

## Nichiren and *Setsuwa*

Laurel Rasplica RODD

### SETSUWA COLLECTIONS AS SOURCE BOOKS

Problems of genre have troubled students of medieval Japanese literature for many years. Labels and classifications often set artificial boundaries between works that are remarkably similar, while grouping together works with widely divergent characteristics.

*Setsuwa*, *shōdō*, and *zuihitsu* are among the rubrics applied to Kamakura literature. *Shōdō* refers to evangelical preaching and is generally used for oral literature, although texts of some such sermons exist. *Zuihitsu* are personal essays, attractive because of their polished language and revelation of the personality of the author. The vaguest of the three terms, *setsuwa*, is applied to the broadest range of materials, sometimes encompassing *zuihitsu*.

This paper seeks to investigate the purposes for which certain *setsuwa* were written, and to relate those purposes and the diverse forms *setsuwa* may take to the style of preaching used in the medieval period in Japan. The letters of Nichiren illustrate interrelationships among these types of literature. Comparative studies, more than classification into separate groups of literature, may shed some light on the development of Japanese literature in the medieval period.

*The nature of setsuwa.* The Japanese term *setsuwa bungaku* is as amorphous as its English translation "tale literature." In its broadest sense it refers to tales of any sort (myths, legends, fairy tales) when they are considered as literature. More commonly it is used to refer to groups of tales gathered together in literary form. In this sense *setsuwa* includes a wide range of written literature often with little in common but brevity (Shimazu 1974, pp. 317–318).

Because of the general lack of development of the narration and the flat style of most tale collections, *setsuwa* are said to have "primitive literary form and content" (Shimazu 1974, p. 317). This does not mean that these written stories are products of the masses or that the collections are the outgrowths of village storytelling, however, for the authors of most collections were well-educated priests or courtiers. Yet if they are not true "popular" works of literature, the question arises as to what role such works play in Japanese literature.

Until recently scholars in Japan and the West rather facetiously dismissed the *setsuwa* as of insignificant literary merit. A recent surge of interest in the medieval period in Japan and in nonaristocratic genres, conversely, has led not only to some extravagant claims for their value but also to a generally accepted more conservative view that the best of the collections, at least, have some positive literary qualities. Even granted this latter view, however, there still remain questions as to the value to assign to the majority of collections and as to the role *setsuwa* play in the Japanese literary context.

In coping with the volume of material, it is helpful to note that

more than half of the extant collections from the period up to 1333 are purely Buddhist, and if the Buddhist tales in works of mixed content are taken into account, the proportion of Buddhist tales to all others in these collections must be nearly two to one (Mills 1970, p. 5).

Some religious purpose seems indicated by this preponderance of religious materials.

As for the intended audience, we can imagine several possibilities: the masses of the illiterate population for whom these simple stories seem most appropriate; the court ladies who wrote and read the courtly romances that dominate the literature of earlier centuries; or priests who might be most interested in the subject matter. None of these answers, however, is satisfying: the illiterate could not have read the Japanese collections, much less the ones written in Chinese; courtiers accustomed to fairly

sophisticated literature might have demanded more extensive development; priests would surely have found the tales too puerile and the doctrine too simplistic and commonplace for their own pleasure.

It is in this connection that the letters of Nichiren, a thirteenth-century priest, prove valuable, for they illustrate one way in which the tales were used and provide concrete examples of audience. The peak in the production of tale collections occurred during the late Heian and the Kamakura periods (around 1050 to 1333). This was also the period when Buddhism spread throughout Japanese society, carried by a new class of nonmonastic priests, of whom Nichiren was one.

The upsurge in the number of tale collections during this time of Buddhist growth may not be coincidental and permits the supposition that many of the collections were intended not as written literature but as source books for oral presentation.

*Religious use of setsuwa.* The earliest collections of tales, such as the early ninth-century *Nihon ryōiki*, contain Buddhist stories—tales to illustrate the workings of karma in this life or to describe the horrors of the hells and the pleasures of the paradises in which one might be reborn. The morals of the stories are very simple, and the plots appeal to those untutored in religious matters. But it is certain that these stories were not to be read by the untutored, for they are written in Chinese, which was studied only by priests and educated laymen. It was through oral presentation by priests that such stories reached the unlearned. Tales were used in the course of sermons as simple, concrete illustrations of doctrine.

From the beginnings of Buddhism in Japan, lectures on various sutras were held at regular intervals at all temples. Generally these consisted of much pageantry and a fairly dull lecture. The parables were undoubtedly the most interesting part of these sermons, which followed an established order: reading of the sutra in Chinese, commentary on the individual Chinese charac-

ters in the title of the sutra, and finally explication of the meaning of the passage. In this final section the priest would illustrate this meaning with analogies and tales (Kadokawa and Sugiyama 1967, vol. 5, p. 166).

The language of the sermons in early times was flowery and difficult, but the illustrative tales were presented in terms the audience could understand. In all the medieval Japanese language tale collections, there is a corresponding popular feel about the language used. It has none of the "allusive vagueness and economy" of *Genji monogatari* and other works of the aristocratic tradition, being, rather, "prolix, repetitive," and simplistic. Even the works in Chinese have a simple style, often heavily influenced by Japanese (Mills 1970, p. 34).

There are a number of works, not generally included as part of *setsuwa bungaku*, that are acknowledged to be collections of notes for sermons.<sup>1</sup> These are considered to have been written for this purpose because they contain notes on doctrinal matters and interpretations of the sutras as well as plots of parables and tales and reflective passages like those in the *setsuwa* collections.

By analogy, and judging from the customary lack of appeal in narrative and style, it seems likely that many of the *setsuwa* collections were compiled and served primarily as source books for priests to use in preparing services and sermons. The Buddha himself encouraged the use of parables and anecdotes as *upāya*, devices or means to the end of leading people at different stages of understanding along the road to enlightenment. The *Lotus sutra*, especially, one of the most popular sutras in Japan, is filled with parables told by the Buddha. Adaptations of these parables and stories of the enlightenment and worldly benefit derived from Buddhist faith and practice make up the bulk of the early tale collections and form a large part of later ones. Priests, following the Buddha's example, made

---

1. *Hokke hyakuza*, *Uchigikishū*, and *Kanazawa bunko-bon bukkyō setsuwashū* are said to consist either of notes taken from sermons or notes prepared for use in sermons (Mills 1970, pp. 12, 33).

lavish use of them in their sermons. Gradually the stories became the most important part of the service.

This change in the service came about partly because of a change in Buddhism. When Buddhism was first introduced to Japan, there was little sectarian consciousness, but by the Kamakura period, the situation was very different. Many priests, called *hijiri*, *sekkyōsha*, or *shōdōshi*, among other names, had moved their now simplified teachings out of the great temples and carried them directly to the people. Commoners, peasants, fishermen, and warriors, excluded in the early aristocratic days of Japanese Buddhism, now became coveted audiences as new and competing sects sought followers. Wandering priests of these new sects preached to the illiterate and poor as well as to the rich and educated, in temples, when they were invited, or in homes and on the streets. Sermons became less structured; they were now individual efforts to persuade the hearers to faith and to teach elementary points of doctrine.<sup>2</sup>

Even services and ceremonies at the temples acquired a new character. The atmosphere at such services was “that of a carnival, with all manner of means employed to appeal to and sway the minds of the congregation” (Mills 1970, p. 35). Plays, music, and vaudeville-like programs—festivities that evolved into the No drama—enlivened the proceedings. An essential part of such entertainments was story-telling, and secular tales as well as religious had their place.

Many stories not specifically Buddhist were recited by itinerant entertainers such as the *biwahōshi*, nominally priests, who traveled about reciting ballads and telling stories to the accompaniment of the lutelike *biwa*.<sup>3</sup> These ballads, founded in the tradition of the oral tales about military exploits, reached the brilliance of epic poetry with the *Heike monogatari*. Though a war tale, the *Heike* is hardly a glorification of war; it illustrates

2. See Kikuchi (1968) for an extensive discussion of the new styles of preaching.

3. See Ruch (1977) for a study of the “vocal literature” of the Kamakura and Muromachi periods, and its performers.

the pervasive Buddhist nature of medieval Japanese literature. The famous opening lines set the tone:

The sound of the bell of the Gion Temple echoes the impermanence of all things. The pale hue of the flowers of the teak tree show the truth that they who prosper must fall. The proud do not last long, but vanish like a spring night's dream. And the mighty too will perish in the end, like dust before the wind.

Entertainment it was, and in this case great literature too, that these priests were purveying, but there was also an underlying didacticism, conveying the Buddhist world view of impermanence and the inevitability of suffering. In this way even tales that seemed to have no connection with religion could present a theme that would lead into a sermon. Any tale that could capture the attention of the audience had a place.

Variations on two types of sermons were used by these priests. One was the parable-centered lecture, the other the lyrical, emotional description of personal religious experience (Kikuchi 1968, p. 57). These two types of preaching correspond to the two main types of *setsuwa* collections that appeared during the thirteenth century, a century during which at least fifteen new collections were compiled. It seems probable that a good proportion of the outpouring of collections was assembled for the practical use of preachers seeking new materials and more varied anecdotes to capture the attention of different audiences.

Among the *setsuwa* collections the style varies from one of bare sketching of plot outlines to the richer texture of essays. The latter collections, such as *Kankyo no tomo* and *Senjūshō*, are close to the Japanese genre of *zuihitsu*. Like *pensées*, they are notes of random thoughts on random subjects, combining anecdote, analogy, and the author's own experiences with his philosophical and emotional responses to them.

#### NICHIREN AND SETSUWA

*Nichiren's letters.* Among Nichiren's writings are letters, some

centered on tales with a moralizing purpose, others that are close to the *zuihitsu* style, in which each train of thought is followed to its end and comment is very personal. Nichiren, who lived from 1222 to 1282, was one of the new tribe of preachers who worked among the people. Also, though he did not intend it, he became the founder of the Nichiren or Lotus sect of Buddhism that has engendered many of the so-called new religions of twentieth-century Japan.

For a man who lived seven hundred years ago, a startling number of Nichiren's writings have survived. The standard edition, *Shōwa teihon Nichiren shōnin ibun*, contains 3,019 pages of small print. Of some 434 letters and essays considered to be authentic, nearly 100 still exist in manuscript in Nichiren's hand. Nichiren spent much of his career in exile, either official or self-imposed, but kept in close touch with his disciples and lay followers in various parts of the country by means of a steady stream of personal letters. More than one hundred of his followers can, in fact, be identified by name from his letters. Over one-third are women, and many of the others are lower-ranking samurai and farmers, on the whole poorly educated people.

Nichiren wrote a semi-Chinese which he used in his doctrinal essays and in letters to his better-educated disciples, but the rest of his writings are in a Japanese much closer to the contemporary colloquial Japanese than to the blend of Chinese and Japanese (*wakankōbun*) used in most religious writings. Also, because he wrote most of his letters to individuals, Nichiren tailored them to suit: personal questions, suggestions for solving problems they had written him about, and explications of doctrine are designed specifically for each one.

It is these letters that offer the best available examples of what priests could do with the story outlines contained in the tale collections: how they elaborated on them, related them to their audiences' lives, and added literary and appealing touches and a personal style. Oral sermons, of course, were not recorded word for word, even though notes survive, so Nichiren's written ser-

mons are valuable examples of exactly how the tale collections may have been used.

Nichiren used several hundred different anecdotes and tales in his letters. Some appear to be original, but many others are found in one or more of the collections of tales produced during the centuries of Buddhism in Japan or have their source in the *Lotus sutra*. Buddhist tales and tales from Chinese history illustrating Confucian virtues, which Nichiren promoted as a basis for secular morality, are the most common.<sup>4</sup>

*Nichiren and the tale-centered sermon.* A fairly short letter, "Ueno ama gozen gohenji" (*Shōwa teihon Nichiren shōnin ibun* 1971, vol. 2, pp. 1890-94), sent to a woman believer after she had sent alms on the anniversary of the death of her father, illustrates how Nichiren used tales. He tells the story of the salvation of Wu-lung, a famous Chinese calligrapher and enemy of Buddhism. This story appears in the T'ang collection, *Fu hua ch'uan chi* (Takagi 1973, p. 114). It is found in two Japanese collections: in the *Shishū hyakuinnenshū* in the mixed Chinese and Japanese *wakankōbun*, and in the *Jikkishō* in pure Japanese. Both appeared around the middle of the thirteenth century when Nichiren was preaching.

The *Jikkishō* version is spare:

The man named Wu-lung did not believe in Buddhism. Although he wrote many things he did not write one single character about Buddhism. His son I-lung inherited his talent, and he too became a marvelous calligrapher. When Wu-lung was dying, he told his son, "You must follow my example and never write a character of anything that advocates Buddhism." Since he was an evil man, he fell into evil destinies and suffered terribly. I-lung, in accordance with his late father's wishes, became an unshakable enemy of Buddhism. He was commanded by the king to write

4. Takagi Yutaka (1973) provides an exhaustive listing of tales cited and related in Nichiren's letters. See the charts on pages 109-110, 122-123, and 141.

the eight characters of the title of the *Lotus sutra* on the outside cover of each of the eight scrolls of the sutra. In a dream I-lung saw these characters become sixty-four Buddhas and descend to the hell to which Wu-lung had fallen. There they relieved his suffering and Wu-lung was enlightened.

When we think about this we realize that even if one does not believe and is not pure of heart, if he writes but one character of the *sutra*, there need be no doubts about the next life (*Jikkishō* 6–27).

Nichiren's letter, written in Japanese of a straightforward sort, is easily understood and suited to Nichiren's personality and the simplicity of the teaching conveyed. It opens with a word of thanks for a gift of rice and potatoes. Then, after an extended introductory series of analogies explaining how the *Lotus sutra* brings instantaneous enlightenment "just as the reflection of the moon floats upon the water the moment the moon rises from east of the mountains and just as the sound and echo ring out simultaneously," Nichiren launches into his version of the story of the calligrapher and his son, implicitly comparing Ueno Ama Gozen and her memorial offerings for her nonbelieving father to the salvation of Wu-lung by his son.

Nichiren's version is more than five times as long as the *Jikkishō* version, amplified by fuller narrative technique; more vivid detail; human touches, such as description of feelings, designed to elicit sympathy for the characters and make them them more real; and dialogue.

With his opening description of the setting, Nichiren engages his reader's attention:

If you cross the great sea to the southwest of Japan, you will come to the country called China. In that country there were men who believed in Buddha but not the gods, and there were men who believed in the gods but not the Buddha. In the beginning it was the same in Japan, too.

The story may take place in China, but Nichiren has placed it within the experience of his reader and within the scope of

her imagination. Using comparisons again, he introduces the main character:

In China there was a man named Wu-lung who was the greatest calligrapher in the country. He was as famous as Michikaze or Nariyuki in Japan. This man hated Buddhism and vowed that never in his life would he copy a sutra.

In dialogue Nichiren introduces the vow that gives rise to the conflict portrayed in the story: should the young man keep his vow to his dying father never to write the sutras, or should he break it and obey the command of his lord?

The king, barely mentioned in the *Jikkishō*, plays a major role in Nichiren's version. He is a "Buddhist with a special faith in the *Lotus sutra*." Wishing a copy of the *Lotus* to worship, he summons I-lung, "the best calligrapher in the country." At first he accepts I-lung's refusal, but, dissatisfied with the copy made by another calligrapher—a character added by Nichiren for dramatic tension—he again summons I-lung.

You say you cannot copy the sutra because of your dying father's wish. So I order you to copy just the title on the eight volumes of the sutra.

Again I-lung refuses and the king is enraged.

Your father was my retainer. How can you fear to break your vow to your father, and yet refuse to obey your lord's command, a far worse crime?

By this time Nichiren's readers would be as torn as I-lung. Which comes first, loyalty to parent or loyalty to lord? Carefully, Nichiren balances forward movement and pauses in the action to build the tension that leads to the climax. At last I-lung gives in and writes the title, but he rushes immediately to his father's grave, "weeping tears of blood."

There was no apology he could make for his disobedience. Three days he stood by the grave, refusing all food and bewailing his unfilial conduct. Around five on the morning

of the third day, he fell to the ground as if dead. In a vision he saw a god in the sky. The god looked like pictures of Indra. His retinue surrounded him.

In the ensuing conversation, I-lung discovers that the god is his father, who explains in great detail how he had suffered in hell for his sins against the Buddhist teachings and how he was finally rescued by the personified characters of the title of the *Lotus sutra* which I-lung had written. At length I-lung inquires:

“How could the titles which I wrote have saved you, for I wrote the characters without faith?” His father explained: “Your hand is my hand; your body is my body. The characters you wrote were characters written by me. You did not believe in the *Lotus sutra*, but you saved me by writing the title. This is like a child who, playing with fire, burns something by accident. Faith in the *Lotus sutra* is the same. You can have faith without realizing it and still be saved.”

The liberal use of simile and metaphor, common to all Nichiren’s writing, and the dialogue, add sparkle to an explanation that is best characterized by a Japanese word, *setsumeiteki* (“explanatory”). After this lecture in dialogue, there is a rapid conclusion—

I-lung was favored by the king and soon the entire nation came to believe in the *Lotus sutra*.

and a succinct moral—

Now the late lord Gorō and the lay priest were your father and son. You are the daughter of the lay priest. Your faith in the *Lotus sutra* has undoubtedly already guided your father and child to the palace of the Tushita heaven.

*Nichiren and the zuihitsu-centered sermon.* The *zuihitsu* is closely related to the journal (*nikki*) in Japanese letters: both contain a loose, quixotically ordered collection of personal comments on events, conversations, fruits of contemplation, nature, or whatever interests the author. Shaping of the material is informal,

reflecting the personality and sensitivities of the writer. It is this personal revelation that is most attractive in sermons which follow this style, and Nichiren was a master of it. His religious meditations speak to a wide audience. These letters, often lyrical, reflect the charismatic aspect of Nichiren's proselytization. In them he describes his surroundings, muses on his life and role, explores his doubts and joys, and expresses his love for his followers. It is easy to imagine how so many of Nichiren's letters survived, treasured by families over the centuries for their immediacy and intimacy.

"Niiama gozen gohenji" (*Shōwa teihon Nichiren shōnin ibun* 1971, vol. 1, pp. 864-70) is addressed to a young woman of the manorial family in Tōjō district, Awa province, where Nichiren grew up. She had requested a *honzon*,<sup>5</sup> a mandala designed by Nichiren as a concrete object of worship, for her mother-in-law, known to us as Ōama.

The letter combines Nichiren's reminiscences about his childhood home, his expression of love for Niiama and her family, a simple discussion of the meaning of the *honzon*, and a description of Mt. Minobu and Nichiren's sense of isolation there.

Opening Niiama's gift, a packet of dried seaweed, Nichiren grows nostalgic and compares the beauties of the gentle seacoast he has not seen in a decade to his hermitage in the mountains of Minobu. Wistful idealization of his boyhood home transforms the rolling mountains of Minobu into a rugged and dangerous landscape.

The Ukishima Plain of Suruga stretches more than two hundred fifty miles from the sea coast to Mt. Minobu here in Hakii district in Kai. A hundred leagues over this road are more difficult to travel than a thousand on any

- 
5. While in exile in Sado, Nichiren had conceived of an object of worship which was to be a mystic representation of the universe: a mandala. It consisted of the words "Homage to the Sutra of the Lotus of the Good Law," surrounded by the names of the Buddhas Sākyamuni and Prabhūtaratna, and of bodhisattvas, men, gods, and other beings, thus symbolizing the universality of the Buddha nature.

other. Here the swiftest river in Japan, the Fuji, plunges from north to south. On either side rise towering mountains. The valleys are deep, bordered by huge boulders aligned like folding screens. The water rushes past like an arrow shot through a tube by a stalwart warrior. At times the water is so swift and the rocks so numerous that boats following along the banks or crossing the river are smashed to bits. Beyond these rapids stands the peak called Minobu. To the east is Tenshi Peak; to the south is Mt. Takatori; to the west is Mt. Shichimen; and to the north, Minobu. These mountains encircle the valley like folding screens. When I climb the mountain to look around, the forest is dark and dense. Descending into the valleys, I find fallen boulders ranged in rows.

Nichiren's reader senses his love of Awa and those who live there, banished as he was to the lonely forest where "the howls of wolves fill the mountains, while monkeys' screams echo in the valleys, and cries of deer longing for their loved ones touch the heart over the clamorous shrilling of the cicadas." His visitors are rare: a peasant gathering wood, an old friend and fellow believer.

Dreaming of home, Nichiren superimposes the landscape of Awa upon that of Minobu:

When I clamber eagerly up the mountain, thinking I have seen *wakame* growing, it is only bracken that grows there, row upon row. When I climb down to the valleys thinking I have seen *nori* growing, again I am mistaken: it is only parsley that sprawls in thick clumps. I had long forgotten my native village, but the *nori* you sent brought sad memories rushing over me.

Tōjō district had the added virtue in Nichiren's eyes of having been chosen by Amaterasu as her home:

Although the Tōjō district of Awa is remote, it may be thought of as the center of Japan. This is because the great goddess Amaterasu appeared there. Long ago she manifested herself in Ise province, but the ruler's deepest

devotion was turned to the Hachiman and Kamo Shrines, and his devotion to Amaterasu was shallow. At that time, when Amaterasu was angered, there lived a man called Minamoto Yoritomo, General of the Right. He wrote a pledge of faith in Amaterasu and presented it to a priest, Ōka Kodayū, who secreted it in the Outer Shrine at Ise. It is because this pleased Amaterasu that Yoritomo became the general who took all Japan into his grasp. Did this great goddess leave Ise to settle in Tōjō of Awa when he decided on that district as her dwelling?

The sad memories inevitably include Nichiren's parents, who died two decades or so before this letter was written; thoughts of them bring him back to the problem at hand: Ōama's faith and the question of a *honzon* for her. Nichiren's father had probably been a manorial functionary. He had sided with Ōama's family in its quarrels with the *jitō* ("bakufu steward"), Kagenobu, as he, like the other *jitō* of the time, attempted to extend his administrative rights and his lands. In turn, Nichiren's family had been aided by the manorial family over the years, and Nichiren felt a debt of gratitude to them.

The problem of faith, however, overrides all Nichiren's personal attachments to Ōama; she and her family were "given to foolish lies, sometimes believing me, sometimes attacking me—thoroughly inconstant." Nichiren's *honzon* was a symbol of confirmation given only to those he deemed ready to practice their faith and to lead others to salvation.

Nichiren reminds Niiama of the uniqueness of his *honzon*:

This *honzon* I worship is not mentioned in the writings of any of the many monks who traveled from India to China, nor is it mentioned by the Chinese scholars who traveled to India. If you look into such books as *Journey to the west*, the *Tz'u en ch'uan*, or the *Ch'uan teng lu*, there is mention of the *honzon* of every temple in each of the five regions of India. There are also the *honzon* of the many temples described by the saints who crossed from China to Japan and the wise men who left Japan to go to China. Because all the tem-

ples of Japan, beginning with the oldest, Gangōji and Shitennōji, have appeared in the various books written since the time of the *Annals of Japan*, surely no *honzon* has been omitted. Among them all, there is no *honzon* such as this.

He explains that the *Lotus sutra* promises salvation for beings in *mappō* (the final period of the Buddhist Dharma):

This doctrine must not by any means be propagated during the thousand years of the True Law after my death, nor during the thousand years of the Imitation Law. At the beginning of the Latter Days when heretics fill the land, all the heavens will be angered, comets will shoot across the sky, and the earth will rumble like waves crashing on shore. Such terrible disasters as droughts, fires, floods, high winds, epidemics, plagues, famines, and armed riots will occur without number. At that time when every man will wear armor and carry a bow and arrows; when all Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and good gods of heaven will have exhausted their power; when the bodies of men falling into the deepest hell will be thick as falling rain; if you gird your body with this five-word mandala and lodge it in your heart, all rulers will be able to aid their countries and the people will escape tribulation. Moreover, in future lives they will escape the great fires of hell.

As the apostle of the Buddha sent to prepare the way for the bodhisattvas who will preach the Dharma, Nichiren has suffered exile and slander as predicted in the *Lotus sutra*. The unique *honzon*, symbol of faith and practice and presented by the apostle of the Buddha, cannot be disseminated indiscriminately. Therefore Nichiren refuses, with an apology, to send a *honzon* to Ōama.

Let me make my reasoning a little more clear. When I was in disfavor in Kamakura, 999 out of 1,000 followers lost faith, but now that the persecutions have lessened, these people have come back in repentance. Of course, your mother-in-law means more to me than these, but, while I am very sorry, I cannot return flesh to the bones. I shall

forever say that one must not turn one's back on the *Lotus sutra*.

The beauty of this letter lies in the smooth combination of the disparate elements. The opening nature description has Chinese overtones: the balanced prose, allusions to Chinese hermits, images from Chinese literature, and the craggy landscape reminiscent of a Chinese painting all combine to make the reader feel Nichiren's distance from home. The landscape becomes Japanese as Nichiren envisions *wakame* and *nori* growing there, and people of his childhood appearing in the scene.

In quest of the *honzon*, Nichiren retraces this imaginary journey from India and China, where no hint of his *honzon* appeared, to earliest Japan, where again there was no such object of worship, to the Japan of his day and particularly to Tōjō in Awa, site of the revelation of the true teaching for the *mappō*. This double journey emphasizes both Nichiren's isolation and the miracle of the revelation of the *honzon* in Tōjō and in the *mappō*.

Reflecting on his own role in the propagation of the teaching, Nichiren reviews the persecution he has suffered at the hands of various enemies. His reflections return to Awa as he recalls Kagenobu, his enemy and enemy of the manorial family.

The final paragraphs trace the relationship of the manorial family of Tōjō district, the "center of Japan," and the Lotus Sutra; Nichiren concludes that he cannot send a *honzon* to one whose faith has faltered, no matter how dearly he loves her.

#### CONCLUSION

Nichiren's letters have the suasive characteristics of oral *shōdō*, written as they were as substitutes for oral sermons, and they include both *setsuwa* and *zuihitsu*. *Shōdō*, *setsuwa*, and *zuihitsu* are tied together by their audience-orientation; all serve to evoke emotional response in the hearer or reader. This link can clearly be seen in Nichiren's letters.

The problem of understanding Kamakura fiction has been larger than mere confusion of terms or lack of definition. The

barriers to the understanding of Muromachi fiction described by Barbara Ruch (1977, pp. 279–84, 308–9) have also blocked study of Kamakura fiction: there has been insufficient attention to the vocal component of literature and popular traditions, and there has been a class bias, a vision of literature as divisible according to the social strata of the practitioners, which has kept scholars from tracing the growth of audience-oriented literature based on emotional need rather than received aesthetic codes. Religious conversion is but one of the emotional responses which were goals of this literature.

The information obtained from Nichiren's letters about the development of this stream of literature in the Kamakura period is an important link in the chain of the Japanese narrative tradition. These facts call for a great deal more comparative and descriptive work and analysis of the sources available in relation to oral literature.

#### APPENDIX 1

Translation of *Ueno ama gozen gohenji*  
[Reply to my lady the nun Ueno]

I received the load of white rice and the basket of potatoes you sent as alms and have chanted *Namu myōhōrengekyō* for your father.

The Buddha named the sutra "Lotus of the Good Law" after the lotus blossom. In heaven the great *māndāra* flower is most marvelous and on earth the cherry blossom, but the Buddha did not choose them. Comparing other blossoms to the lotus, we find that sometimes the flower appears first and then the fruit, or the fruit may come first and then the flower. There are plants which produce a single flower and many fruits, some which produce many flowers but only one fruit, and still others which produce fruit without flowers. Only the lotus bears fruit and flower at the same time.

According to other sutras, one piles up good deeds first and later obtains Buddhahood. Thus they are uncertain. However, if you but take the *Lotus sutra* in your hand, that hand will soon become Buddha, and if you chant the *Lotus sutra*, your mouth will soon become Buddha,

just as the reflection of the moon floats upon the water the moment the moon rises from east of the mountains and just as the sound and echo ring out simultaneously. Thus it is that the *Lotus sutra* promises, "All who hear this sutra will attain Buddhahood," and by this we know that of one hundred or one thousand who keep this sutra, there will be not even one who fails to attain Buddhahood.

I understand from your letter that this is the anniversary of the death of your father, the *nyūdō*, Matsuno Rokurōzaemon. It is only to be expected that with so many descendants there would be considerable variation in the filial duties which they perform on behalf of their late ancestor. Should any of them, however, not have faith in the *Lotus sutra*, they must be reckoned among the enemies of the true Law.

The Buddha Sākyamuni vowed, "At last I will preach the Truth in this sutra." And Prabhūtaratna testified that "the *Lotus sutra* is wholly true," while the Buddhas of the ten directions rolled their tongues out to Indra's heaven in verification.

If you cross the great sea to the southwest of Japan, you will come to the country called China. In that country there were men who believed in Buddha but not the gods, and there were men who believed in the gods but not the Buddha. In the beginning it was the same in Japan.

In China there was a man named Wu-lung who was the greatest calligrapher in the country. He was as famous as Michikaze or Yukinari in Japan. This man hated Buddhism and vowed that never in his life would he copy a sutra.

He became very ill, and on his deathbed he turned to his son. "You are my son. You must succeed me and work to become an even greater calligrapher than I. But no matter what the circumstances you must never copy the *Lotus sutra*," he enjoined. With his last words blood gushed from his eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and skin like water from a spring. His tongue split into eight parts and his body disintegrated. The relatives and family at his bedside knew nothing of the three evil destinies. They did not realize this horrible death was a sign that he was falling into hell.

The son whose name was I-lung became the most famous calligrapher in China. Like his father he vowed never to copy the *Lotus sutra*. The king, a man named Ssu-ma, was a Buddhist and especially revered the *Lotus sutra*. He summoned I-lung because he wished

to have the best calligrapher in the country make him a copy of the *Lotus sutra* to keep and worship. I-lung said to him: "My father made this last request," and he told the king of his father's command. Since it had been his father's dying wish, the king summoned another calligrapher to copy the sutra for him. But when it was done, he was not satisfied.

Once more he summoned I-lung. "You say you cannot copy the sutra because of your father's dying wish. So I order you to copy just the title on the eight volumes of the sutra." Again and again I-lung refused. The king was enraged. "Your father was my retainer. How can you fear to break your vow to your father, and yet refuse to obey your lord's command, a far worse sin?"

I-lung did not want to be unfilial, but he could see no way to refuse the royal command. He wrote the titles, gave them to the king, and returned home. Immediately he went to his father's grave where, weeping tears of blood, he confessed that, unable to refuse the king's order, he had written just the title of the *Lotus sutra*. There was no apology he could make for his disobedience. Three days he stood by the grave, refusing all food and bewailing his unfilial conduct. Around five on the morning of the third day, he fell to the ground as if dead. In a vision he saw a god in the sky. The god looked like pictures of Indra. His retinue surrounded him.

"Who are you?" I-lung asked.

"Don't you recognize me? I am your father, Wu-lung. Because in my former life I clung to the non-Buddhist teachings and hated Buddhism and especially the *Lotus sutra*, when I died I fell into the deepest hell. Every day my tongue was torn out hundreds of times. When I died, I was reborn to suffer again. I cried out to heaven; I bent down to the earth and wept, but to no avail. I wanted to warn people in the human world of this misery but I could not. As long as you obeyed me, my words turned into flames which roared around me and into swords which fell upon me like rain. Your behavior was outrageous, but your disobedience saved me. I was weeping over my fate when a golden vision appeared before me in hell, and chanted these verses from the *Lotus sutra*: 'Though you piled up many sins in the human world, there is no doubt you will attain Buddhahood if you but listen to the *Lotus sutra* once.' It was as though water had been dashed on the flames. My pain was gone.

"I pressed my palms together and asked his name. 'I am the

character Wonderful from the sixty-four characters of the titles of the *Lotus sutra* which your son, I-lung, is writing now.<sup>6</sup>

“My son, you wrote the characters eight times on eight scrolls and the sixty-four characters became Buddhas; they lit up the darkness of hell like full moons. The deepest hell became paradise; it became the bright abode of Buddha. All the sinners in hell were transformed into buddhas on lotus blossoms. Now I am going to the palace in Tuṣita heaven, but I wanted to tell you this first.”

I-lung asked, “How could the titles which I wrote have saved you, for I wrote the characters without faith?”

His father explained: “Your hand is my hand; your body is my body. The characters you wrote were characters written by me. You did not believe in the *Lotus sutra*, but you saved me by writing the title. This is like a child who, playing with fire, burns something by accident. Faith in the *Lotus sutra* is the same. You can have faith without realizing it and still be saved. Knowing this, do not slander this truth, for it is easy to regret those things you said while in the world.”

I-lung told his dream to the king, who rejoiced. “My prayers have been answered,” he said. I-lung was favored by the king and soon the entire country had come to believe in the *Lotus sutra*.

Now the late lord Gorō and the lay priest were your father and son. You are the daughter of the lay priest. Your faith in the *Lotus sutra* has undoubtedly already guided your father and child to the palace of Tuṣita heaven.<sup>6</sup>

Respectfully,  
Nichiren

15 November<sup>7</sup>

## APPENDIX 2

Translation of *Niiama gozen gohenji*  
[Reply to my lady the nun Niiama]

The package of *norī* you sent arrived safely, and I am very grateful for that sent by Ōama as well. I am now in a place called Minobu

6. Gorō, a child of Niiama, had died some time earlier.

7. 1281.

Peak, which adjoins Suruga Province on the south. The Ukishima Plain of Suruga stretches more than two hundred fifty miles from the sea coast to Mt. Minobu here in Hakii district in Kai. A hundred leagues over this road are more difficult to travel than a thousand on any other. Here the swiftest river in Japan, the Fuji, plunges from north to south. On either side rise towering mountains. The valleys are deep, bordered by huge boulders aligned like folding screens. The water rushes past like an arrow shot through a tube by a stalwart warrior. At times the water is so swift and the rocks so numerous that boats following along the banks or crossing the river are smashed to bits. Beyond these rapids stands the peak called Minobu. To the east is Tenshi Peak; to the south is Mt. Takatori; to the west is Mt. Shichimen; and to the north, Minobu. These mountains encircle the valley like folding screens. When I climb the mountain to look around, the forest is dark and dense. Descending into the valleys, I find fallen boulders ranged in rows. The howls of huge wolves fill the mountains, while monkeys' screams echo in the valleys. Over the clamorous shrilling of the cicadas, cries of deer longing for their loved ones touch the heart.

Spring flowers bloom in summer; autumn fruits ripen only in winter. When rarely I see a human figure, it is a peasant gathering wood. My infrequent visitors are old friends, fellow believers. The Four White-Haired Recluses, who fled the world to Shang Mountain, and the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove, who hid their traces from the vulgar world, must have lived like this.

When I clamber eagerly up the mountain, thinking I have seen *wakame* growing, it is only bracken that grows there, row upon row. When I climb down to the valleys thinking I have seen *nori* growing, again I am mistaken: it is only parsley that sprawls in thick clumps. I had long forgotten my native village, but the *nori* you sent brought sad memories rushing over me. This is the *nori* I saw long ago on the beaches at Kataumi, Ichikawa, and Kominato. Its color, appearance, and taste are unchanged, yet my parents are both gone. My regrets bring tears to my eyes.

But enough of this. I have been worrying for some time about your request for a *honzon* for Ōama. This *honzon* I worship is not mentioned in the writings of any of the many monks who traveled from India to China, nor is it mentioned by the Chinese scholars who traveled to India. If you look into such books as *Journey to the*

west,<sup>8</sup> the *Tz'u en ch'uan*<sup>9</sup>, or the *Ch'uan teng lu*,<sup>10</sup> there is mention of the *honzon* of every temple in each of the five regions of India. There are also the *honzon* of the many temples described by the saints who crossed from China to Japan and the wise men who left Japan to go to China. Because all the temples of Japan, beginning with the oldest, Gangōji and Shitenōji, have appeared in various works since the time of the *Annals of Japan*, surely no *honzon* has been omitted. Among them all, there is no *honzon* such as this.

Someone questioned me saying, "If it does not appear in the texts, it should at least have been painted or carved by the sages of old." But the sutra<sup>11</sup> is right before their eyes. Doubters should check carefully to see whether or not it really is in the sutras. To think that the existence of no previous replica is a shortcoming is unjust. To take another example, no one in the world except Maudgalyāyana knew that Sākyamuni hid for a time in Trayastrimsāh Heaven to preach the Teaching to his mother.<sup>12</sup>

This *honzon*, also, I know of through the power of the Buddha. Although the teachings of the Buddha are right before our eyes, unless the opportunity comes, they are unseen. Unless it is time for their propagation, they do not spread. This is the Law. This is as immutable as the rise and fall of the tides, as the waxing and waning of the moon.

Our spiritual leader Sākyamuni held this teaching in his mind for five hundred eons. Then, for forty some years after he appeared

- 
8. The record of the travels in India of the Chinese pilgrim, Hsüan-tsang, who left China in A.D. 629 and returned seventeen years later bearing numerous sutras and relics.
  9. A biography of Hsüan-tsang by the T'ang dynasty monk Hui-li.
  10. A S'ung dynasty work compiled by Tao-yuan, which traces the lineage of the masters of Zen.
  11. The *Lotus sutra* (Skt., *Saddharmaṣuṣṭarika sutra*) on which Nichiren's *honzon* is based.
  12. Since Sākyamuni's mother died seven days after his birth, she never benefited by his teachings. A story tells how he transported himself in trance to heaven to preach the Dharma to her. The earthly king feared he would not return. Gathering the best artists in the land, he sent them to heaven. The image they created of the Buddha preaching in heaven is, of course, not extant, but copies were supposedly carried to China and thence to the Seiryōji temple in Kyoto.

in this world and while he preached the first half of the *Lotus sutra*,<sup>13</sup> he still kept it to himself. But he prepared for it in the eleventh chapter, "Apparition of a jeweled *stupa*," revealed it in the sixteenth chapter, "Duration of life of the Tathāgata," and culminated his explication in the chapters on "The transcendent power of the Tathāgatas" and on "Spells."<sup>14</sup> Manjusrī in his Gold-Hued World, Maitreya in the Tuṣita heavenly palace, Avalokiteśvara on Potalaka Mountain, and such disciples of Candravinalasūryaprabhāsaśrī as the bodhisattva Bhaiṣajyarāja all fought to be allowed to deliver the message but were unacceptable. Though these were said to be the wisest of men, they had studied the *Lotus sutra* only briefly and would have had trouble enduring the persecutions of the Latter Days. These words the Buddha set down in the fourteenth chapter, "Issuing of bodhisattvas from the earth":<sup>15</sup> "I have true disciples who were hidden away in the depths of the earth five hundred eons ago. I now call forth Viśiṣṭacāritra and the other bodhisattvas to deliver this teaching to them and to entrust to them the words, Myōhōrengekyō<sup>16</sup>, which are the essence of the Original Gate<sup>17</sup> to Buddhahood.

13. The first half of the sutra, the *shakumon*, was considered preparatory to the revelation of truth in the latter half, the *honmon*.
14. Chapter numbers refer to the Chinese version by Kumārajiva, which Nichiren most often cited. "Apparition of a jeweled stupa" contains the revelation of Sākyamuni's existence in times past, while "Duration of life of the Tathāgata" reveals that the Buddha is not limited to this human lifespan, but is eternal. Chapters 21, "The transcendent power of the Tathāgatas," and 26, "Spells," reveal the saving power of the *Lotus sutra* ("Any who receive and keep this scripture after my passage into extinction shall have no doubts about the Buddha Path") and the holiness of the title (*daimoku*) ("All of you who do no more than protect those who receive and keep the name of the Dharma Blossom shall have incalculable happiness").
15. In this chapter of the *Lotus sutra* myriads of bodhisattvas rise from the earth led by these four: Jogyō (Viśiṣṭacāritra); Muhengyō (Anantacāritra); Jogyō (Viśuddhacāritra); Anryūgyō (Supratīṣṭhitacāritra). Jogyō was supposed to have been a convert of the Buddha ages ago and to have come into the world in evil times to bring the *Dharma*. Nichiren at times proclaimed himself a reincarnation of this bodhisattva, come to proclaim the teaching in the Latter Ages. This passage is not a citation from the *Lotus*, but a summary and elaboration of certain points by Nichiren.
16. Sutra of the Lotus of the Good Law (the *Lotus sutra*).
17. *Honmon*, used to designate the saving teaching of a sect, and in the more specific sense of the doctrine taught in the second half of the *Lotus sutra*.

This doctrine must not by any means be propagated during the thousand years of the True Law after my death, nor during the thousand years of the Imitation Law. At the beginning of the Latter Days when heretics fill the land, all the heavens will be angered, comets will shoot across the sky, and the earth will rumble like waves crashing on shore. Such terrible disasters as droughts, fires, floods, high winds, epidemics, plagues, famines, and armed riots will occur without number. At that time when every man will wear armor and carry a bow and arrows; when all Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and good gods of heaven will have exhausted their powers; when the bodies of men falling into the deepest hell will be thick as falling rain; if you gird your body with this five-word mandala and lodge it in your heart, all rulers will be able to aid their countries and the people will escape tribulation. Moreover, in future lives they will escape the great fires of hell."

While Nichiren is not the bodhisattva Viśiṣṭacāritra, that I should know all this must be, I believe, the plan of this bodhisattva. I have spoken thus the past twenty years or so. Of the one who is to propagate this teaching it is said: "This scripture has many enemies even now when the Tathāgata is present; how many more will there be after his nirvana,"<sup>18</sup> and "All beings are full of hatred, and belief is difficult."<sup>19</sup> The first enemies of the teaching and its bearers are rulers of nations, of districts and towns, stewards and proprietors and all the people. The second and third are priests who bring complaints, and ascetics who slander or abuse the prophet of the teaching or who attack him with swords and sticks.

Although the Tōjō district of Awa is remote, it may be thought of as the center of Japan. This is because the great goddess Amaterasu appeared there. Long ago she manifested herself in Ise province, but the ruler's deepest devotion was turned to the Hachiman and Kamo Shrines, and his devotion to Amaterasu was shallow. At that time, when Amaterasu was angered, there lived a man called Minamoto Yoritomo, General of the Right. He wrote a pledge of faith in Amaterasu and presented it to a priest, Ōka Kodayū, who secreted it in the Outer Shrine at Ise. It is because this pleased Amaterasu that Yoritomo became the general who took all Japan into his grasp. Did this great goddess leave Ise to settle in Tōjō of

18. *Lotus sutra*, chapter 10, "The preacher."

19. *Lotus sutra*, chapter 13, "Peaceful life."

Awa when he decided on that district as her dwelling? There is another such example: the bodhisattva Hachiman long ago dwelt in the West, then moved to Otoko Mountain in Yamashiro Province and now dwells in Tsurugaoka in Kamakura, Sagami Province.

Of all the places in the world, Nichiren first preached the True Teaching in the same Tōjō of Awa Province in Japan. Consequently, the steward of that area became my enemy. He and his followers attacked me and half his forces were lost. Your family is given to foolish lies, sometimes believing me, sometimes attacking me—thoroughly inconstant. When I was in disfavor, they soon abandoned the *Lotus*. This is why I have always preached that the *Lotus* is “difficult to believe, difficult to understand”<sup>20</sup> on every occasion. If I should send a *honzon* because of my debt to your family, the ten *rākṣasi* would surely think this favoritism on my part. If in accordance with the *sutra* I do not give the *honzon* to unbelievers, I will avoid favoritism, but Ōama will not understand her misdeed, I fear, and will bear a grudge against me. Therefore, I have written my scruples to Suke no Ajari and had him take the letter to Ōama.

Although you have been sympathetic to your mother-in-law in her vacillations, your faith is known. While I was on Sado and during the time I have been here, you have corresponded with me now and then, and never have you shown signs of faltering. Therefore, I am sending you a *honzon*. I feel as though I am treading on thin ice or confronting a great sword.

Let me make my reasoning a little more clear. When I was in disfavor in Kamakura, 999 out of 1,000 followers lost faith, but now that the persecutions have lessened, these people have come back in repentance. Of course, your mother-in-law means more to me than these, but, while I am very sorry, I cannot return flesh to the bones. I shall forever say that one must not turn one’s back on the *Lotus sutra*.

Respectfully,  
Nichiren

16 February<sup>21</sup>

20. *Lotus sutra*, chapter 10, “The teacher.”

21. 1275.

GLOSSARY

- |                               |                                   |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>biwahōshi</i> 琵琶法師         | <i>nikki</i> 日記                   |
| <i>Ch'uan teng lu</i> 傳燈錄     | <i>sekk'yōsha</i> 說經者             |
| <i>Fa hua ch'uan chi</i> 法華傳記 | <i>Senjūshō</i> 撰集抄               |
| <i>Genji monogatari</i> 源氏物語  | <i>setsumeiteki</i> 說明的           |
| <i>Heike monogatari</i> 平家物語  | <i>setsuwa bungaku</i> 說話文学       |
| <i>hijiri</i> 聖               | <i>shakumon</i> 迹門                |
| <i>Hokke hyakuza</i> 法華百座     | <i>Shijū hyakuinnenshū</i> 和聚百因緣集 |
| <i>honmon</i> 本門              | <i>shōdō</i> 唱導                   |
| <i>honzon</i> 本尊              | <i>shōdōshi</i> 唱導師               |
| <i>Hui-li</i> 慧立              | Tao-yuan 道原                       |
| <i>Jikkinshō</i> 十訓抄          | <i>Tz'u en ch'uan</i> 慈恩傳         |
| <i>jitō</i> 地頭                | <i>Uchigikishū</i> 打鬮集            |
| <i>Kankyo no tomo</i> 閑居友     | <i>wakankōkōbun</i> 和漢混淆文         |
| <i>mappō</i> 末法               | <i>zuihitsu</i> 隨筆                |
| <i>Nihon ryōiki</i> 日本靈異記     |                                   |

REFERENCES

- KADOKAWA Motoyoshi and SUGIYAMA Hiroshi 角川源義・杉山博  
1967 *Nihon bungaku no rekishi* 日本文学の歴史 [History of Japanese literature], 12 vols. Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten.
- KIKUCHI Ryōichi 菊地良一  
1968 *Chūsei no shōdō bungei* 中世の唱導文芸 [The art of preaching in the middle ages]. Tokyo: Kōshobō.
- MILLS, D.E.  
1970 *A collection of tales from Uji*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Risshō Daigaku Nichiren Kyōgaku Kenkyūjo 立正大学日蓮教学研究所  
1971-73 *Shōwa teihon Nichiren shōnin ibun* 昭和定本日蓮聖人遺文 [Shōwa edition of Nichiren manuscripts], 4 vols. Minobu: Sōhonzan Minobu Kuonji.
- RUCH, Barbara  
1977 Medieval jongleurs and the making of a  
184 *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 5/2-3 June-September 1978

national literature. In *Japan in the Muromachi age*, John Whitney HALL and TOYODA Takeshi, eds. Berkeley: University of California Press.

SHIMAZU Hisamoto 島津久基

1974

*Setsuwa bungaku* 説話文学 [Tale literature]. In *Nihon bungaku daijiten* 日本文学大辞典 [Dictionary of Japanese literature], FUJIMURA Tsukuru 藤村作, ed. Tokyo: Shinchōsha.

SHIMURA Kunihiro 志村有弘

1974

*Chūsei setsuwa bungaku* 中世説話文学 [Tale literature of the middle ages]. Tokyo: Ōbūsha.

TAKAGI Yutaka 高木豊

1973

*Nichiren to sono montei* 日蓮とその門弟 [Nichiren and his followers]. Tokyo: Kōbundō.

TAKAHASHI Mitsugu 高橋貢

1974

*Chūko setsuwa bungaku kenkyū josetsu* 中古説話文学研空序説 [Introduction to the study of early medieval tale literature]. Tokyo: Ōbūsha.