beginning of the Japanese creation myth as told in the ancient classics *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki*, and is the place where the first deities (*kami*), the “three creating deities,” appear. In this interpretation, on which Ishiwara does not really expand much, the original myths of Japan in reality talk about the origins of humanity, and not in Japan, but in central Asia. This is remarkable for several reasons: first, it merges the ancient creation myths with Ishiwara’s Nichirenist eschatology; second, it does this in a way that appeals primarily to science; thirdly, it gives the ancient myths a universality that they otherwise lack; and finally, it places the origins of Japan (together with all of humanity) on the Asian continent, thus supporting the EAL’s vision of Japan’s Asian, and even continental identity. While obviously this argument also legitimated Japan’s presence on the Asian mainland, it should not be dismissed out of hand as an ideological justification for imperialism and without religious significance. For the EAL, this was a religio-scientific account showing that the modern division into nation-states was but one temporary and superficial stage that masked a more fundamental reality of an original biological as well as spiritual human unity.

Furthermore, Ishiwara/EAL merged evolution with Nichirenist eschatology to argue that future world unity and peace would usher a new stage in evolution of the human species, and that “an era of a new living being [using the biological term for “organism” or *seibutsu* 生物] different from today’s human race.” He also stated that “through the [artificial] stimulation of sudden mutation,

beings higher than today's humans will be born in this world. In Buddhism, this is called the age of Maitreya (*Miroku bosatsu* 弥勒菩薩)" (IKZ 3: 79). Ishiwara found scientific confirmation of his ideas in SHIMIZU Yoshitarō's (1899–1941) *Nihon shin taisei ron* (1941), a book that speculated about the use of new forms of energies and technologies in the making of a "nation of great culture." Shimizu argued in favor of mutation theory, which, in contrast to Darwin's theory of evolution through the gradual accumulation of small variations, argued that mutation occurred in large bursts in a relatively short span of time.¹⁷ Ishiwara thus combined this theory of evolution with Buddhist eschatology to argue that the realization of world peace would trigger a new stage in evolution, and literally change the human species into a divine one. This could also be seen as a new—and in a sense biological—interpretation of the prediction in the *Lotus Sutra* of all humans eventually becoming Buddhas.

Ishiwara did not elaborate much on this future evolution of humanity (in fact Ishiwara tended to be vague on the post-final war era), but it should be noted that this theory was less eccentric in the prewar period than one might expect; as I describe elsewhere, various thinkers in Japan and other countries, such as Kita Ikki (also a Nichiren Buddhist), as well as some Christians, such as Kagawa Toyohiko, combined religious ideals with speculations on future human evolution.¹⁸ In short, Ishiwara thus argued not only that Buddhism did not conflict with modern science, but that a scientific theory, in this case the theory of evolution, proved and held a promise of a utopian and religious ideal of regaining the lost unity of mankind, and would push humanity into a new and divine form.

Women in the East Asia League

One other characteristic of the EAL is the prominent and active role of women in this movement, and its progressive view of modern gender relations. Several factors might be brought in to explain this, starting with the *Lotus Sutra* itself, which advocated the view that women could reach Buddhahood. Tanaka Chigaku, in his advocating of an active lay Buddhism, had emphasized marriage as the fundamental unit in lay Buddhist society, and had also stimulated women's

17. Mutation theory was in Japan mainly associated with Hugo DE VRIES (1901–1903) and was an influential theory well into the 1930s. Since evolution seemed to have stalled, Shimizu thought that man, "as children of the gods," had the duty to artificially create the conditions for sudden mutations, mainly by the use of radioactive waves. This would create the conditions for the rise of a new human race. "Similar to when among apes a sudden mutation caused the emergence of the human race, a sudden mutation among the human race will bring about a human race that surpasses the [current] human race. Just like it was impossible to imagine the world of humans from the world of apes, we humans cannot imagine a human world higher than that of humans [today]" (SHIMIZU 1941, 221).

18. See GODART (forthcoming); see also HASTINGS (2015) on Kagawa.

organizations in the Kokuchūkai (ŌTANI 2001, 36). In Ishiwara's own thinking, his relationship with his wife, Tei (1896–1974), who also became a Nichiren Buddhist, might have played a significant role. In his many letters to Tei, written when Ishiwara was stationed in Hankow and Berlin, Ishiwara emphasizes the faith they both shared and urges her to take on an active role. His letters often seamlessly mixed his love for her with a shared faith in Nichiren Buddhism. The following is representative: “If we have truly entered the same faith, then a thousand or even two thousand *ri* is nothing. Through the strength of Buddha, isn't there in small sadness a strong joy? In this fleeting world of course, but I also believe I can take your hand also in the next world, and the one after that” (IKSS 1: 22). Ishiwara praised her intellect above his, and in his letters, Ishiwara often urged Tei to attend Kokuchūkai meetings, read texts, and explain the content to him.

Later, when promoting the EAL, Ishiwara also actively pushed to set up women's branches of the EAL movement. Ishiwara probably saw this also as part of a strategy to disseminate Nichirenism to the whole population—which was after all one of his main goals—but he also had a genuine sense of the necessity to actively involve women and change women's role in society. Ishiwara was in contact with, and hoped to enlist, the well-known feminist Ichikawa Fusae 市川房枝 (1893–1981).¹⁹ After the war, Ishiwara said “The East Asia League Movement is the only organization in Japan that has, from prewar through the wartime and into the post war periods, pushed for women's equal rights” (KOIZUMI 1992, 10). This being a second hand report of a statement made in the postwar era, it should not be taken at face value, but it is a fact that Ishiwara and the EAL placed much emphasis on the active involvement of women.

The most prominent and active woman in the movement was Koizumi Kikue 小泉菊枝 (1904–1992). Despite being a high-profile and prolific figure in both Nichirenist movements, her life and thought has remained largely unexamined. Koizumi was born in Aomori and became the wife of an army officer. She joined the Kokuchūkai in 1932, after a spiritual crisis after the loss of her son. She was dissatisfied with the passive role of women in the organization and set up a women's study group called the “Sincerity Association” (*Makotokai* まこと会) which received the blessing of Tanaka Chigaku. She lived in Manchuria for a while, where she met Ishiwara, and after relocating to Japan, formed a group in Nagoya where she gave weekly lectures on the *Lotus Sutra* and Nichiren, before becoming a founding member of the EAL.²⁰

Kikue became well-known for her book *A Manchurian Girl*, written from 1936 to 1938 in the journal *Makoto*, and later published as a monograph

19. Ishiwara mentioned this in a letter to Koizumi Kikue, see NOMURA (2007, 69).

20. Koizumi Kikue wrote her autobiography and reflections after changing her family name from Shirato to Koizumi; see KOIZUMI (1992).



FIGURE 4. Koizumi Kikue (left) with Li Guiyu (right) in Manchuria. Koizumi would emerge as one of the most important figures in the East-Asia League Movement. From *Manshūjin no shōjo* (1938).



FIGURE 5. An EAL branch group photo with female members in their distinctive uniforms. Ishiwara is in the middle of the front row. Courtesy of Tsuruoka City.

(KOIZUMI 1938). The story relates how in 1935, after she went to Manchuria, her husband there hired a local girl, Li Guiyu 李桂玉, as a house help. Koizumi tells the story about her relation with Li Guiyu as essentially a success story of Pan-Asianism. Despite Li's anti-Japanese sentiment and support for local insurgents, Koizumi gradually wins over Li's heart as she explains and demonstrates the good intentions of Japan for the liberation of Asia. Koizumi also relates how she was able to convey that the Tennō is the Tennō of all people in the world. In many ways a typical example of colonial literature (symbolized by a maternal relation between adult and a child in need of guidance), this book also carried a warning against other Japanese people, that they should not betray the high ideals of the harmony of people, and not come to Manchuria or China for profit, which would alienate the people and prolong the conflict. The book also had a Buddhist dimension, as Koizumi (partly) overcomes the cultural divisions between her (as Japanese) and Li (as Chinese) through recognition of the universal Buddhahood in all humans: "And in the basis of belief all people have the same mind as the Buddha. They possess the Buddha nature. It is the belief in the teachings of the Buddha, the sincerity (*makoto*) at the depths of people's hearts that is equal. And the belief of Nichirenism that this Buddha nature, this sincerity, is not something abstract, but that it has form in daily life and is alive in things" (KOIZUMI 1938, 24). Ishiwara read this story with great interest and asked it to be republished in the journal *Gekkan Manshū*, marking the beginning of their relationship. *A Manchurian Girl* was well received and found success in Pan-Asianist circles.

An important thing about Koizumi Kikue's role in the EAL was that she was thus by no means a passive receiver of Ishiwara's ideas, but entered the movement with her own ideas and left her own mark on the movement. Koizumi herself seems to have been very inspired by the twelfth chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, which stated that women could reach Buddhahood (*nyonin jōbutsu* 女人成佛). In KOIZUMI (1941a), she developed her own Nichirenist Buddhist theory, in which she essentially fused her own feminist theory of a women's history of Japan and the *Lotus Sutra* with Ishiwara's theory of the final war. This book seems to have been widely read among and well received among members of the EAL. Koizumi argued that the women's history of Japan was essentially a development from "the cooperation between the sexes" (*ryōsei kyōryoku* 両性協力) in ancient times, to an era "when women had no self-consciousness," from the Taika reforms until today, after which we will see again an age of cooperation between the sexes. This restoration of a fair balance between women and men would happen after the demise of pernicious theories such as materialism (Marxism), individualism, and the emperor-as-organ-theory (*Tennō kikan setsu* 天皇機関説), and a successful Showa restoration and the establishment of the East Asia League in

Asia (KOIZUMI 1941a). Koizumi's history of women thus relied on Ishiwara's theory of the final war, and had a similar circular or regenerative logic.

After Japan had changed from a matriarchal to a patriarchal society (which in itself Koizumi did not see as a negative, but as a necessary development in history), Confucianism distorted women's "autonomous social spirit."²¹ In the new era, "feudal" ways would be left behind, and women, who, after all, "before they are women first want to be humans with an independent personality," will regain a "spiritual independence" and become active participants in the establishment of the Buddha country (KOIZUMI 1941a, 143 and 54). Of particular interest is how Koizumi further advances her argument by connecting it to Ishiwara's vitalist cosmology through the argument that women, through their naturally possessing motherly love, are in close contact to the divine life that permeates the universe: "The motherly love that women possess is originally identical to the feeling of the totality of life (*seimei*) that stretches out into infinity.... When women themselves attain the most exquisite state of selfless love, their wish to project the single grand system of the great cosmic life just as it is to the society of the human race and create the highest society, this wish becomes an irrepressible life-instinct. This is because apart from that there is no true love" (KOIZUMI 1941a, 54). Crucially, this also meant that women would have to be able to play active political roles.

Koizumi thus brought her own criticism of the modern condition and the hope of an active role for women to the Nichirenist vision of the future, and she disseminated her ideas through the women's branch of the movement. But Koizumi did not simply use the EAL as a vehicle for her feminism. And her feminism, while advocating "spiritual independence," was quite different from the idea of gaining equal opportunities for their own sake: she was a fervent believer in Nichiren Buddhism, and absolutely convinced of the historic and divine mission of Japan in bringing about world unity, and wished nothing more than for Japanese women to be mobilized and to play their part. Ishiwara held Koizumi in the highest regard, and praised her for her ability to present difficult Nichirenist arguments in an accessible manner, and helped her publish her books: "Koizumi sensei is a person of deep faith; she is one of the top minds translating difficult Buddhist theories into contemporary language" (IKZ 7: 415).

Koizumi took on a quite central role in the EAL after war's end. She toured the Kansai region and other areas as a representative of Ishiwara (who was by then mostly bedridden), led the protest against GHQ to lift the ban on the EAL, even writing a letter to MacArthur's wife, who did not reply to her letter (Koizumi later wrote, "Later I heard she was a rather homely type of woman" (KOIZUMI 1992, 43). She also helped draft the full text of *Nichirenkyō nyūmon*, which was

21. KOIZUMI (1941a, 55). Koizumi was indebted to the anarchist feminist Takamura Itsue 高群逸枝 (1894–1964) for the theory that ancient Japan had been matriarchal.

based on Ishiwara's general outline, and was the most extensive treatise on the EAL's version of Nichiren Buddhism.

Koizumi was a very high profile figure, but there were many other, less prominent women, who played active roles in the EAL, and they give us glimpses of the motivations and operations of the movement. Consider the case of Ogata Yoshiko 尾形好子, a housewife in Tsuruoka in Shōnai.²² According to her account, she stumbled into the movement by accident. She accompanied her husband to a lecture by Ishiwara, but was struck when he simply said "I believe in the Buddha." Ishiwara also told them that Japan was going to lose the war. "Since in the town they had lanterns with the word "victory, victory" lined up, I was really struck by this" (Ogata, cited in NOMURA 2007, 70). Later, she was asked to make a women's branch, but she felt uncertain, and did not even know about the EAL. One person came to her house every day to explain it, and finally told her to go to Ishiwara herself, which she did. Ishiwara noticed she was not very healthy, and advised her on eating habits, and she changed her lifestyle. Finally she agreed to make a women's branch. The branch grew, and since the women wanted to learn more about Buddhism, Ishiwara agreed to lecture several times to them. However, later he said he would "introduce us to a much better teacher than I am" and he introduced Koizumi Kikue, who came over and over again to Shōnai to lecture. "Eventually the branch became something like two thousand members" (NOMURA 2007, 72).

I was a weak and sickly person and sometimes only slept, I improved my daily life, and while forgetting myself and my housework by walking from place to place, at one point my fever disappeared, and I became someone who works in the field. In the postwar era, I overcame many hardships and came to believe in the Buddha. I am still so grateful for that, nothing can replace it.

(Ogata, cited in NOMURA 2007, 72)

For Ogata, joining and participating in the EAL was intimately connected to her faith in Buddhism. What is striking is that while she must have heard about the theory of the final war and Pan-Asianism from Ishiwara and Koizumi, for Ogata, improving everyday life, simple living, health, and Buddhist faith seemed to have been of a larger importance. From the accounts of Koizumi and Ogata, we can see that a number of women saw the EAL as a religious movement, and one that, in contrast to the modern Japanese state's restrictive view of women's roles ("good wife, wise mother"; *ryōsai kenbo* 良妻賢母), opened avenues for a different balance between the genders and active social and political roles for women.

22. See Ogata's account, item number 35, in *Tōarenmeiki no Ishiwara Kanji shiryō* (NOMURA 2007, 69–72).

Koreans in the East Asia League

Characteristic for the EAL was the significant involvement of Koreans. The whole idea of an East Asian League (as a preamble to world unity) as the cooperation of Japan, Manchukuo, and China also opened the door to the question of what position Korea and Koreans should take in this new constellation. Ishiwara recognized this, worrying that “the largest problem of the EAL is the problem of nationalities (*minzoku* 民族),” and that the EAL should solve the problem of what position to take with regards to Korea (NOMURA 2007, 289). Openly advocating independence for Korea would have invited an even heavier crackdown, which was probably the reason why Ishiwara discussed this issue “with fellow believers only.” Miyazaki Masayoshi opposed raising the issue openly but also admitted that “Korea needs to be rethought from the standpoint of the East Asia League” (NOMURA 2007, 12–14). Suspicious officials also approached EAL leaders asking whether the EAL’s ideology could probably be abused for advocating Korean independence, which one prominent Korean member denied (NOMURA 2007, 289). Several Korean members of the EAL were arrested and tortured in prison.

Some Koreans indeed did seem to have joined the EAL in the hope of advancing a Korean nationalist agenda, or to advance Korea’s position within the new order of Asia. From the perspective of a colonial subject at the time, despite Japan’s shortcomings, it would probably have been difficult to imagine Japan, as the most advanced and powerful nation in Asia at the time, not playing a leading role. Also, the reformist agenda of the EAL as well as its critique of the global dominance of the Anglo-Saxon countries had the potential to win over left-leaning individuals. The most notorious of these was probably Park Yeol 朴烈, a Korean anarchist who attempted to kill the emperor, was imprisoned, and released in October 1945, after which he joined Ishiwara. He became one of the founders of the *zainichi* Korean organization *Mindan*. Outside the EAL movement was Ō In-Sik, an important Marxist philosopher who came to support Miki Kiyoshi’s philosophy of a East Asian community (*Tōa kyōdōtai* 東亞共同体). This was in many ways similar to the EAL program—transfiguring the idea of class struggle to the idea of an East Asian community as the overcoming of world capitalism (WORKMAN 2013). However, religious reasons, Nichiren Buddhism, and the idealism of a utopian vision for a new Asia and a new world did have some genuine appeal.

One of the most prominent Korean members in the EAL was Cho Yōng-ju 曹寧柱 (1913–1996). Cho was a Korean nationalist who had come to Kyoto as a student, and became involved in the radical leftist student movement. He was arrested in 1942 and suffered greatly in prison, including torture. He was released from prison and came to play an important role in the EAL, and together with Koizumi Kikue helped draft the *Nichirenkyō nyūmon* after the war. In his post-

war autobiography, he describes his entry to the EAL as a journey from radical Marxist and materialist atheism to conversion to Nichiren Buddhism (CHŌ 1949a and 1949b). Cho relates how he came into contact with the writings of Marx, Engels, and Feuerbach, and with the antireligious movements in vogue in the early 1930s, fully embraced the position that religion was a remnant of a primitive world view and nothing more than a tool to conceal class struggle, and “opium for the people.” While he became dissatisfied with Marxism and interested in religion, the sticking point remained what he thought of as the fundamental incompatibility of religion and science. However, through reading (among others) the socialist Christian philosopher Kagawa Toyohiko 賀川豊彦 (1888–1960), he came to realize that science did not have all the answers, and that “the mystery of the universe is much more incomprehensible (*fukashigi* 不可思議) than science supposes” (CHŌ 1949a, 11). He thus came to reject materialism, believing that behind the changing world of matter, the “spirit (*seishin*) of the universe is absolute, unchanging, and eternal,” and religion was to accept this eternal spirit that also resides in man (CHŌ 1949a, 14). While he at first did not know exactly what religion he should turn to, and admits he joined the EAL in order to advocate the independence of Korea, he was arrested, and through the hardships endured in prison, he experienced a religious breakthrough, and turned to Nichiren Buddhism. According to his own account, he came full circle, eventually arguing that the teachings of Nichiren (*Nichirenkyō* 日蓮教) was “the only faith that could overcome the Marxist critique of religion,” and that Nichiren Buddhism offered the promise that humans could go beyond science and retrieve lost “powers of intuition” in order to discover the “magnificent cosmic power of life” (CHŌ 1949b, 6). Since Chō wrote on these issues separately, and since he was involved in the drafting of *Nichirenkyō nyūmon*, which advances the same position, it is very likely that this input came from Chō rather than Ishiwara. From Chō’s account we can see that he was not drawn to the EAL for political reasons only, but that a change in world view and a religious experience played a large role.

Chō’s commitment to Japan and the Tennō should also be understood in Nichirenist terms. In other words, before we dismiss Chō as a “collaborator,” it is significant that he saw himself as having, through his Nichirenist faith, achieved a spiritual understanding of “Japan” as a kind of ideal to strive for: a “Japan” not as the existing nation-state (which tried to suppress the EAL), but as a platform that—when brought into the right state of mind—had a religious mission to change the world, and usher in a new era beyond nation-states and of course colonialism altogether. This allowed him also to criticize Japanese people for not living up to this mission by indulging in a modernist lifestyle or embracing Marxism. Crucially, neither Japan’s defeat in 1945 nor Korean independence made him waver in this faith, as in the postwar period, Chō criticized both

Koreans and Japanese for turning their backs on the Kokutai, and stated that he would continue to “follow his Nichiren faith” and contribute to making Japan the Buddha country (*kokka jōbutsu* 国家成仏): “For us believers in Nichiren, the Buddhification of Japan is an absolute duty” (CHŌ 1949b, 11–12). Chō continued to become one of the leading figures in *zainichi* organizations in postwar Japan.

Although the EAL was one of the few groups willing to raise the issue of Korea within the new order in Asia, and were supportive of the Korean members, they remained ambivalent about Korean nationalist aspirations. The EAL stood up against economic discrimination of Koreans in Japan, and especially after the war, when the position of Koreans in Japan became more precarious due to their loss of Japanese citizenship, the state’s active attempts to repatriate Koreans, and continuing discrimination, the EAL was a rare voice in defending the role and position of Koreans in Japan. Ishiwara and the EAL recognized Korean national characteristics and aspirations for self-rule, and were critical of Japanese colonial policy, but during the war opposed calls for the independence of Korea. Their position became quite subtle (or perhaps contradictory), arguing that nationalities were real entities and that Japan had made a mistake in suppressing Korean national aspirations, while at the same time arguing that ultimately nation and national borders did not matter, since all humanity came from the same origins, and nation-states would vanish anyway.

More important is that the EAL’s program seemed to have been open enough that it held a more flexible and fluid notion of national identity than the rigid ethnic nationalism of the modern nation-state. During the war, the EAL drew attention to the social and economic discrimination of Koreans, and Ishiwara, in speeches and among others in his *Critique of Mein Kampf* (*Main kampu hihan* マインカンフ批判; IKSS 4: 9–122) of 1944, which was banned from publication, warned against Japan adopting a position of racial purity, which would exclude Koreans. Hitler, Ishiwara argued, had made a biological mistake in believing Germans and Jews were different species, while they were in reality more like variants of the same species. Also, racially pure peoples, such as native American tribes, were in practice weak. In contrast, the Japanese, Ishiwara argued, were of “mixed blood” (IKSS 4: 20–22; IKZ 7: 183). In the postwar era, the EAL’s new manifesto declared that there was no doubt that Koreans would have a large role to play in the construction of the new Japan (ISHIWARA KANJI HEIWA SHISŌ KENKYŪKAI 1994). In short, Ishiwara and the EAL tried to carry over an *ideal* multi-ethnic identity into postwar Japanese society. This stood in sharp contrast to the direction Japan was moving: as the sociologist OGUMA Eiji (1995) has argued, with the loss of empire, Japan decisively turned to the embrace of a mono-ethnic identity for its modern nation-state, with dire consequences for the Korean minorities within Japan. The EAL was also one of the first to call for

expressing regret with regards to Japan's actions during the war and call for a reconciliation with Korea and China.

A comparable case to Chō was the Korean-born but Japanese EAL member Irie Tatsuo (1908–), whose path to the EAL started by his joining the socialist Nichirenist Seno'ō Girō 妹尾義郎, motivated by his concern, as a believer in Nichirenism, with poverty, the labor problem, and the general gap between faith, politics, and economics (IRIE 1982, 92). When he joined the army, he raised concerns about the discrimination against the *buraku*, and that generally he could not “tolerate the existence of discrimination” (IRIE 1982, 95). Similarly, when returning to Korea in the 1930s, he was appalled by the *Kōminka* policies, the forced adoption of Japanese names and language, and forced shrine visits for Koreans (IRIE 1982, 98). He went to Manchuria because he believed in the ideal of the harmony of races, but could still not find “the path to a life in which my faith in Nichiren and politics and economics were one” (IRIE 1982, 103). A Korean friend eventually led him to the EAL, where he was able to find an ideal that filled this void.

In short, the EAL became a voice against the idea of Japanese racial superiority and discrimination within Asia, while maintaining a difficult balance between the idea of an essential difference between Asians and Europeans, and the common origins and shared Buddhahood of all of humanity.

Conclusions: The East Asian League as a Nichirenist Buddhist Movement

The EAL was an important modern variant of the Nichirenist movements in Japan, in addition to the Kokuchūkai and Soka Gakkai in the postwar. It inherited and further developed the key elements of Tanaka Chigaku's Nichirenist program, such as the belief in the Kokutai as the realization of the wise Buddhist ruler (*kenō* 賢王), the establishment of the national ordination platform (*kokuritsu kaidan*), an eschatological view of history leading to world unity and eternal peace, a conception of Nichirenism as total (encompassing all aspects of life including politics, economics, education, and so on), and the making of blueprints for the establishment of an ideal Buddhist world. But the EAL also added several elements that made it somewhat unique. Although I argued for the EAL as a religious organization, the EAL can perhaps also be characterized as a hybrid organization, a combination of a religious, political, and social movements. In this conclusion I will elaborate on what I believe are the most salient characteristics of the EAL as a religious organization.

Some of the characteristics of the EAL stem from Ishiwara's own peculiar combination of Nichirenist belief and his interpretation of military history culminating in final war, but not all. A most important addition that Ishiwara and the EAL made to Nichirenism was the merging of Pan-Asianism with Buddhist beliefs. The movement would simply not have been born without the unique

circumstances of the colonization of Asia by Western powers, the reaction against this by Pan-Asianist thought, and the rise to prominence of Pan-Asian ideas in the interwar period. The idealism of the founding of Manchukuo as the starting point of the unification of Asia played a very large role in the movement, and figures in the EAL ascribed a certain religious meaning to it, as a pivotal moment in history that announced the beginning of the Showa restoration. Similarly, the circumstances of the war in China and the EAL's attempt to stop it was formative in the articulation of Pan-Asian ideals.

While the movement undoubtedly had certain nationalist aspects (such as the divine mission of Japan), its position cannot be reduced to nationalism or Japanese ideology, since it also advocated the idea of the nation-state as a passing phenomenon. The EAL also openly clashed with right-wing "Japanists" and notions of Japanese racial superiority. Rather than ideology, its Pan-Asianist vision functioned as a source of resistance, both against Western and Japanese imperialism, in the prewar and postwar periods. The EAL's utopianism in its political meanings can perhaps be understood in the way that Karl Mannheim has characterized utopianism: as opposed to "ideology." Utopianism functioned as an avenue enabling those outside of power to critique the existing order (in this case: capitalism, Western global hegemony, uneven gender relations, racial discrimination, "internal colonisation" of the Tōhoku region), and as an avenue to envision an alternative ideal future without these problems.

Nevertheless, its conception of history implied an unshakable belief in the superiority and eventual victory of Japanese and Asian values and Nichiren Buddhism over the West. Ideas very similar to, or even from the EAL, were eventually used to legitimize the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Similar to other Pan-Asian organizations, it thus found itself in the ambivalent position of critiquing state and empire while also having supplied intellectual sources for legitimizing empire. Nevertheless, Pan-Asianism was not the ultimate goal of the EAL; the crux of the EAL's pan-Asianism was that it was ultimately part of a larger religious world view.

Similarly, the EAL's vision of war played a very large role in its religious world view: While the movement was presented as an "antiwar movement" and its ultimate goal was everlasting peace, the idea of a final war focused and determined almost all other aspects of the EAL's program, including its urban planning and its opposition to the war in China. It probably gave the members a clear sense of the world, how history would unfold, and their place in this drama. Hence, to a degree, its vision of war can be understood in terms of what Mark Juergensmeyer has called "cosmic war" in religious conceptions:

The idea of warfare implies more than an attitude; ultimately it is a world view and an assertion of power. To live in a state of war is to live in a world in which

individuals know who they are, why they have suffered, by whose hand they have been humiliated, and at what expense they have persevered. The concept of war provides cosmology, history, and eschatology and offers the reins of political control. Perhaps most important, it holds out the hope of victory and the means to achieve it. In the images of cosmic war this victorious triumph is a grand moment of social and personal transformation, transcending all worldly limitations. (JUERGENSEMEYER 2003, 158)

On the other hand, historically, the EAL's vision of a final war was equally a secular theory, based on Ishiwara's analysis of military history, and was also a product of the specific historical circumstances of the interwar period, when speculations about future total war were very prevalent. I want to suggest here that the EAL's attitude to war should be further investigated, and not be dismissed as religious justification for secular war ends, since in practice, the EAL has opposed and tried to stop the China war, the Asia-Pacific War, and after 1945 opposed Japan's rearmament. Also, its religious vision of eternal peace, the flip-side of the theory of the final war, was equally important to its vision and should be given equal weight when assessing the EAL's world view.

Several questions with regards to the final war theory remain. Was everything Ishiwara and the EAL proposed all a means for victory in the final war? While all of Ishiwara's and EAL's texts discuss the final war as inevitable, there is room for doubt as to what degree Ishiwara and the key EAL members believed this war also to be desirable. In a certain way, as alluded to above, the final war was to be a religious war, resulting in the inevitable victory of Nichiren Buddhism, the desirable end result. But Ishiwara and many other members were quite quick to drop the whole idea after 1945 and embrace pacifism. Ishiwara wrote that he "admits" that his prediction of a final war between Asia and the West "was a profound self-conceit and in fact a mistake" (ISHIWARA KANJI HEIWA SHISŌ KENKYŪKAI 1994, 200). Ishiwara and the EAL were also somewhat unclear on the relation between victory in the final war and world acceptance of Nichiren Buddhism. Would victory pave the way to force Nichiren beliefs on the world's population? Ishiwara's and the EAL's writings did not indicate this. Writing in 1944, thus probably before he gave up on the idea of the final war, Ishiwara, while defending the unrivalled religious freedom of Japan, insisted that he would never use the force of the state or law to suppress Christianity or Pure Land Buddhism, believing that religion would be unified through persuasion and debate. While Ishiwara and the EAL described the final war as a necessary condition for the global spread of Nichiren Buddhism, they left it ultimately extremely vague as to how this would happen in practice.

The most important element of the EAL, and what probably motivated many members, was that it promised a complete alternative course of modernization,

one in which religion took an absolutely central position. The unification of Asia and the world would also go hand-in-hand with a large-scale transformation or “revolution” (*kakumei* 革命) of all aspects of life, economy, and politics, creating a Buddhist utopia that promised the overcoming of all the ills of modernity.

Among the many proposals and policies of Ishiwara and the EAL, the overarching theme was the integration of Nichiren Buddhism in modern politics, the economy, and all aspects of everyday life, almost always formulated as a new “unification” (*tōitsu* 統一). This emphasis on unification can be seen in the EAL’s emphasis on the unification of politics and religion, science and religion, government and people, city and country, industry and agriculture, roles of men and women, and unification of nations, first in Asia, then followed by world unity. The separation or differentiation of these spheres of human life was then portrayed as a temporary stage in history, and often a product of modernity. In this sense, the EAL’s analysis of modernity as characterized by differentiation was to a degree similar to the wider-held theme of “overcoming modernity” (*kindai no chōkoku* 近代の超克), as articulated by the participants of the well-known symposium held in Kyoto in 1942.²³ However, unlike the current of overcoming modernity, the EAL had no qualms of promising the end of things such as traditional family structures and food culture, and also held views that strongly endorsed modernization in the form of rationalization, a rise in economic productivity, and especially unlimited scientific and technological progress, in a sense thus promising a kind of hyper-modernity.

This complex and ambivalent engagement with modernity and progress also showed itself in a complex conception of historical time. The EAL’s sense of history was based on a modern *linear* conception of time, in the sense of history inevitably advancing in a single direction, accompanied by (technological) progress. In its embrace of the unilinear pattern of historical change, the EAL was the child of the modern historicist ideologies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Similarly, completely absent in the EAL’s texts was a sense that there might be multiple directions of historical change, nor did there seem to be any self-reflective questioning if other countries, social groups, or individuals actually would accept its utopian vision.

On the other hand, the EAL held a form of what perhaps can be called a “circular eschatology”: the idea that the future would bring a restoration of a past unity, thus a type of *circular*, or dialectical, pattern of historical change. This can be seen in examples such as the prediction of a return to the original unity of the various human ethnicities; the restoration of the unity of science and religion,

23. The theme of “overcoming modernity” has been subject of much scholarly attention. In English, see especially Harry HAROOTUNIAN 2000, and Richard CALICHMAN’s (2008) translation and commentary.

and science and politics; equal cooperation between men and women, and land and city; and, after the era of the division of labor, a return to cooperative work centered around agriculture in self-sufficient communities. Although Ishiwara and the EAL's view of history was heavily influenced by Buddhist eschatology and the idea of *mappō*, the circular movement described above was not exactly the same as premodern conceptions of circularity, in which the past was the ideal. While Ishiwara and the EAL did hold certain elements of the past as ideal, they were by no means longing for a nostalgic return to the past. On the contrary, the EAL's emphasis was mostly on the future, which they presented as an entirely new and infinite possibility for the betterment of man and society. Both these conceptions of historical change depended on each other, in the sense that progress would enable the restoration of these forms of the past, but within an entirely new future.

While the EAL's program betrayed a certain unease with modernity, it was thus by no means anti-modern. This showed most clearly in that the realization of its Buddhist utopia was often dependent on imagined future developments in science and technology. Probably no other Buddhist movement expressed such emphasis on the scientific character of their beliefs and the fusion of science and religion. The EAL attributed a large and direct role to technology in the achievement of religious ends. Many of the religious and political goals that the EAL formulated were *dependent* on future technological innovations, or adaptations to the speed of technological change (such as the airplane, or new fertilizers). Hence the EAL can also be labeled a form of religious techno-utopianism.

Despite its insistence on "unification," in practice the movement had a great deal of ambivalence; it also seemed to have held different promises for different people and for different reasons. Idealist Pan-Asianists saw it as an ideal for Asian unity, and a sincere belief to liberate Asia and the world from Western colonialism, while others saw it as part of a program to assert Japanese leadership. Several figures in the army most likely saw the EAL as an asset in the propaganda war in China, while high-profile Chinese members in the Nanjing government most likely saw the movement as an avenue for strengthening their political independence. Meanwhile, mothers and farmers in northeastern Japan saw the movement as a way to improve daily life, increase farm yield, or reform the local region. Some women saw it as an opportunity to envision a kind of equality between the sexes. Koreans saw the movement as a way to advance the position of Koreans in the empire and after the war within Japan. And several members of both Japanese and Korean backgrounds joined with initially socialistic ideals of solving the gap between rich and poor, or in the case of Chō, to harmonize science and religion. This aspect of multivalence can probably be understood as somewhat of an accidental characteristic of the movement, and one that Ishiwara at times tried to correct by attempts to unify and streamline

the organization, and remind them of the essentially Nichirenist spirit and goal of the EAL. While the members might have had different motivations, and different reasons for feeling an unease with modernity, the solution was always the same: a total unification of all aspects of life under a single program inspired by the *Lotus Sutra*; a single solution that would solve the ills of modernity.

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- SKKS *Shōnai kokudo keikaku sōan* 庄内国土計画草案. Tōarenmei Shōnai Shibu 東亜連盟庄内支部, ed. Tsuruoka: Tōarenmei Dōshikai Shōnai Shibu, 1943.

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