

Nichiren, Imperialism, and the Peace Movement

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Prewar Imperialism and Postwar Pacifism

The theme of world peace has become very prominent in the Sōka Gakkai, a lay movement claiming to be, together with its parent organization, the only true sect (Shōshū) of Nichiren (1222–1282) and of Buddhism, and hence to be the only true peacemakers (METRAUX 1986, p. 41). The strategic importance of this theme may be judged from the following paragraph in its introductory booklet, *Sōka Gakkai* (ZOLL 1983):

Profoundly worried about the possibility of nuclear war, members of Sōka Gakkai have been engaged in an anti-war, anti-nuclear peace movement for some time. . . . [Peace Committee representatives] attended the UN General Assembly second session on disarmament in June 1982. The Sōka Gakkai's peace movement is motivated by the Buddhism of Nichiren Shōnin, which stresses respect for life. Concern for life comes before all else; under no circumstances must lives be sacrificed for some political end (p. 70).

There are reasons to believe that this emphasis on peace is a tactical move, rather than a natural development from Nichiren Buddhism. One reason is that the emphasis became prominent after the intimidatory tactics of Sōka Gakkai had made it unpopular (MURAKAMI 1967, pp. 136–38). Another reason is the imperialist and militarist attitude of most prewar Nichirenites, such as Tanaka Chigaku 田中智学 (1861–1939), Honda Nisshō 本多日生 (1867–1931), Ishihara Kanji 石原莞爾 (1889–1949), and Kita Ikki 北一輝 (1883–1937). In fact, the Nichiren school has been described as “the only Japanese Buddhist Sect to have evolved a spirit of fanaticism, a sense of Japan's destiny as a chosen people” (MC-CORMACK 1987, p. 8).

Thus Tanaka, in *Bukkyō fūfu ron* 仏教夫婦論, a work dedicated to the imperial family (quoted in TOKORO 1966, p. 76), wrote that, whereas previous sages had spoken of *enbudai no Nippon* 閻浮提の日本 (Japan of the inhabited earth), Nichiren had used the term *Nippon no enbudai*, to

include the whole inhabited earth in Japan. Tanaka further claimed that, as a result, the mausoleums of Japan's imperial deities, Amaterasu-ōmikami and Hachiman, were to become universal objects of worship. This objective was to be realized by *shakubuku* 折伏, which means to conquer evil aggressively (HAYASHIMA 1965, p. 267). Tanaka extended the meaning of *shakubuku* to justify military aggression against China in 1931:

When it is said that the Japanese Imperial Army is an army of humanity and justice, for maintaining justice and building peace, it means that it is a force for compassion. The *shakubuku* of Nichirenism must be like this (quoted in TOKORO 1966, p. 79).

“Compassion” for Tanaka meant extension of the emperor-centered Japanese polity (*kokutai* 国体) to other parts of the world. By means of the *Lotus Sūtra* and the sword, the whole earth was to be unified around Japan. In *Shūmon no ishin* 宗門の維新 (Restoration of the sect, 1901) he urged followers to believe aggressively, to preach and write aggressively, and to “pray for aggression.” The *Lotus Sūtra* (rather than the Koran) was to be the sword, and in the work of unifying the world, Nichiren was to be Generalissimo, the empire the supreme command, the people of Japan the heavenly soldiers, and teachers devoted to Nichiren the officers. Establishment of the teaching by *shakubuku* was the strategy, the fourfold denunciation of other sects was the discipline, and the establishment of the Myōke Honshū 妙化本宗 as the national religion of Japan would be the preparation for going to the front (quoted in TOKORO 1966, pp. 76–77). Tanaka's enthusiasm for the Manchurian invasion shows that he was not using these phrases in a merely metaphorical sense.

Nichiren's insistence on aggressive proselytization was certainly useful for militarists bent on aggressive expansion overseas, but, as will become clearer, he did not have the same views as Tanaka did on the relative status of Buddhism, imperial authority, and Japan. Tanaka subordinated everything to the *kokutai*, and asserted that Japan, with its “unbroken” line of emperors, had a unique destiny “to guide and induce every country in the world to become a state ruled by the Way of the Prince (*ōdō* 王道).” Only the Emperor of Nippon was “unchangeable for good with his origin in Heaven . . . a God or morality itself.” All the emperors had “inherited from the first emperor, Jimmu, his virtues and brilliant work” (the extension of the Heavenly Task), and “the extraordinarily great Emperor Meiji [had] appeared to become the axis of the world.” This was finding fulfilment in Manchuria, and, with Japan's help, it would spread to China and the whole world (TANAKA 1935–36, pp. 74–75, 82, 90, 158).

Honda Nisshō, High Priest of the Kenbon Hokke sect, also made Nichirenism the tool of military imperialists, who, in the face of popular unrest during the late Taishō and early Shōwa eras, were feeling the need of some religious dynamic to strengthen their authority. Honda was so successful in converting high-ranking military, naval, and diplomatic personnel to Nichirenism, that in 1916 twenty-seven of them wrote forewords for his *Hokkekyō kōgi*, a commentary on the *Lotus Sūtra*. One of them, Tōgō Heihachirō (1847–1934), a hero of the Russo-Japanese war, was by then Admiral of the Fleet, and very influential in defence policy. In 1929 he took part in the London arms reduction treaty talks, where he opposed any move to strengthen the treaty. Militarism was ascendant.

Ishihara Kanji was one who sought to implement Tanaka's vision, and he took part in the Manchurian invasion. It was through his wife's influence that in 1919 he had joined the *Kokuchū-kai* (Pillar of the Nation Society) founded by Tanaka. After studying military science in Germany in 1923–1924, he joined the staff of the Military Academy in Tokyo, before being sent to Manchuria in 1928.

He saw Japan's mission as that of overthrowing the military clique, freeing Asia from domination by the U.S. and Europe, and forming a single economy and combined defence system for Japan, Manchuria, and China. It was to be a paradise following "the Way of the Prince" and exemplifying the principles of the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere. So he helped to establish the puppet state of Manchukuo and believed that, with the cooperation of China, a model state would develop.

For his endeavours Ishihara received the Order of the Golden Kite, and from the *Kokuchū-kai* he received a *maṇḍala* that was supposed to have been drawn by Nichiren to pray against the Mongolian invasion. (As will become evident, it is a forgery. Nichiren did not pray against the Mongols, but regarded them as instruments of divine punishment upon Japan.)

Nevertheless, he became critical of Japanese maladministration in Manchuria, and ordered further expansion to stop. When his orders went unheeded he returned to Japan in 1936, and, after a rift with General Tōjō, he was moved to the reserve in 1941. There he continued to cooperate with the East Asian Alliance, which had been established in 1939.

Ishihara believed that world unity would ultimately be achieved after a "final world war" which was to break out 2500 years after the death of the Buddha. This he saw as a fulfilment of the "unprecedented war" spoken of by Nichiren in *Senji shō* 選時抄, although Nichiren was referring to his hopes that Japan would be punished by a Mongolian invasion during "the fifth period of 500 years," when "great devil-possessed

priests," collaborating with the rulers, would abuse and condemn to death "a wise man."¹ The invasion would be at the command of the bud-dhas, who would commission the devas and the rulers of neighboring countries to chastize the rulers and priests, and this would result in unprecedented strife in the whole inhabited earth (ASAI 1934, p. 1194; HORI 1952, p. 259).

Nichiren was following the date of 949 B.C. for the death of Śākyamuni when he emphasized that "the last period of 500 years" was the period in which they were living. When Ishihara discovered that the calculations used by Nichiren were wrong, he was shocked, but then decided that Nichiren was to appear twice: first as a monk, to establish the doctrines and concepts, and then as a wise ruler, to bring these into effect.² Nichiren had written as follows:

Make no mistake. When these four [great] bodhisattvas demonstrate *shakubuku*, they become wise rulers punishing foolish ones; when they carry out *shōju* [撰受 gaining converts by gentle persuasion], they become monks proclaiming the Right Dharma (*Kanjin honzon shō* 観心本尊抄, ASAI 1934, p. 964; HORI 1953, p. 254).

By "these four bodhisattvas" Nichiren meant the leaders of the "bodhisattvas from the earth" mentioned in chapter 15 of the *Lotus Sūtra*, and although, like Tanaka, Ishihara identified Nichiren with Jōgyō 上行 (Viśiṣṭacāritra), the leader of these four, I believe that Nichiren himself had decided he was not Jōgyō after all.³

However, Ishihara wrote that he had believed in Nichiren because he had a completely satisfying view of the *kokutai*, and so had to be the one to unify world thought and faith (*Tōa renmei*, 1941, quoted by NAKANO 1972, p. 85). Nevertheless, it is surprising that Ishihara should imply that Nichiren had been like the "monk" using only peaceful persuasion, and that he would be like the "wise ruler" carrying out *shakubuku* only at his second appearance, for he was thereby contradicting not only Nichiren but Tanaka also. He admitted that his seniors had a different opinion, and that his faith was "intuitive" (p. 86).

Both Tanaka and Ishihara believed that world unity centered on the Japanese emperor would be achieved when the *Lotus Sūtra* was recognized by the Court as the substance of the Japanese polity. Tanaka did not live to see his dreams shattered by defeat, but in 1949, Ishihara wrote to General MacArthur, admitting he had been gravely mistaken and arrogant in supposing that the "final" war would be fought between East Asia on the one hand and Western countries on the other. But he

¹ For Nichiren's attitude towards the Mongols, see NAYLOR 1984–86, pp. 129–38.

² Nichiren's historical errors are set out in NAYLOR 1987, p. 59.

³ My reasons are set out in NAYLOR 1984, pp. 306, 318, etc.

still hoped for “a fundamental world reformation” based on new family life, new villages, and government according to *Risshō ankoku* 立正安国 (NAKANO 1972, p. 87). It would seem that he had become disillusioned with militarism.

Somewhat different from the above three was the socialist revolutionary, Kita Ikki, for whereas Tanaka and Honda upheld the Confucian virtues of filial piety and loyalty as the basis of the imperial polity, Kita despised Confucianism as “the worst religion” and the cause of China’s weakness, because of its aversion to bloodshed. Like Tanaka and Honda, he regarded Japan as destined to dominate Asia, but, unlike them, he envisaged Japan guiding a socialist revolution, beginning with China. In revolutionary China, the hero that unified the land had to have “a liking for bloodshed,” but Yuan Shi-kai (first president of the Republic) he regarded as “a cowardly assassin incapable of large-scale massacres.” China was “thirsting for salvation” by *shakubuku*, for Emperor Meiji had brought “enlightened rule” 明治, and, “grasping the eight volumes of the *Lotus Sūtra* of compassion and *shakubuku*,” had led Japan to victory against Russia in 1904–1905. Emperor Taishō (1912–1926) was then to extend “great righteousness” 大正 from Japan to the whole world (KITA 1967, pp. 13–18, 153, 154, 161–62).

Although Kita later became critical of the Japanese imperial household, which was dominated by the *zaibatsu*, and wrote in detail about the need to reform many aspects of Japanese society, he did not advocate peaceful means. Rather, he supported the *kōdō-ha* 皇道派 (imperial way faction) that was responsible for several political assassinations and the coup of 26 February 1936 (p. 369). He seemed blind to the traditional Buddhist prohibitions against bloodshed, for he wrote that the compassion of the Buddha crushes resistance, and called on his followers to steep their sūtras in demons’ blood, if they hoped for the Buddha-light to illumine East Asia (pp. 154, 204). Then he used one of Nichiren’s prophecies to justify military expansion:

The flag of the sun, of the country where the sun rises, as prophesied by the Buddha long ago, is now truly about to illumine the darkness of the whole world (p. 201).

The original prophecy refers to the expanding influence of the *Lotus Sūtra*:

The moon goes from west to east—a sign that the Buddhism of Yueh-chih must progress eastwards. The sun rises in the east, signifying that the Buddha Dharma of Japan must return to Yueh-chih. . . . The light of the sun is brighter than that of the moon, signifying the illumining of the long darkness of the fifth [period of] 500 years [the beginning of the Age of Decay] (*Kangyō Hachiman*

shō 諫曉八幡抄 [Warning to Hachiman], TOKORO and TAKAGI 1970, p. 369).⁴

Before Japan's defeat, few people of any religion or sect would have queried the interpretation put on these words by ultranationalists like Kita and Tanaka. Patriotic fervor made it easy to misinterpret Nichiren's words. A similar misinterpretation was perpetrated at the time of the Russo-Japanese war (1904–1905), when chauvinism was at a peak. A 65-ft bronze statue of Nichiren was unveiled at Hakata in Kyūshū to commemorate the repulsing of the Mongolian invaders in 1274 and 1281, supposedly by virtue of Nichiren's *maṇḍala* and prayers. I have read of only one Nichirenite who recognized that Nichiren had not prayed against the Mongols, and criticized the statue as "meaningless." This was Takayama Chogyū 高山樗牛 (1871–1902), who had turned against nationalism. A Christian socialist, Kinoshita Naoe 木下直江 (1869–1937), agreed that it was "senseless" to call Nichiren a "patriot" (TOKORO 1966, p. 187).

One prewar Nichirenite who became a pacifist was Seno'o Girō 妹尾義郎 (1889–1961). Although he had studied under Honda Nisshō and formed the *Dai Nihon Nichirenshugi seinendan* 大日本日蓮主義青年団 (Nichirenite Youth Association of Greater Japan) in 1918, his belief that faith must be directed towards political activity led him away from militarism, and when in 1931 he founded the *Shinkō Bukkyō seinen dōmei* 新興仏教青年同盟 (New Buddhist Youth Federation), Buddhists from all sects who were opposed to the prevailing militarism and wished to help the poor were attracted. Seno'o was jailed during the war, but after his release he continued his pacifist activities, in the more favorable postwar atmosphere. By then he had come to base his convictions less on Nichiren and more on ancient Indian Buddhism.

The conflicting interpretations of Nichiren's writings outlined above have arisen partly because of their bulk and complexity, and because of the tangled strands in his personality and ideas. Having studied various topics in over a hundred of Nichiren's works (including all the major ones), I shall try in the following sections of this brief study to clarify what Nichiren himself taught, and to see if there is any justification for the interpretations made (both before and after the war), by ultranationalist imperialists on the one hand and by pacifists on the other.

Of course, both sides claim to be working for peace, and pacifists usually acknowledge that "peace" is not just the absence of war. As well as looking at Nichiren's attitude to violence and the taking of life, I wish to look briefly at his attitude to civil administration (especially the

⁴ Age of Decaying Dharma (*mappō* 末法): age when people are no longer able to understand or practice the teachings of the Buddha; follows the Age of Right Dharma and the Age of Formalistic Dharma as the "last period of 500 years."

imperial system) and to welfare activities, which also affect the peace of this world.

*Nichiren's View of Rulers, Deities, and the Dharma:
Formative Influences*

Nichiren did not condemn military action, and there is evidence of a warrior-class upbringing. Thus he quoted from the samurai legal code of 1232 (*Jōei shikimoku* 貞永式目) to accuse the authorities of unlawfully letting his enemies go unpunished (*Shimoyama shō* 下山抄, TOKORO and TAKAGI 1970, p. 324). More importantly, he was imbued with the warrior values of loyalty, obedience to one's lord, and manly endurance:

As the men of old left glorious names for posterity, though they went to their deaths, so I, following the samurai way, have been chased from one place to another, have fought, have been man-handled — all for the sake of the *Lotus Sūtra* (*Myōhō bikuni gohenji* 妙法比丘尼御返事, ASAI 1934, p. 1170).

Nichiren had been raised in the midst of warrior-class rebellion against the imperial government. His father was “an outcaste by the sea, in Tōjō, Awa-no-kuni, land of the barbaric eastern samurai” (*Sado gokanki shō* 佐渡後勘気抄, ASAI 1934, p. 713), and could have had several fishermen under him. Local officials of similarly low rank had been the first to rally round Minamoto Yoritomo (1147–1199) when he founded the Bakufu (military government) in Kamakura during the 1180s.

They soon found that, to Yoritomo, the cult of Amaterasu-ōmikami was still important, even though it had been developed to support the position of the emperors, her “descendants.” Yoritomo had not broken entirely from the Kyoto government when he founded the Bakufu, for he depended on the emperor for his title of shogun, while Kyoto depended on Kamakura to help control its warriors. Amaterasu was therefore an important symbol of national unity, and, in 1184, Yoritomo had commended Awa-no-kuni Province (where Nichiren was born) as a tribute estate to supply food to the Outer Shrine of Ise.⁵ The prestige gained thereby for his province and the favor gained for the “barbaric eastern samurai” evidently pleased Nichiren:

However, although Tōjō-no-gō is a remote village, it is like the center of Japan. This is because Amaterasu-ōmikami has manifested herself there. When Minamoto, Shogun of the Right, brought the text of his endowment . . . this pleased Ōmikami so

⁵ Tribute estates (*mikuriya* 御厨): formerly assigned to shrines or temples to supply their kitchens (*kuriya*). The incident is recorded in *Azuma kagami* Roll III, Genryaku 1 [1184] 5/3 (*Kokushi taikē* 4, p. 110).

much that he held Japan in the palm of his hand while he was shogun (*Niama-gozen gohenji* 新尼御前御返事, ASAI 1934, p. 1101).

Honji Suijaku 本地垂迹 and *Yōtenki* 耀天記

Although Amaterasu-ōmikami and Hachiman were important national deities used to consolidate the throne, they were not generally regarded as important outside Japan, or as independent of Buddhist entities (buddhas, bodhisattvas, and devas that had been assimilated into Indian Buddhism). The situation was different from the Meiji, Taishō, and early Shōwa eras, when emperor worship was enforced, Chinese and Buddhist influences were rejected, and imperialists asserted the inherent superiority of the divinely-created Japanese State, to which all other nations were to aspire to be united (TANAKA 1935–36, p. 76).

By contrast, in Nichiren's times the rulers still put more faith in Buddhism, which had entered Japan together with the superior culture of China. However, a nationalist reaction against Buddhism was developing in the very Outer Shrine to which Nichiren's district had been dedicated. Reasserting the superiority of the kami over Buddhist entities, one Outer Shrine priest, Watarai Yukitada 度会行忠 (1236–1305), wrote in *Zō Ise nisho Daijingū hōki hongī* 造伊勢二所太神宮宝基本記:⁶

If everyone attains the Great Way . . . people with divine powers will preserve the original order when heaven and earth were undifferentiated, stifle Buddhism, reverence the kami . . . and pray for the emperor (ISHIDA 1970, p. 110).

There is evidence to suggest that, while Nichiren rejected Shinto ascendancy, he absorbed some Outer Shrine influence. Not only did he boast of his origins in its tribute estate, he also reacted against subservience to Chinese Buddhism, after suffering contempt from China-imitating monks in Kyoto, who derided him as “a frog in the well that has never seen the ocean,” because of his lack of overseas study. So he retorted that study in China was unnecessary for him, who followed in the footsteps of Dengyō Daishi (HORI 1952, pp. 199, 222). We could compare this reaction against foreign cultural dominance to the reaction against Western culture in Tanaka's day. However, unlike Tanaka, and unlike the priests of the Outer Shrine, who declared the Buddha to be but one manifestation of the Japanese emperor (ISHIDA 1970, p. 6), Nichiren maintained the superiority of Buddhist entities as the origin (*honji*), and the subordination of kami and emperors, as their manifestations (*suijaku*). The source of his nationalism was not Shintoism but his faith in Japanese Buddhism.

⁶ *Hōki hongī* is part of *Shintō gobusho*, which was compiled between 1221 and 1334 by priests of the Outer Shrine, but presented as “ancient documents.”

Nichiren studied this *honji suijaku* doctrine at Mt Hiei, headquarters of the Tendai Sect, where about 1223 some monks had compiled *Yōtenki*, a text based on an apocryphal Chinese sūtra, the *Fu-fa-tsang yin-yüan ch'uan* 付法藏因緣伝 (Transmission of the Dharma; T 2058). Their aim had been to show that Shinto as well as Confucian teachings were but stepping stones to Buddhism, and that the kami had been sent to Japan (especially to Mt Hiei) by Śākyamuni Buddha, who claimed the whole world as his domain. Nonetheless, the Shinto myths that form the basis of imperial claims were upheld:

In ancient times Japan was ruled by seven generations of heavenly kami, after which Amaterasu-ōmikami manifested herself in Ise-no-kuni. The Inner Shrine was called Kōtaijingu (Shrine of the Great Imperial Kami), while the Outer Shrine was called Toyouke Daijingu. The dual splendor of the two shrines has guarded the Hundred Kings since ancient times, and saved the people over a wide area. . . . All the kami . . . guard rulers' castles, and shelter people's homes under their wings (ISHIDA 1970, pp. 41, 42).

This Shinto-Buddhist amalgam had been reinforced by Neo-Confucian ethics, to “correct the relationship of ruler and subject . . . and lay down the way for a son to be filial and for a subject to show gratitude to his lord” (ISHIDA 1970, p. 56). Such ethics continued to undergird social relationships in the samurai class, up till modern times. As we have already seen, Nichiren gloried in the samurai way, and the ideals of loyalty and filial piety colored his writings. However, his interpretation of them caused constant conflict with the authorities.

Ultimate Loyalties and Compromises

Nichiren expressed his acceptance of Confucian ethics (but only as provisional teaching) in the opening sentences of his major work, *Kaimoku shō* 開目抄:

There are three classes of people to be respected by all: rulers, teachers, and parents. Furthermore, there are three things to be studied: Confucian, Buddhist, and non-Buddhist teachings (ASA 1934, p. 764; HORI 1952, p. 186).

He went on to endorse Confucian teaching about music, decorum, and ruler-subject relationships, but only as preparing the way for Buddhism, for in his view, all beings must be subordinated to the Buddha Dharma, and during the Age of Decay this meant the *Lotus Sūtra*. So although he did not exempt his followers from the Four Obligations to parents, rulers, living beings, and the Three Treasures, he claimed that these obligations could only be fulfilled by practicing the *Lotus Sūtra*, because only

by chanting it could one save one's parents in the next life, as well as in this (ASAI 1934, pp. 818–19; HORI 1952, p. 266).

Similarly, his professed motive for presenting his memorial *Risshō ankoku ron* 立正安国論 to the retired regent, Hōjō Tokiyori, in 1261, was a patriotic desire to “pay (his) debt to the country” (*Ankoku ron gokan yurai* 安国論御勅由来, ASAI 1934, p. 617). To his credit, he held to his highest loyalty consistently, despite constant conflicts with the authorities and the thwarting of his undeniable political ambitions:

In order singlemindedly to pay my debt to my parents, my teachers, the Three Treasures, and my country, I have broken my health and thrown away my life, yet I am not broken (*Hō-on shō* 報恩抄, TOKORO and TAKAGI 1970, p. 290).

When we look at the ultimate loyalties of most prewar Nichirenites we find that, like Nichiren, Kita Ikki also “threw away” his life and clashed with the authorities. Tanaka came into conflict with them in his youth, and even left the Nichiren Sect priesthood in order to have more freedom for *shakubuku*. He was dissatisfied with the weak stand of the principal of the Daikyō-in, who was only concerned with protecting the Nichiren Sect, and (on the basis of the Tendai doctrine of the interpenetration of all realms, and of the opening lines of *Kaimoku shō* quoted above), taught peaceful co-existence with Confucians and Shintoists.

However, Tanaka himself later taught that Shinto was the root, Confucianism the branches, and Buddhism the fruit (TANAKA 1911, p. 193). He had become an ally of Shinto imperialism, praised the Imperial Rescript of Education as a perfect expression of the unity of the *kokutai* under the emperor, and saw Nichiren's religion as primarily “world-uniting imperialism centered on Japan” (*Bukkyō fūfu ron*, in TOKORO 1966, p. 106). He did envisage the establishment of the Marvellous Sect of the Original Buddha (Nichiren) as the national religion of Japan, to precede worldwide conquest, but by then he had so far compromised with Shintoism that he did not see how unlikely this was, or to what extent the Shinto root had deformed the fruit. Following the National Learning scholar Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801), he wrote that it was “impure things as Chinese thoughts or foreign theories that deform the basis of the State.” This would seem to exclude Buddhism altogether. But he also wrote that “the natural refinement of the Japanese” always purified these imports (TANAKA 1935–36, II/24; X/110). Obviously, his ultimate loyalty was to Japan and the emperor, not to Buddhism.

Subservience of Rulers and Deities to the Buddha Dharma

Confucius encouraged subjects to rebuke the ruler if necessary. This was true loyalty. Nichiren did the same as a Buddhist, unlike some “fol-

lowers,” and in *Risshō ankoku ron* he attacked religious leaders for arrogance and greed, and secular leaders for promoting the Jōdo sect at the expense of the Shingon and Tendai-Lotus sects (KABUTOGI 1968, pp. 181, 184). (At this point we should note that, after his first exile, Nichiren attacked Shingon as vehemently as he had ever attacked Jōdo.) Amidist teaching was only “provisional” and unable to help men or deities during the Age of Decaying Dharma, so, by depriving the gods of recitations of the *Lotus Sūtra*, the rulers were bringing ruin on the land:

Although the Lotus and Shingon sects are found in Japan, nobody takes any pleasure in listening to them. [Amidists] induce people to abandon them. For this reason the devas cannot listen to this marvellous Dharma, and because they do not savor the Dharma they have no prestige or influence. The Four Deva Kings and their retinue have forsaken the land, and Japan’s guardian kami have also gone right away (*Shugo kokka ron* 守護國家論, ASAI 1934, pp. 258–59).

Ikeda Daisaku, commenting on the “guardian deities of Buddhism” (the Four Deva Kings, etc.), wrote: “Buddhist gods here signify thought,” and, “when thought becomes chaotic, the people fall into disorder. . . . Thus the nation goes into ruin” (METRAUX 1986, p. 38). His attempt to sound more sophisticated is understandable, but hardly explains how disordered thoughts could have caused the storms and earthquakes that were devastating Japan at the time. As will become clearer, Nichiren regarded the gods as objective entities, distinct from human beings, and responsible for defending both the land and devotees of the *Lotus Sūtra*.

The leaders responded to Nichiren’s exhortations with harassment and exile. He had been prepared for this, and often quoted texts to prove that such hardships were the credentials of the true devotee. However, he also quoted passages to encourage his followers to expect the kind of divine aid that would bring both vindication, and the title of National Teacher (NAYLOR 1984, pp. 125, 197–201; 1984–86, pp. 126–51). So his severest anguish came from the repeated failure by guardian deities to rescue him. In fact, he stated that the kernel of *Kaimoku shō* was the question: “Why do the devas not help me?”

I had confidently expected the devas to plan some intervention on my behalf, but there was no sign of it. I am sinking under ever heavier punishments. In fact, when I consider all this, I have all sorts of doubts, and wonder if perhaps I am not a *Lotus Sūtra* devotee at all, or whether all the celestial beings and good devas have deserted the land and left (KABUTOGI 1968, p. 232; HORI 1952, p. 203).

*The Subservience of the Gods to Nichiren,
and the Inferiority of Native Kami*

Up till his second arrest Nichiren warned that, having lost the protection of its native kami, Japan would incur the yet direr punishments of invasion and civil war from the superior Indian devas (Brahmā, Indra, etc.), unless the rulers put exclusive trust in the *Lotus Sūtra*. He continued these warnings, and pointed out signs of imminent fulfilment, but after his second exile (1271–1274) it was the kami that he began to threaten with punishment from the devas, because of their failure to defend him. The theory behind this threat he set out in *Kangyō Hachiman shō* (1280).

If the clan gods do not punish [Mara of the sixth heaven, or any evil spirit entering the bodies of human beings. . . in order to harass the disciples of the Buddha], then Brahmā . . . and Indra should punish the guardian kami (ASAI 1934, p. 130).

The chief culprits were, of course, Amaterasu-ōmikami and Bodhisattva Hachiman, but the latter became the chief object of his ire, partly because he had boasted to his disciples that Hachiman now dwelt in the head of Nichiren, the only honest devotee of the only honest sūtra (*Hōmon mōsarubeki yō no koto* 法門申さるべき様の事 [1270], ASAI 1934, pp. 647–48). It was all the more inexcusable that this great kami, “whose mausoleum is second only to [that of Amaterasu at] Ise,” and who had “made a vow to protect devotees,” had apparently forgotten his vow, and left the only true devotee in the lurch:

For several years, not only has he failed to punish the great enemies of the *Lotus Sūtra*, but he has even failed to come and defend the devotee of the *Lotus Sūtra* that happened to arise. Before his very eyes the rulers have found it as easy to attack [me] as it is for a dog to bite a monkey . . . or a lion to kill a rabbit. Yet [Hachiman] has not rebuked them even once (*Kangyō Hachiman shō*, TOKORO and TAKAGI 1970, pp. 358, 360; HORI 1952, pp. 581, 582).

Worst of all, Hachiman had done nothing when Nichiren had his hermitage wrecked by rampaging soldiers, and was made a laughingstock as he was “paraded around the narrow streets of Kamakura in broad daylight like a traitor” (ASAI 1934, pp. 1344, 1935). As Nichiren later recalled his humiliation, his eyes were still “grim with anger,” and he could only console himself by predicting that in this life the people of Japan would suffer captivity and serious diseases such as leprosy, and in the next life would fall into the incessant hell (*Shinkoku ō goshō* 神国王御書 [Rulers of the Divine Country], ASAI 1934, p. 1342). But it was not only the rulers and people that would be punished; if Amaterasu and Hachiman abandoned him, they would become “mere kindling for the flames

of Avici hell,” having “in this life exhausted their karmic rewards that had brought them into the heavens” (HORI 1952, pp. 927, 1526). Hachiman had already been punished by the razing of his shrines—one in Kyūshū in 1274, and another at Tsurugaoka in 1280. This showed not only the inferiority of the native kami, but also their subservience to Nichiren:

In the 11th month of Bun'ei 11 [1274], the Mongols attacked, and not only killed many Japanese soldiers, but also burnt down the Hachiman shrine. Why did not Hachiman punish the soldiers of that land? It is clear that the great ruler of that land is superior to the kami of this one (TOKORO and TAKAGI 1970, p. 361; HORI 1952, p. 583).

Though Amaterasu and Hachiman are important in Japan, they are but minor deities compared with Brahmā, Indra, Candra and Sūrya. So when we offend one of them it is equivalent to destroying high-ranking people, like . . . the exiled emperor Go-Toba. But because the one now offended is the messenger of the Buddha Śākyamuni [i.e., Nichiren], there is no comparison. Amaterasu-ōmikami and Shō Hachiman should bow down and prostrate themselves. The devotee of the *Lotus Sūtra* is attended by Brahmā and Indra on the right and left, and illumined by Sūrya and Candra before and behind (*Shuju ofurumai gosho* 種種御振舞御書, ASAI 1934, pp. 1377–78; HORI 1952, p. 919).

Some disciples had become worried by Nichiren's irreverence towards Hachiman, and even called him “an enemy” of this august deity. To reassure them, Nichiren quoted a story from the *Fu-fa-ts'ang yin-yüan ch'uan* about a wealthy Brahmin, Nyagrodha, who threatened to burn the image of his god, a forest-spirit, unless it granted his prayers for a son and heir. The result was entirely satisfactory, for after the terrified spirit had appealed for help to the Four Deva Kings, who relayed the message to Mahābrahmā, Nyagrodha got a son, who became Kāśyapa, one of Śākyamuni's leading disciples. So Nichiren argued that, although getting angry with one's clan god would usually result in a bad rebirth, his own anger was quite justified, and could have an equally favorable result (*Kangyō Hachiman shō*, TOKORO and TAKAGI 1970, pp. 362–64; quoting from T #2058, 50.297b–c).

Revere the Emperor?

However, such lack of respect for the kami was tantamount to irreverence to the emperor, since Amaterasu was worshipped as his ancestor, and Hachiman was not just the Minamoto clan god, but had also been identified with Emperor Ōjin (A.D. 270–310). The National Learning scholar, Hirata Atsutane (1776–1843), was infuriated by the way

Nichiren belittled Japan and its emperors, and showed more respect for the ancient Indian monarch, Ajātaśatru:

Hachiman is Emperor Ōjin, the ruler of a small country. . . .
Compared to King Ajātaśatru, he is like a commoner (*Kangyō Hachiman shō*, ASAI 1934, p. 1936).

However, prewar Nichirenite imperialists were so infatuated with their belief in Japan's divine mission abroad that they ignored completely Nichiren's contempt for its rulers and deities. So Tanaka declared that the imperial house was not only the governor and protector of Japan; it must stand on its moral traditions and make people realize that it was the protector of all mankind (*Daigyaku jiken ni okeru kokuminteki hansei* 大逆事件に於ける国民的反省 in *Shishi ō kokutai hen* 師子王国体篇, p. 46; referred to in WATANABE 1972, pp. 60–61).

One thing, however, did worry Tanaka—the shattering defeat of the imperial forces in the 1180s by Minamoto Yoritomo, and again in 1221, when the retired emperor Go-Toba was defeated by Yoshitoki, a mere retainer of a retainer. This “usurpation of the imperial prerogative” continued to threaten Japan's polity until the Meiji Restoration (TANAKA 1911, pp. 195–97). Nichiren had also thought about the imperial overthrow, even as a boy, but his description of events in *Shinkoku ō gosho* shows scant respect for rulers:

[The 81st emperor] Antoku . . . was fed to the fishes at Dan-no-ura, attacked by Yoritomo. The 82nd emperor Go-Toba . . . was exiled to Oki. The 83rd, Tsuchimikado, was banished to Awa; the 84th [Juntoku] was exiled to Sado. The 82nd, 83rd, and 84th rulers were father and sons, attacked by Yoshitoki, a retainer of the Kamakura Udaishō [Yoritomo] (ASAI 1934, pp. 1338, 1334).

How could this be? Assuming for the sake of argument that the *honji-suijaku* and Divine Country ideas were both correct, Nichiren professed to be very perplexed, since “all the rulers of the triple-world are emanations of Śākyamuni Buddha,” and would lose their crowns “should they rebel even for an instant.” As for the kami, they were “revered as reincarnations of perished and departed rulers. . . . If they are revered, the land subdues . . . natural disasters (ASAI 1934, p. 1335; HORI 1952, p. 1518).

He went on to quote more of the doctrine that helped to keep the ruling classes in power. Emperors were all of divine descent; only reverence for them and the gods could ensure divine protection and tranquillity. Moreover, in Japan they were better protected by Buddhist rites than in China or India, because of the greater number of temples and shrines. Reading this passage out of context, one could easily assume (as Tanaka

apparently did), that Nichiren was an ardent believer in the imperial system. But a little further on, he begins to query it, then to ridicule it:

What is more, we have as our kami the three thousand shrines, firstly of Amaterasu-ōmikami, then of Bodhisattva Hachiman, and Sannō. Night and day they guard this land. . . . How could Antoku, [or Go-Toba, Tsuchimikado, and Juntoku, exiled to] Oki, Awa, and Sado, have been attacked one after the other, and either been killed or exiled, or become demons and fallen into hell? A simple Buddhist ceremony performed in the 171,037 temples⁷ should ensure the long continuance of heaven and earth, and the safety of the rulers. Further, Hachiman has vowed to guard the emperors (*Shinkoku ō goshō*, ASAI 1934, p. 1336; HORI 1952, p. 1519).

This last “vow” was literally to guard “the hundred rulers,” in unbroken succession:

During the reign of the 48th emperor, [Hachiman] entered the presence of the Takano Tennō [Empress Kōken] and said: “Since its inception, my nation has never known a subject to become ruler. The position of emperor will always maintain the imperial lineage. . . .” Further, Ōmikami said to Gyōkyō: “I have a vow to guard the hundred rulers.” If this be so, all the emperors since Jinmu should have been free from illness and decline, come what may. How could these four emperors not only be driven from their thrones and lose their empire, but also be drowned or exiled? Has not Amaterasu inhabited the bodies of each succeeding emperor? What has become of Hachiman’s vow? (ASAI 1934, p. 1336; HORI 1952, pp. 1519–20).

He concluded that, by relying on Shingon rites, the emperors had forfeited any right to divine protection. The long series of memorial services had been futile and in any case should have been quite unnecessary, if the emperors really had the protection of all the deities of the triple-world, for they were so superior to Yoritomo and Yoshitoki that they should have defeated them “as easily as an eagle attacks a pheasant, or a lion kills a rabbit” (ASAI 1934, p. 1337; HORI 1952, p. 1520). But their defeat in this case did not mean that Amaterasu and Hachiman had broken their vows, for, he argued, Hachiman had vowed to protect only honest rulers. Emperor Go-Toba was a liar, and therefore a merely nominal ruler; the regent, Hōjō Yoshitoki, was “without deceit in his mouth,” and therefore the legitimate ruler (*Kangyō Hachiman shō*, ASAI 1934, p. 1943). So whereas Tanaka blamed the “usurpation” by the

⁷ In *Kangyō Hachiman shō* (TOKORO and TAKAGI 1970, p. 361) the number of temples is given as 11,037, which seems more realistic. In *Yōtenki* the number of “sacred enclosures” for the kami is given as 3,120, and the number of temples as 13,700-odd during the tenth century (ISHIDA 1970, p. 64).

Hōjō regents for all subsequent woes, Nichiren blamed the emperors themselves, for causing Tendai-Lotus temples to be “usurped” by Shingon rites honoring Mahāvairocana instead of Śākyamuni.

As if the inferiority of the emperors and their “divine ancestors” needed any further emphasis, Nichiren claimed to be “the father and mother of the present emperor, the model for Amidist, Zen, and Shingon masters to follow, and their lord” (*Senji shō*, ASAI 1934, p. 1203). As for Amaterasu and Hachiman, they were only low-grade bodhisattvas, and although they had once been on the Vulture Peak with myriads of other disciples of Śākyamuni Buddha, they had not progressed beyond the beginner stages towards buddhahood:

The ones that become rulers and deities of this small land are bodhisattvas of the Three Wise Degrees in Hīnayāna, or of the Ten Degrees of Faith in Mahāyāna (*Kangyō Hachiman shō*, TOKORO and TAKAGI 1970, p. 355).

Nichiren also rebuked Hachiman for failing to discipline his “clan-children” 氏子, the Hōjō regents, for although Yoshitoki had been “honest,” his successors had deserted Tendai-Lotus for Shingon and Jōdo. What kind of “disciplining” was he looking for? He recalled how during the reign of Kinmei (539–571), when the Mononobe opposed the introduction of Buddhism, “fire came down from Heaven and consumed the emperor’s residence,” and “more than half the population died in a plague.” Presumably he was implying that any lesser punishment on his enemies would be quite inappropriate, since by propagating the title of the *Lotus Sūtra*, Nichiren had become “the eyes of devas and of the world,” and in opposing him, Shingon masters in particular were “gouging out” the eyes of all (TOKORO and TAKAGI 1970, pp. 355, 359; ASAI 1934, pp. 1929, 1934–35; HORI 1952, pp. 578, 581).

To summarize thus far: Nichiren lived in a very different age, when the Japanese were too preoccupied with the threat of invasion by the Mongols, and with their own internal struggles, to pose any threat to other countries. Native deities such as Amaterasu, Hachiman, and other clan gods were still revered, but, unlike the Outer Shrine priests, neither Nichiren nor the rulers asserted their primacy or superiority over Buddhist entities. By contrast, Nichirenite imperialists such as Tanaka followed the Shinto nationalism of National Learning scholars (which goes back to the Outer Shrine), by asserting Japanese superiority, the redundancy of foreign ethics and religion, and the primacy of Amaterasu, who “went to India and appeared as Śākyamuni” (TANAKA 1935–36, p. 288). They introduced the main features of Japanese imperialism (belief in the absolute supremacy of Japan, its emperor, and his “divine” ancestors) into their interpretation of Nichiren’s works, despite contrary arguments by Nichiren himself.

In the following sections we must look at other factors – Nichiren’s vision of Japan as the center of world Buddhism, whether this vision would be fulfilled by peaceful or violent means, and whether it contained that concern for social justice and compassion that could allow peace to flourish.

Japan as the Center for World Buddhism

Although Nichiren criticized Japan severely at times, at other times he took an idealized view of it, comparing it to the K’un-lun Mountains, where “there are no stones except precious ones.” In his view, it had become an entirely Mahāyāna country, linked solely to the *Lotus Sūtra*, ever since Dengyō Daishi (767–822) defeated the scholars of Hīnayāna and earlier Mahāyāna sects in debate before Emperor Kanmu, and founded the Tendai Sect in Japan (*Kyōkijikoku shō* 教機時國抄, ASAI 1934, p. 452). Hence, Japan had become a very desirable, if difficult, land into which to be born, for there anyone could hear the Dharma needed for the Age of Decay. But the chance to gain rebirth in the Land of the Sun was “as negligible as the dirt under the fingernails,” whereas those reborn in the hells, or in the realms of hungry ghosts or animals would be “as numerous as the grains of dirt in all the worlds of the ten directions” (*Shugo kokka ron*, TOKORO and TAKAGI 1970, p. 14; ASAI 1934, p. 222).

Because Nichiren believed that Japan had such an affinity for the *Lotus Sūtra*, he envisaged it as the center for worldwide propagation. However, to make it as easy as the rival Jōdo (Pure Land, Amidist) sect, he whittled down the teaching to the mere Title *Namu myōhō rengekyō* 南無妙法蓮華經 (Adoration to the Marvelous Dharma of the *Lotus Sūtra*), and called all but chapter 16, plus the adjacent halves of chapters 15 and 17 of the sūtra, “Hīnayāna, heresy, unable to bring enlightenment” (*Kanjin honzon shō*, ASAI 1934, p. 956). Later he wrote:

There are 80,000 countries in this world, with 80,000 rulers. All these rulers, with their retainers and all their subjects, must proclaim *Namu myōhō rengekyō*, just as now everyone in Japan invokes the name of Amida (*Senji shō*, ASAI 1934, p. 1193; HORI 1952, p. 258).

We should notice that the Dharma to be propagated was no longer the Buddhism of Śākyamuni, but the Buddhism of Nichiren. Although Nichiren had attacked the Jōdo and Shingon sects for displacing the historical Buddha, Śākyamuni, in favor of the “Eternal Buddha,” Amida or Mahāvairocana, he himself displaced Śākyamuni in favor of the Title, and this Dharma of Japan was to outshine the Dharma from India, as the sun outshines the moon.

The changed status assigned to Śākyamuni and Japan is clearly seen

in Nichiren's *mandala*, described in *Kanjin honzon shō*. Here, the Title, written in Chinese characters, occupies the center, symbolizing its central position in his idea of the cosmos, while Śākyamuni is relegated to the position of Manifestation Buddha at the side. This *gohonzon* (object of worship), he said, was to be erected in Japan, and did not exist in India or China (TOKORO and TAKAGI 1970, p. 147; ASAI 1934, p. 956).

The Dharma of Japan for World Peace? Capacity and Karma

When we look more closely at such statements as "Japan has the capacity for the Round [Complete]⁸ without admixture," and "its affinity for that Dharma is like the affinity of iron for a magnet" (*Nanjō Heishichirō dono gosho* 南条兵衛七郎殿御書, HORI 1952, p. 1496), we find that this is a very doubtful compliment, for Nichiren used the phrase "capacity for the *Lotus Sūtra*" mainly to denote the dull and the difficult, as in the following passage:

To Dharma-slanderers we should expound only the *Lotus Sūtra*. . . . However, if we know someone with the capacity to become wise, we should always teach Hīnayāna first, then provisional Mahāyāna, then true Mahāyāna. If we know him to be stupid, we should always teach true Mahāyāna first (*Kyōkijōkoku shō*, ASAI 1934, p. 448; HORI 1952, p. 438).

When he wrote: "for four hundred years the people of Japan have had the capacity only for the *Lotus Sūtra*," did Nichiren mean that the people of Japan were more stupid than people of Hīnayāna countries? Tanaka did not think so; he took it for granted that Nichiren referred to the innate superiority of the Japanese, which he attributed partly to "the refining principle in the climate" (TANAKA 1911, p. 192). Actually, at times Nichiren suspended his usual critical attitude to Japan, and used the expression "capacity for the *Lotus Sūtra*" in the way used in the *sūtra* itself: intelligent seekers who had listened to the Buddha on the Vulture Peak. They had all been "arhats, faultless . . . and free in mind." But then in his next sentence, Nichiren uses the term "capacity" to denote those who find it difficult to absorb the simplest teaching—his usual opinion of his fellow countrymen (*Kyōkijōkoku shō*, ASAI 1934, p. 451; HORI 1952, p. 440; quoting from T #262, 9.1c).

Those who follow other sects or religions could well protest that their own teachings and practices were not only more relevant to world peace, but also more suited to their capacity and country. Even in the *Lotus Sūtra* the precepts are not abolished, or considered beyond the capacity

⁸ "Round" 円 in Tendai means "no jagged edges or conflict with other teachings"; also "full, complete" (HURVITZ 1960–62, p. 263).

of the people of the Age of Decay; rather, they are said to supplement recitation. Nichiren taught that they were all subsumed under “receiving and keeping” the sūtra, and Nichiren Shōshū now interprets this to mean accepting and copying the *gohonzon*, chanting the Title, and *shakubuku* (T #262, 9.45c; HORI 1952, p. 783; SŌKA GAKKAI KYŌGAKUBU 1972, p. 264). It claims that this practice, by improving karma, will pave the way to peace, for bad karma people are “prone to violence and hate; good karma people stress peace and love” (METRAUX 1986, p. 41).

Nichiren himself never connected karma and peace, but did write that anyone must have good karma to be born in a land where the *Lotus Sūtra* is preached. If this is so without any qualification, then all Japanese should have good karma, and the Japanese army must have been a “force for peace,” just as Tanaka claimed. However, during his two exiles, Nichiren explained his misfortunes by claiming that by them, he was working off a lot of very bad karma. Although he had been born in Japan, in the *mikuriya* of Amaterasu, his lot was to become a “poverty-stricken, vulgar person from an outcaste family,” with “the body of a man-like beast; a fish and a bird rolled into one” (*Sado gosho* 佐渡御書, ASAI 1934, p. 844). His circumstances did not improve, despite many years of zealous chanting of the Title, and, judging by the vitriolic attacks he continued to make on those who opposed him, his “peace and love” were very limited in extent.

However, in *Kanjin honzon shō* he claimed that the Title was “the marvelous vehicle for conveying the merits of the Six Paramitas of almsgiving, keeping the precepts, patience, diligence, meditation, and wisdom” (ASAI 1934, p. 954). What is more, he saw perfection already imparted to the whole defiled world, which had left behind all such disasters as flood, fire, famine and war, and “become the changeless, ever-abiding Pure Land.” For him, the cycles of rebirth, decay, and destruction had ceased, without any objective improvement for the land or its people (ASAI 1934, p. 955; HORI 1952, p. 247).

This subjective view of reform may account for the centuries of inactivity by Nichirenite sects in social welfare work. The position of Sōka Gakkai may be different. Ikeda Daisaku has declared that, while religion is to be kept out of politics, it impinges indirectly on society by molding people’s character.

Through the *Lotus Sūtra*, he says, people gain a firm basis to face suffering, by attaining not to some state of mind divorced from reality, but to the ability to see both one’s own buddha nature, and the interpenetration of all ten realms of existence (IKEDA 1977, pp. 23–25; 131–32). Although this position still allows people simply to call this defiled world “the land of eternally tranquil light,” without changing society, it is also argued that because disciples are guided by the Eternal Buddha, and because the Title is the vehicle for imparting the merits of

Śākyamuni, chanting it is the only means for achieving peace and happiness, and the Buddhism of Nichiren is thus said to be the basis for their peace and social welfare programs (*Sōka Gakkai News* 118, p. 16).

Nichiren himself did not explain how perception of the potential buddhahood of all beings could change society, for he was more interested in showing that the same doctrine found in other Mahāyāna sūtras had no efficacy.⁹ Also, “efficacy” for him was a shamanist notion, not a psychological or political one. His argument in *Risshō ankoku ron* is that peace and safety come about only when the guardian deities are revitalized by the “right sūtra,” and are able to perform their protective role. There is no call for justice, mercy, love for enemies and neighbors, honest work, or a simple lifestyle, such as we find in Biblical writers. Even the Six Paramitas mentioned above are more concerned with the religious life than with tackling the social injustices that destroy peace. Nichiren demanded justice for himself when he felt deprived of a fair hearing, but otherwise he ignored the issue, for he believed that chanting the correct formula was more important to national welfare than good administration. Thus, in *Shinkoku ō goshō* he wrote: “the perversion of secular law 王法 is like the small waves . . . that can hardly do much harm to a great country . . . but [perversion of] the Buddha Dharma is like . . . great waves shattering a small boat” (ASAI 1934, p. 1338). Moreover, because he believed that false teachings were already bringing ruin, despite his warnings, he could no longer promise peace to his followers in this life.

The Precepts and Peace

The main claim for Buddhism to be called a force for peace lies in the first of Śākyamuni’s precepts, which forbids the taking of life. Sōka Gakkai claims that its opposition to killing for any reason makes it superior to religions such as Christianity and Islam, which have waged religious wars (HOSOYA 1972, p. 99).

However, Nichiren’s attitude to the precepts was not consistent. Although he eventually relegated Śākyamuni to a subordinate position, during his first exile he claimed to have kept the precepts far more strictly than other monks, for he had eaten “neither fish nor fowl,” nor “killed so much as an ant or a cricket” (since abandoning the life of a fisherman, one presumes) (*Shi-on shō* 四恩抄, HORI 1952, p. 936). He declared that most monks and devotees would be reborn in one or other of the hells, because of such offences against the precepts as killing animals, adultery, drinking, lying, and seducing nuns (*Kenhōbō shō* 顕謗法抄, HORI

⁹ The fallacies in his argument that the *Lotus Sūtra* was the only effective sūtra during the Age of Decay are set out in NAYLOR 1987, pp. 51ff.

1952, p. 445). However, although offenses such as these contribute in varying degrees to social disharmony and disintegration, I have not seen them mentioned by Sōka Gakkai in its discussions about peace. The whole emphasis is on the first precept, and that only in the narrow sense of not taking human life. But when we look at the works of Nichiren, we find that the prohibition against taking human life is deliberately modified. He had many followers from among the warrior class, and on one occasion he strongly urged one of them to get himself honor and domains by joining the battle in Kamakura (HORI 1952, p. 919). He did not even condemn Tendai soldier-monks for raiding rival temples.¹⁰ Rather, he told the Bakufu that unless they razed all the Zen and Jōdo temples and beheaded their monks, Japan would perish (*Senji shō*, HORI 1952, p. 287). He told a follower that the only way to bring back the buddhas and good kami was to “destroy every Zen and Amidist temple, punish the monks, and build Hiei halls” (*Hōmon mōsarubeki yō no koto*, ASAI 1934, p. 647; HORI 1952, p. 1273). Sōka Gakkai regards *Risshō ankoku ron* as an appeal against “the horrors of war,” but in fact, the theme of this work is the demand for a “holy war” against the Jōdo sect, and in it the Five Precepts are subordinated to the defence of the “Right Dharma.” In the following passage, Nichiren quotes from the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* to prove his point; the author of this sūtra assumes, of course, that it, rather than the *Lotus Sūtra*, is the “Right Dharma.”

Those who would guard and keep the Right Dharma must not receive the Five Precepts or cultivate the Rules of Conduct. Rather, they must always bear sword, bow, and halberd. . . . Again it says “If there is anyone who would keep the Five Precepts, he cannot be called a Mahāyānist” (*Risshō ankoku ron*, ASAI 1934, p. 405; HORI 1952, p. 28, quoting T #374, 12.383b, 384a).

It is sometimes argued that Nichiren was referring to the use of weapons in a purely metaphorical sense, but if this were so, it would not be necessary to set aside the Five Precepts. Neither was he urging the authorities to behead the monks in a metaphorical sense. The literal interpretation is borne out by the succeeding passage, where he holds up as models two virtuous rulers who slew many heretics and were then reborn as Kāśyapa and Śākyamuni Buddha. In *Gyōbin sojō goetsū* 行敏訴狀御会通, he quoted several Tendai authorities to defend the presence of armed soldiers in his hut, claiming that it was the same as having armed forces to defend the ruler (HORI 1952, pp. 181–82). Nichiren sanctioned both secular and religious wars.

¹⁰ Although Nichiren argued that “countless monks” had disqualified themselves as devotees because they had burnt temples and stupas, he did not count them as enemies of the Dharma. ASAI lists numerous instances of arson and use of force by Nara and Hiei monks (1934, Vol. III, pp. 437–57).

Compassion and Reverence for Life

In *Kaimoku shō* Nichiren claimed that the worst enemies of the Dharma were not so much the notorious soldier-monks of Tendai as the precept-honoring monks of Zen and Ritsu (HORI 1952, p. 227). He criticized Ritsu for its wealth, and denounced its influential leader, Ryōkan, who, though revered by many as the “living Buddha” for his welfare work among the poor, was, he said, causing much hardship by his efforts to build roads and bridges, because of the toll imposed. Moreover, while Ryōkan was also endeavoring to gain wider observance of the precepts, Nichiren declared that they were now “useless” during the Age of Decay (*Shōgu mondō shō* 聖愚問答抄, ASAI 1934, p. 564). Whether or not his criticisms of Ryōkan were justified, it is difficult to find any basis for welfare programs in Nichiren’s writings.

Moreover, his compassion and reverence for life were very limited in scope. When his mother recovered from an illness, he wrote: “For any person, life is the most precious possession. To prolong it for even one day is worth more than ten million *ryō* of gold” (*Kaen jōgō gosho* 可延定業御書, KABUTOGI 1968, p. 44). He also expressed pity for the people of Iki and Tsushima who had suffered at the hands of the Mongols, and even for the Mongolian envoys who had been beheaded. However, he did not pity the soldiers who had humiliated and beaten him during his second arrest; in fact, he wondered why they were not struck down, or smitten with leprosy or other dread diseases. Others had been torn open or smitten with a burning disease for “less serious crimes” (*Kaimoku shō*, ASAI 1934, p. 1377). As he reflected on his rejection, desire for vindication drove out all compassion, and he fondly imagined “all Japan” devastated by the Mongols, and his enemies prostrate before him, crying “Nichiren-gobō, save us!” But the high priests of Japan would fall into hell, like Devadatta, through their inability to complete the phrase “*Namu Nichiren Shōnin*” (Adoration to St Nichiren). (*Senji shō*, ASAI 1934, pp. 1234–35; HORI 1952, pp. 286–87).

Yet he claimed to excel in compassion, because of his sufferings and strivings to “put the seven words of the Title into the mouths of the people of Japan, as a mother in pity tries to put milk into the mouth of her infant” (*Kangyō Hachiman shō* and *Kaimoku shō*, ASAI 1934, pp. 1939, 788). But when we compare the concept of compassion in Mahāyāna Buddhism, we find that it is expressed by endeavors to bring out the latent seeds of buddhahood in all beings, using “skillful means” rather than force-feeding. It is ironical that both opponents and disciples quoted from chapter 14 of the *Lotus Sūtra* to criticize Nichiren’s aggressive tactics, while he, “the only true devotee,” rejected this chapter as applicable only in peaceful times (although it says in the first paragraph that it is meant for “the evil age to come”). Of course, it is not surprising that the

son of an outcaste fisherman should dislike the advice in this chapter to avoid fishermen and other outcaste slaughterers, and not to despise or criticize other preachers (KATO et al. 1975, pp. 224, 226). But to answer his critics, he had to resort again to quotations from the *Nirvāna Sūtra* (*Kaimoku shō*, ASAI 1934, p. 838).

Conclusion

NICHIREN AND IMPERIALISM

The imperialism of prewar Japan was backed by the claim that the benefits of Japan's polity, headed by a divine emperor, should be extended worldwide. But Nichiren's writings lend support to emperor worship only if torn out of context, for he actually ridiculed several defeated emperors, and always ranked the *Lotus Sūtra* and its devotee above human rulers and the "imperial ancestress," Amaterasu-ōmikami. Nevertheless, imperialists did gain inspiration from him. To quote Kenneth CH'EN: "The chauvinism and militarism which characterized Japanese policy during the 19th and 20th centuries could be traced to some extent to the aggressive attitude and ideas of Nichiren" (1968, p. 184). Nichiren's "aggressive attitude" was epitomized by *shakubuku*, and his aim was to establish Japan as the center of world Buddhism, but imperialists linked it to military conquest and the assertion of Japanese superiority. Although Nichiren regarded Japanese rulers as inferior to those of India and China, and more than once declared that most Japanese were headed for rebirth in one of the hot hells (e.g., ASAI 1934, p. 222; HORI 1952, p. 36), yet the scorn he had suffered from China-imitating aristocrats reinforced the nationalist attitude which he imbibed from his native district, and finally expressed in the declaration that the Dharma of Japan was like the sun, and would supersede the Dharma that had come from India and China.

Postwar *shakubuku* has been paralleled by an anti-war, anti-nuclear movement, supplemented by social welfare and refugee aid programs. It remains to be seen whether it will be used again to support economic or military imperialism, but this depends partly on the extent to which Sōka Gakkai modifies its aims, and its interpretation of *shakubuku*, in order to become more popular.¹¹

NICHIREN AND THE PEACE MOVEMENT

It seems difficult to reconcile *shakubuku* with peace programs. Nichiren's aim in *Risshō ankoku ron* was to persuade the authorities to make the

¹¹ Debate has arisen in the Kōmeitō recently over what its attitude should be in response to the U.S. call for military help in the Gulf crisis.

Tendai-Lotus sect supreme, and to suppress other sects by beheading their monks and razing their temples. This is quite different from the claim by Ikeda that the concepts behind *ankoku* (which he interprets as “national prosperity”) are “respect for life and humanity, and the principle of absolute pacifism” (1977, p. 23). But it is not so different from the intimidatory tactics that have been employed by Sōka Gakkai. As METRAUX points out, there is widespread skepticism about its true intentions (1986, pp. 54–55). Some people suspect that peace and welfare programs are designed to hide its goal of making Nichiren Shōshū the official religion. After all, the concept of the unity of secular and Buddhist law (*ōbō-buppō* 王法仏法) goes back to *San daihō shō* 三大秘法抄 (HORI 1952, p. 1021), and has been the aim of the sect ever since Nikkan (1665–1726). Ikeda Daisaku has tried to distinguish between *ōbō-buppō* and unity of Church and State, by arguing that “establishing the right Dharma” (*risshō*) is the task of Nichiren Shōshū, not of Kōmeitō, whose task it is to effect *ankoku* as an ordinary political party separating Church and State in accordance with the Constitution, while still affirming the principles of pacifism and respect for life. He also argues that the expression “*ōbō-buppō*” no longer means a union of Buddhist law with the law of the “king” or “national power,” for, he says, in a democratic age when the people are king, 王 means all factions of society (1977, pp. 24, 25). This is not true. People are just as much at the mercy of the rich and powerful as ever they were, and not only do the Sōka Gakkai and Kōmeitō possess considerable wealth themselves, but they have also shown that they ally themselves with the rich and powerful as happily as anyone else.¹²

Accusations of intimidation are now dismissed as excessive zeal on the part of uneducated members, but, as Murakami and others have shown, much of it has been organized by high-ranking leaders. More basically, Nichiren’s works lack the necessary teachings to show the way to peace – unless one really believes that chanting the Title of the *Lotus Sūtra* is going to bring back and nourish the guardian deities. The fact that Ikeda has tried to explain away this idea shows how much of an embarrassment it is to modern followers, who claim instead that chanting will improve one’s karma. But it is hard to believe this claim also, when we reflect that Nichiren’s chanting failed to produce any improvement in his own lot, or any demands for disarmament or social justice. Although he did stress that the superiority of the *Lotus Sūtra* lay in its unique power to effect buddhahood in all (even women!), he did not demand equality or mutual respect as a consequence. Rather, he repeat-

¹² Disclaimers about political aims were made after the furor in 1970 when the Kōmeitō tried to suppress Fujiwara’s book *I Denounce Sōka Gakkai*; KOMURO 1981, p. 120.

edly set forth the reasons why buddhahood for all as taught in other Mahāyāna sects had no validity.

Neither did Nichiren appeal against the use of violence. Rather, he urged the kind of “holy war” against heretics that Sōka Gakkai criticizes in Christianity and Islam. Ikeda Daisaku did admit that Nichiren allowed the use of arms to protect the Dharma, but argued that they were never to be used for aggression (Nov. 1971). In this respect Ikeda’s position is no different from that of anyone else endeavoring to sound respectable. It is quite reasonable, of course, to adopt a program of opposing war and nuclear weapons, for there is no point in achieving power if the whole world is devastated and uninhabitable – as noted by Nichiren in *Risshō ankoku ron*. In sum, not only did Nichiren not oppose war or propose peace and welfare programs, he criticized Ryōkan’s efforts to encourage precept-observance, and to try to help the poor and improve roads. By contrast, the ideal of *shalom* – a just peace in which people’s needs are so adequately and fairly met that they dance for joy – has inspired untold numbers of people motivated by the love of God, to pioneer or cooperate in peace programs. Yet Nichiren would have dismissed their religion as inferior even to Hīnayāna Buddhism.¹³ The claim that the inspiration for Sōka Gakkai’s peace programs comes from Nichiren is hard to justify.

ABBREVIATION

- T TAKAKUSU Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and WATANABE Kaigyoku 渡辺海旭 eds. 1922–33. *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經 [Newly revised Tripiṭaka of the Taishō era]. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō.

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¹³ Nichiren inherited the belief that non-Buddhist religions were at best a preparation for Buddhism, and that Hīnayāna was but a preparation for Mahāyāna. He also argued that the piety of non-Buddhists was only nominal, since it did not help parents in the next life (*Kaimoku shō*, HORI 1952, p. 223).

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