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Lire le Sutra du Lotus avec son corps selon Nichiren

Ruben L. F. Habito

La lecture par Nichiren du Sutra du Lotus, qu'il considérait comme la quintessence de l'enseignement du Bouddha Shakyamuni selon la tradition tendai, détermine le contenu de son enseignement ainsi que le cours de sa carrière religieuse. Cet article examine d'abord l'enseignement du Sutra du Lotus proprement dit puis en examinant les Écrits de Nichiren pour voir comment il comprenait la lecture du Sutra du Lotus et expose les éléments impliqués dans la manière il l'a effectivement lu. Un examen plus approfondi de la «lecture corporelle» de Nichiren (shikidoku) du Sutra du Lotus offre une clé pour comprendre son 'enseignement et la pratique dans le contexte de la plus large tradition mahayana et jette également une nouvelle lumière sur les dimensions mystiques et prophétiques de sa vision religieuse.

\* \* \*

Dans le Japon moderne un certain nombre de chercheurs influents ainsi que des militants sociaux et politiques avaient tourné leur regard vers le treizième siècle japonais. Prenant la figure du bouddhiste Nichiren comme source d'inspiration ils l’ont dépeint selon leur propre programme religieux, politique et / ou nationaliste (Tamura et Miyazaki 1972 ,Maruyama 1981) .[1 Voir le volume 2 de la présente revue]. L’enseignement de Nichiren a donné naissance pendant cette période à de nouvelles religions qui offrent leurs propres images de Nichiren souvent très contrastées.

Sato Hiroo, un éminent spécialiste de la religion et de la société médiévales japonaises, se penche sur la disparité des portraits de Nichiren au Japon d’aujourd'hui, avec toutes ses distorsions unidimensionnel qui vont jusqu’à le présenter comme un fanatique religieux ou un alors un nationaliste de droite. Il souligne le besoin pressant d’études critiques qui offriraient des images de Nichiren plus fondées historiquement, sa personne et sa pensée dans le contexte de son époque (Sato 1997).

Dans cet article, nous allons aborder la question : comment Nichiren a-t-il lu le Sutra du Lotus qu’il considérait comme central parmi tous les textes bouddhistes ? Nous recherchons une clé pour mieux comprendre sa pensée et son enseignement, essayant de donner un aperçu de sa vie intérieure et de la façon dont il a répondu aux questions et problèmes de son temps.

Dans un premier temps, nous examinerons le Sutra du Lotus lui-même et la lecture de son enseignement. Nous nous tournerons ensuite vers les écrits de Nichiren pour voir comment il a compris ce qu’impliquait la lecture du Lotus Sutra, et pour finir nous examinerons à travers ses écrits comment sa lecture a déterminé la nature de son message religieux et a tracé le déroulement de sa carrière.

Le Sutra du Lotus – Comment lire le Sutra du Lotus

Le Sutra du Lotus a joué un rôle majeur dans la diffusion et le développement du bouddhisme à travers l'Asie de l'Est, et a été à juste titre l'objet d'études approfondies sous différents angles. Des fragments et différents inventaires de textes sanscrits du Sutra du Lotus découverts en différents lieux ont été conservés et publiés. Il existe trois traductions chinoises sur les six qui auraient été composées (Karashima 1992). La version prépondérante et la plus utilisée est la traduction chinoise de Kumarajiva, le Miaofalianhuajing, datée de 406 (T. no.262). C’est cette version qui a prévalu auprès des penseurs chinois Tiantai, et elle a également été considérée par Nichiren comme faisant autorité.

Hirakawa Akira, un savant mahayana, a noté que dans la première partie (chapitres 1 à 9) le thème sous-jacent est la vénération des stupas avec les reliques du Bouddha, alors que dans la deuxième partie (du chapitre 10) le thème prédominant est la réception et la propagation du Sutra comme voie vers la réalisation de l’Eveil de la suprême et parfaite (1989, pp. 332-36). C'est dans le contexte du thème « recevoir et de garder » (dharana) le Sutra, c'est-à-dire d'accepter son enseignement et de le garder fidèlement comme guide dans la vie, et par conséquent de le propager et de l'exposer (desana) aux autres, que l'acte de la lecture du Sutra est situé et compris.

C’est dans le chapitre X, intitulé «Maitre du Dharma » (dharmabhanaka [récitant du dharma : moine spécialisé dans la mémorisation d’un passage donné]), que nous trouvons - parmi de nombreuses références à la réception et à la propagation du Sutra du Lotus. - le passage suivant,

Ceux qui reçoivent et gardent (dharayisyanti), lisent (vacayisyanti), font connaître (prakasayisyanti), exposent (samgrahayisyanti), copient (likhisyanti), et, après avoir copié, gardent constamment en mémoire (anumarisyanti), et de temps en temps réfléchissent (vyavalokayisyanti) ne serait-ce qu’à une seule stance de cet Enseignement;

qui, dans ce livre (lu et récité), éprouvent de la vénération pour les Tathagatas, les traitent avec respect, les honorent, les estiment, les vénèrent; qui révèrent ce livre avec des fleurs, de l'encens, des guirlandes parfumées, des onguents, des fumigations, des vêtements, des dais de soie, des bannières, de la musique, etc., ou par des actes de révérence tels que s'incliner et joindre les mains, en un mot, Bhaishajyaraja, à tous les fils ou les filles de bonne famille qui recevront ou accepteront avec joie ne serait-ce qu’une seule stance de cet Enseignement, à tous, Bhaishajyaraja, je prédis qu’ils sont destinés à l'Éveil suprême et parfait. (Kern et Nanjio 1977, p. 225: 3-10)

Et si, encore, il se trouve des gens qui reçoivent et gardent (dharayisyanti), lisent (vacayisyanti), récitent (prakasayisyanti), expliquent (samgrahayisyanti), ou recopient (likhisyanti), le Sutra du Lotus du Dharma merveilleux, n'en serait-ce qu'une stance,

qui regardent les volumes de ce Sutra avec le même respect que l'Éveillé, qui lui font des offrandes de toutes sortes, de fleurs, d'encens, de colliers, de poudres, d'onguents, de fumigations, de dais de soie, de bannières, de vêtements, de musique, ou même joignent les paumes en vénération, eh bien, sache-le, Bhaishajyaraja\* (Yakuo), de telles personnes auront déjà fait offrande à des centaines de milliers de myriades de bouddhas, auront accompli, auprès des bouddhas, le grand Voeu, et c'est par commisération pour les êtres qu'ils seront nés comme humains. (site)

Celui qui saisirait, comprendrait, répéterait, possèderait, expliquerait, écrirait, ferait écrire, se rappellerait après avoir écrit, la totalité de cette exposition de la loi, et qui honorerait, respecterait, vénérerait, adorerait ce livre, qui lui rendrait un culte, des respects et des hommages, en lui oddrant des fleurs, de l’encens, des odeurs, des guirlandes de fleurs, des substances onctueuses, des poudres parfumées, des vêtements, des parasqols, des drapeaux, des étendards, la musique des instruments, des démonstrations de respect, comme l’action de tenir les mains jointes, de dire adoration et de s’incliner ? Ce fils ou cette fille de famille , o Bhaichadjyaradja, doit être reconnu comme arrivé au comble de l’état suprême de Bouddha parfaitement accompli ; il faut le regarder comme ayant vu les Tathagatas , comme plein de bonté et de compassion pour le monde

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Bodily Reading of the *Lotus Sutra*

Understanding Nichiren’s Buddhism

Ruben L. F. Habito

*Nichiren ’s reading of the Lotus Sutra, which he regarded as the quintessence*

*of Sakyamuni Buddha’s teaching following the Tendai tradition,*

*determined the content of his teaching as well as the course of his religious*

*career. This paper first looks at the Lotus Sutra teaching on its own reading*

*and then, surveying Nichiren’s writings to see how he understood the*

*act of reading the Lotus Sutra, lays out the elements involved in the way*

*he actually did read it. A closer examination of Nichiren “bodily reading”*

*(shikidoku) of the Lotus Sutra offers a key for understanding his*

*teaching and practice in the context of the wider Mahayana Buddhist tradition,*

*and also throws fresh light on the mystical and prophetic dimensions*

*of his religious vision.*

**Keywords:** Nichiren — *Lotus Sutra* — *shikidoku* — *ichinen sanzen*

In japan’s modern period a number of influential Japanese thinkers as

well as social and political activists have looked up to the thirteenthcentury

Buddhist figure Nichiren as an inspiration for their thought

and action, portraying Nichiren in ways that have furthered their own

religious, political, and/or nationalist agenda (Tamura and Miyazaki

1972，Maruyama 1981).1 Nichiren’s teaching also spawned a number

of Japan’s new religions that came into existence during this period,

and these offer their own particular and contrasting images of Nichiren.

Given the variety of images of Nichiren presented in Japan today,

not excluding the outright distortions based on his one-dimensional

portrayals as religious zealot or right-wing nationalist, Sato Hiroo,a

leading scholar of Japanese medieval religion and society, has recently

emphasized the continuing need for critical studies that would offer

more historically grounded pictures of Nichiren, the person and his

thought, in the context of his own epoch (Sato 1997).

1 See also the review of these two volumes in the present issue.

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In this paper we will pursue the question: how did Nichiren read

the *Lotus Sutra,* considered by him as central among all Buddhist

scriptures? Here we are seeking a key toward better understanding his

thought and teaching, attempting a glimpse into his inner life as he

responded to the issues and problems of his times.

In our first section we will look at the *Lotus Sutra* itself for its teaching

on its own reading. We will then turn to Nichiren’s own writings in

the second section to see how he understood what is involved in reading

the *Lotus Sutra,* and in the third, through these writings, examine

how he actually did so, to understand how his reading determined the

nature of his religious message and set the course of his career.

*The Lotus Sutra on Reading the Lotus Sutra*

The *Lotus Sutra* has played a major role in the spread and development

of Buddhism through East Asia, and has deservedly been the subject of extensive studies from different angles. Portions and different recensions of Sanskrit texts of the *Lotus Sutra* discovered in several locations have been edited and published, and there are three extant Chinese translations out of six said to have been composed (Karashima 1992). The most influential and widely used version is Kumarajiva，s Chinese translation, the *Miaofalianhuajing,* dated 406 (T. no. 262). This version was preferred by the Chinese Tiantai thinkers, and

it was also taken by Nichiren as authoritative.

Hirakawa Akira, a Mahayana scholar, has noted that in the first part (chapters 1 to 9) the underlying theme is the veneration of stupas containing the Buddha’s relics, whereas in the second part (from chapter 10) the predominant theme comes to be the reception and propagation of the *Sutra* as the way to the attainment of supreme and perfect enlightenment (1989，pp. 332-36). It is in the context or this theme of receiving and keeping *(dharana)* the *Sutra,* that is, in accepting its teaching and keeping it faithfully as one’s guide in life，and consequently of propagating and expounding (*desana)* it to others, that the act of reading the *Sutra* is situated and understood.In the tenth chapter, entitled “Teacher of the Dharma” *(dharma*

*bhanaka),* we find the following passage, one among several referring to the reception and propagation of the *Lotus Sutra.*

Those who receive and keep *(dharayisyanti),* read *(vacayisyanti)*,

make known *(prakasayisyanti)*, expound *(samgrahayisyanti)*，copy (*likhisyanti)*，and, having copied, constantly keep in memory *(anumarisyanti*) , and from time to time consider (*vyavalokayisyanti)* even a single stanza of this Teaching; who, at that book (being read and recited)，feel veneration for the Tathagatas, treat them with respect due to revered Teachers, honor, esteem, venerate them; who shall venerate that book with flowers, incense，perfumed garlands, ointment, powder, clothes, umbrellas, flags, banners, music, and so on, and with acts of reverence such as bowing and joining hands, in short, Medicine King, any young men or women of good family who shall receive or joyfully accept even a single stanza of this Teaching, to all of them, Medicine King, I predict their being destined to supreme and perfect enlightenment. (Kern and Nanjio 1977，p. 225: 3-10)2

The passages in various chapters describing the series of meritorious acts prescribed vis-a-vis the *Sutra* reveal slight changes in the Sanskrit terminology used to describe the particular acts, of which reading is one. But throughout, the same attitude of devoted reception and concomitant readiness to proclaim the teaching of the *Sutra* to others underlies each act. Such devoted reception of the *Sutra,* leading to its proclamation and exposition, calls forth the very presence of the Tathagata himself in bodily form.

Again, Medicine King, on any place on earth where this teaching is discussed *(bhasyeta)* or taught *(desyeta)* or copied (*likhyeta)* or studied *(svadhyayeta)* or recited in chorus *(samgayeta*), on that very place, Medicine King, one should construct a Tathagata shrine (*caitya*) , high and spacious, and consisting of my magnificent treasures, though without need for placing any relics of the Tathagata. Why not? For the body of the Tathagata is all together there already in that place. Whatever place on earth this teaching is expounded or taught or read *(pathyeta)* or recited in chorus or copied, or kept in written form, there, honoring and venerating it as one would a stupa, let offerings be made, with all sorts of flowers, incense, perfumed garlands, ointment, powder, clothes, umbrellas, flags, banners, streamers, with all manner of song, music, dance, musical instruments, rhythm, and choral shouts. And those beings, Medicine King, who come to the Tathagata shrine saluting it, making offerings or viewing it, all of them, are to be known as beings approaching perfect and supreme

enlightenment. (Kern and Nanjio 1977, pp. 231: 7-232: 5)

2 Kern 1884 was consulted, but I take responsibility for the English translations.

The significant point to note in this passage is the identification of this Teaching (*dharma-paryaya)* with the body of the Tathagata (*tathagata-sarira*), deserving the very same reverence and veneration as the latter.

Through such veneration, the devotee is likewise destined to the realization of supreme and perfect enlightenment.

The above passage can be read as a connecting link between the first part of the *Lotus Sutra,* whose message is the efficacy of the veneration of the Tathagata’s relics for attaining enlightenment, and the second part, whose underlying theme is the importance of receiving and keeping and expounding this *{Lotus) Sutra* on behalf of others.

In other passages throughout the *Lotus Sutra* there is a warning of the persecution that the bearers and expounders of the Teaching (of the *Lotus Sutra)* will be inevitably subjected to and will need to endure.

In all this they will be under the special protection of the Tathagatas.

This Teaching, Medicine King, has been rejected by many people even during the lifetime of the Tathagata. What more so，then, after his entry into final nirvana? Again, Medicine King, young men and women of good family are to be considered as invested with the robes of the Tathagata. Further, the Tathagatas of the different regions will watch over them and be with them, who, after the Tathagata’s entry into final nirvana, will accept in faith *(sraddhadhisyanti)*, read *(vacayisyanti),* copy (*likhisyanti)*, do homage to *(sat-karisyanti)* and honor as Teacher *(gurukarisyanti),* and proclaim this Teaching on behalf of others. (Kern and Nanjio, pp. 230: 9-231:6)

In the Kumarajlva Chinese translation, the passage corresponding to the above (Sanskrit-based translation) reads as follows.

This sutra, during the time when the Tathagata was still present, had aroused such enmity and envy among many. How much more so, then, after his entry into nirvana? Know then, Medicine King: After the Tathagata5s entry into nirvana, those who copy, keep, read, recite, venerate, and expound it to others, will be covered by the Tathagata’s robe. They will also be protected and watched over by the Tathagatas of other regions

in the present aeon. (T. 9，31b)

A comparison of the Sanskrit text with the Chinese translations will reveal differing nuances in the various passages in question. This itself would constitute an interesting topic for investigation, as it would throw some light on the development of thinking on the *Lotus Sutra* as it was transmitted from India to China. Since for Nichiren the authoritative text was Kumarajiva’s translated version (and, needless to say, not the Sanskrit text), the nuances in the translation become significant elements for historical elucidation. In the example above, the shift from simply having been “rejected by many people” to “has aroused such enmity and envy among many” is significant, in that it led Nichiren to see actual events of his time in the light of this passage with much greater clarity, and vice versa, it enabled him to understand this passage in the light of the events of his time, further bolstering his conviction of the truth and historical accuracy of the predictions of the *Sutra.*

In short, the underlying attitude that supports the entire series of meritorious acts regarding the *Sutra* that includes its reading is one whereby one receives and keeps it with reverence and devotion. It is the devoted and faithful acceptance of this *Sutra* and its teaching, upholding it as the beacon and guide of one’s life and practice,that opens the gate to supreme and perfect enlightenment. And this acceptance is inseparable from the readiness to proclaim the Teaching to all, that they may also receive it as such, and thus attain supreme and perfect enlightenment, notwithstanding opposition from,rejection by, or persecution by others. Thus, “reading the *Sutra"*

is understood in the context of this total attitude of devoted reception and willingness to offer oneself for its propagation. This attitude of “receiving and keeping” (*dharana)* scriptures as efficacious in attaining supreme enlightenment is also taught in the *Prajnaparamita* sutras, some of which are considered to have been

composed earlier than the *Lotus Sutra,* and whose influence on the latter on this point is thereby reasonably supposed (Hirakawa 1989，pp. 333, 511). Certain passages in the *Eight-Thousand Verse Prajnapdramita*

on receiving and keeping and reading the sutra, in fact closely resemble those in the *Lotus Sutra* (Conze 1962，pp. 76—77，272-74).

Receiving and keeping scriptures is presented not only as ensuring ones’s realization of supreme perfect enlightenment (*anuttara-samyaksambodhi*), but also as efficacious for the attainment of various kinds of merit and worldly benefit. This understanding opens the way to a significant line of development regarding the reading of sutras. We are referring here to the *dharam* tradition, which flowered later into forms of practice cultivated in esoteric Buddhism (Ujiie 1987，pp. 54-68).

The twenty-first chapter of the Sanskrit *Lotus Sutra* (twenty-sixth in Kumarajiva’s Chinese version) deals with various *dharam* whose recitation is considered efficacious for different kinds of worldly benefit.

These include the prevention or cure of illnesses, protection from different kinds of dangers and calamities, and so on. We must note, though, that this chapter, as well as other sections that include references to *dharam* in this sense, is considered by (some) scholars to be a later addition to the text.

Any young man or woman of good family who receives and keeps (*dharayet*) , reads *(vacayet),* comprehends *(paryavapnuyat),* and practices *(pratipattya)* and follows *(sampadayet)* even a single stanza from the teaching of this *Saddharmapundanka,* that young man or woman of good family, Medicine King, will on that account accrue countless merits. Then the bodhisattva Medicine King immediately said to the Blessed One: To those

young men and women of good family，O Blessed One, who bear in body *(kaya-gato)* and bear in a book *(pustaka-gato)* the teaching of this *Saddharmapundanka,* we will give these verses to keep in mind and recite (*dhdrani-mantra-padani)* for their guard, defense, and protection. (Kern and Nanjio 1977，pp. 395:9-396:3)

What is significant here is that the *dharam* that will ensure protection from various calamities are offered to those who receive and keep the *Sutra.* Also, the compound *dharam-mantra-pada,* which is frequently used in later, more systematized, forms of esoteric Buddhism, appears in a way that links the term *dharam* with those formulas ensuring protection from calamities and the reception of various kinds of worldly benefit.

In the larger (and later) *Prajnapdramita* sutras there are passages that suggest the connection between *dharana* and *dharam.* Here we find the compound *dharana-dharani,* which is understood to mean “the (unborn) dharma heard and kept to heart” (Ujiie 1987，pp. 55-56). In short, to receive and hold on to this unborn dharma, which is no other than the truth of emptiness *(sunyata),* the central theme of the *Prajnapdramita* sutras, is thereby to be in possession of great wisdom (*maha-prajna)* itself,and such possession of wisdom accompanies twentyfold kinds of merit and power. This power is related to wondrous abilities (*abhijna)* and the use of skillful means *(upaya)* in the propagation of the dharma received and kept to heart (T. no. 221,8. 26c-27a, 256b).

The connection between the notion of receiving and keeping *(dharana)* Buddhist scriptures as not only ensuring the attainment of enlightenment but also being efficacious in the attainment of merit and worldly benefit,and the short verses or formulas (*dharani-mantrapadani)* whose recitation is understood to bring about such merit and benefit, is a point that calls for further textual and historical inquiry (Ujiie 1987，p. 54ff).

The tradition that developed especially in East Asian Buddhism that regards the act of reading/reciting sutras in itself as meritorious, effective in transferring merit for deceased persons, as well as bringing about worldly benefit for the reader/reciter and for those to whom the reader/reciter wishes to transfer the merits, is a theme that can also be further elucidated in this regard.

Incidentally, it is of interest also to note that there is a Sanskrit term

for the verb “to read” (*adhi-i),* which means “to turn over in one’s mind，but that the Sanskrit verb that appears in the *Lotus Sutra* in the series of meritorious acts as we saw in several passages quoted above is *vac*~which implies “to read aloud” or “to recite.” The use of this verb *vac* instead of *adhi-i* in the *Lotus Sutra* would thus imply a type of reading that involves vocalization (recitation). In Kumarajiva’s Chinese, the verb frequently used is the compound 読誦，which clearly denotes a vocalized way of reading, that is, a recitation. There are cases in the Chinese, however, where the two characters could also be read separately, to mean “reading and reciting.” The elucidation of this nuance (that is, whether the two characters are to be read as a compound, or separately) in the various passages delineating the series of meritorious acts vis-a-vis the *Lotus Sutra* remains a task for further investigation. For Nichiren, the recitation of the very title of the *Lotus Sutra* (Myoho-renge-kyo)，the Japanese pronunciation of Kumarajiva’s translated title, takes on the twofold efficacy described above, that is, of assuring the attainment of perfect enlightenment, as well as ensuring protection from harm and other kinds of worldly benefit. Nichiren’s emphasis on the practice of recitme the title of the *Lotus Sutra* (題目,*daimoku*)，which had different stages of development in his own career, brings together the *Lotus Sutra* teaching on *dharana* on the one hand, and *dharam* on the other. This is a point significant precisely in the discussion of the historical backgrounds of Nichiren’s use of *daimoku,* which hitherto has focused on its precursors in Heian Buddhism, the influence of Honen’s recitation of *nenbutsu,* and other factors in Japanese Buddhist history (Takagi 1973). Extending the scope of inquiry to include Mahayana (or even to the Nikaya) Buddhist tradition would offer a more comprehensive picture of the backgrounds of Nichiren’s religious thought and Buddhist character.3 *Mystic Truth (妙法 Mydhd): Nichiren’s Religious Vision*

One of the early treatises written by Nichiren, *Shugo kokka ron* 守護国家論 (On protecting the country; 1259),is a systematic and well-documented

3 For example, the possible connections of *dharam* and mantra practices with *vidya* (Pali,=incantations) as depicted in the Pali Buddhist canon deserves further attention in tms

regard. See Miyasaka 1971，pp. 274-332. account of his religious project: the propagation of the teaching of the *Lotus Sutra* as the only effective way for assuring the protection of the land and the salvation of the people. This was composed after over twenty years of spiritual pursuit that involved sojourns to the known religious centers of the period (including Mt. Hiei and Kamakura), and poring over sutras and commentaries, to determine Sakyamuni’s true teaching amidst the many Buddhist scriptures and schools of Buddhist thought handed down through China and Korea to Japan. The following passage, citing Chinese Tiantai commentator

Miaolo 妙楽(Zhanran 湛然），offers us an initial lead on how Nichiren understood the reading of the *Lotus Sutra:* Great Teacher Miaolo writes: “If foolish ana ignorant persons of the Latter Age practice the *Lotus Sutra,* they will behold the bodhisattva Samantabhadra, as well as the Buddha Prabhutaratna, and the Buddhas of the ten different directions,thus proclaiming that it is the Easy Path. Also, “Even with a dispersed mind, without entering into samadhi, sitting, standing, walking, singleminded, keep the *Lotus Sutra* in mind.” This is to be interpreted as intending to save the foolish and ignorant persons of the Latter Age (of the Dharma). “Dispersed mind” is the opposite of “mind in samadhi.” “To read and recite the *Lotus Sutra'* refers to one who reads and recites the eight volumes, or one volume, or one letter, or one stanza, or one verse, or its title (*daimoku*), to one in whom arises a single moment of rejoicing (at hearing even one verse of the *Sutra*), and up to the fit tie th person in succession who hears the *Sutra* being expounded in turn, in whom the merits of hearing and rejoicing accrues. “Sitting，standing, walkingw means one does not discriminate among the four postures, “smgleminded” refers neither to the mind of samadhi nor to the universal mind, but to the singlemindedness of a mind normally dispersed in everyday life. “To keep the letters of the *Lotus Sutra* in mind” means that the letters of this *Sutra* are different from those of all other sutras. In this case, even to read only one

letter is by that very act also to include eighty thousand treasure chambers of letters, and to receive the merits of all the Buddhas. *(STN1:* 110-11)

The citation from Miaolo Zhanran (from the *Zhiguan Fuxing Chuan Hongjueh* 止観輔行伝弘決，T. no. 1912) is a summary of several passages in the *Lotus Sutra* (Ch. 28，“The Encouragement of Samantabhadra,”

T. 9.olb,c) that describe the merits of “practicme” (that is, receiving and keeping，reading, copying, and expounding to others) the *Lotus Sutra* in this earthly realm. It affirms that those who do so practice the *Lotus Sutra* in this way will “behold Samantabhadra, as well as Prabhutaratna Buddha, and the Buddhas of the ten different directions.”

This equation of “practicing the *Lotus Sutra"* with “beholding Buddha” is affirmed by Nichiren in another place in the same treatise, citing also the same passages of the twenty-eighth (Samantabhadra) chapter of the *Lotus Sutra.* In the *Lotus Sutra* is written: “If there is anyone who practices the *Lotus Sutra,* and receives and keeps it in this earthly realm, let them keep in mind that this is with the protection of the wondrous powers of Samantabhadra.” This sentence means that if ordinary beings of the Latter Age believe in the *Lotus Sutra,* it is according to the power of the beneficial guidance of Samantabhadra. Again, it is written, “If anyone receives and keeps, reads, correctly remembers, practices, and copies this *Lotus Sutra,* know that such a person sees Sakyamuni Buddha.

It is the same as being able to hear this *Sutra* preached from the very mouth of the Buddha himself. Let it be known that such a person does homage to Sakyamuni Buddha himself.

According to this passage in the *Sutra,* the *Lotus Sutra* and Sakyamuni Buddha are one and the same. *(STNl:* 123)

This, then, is the first point we can note about Nichiren’s understanding

of reading the *Lotus Sutra:* to do so is no less than to encounter

Sakyamuni himself face to face. In other words, the *Lotus Sutra* is

taken by Nichiren to be the very embodiment of Sakyamuni Buddha,

and thus calls for reception and homage as such. To read the *Lotus*

*Sutra,* then, in this whole context, is not simply to peruse the letters

and words of the text in order to understand what it conveys, but to

engage oneself in a whole cycle of acts centered on “receiving and

keeping” the *Sutra,* including reciting, copying, expounding it to others,

doing homage to it with offerings of flowers and incense, and so

In short, to receive and keep the *Lotus Sutra* is by that very act to

receive and keep Sakyamuni Buddha himself. For Nichiren, “reading

the *Lotus Sutra"* is placing oneself in the very presence of Sakyamuni

Buddha. Writing this treatise “On Protecting the Nation” at the age of

thirty-eight, Nichiren set forth a basic feature of his religious vision in

the above passage that he was to realize more and more deeply, experientially，

as he continued in his mission of propagating the *Lotus*

*Sutra* amidst the tumultuous situation of his times. We shall see the

actualization of this feature in his life and career in our third section.

A second point to be noted concerning Nichiren’s understanding

of reading the *Lotus Sutra* is the emphasis that “even to read one letter

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is by that very act also to include eighty thousand chambers of letters,

and to receive the merits of all the Buddhas.” In affirming this,

Nichiren is simply taking the teaching of the *Lotus Sutra* itself on the

matter (Kern and Nanjio 1977，pp. 224ff” T. 9.30c).

Nichiren’s exposition of the character *myd* 妙，the first in the fivecharacter

title of the *Lotus Sutra* in Kumarajiva^ translation，develops

the *Lotus Sutra* teaching further.

The character *myd* derives from *sad* in the language of India,

and is rendered *miao* in Chinese. *Myd* means “endowed” and

“endowed” has the meaning of “perfection.” Each character of

the *Lotus Sutra,* each and every letter, contains within it all the

other 69,384 characters that comprise the *Sutra.* For example,

one drop of water of the Great Ocean contains within it the

water from all the rivers that flow into it. The magic wishfulfilling

jewel, though only the size of a mustard seed, has the

capacity to shower all the treasures one could wish for.

*(STNl:* 398)

This *Sutra* consists of eight volumes in twenty-eight chapters,

with 69,384 characters. Each and every character contains the

character *myd,* and is thus a manifestation of Buddha with thirtytwo

distinguishing marks and eighty wondrous features. Every

being of the ten worlds manifests the Buddha realm within

one，s own self. As Miaolo writes, just as the fruit of buddhahood

is contained in all the other nine realms, so it is with the

others (as containing the fruits of every other). *(STN1:* 570)

Ihis notion that one contains all derives from a Mahayana tradition

expoundea m the *Avatamsaka Sutra,* developed in different ways by

Chinese and Korean Buddhist commentators. One important exposition

of this notion is Tiantai Master Zhih-i’s notion of “one thought

encompassingr three thousand realms55 *(ichinen sanzen* 一念三十)，which

Nichiren took on as an underlying element of his own religious

understanding of reality (see Kanno 1992).

Nichiren refers specifically to this notion of *ichinen sanzen* in many

of his own writings，and amplifies on it in his major treatise dealing

with “the one important matter in my *(Nichiren toshin no ichidaijt*

日蓮当身の一大事*），Kanjin horizon* 5如観心本尊抄（On contemplating the

true object of worshiD. 1 : /02ft.J. For Nichiren, tne principle or

*ichinen sanzen* is what undergirds the teaching on the buddhahood of

all sentient beings. It is the father and mother of all Buddhas *{STN* 丄：

897)，as well as the seed of buddhahood *(STN* 1:711). This seed of

buddhahood becomes something very concrete as Nichiren equates it

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with the five characters of the title of the *Lotus Sutra*~Myoho-renge-kyo.

Manifesting great compassion for those who do not know this

*ichinen sanzen,* the Buddha wrapped up this gem in a fivecharacter

phrase which he adorned around the necks of the

childish ones of the Latter Age. *(STN I:* 720)

The recitation of the five-character phrase Myoho-renge-kyo thus

becomes the concrete and practical way wherein this principle of *ichinensanzen*

is activated and realized. What easier way is there to the realization

of buddhahood than the recitation of this phrase, which contains

within itself all the treasures of the universe, all the truths in the

teachings of all the Buddhas?

We see how Nichiren has developed the teaching of the *Lotus Sutra*

to the effect that reading and reciting even a single stanza leads one

to the realization of buddhahood and to the reception of an infinite

store of merits. With the Tiantai doctrine of *ichinen sanzen* in the background,

he takes the five-character title of the *Lotus Sutra* and affirms

its recitation as opening the gate to the realization of buddhahood for

all sentient beings in the Latter Age of the Dharma. This recitation is

an efficacious and meritorious act that encompasses all other kinds of

actions vis-a-vis the *Lotus Sutra,* centered on receiving and keeping it

with faith and devotion— reading, reciting, copying, expounding it,

propagating it so that others may also receive and keep it, and so on.

Nichiren himself of course not only recited the title in this way with

this understanding, but also habitually read the text of the *Lotus Sutra.*

Through the major part of his career he carried with him a manuscript

of the *Lotus Sutra* that he continued to annotate in his own

hand, inserting relevant passages from the Tiantai commentaries or

from other sutras, serving as a concordance used in his own preaching

and writing (Yamanaka 1980).

For his followers, he prescribed the simple recitation of the title in

five characters, preceded by *namo* (Jpn. *namu)* from the Sanskrit invocation

expressing homage and veneration. As already noted above,

this simple recitation of the title in an act of homage is understood as

opening the reciter to the infinite treasure house contained m the

*Lotus Sutra,* and destines such a person to supreme enlightenment,

not to mention assuring untold merit and worldly benefit.

The recitation of the title of the *Lotus Sutra* (*daimoku*) , however, is

not simply prescribed in a way that is equally valid and efficacious in

all places and at all times. This practice is taught by Nichiren as especially

suited in a concrete place in this earthly realm (the *saha* world),

namely the country of Japan，in a given time in history, that is, the

period of the Latter Age of the Dharma, in other words，Nichiren’s

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own country and historical time.

This is the third point to be noted concerning Nichiren’s understanding

of what is involved in reading (and practicing) the *Lotus*

*Sutra:* it was accompanied by an acute consciousness of the significance

of the time and the place of its reading (and practice).

The Latter Age of the Dharma, generally believed by people of

Nichiren’s period to have been ushered in with the year 1052，is considered

as a degenerate age wherein many would appear wearing the

apparel of those supposed to be bearers of the Dharma but who are

actually its maligners and despisers. It is thus a period of history when

people who think they are acting in the name of the Dharma of Sakyamuni

are in fact going against it, even persecuting those who are its

true bearers. Nichiren sees this situation as already predicted in the

*Lotus Sutra,* referring to the passage already cited above, wherein this

*Sutra* had “aroused envy and enmity among many” *(STN1:* 327).

Nichiren’s view of his country Japan, with regard to its suitability

for the practice of the *Lotus Sutra,* is presented in the context of his

teaching on the “five items，，’ namely, of the Teaching, the Capacity,

the Time，the Country, and the Sequence of Propagation (later

changed into the Teacher). The people of the country of Japan are

affirmed as having a capacity “suited solely to the (teaching of the)

*Lotus Sutra* (*STN* 1:324) •

Reading the *Lotus Sutra* within the context of his given place

(Japan) and historical time (the Latter Age of the Dharma), wherein

what he considered as slanders against the Dharma proliferated

specifically with the growing popularity and acceptance of H 6nen，s

practice of the recitation of Am ida，s name (*nenbutsu*) , Nichiren takes

a further step regarding the reading (and practice) of the *Lotus Sutra.*

Even if one does a great good deed, even if one reads and

copies the entire *Lotus Sutra* a thousand or ten thousand times,

or even if one succeeds in the contemplation path of three

thousand worlds in a single thought-moment, should one tail

to denounce the enemies of the *Lotus Sutra,* one will not be

able to attain the Way. *(STNI:* 321)

In other words, given a situation wherein the *Lotus Sutra* is misunderstood

or made light of or maligned，a true practitioner will not be

content to ignore this fact and keep one’s practice (of the *Lotus Sutra)*

to oneself. Rather, taking to heart this slander of the Dharma, a true

practitioner will not hesitate to denounce these slanderers.

For example, if a court official who may have served ten or

twenty years, upon knowing that an enemy of the Ruler is in

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the vicinity, does not report such a one nor feels personal

enmity toward such, the merits gained in those years of service

will not only be erased, the official will even be held liable for

crime. *(STN1:* 321-22)

In sum, we have noted three points regarding the way Nichiren

understood what reading the *Lotus Sutra* involved. First, reading the

*Lotus Sutra* is encountering Sakyamuni face to face, putting oneself in

the very presence of the Buddha. Second, to read (and recite) even a

single stanza or a single verse of the *Lotus Sutra* is to be assured of

attaining enlightenment as well as various kinds of worldly benefit.

And the single stanza or verse that is most apt for such reading/

recitation is the very title of the *Lotus Sutra* itself, encompassing all its

contents. Third, to read the *Lotus Sutra* is to do so in the context of a

specific time and place, calling for a reading of contemporary events

and situations and correlating these with the teaching of the *Lotus*

*Sutra.* Nichiren understood himself to be located in the place most

conducive to its reading, namely, Japan, and in the specific time of

history wherein it is most efficacious, the Latter Age of the Dharma.

The *Lotus Sutra,* in other words, is likened to a most potent medicine

capable of curing the gravest kind of illness.

These three points related to reading the *Lotus Sutra* constitute

basic components of his self-understanding and Buddhist vision.

Otani Gyoko, a noted Nichiren doctrinal scholar, has authored a

volume focusing on the Chinese-Japanese compound *ju ji* 受持*(Ju,* to

receive; *ji,* to keep) as a key to understanding Nichiren’s whole outlook

and religious vision (Otani 1984). Otani examines key passages

wherein this compound occurs in Nichiren，s writings, including quotations

from various sutras and commentaries by Chinese masters,

making a strong case for the centrality or *]un* in the whole structure of

Nichiren’s thought. Taking the cue from Otani, we can affirm this attitude

of receiving and keeping the *Lotus Sutra* as defining Nicmren’s

life and career and enabling him to present his own sense or identity

as a “practitioner of the *Lotus Sutra" (Hokekyd no gydja* 法華経の行者）.

And in the light of the three points noted above regarding Nicniren’s

reading of the *Lotus Sutra,* such a practitioner is one who embodies

the Buddha’s mystic D h a r m a 女少法）in one’s very being, in the

concrete time and place that one lives one’s life.

We will now see how this understanding of reading the *Lotus Sutra*

determined the course of action Nichiren took in his life, and how this

in turn brought about consequences that confirmed him in ms reading.

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*Practicing the Lotus Sutra: Prophetic Mission*

In the treatise “On Protecting the N ation，，，as Nichiren lays out his

religious vision based on the teaching of the *Lotus Sutra,* he points out

how he “looks at and listens to current social conditions” *(STN* 1:98)

and cross-reads what he sees and hears in actual events of his time

with Buddhist scripture.

Nichiren opens his famous treatise *Rissho ankoku* ron 立正安国論(On

establishing the right Dharma ana peace in the country) with a

description of the social chaos evident to anyone at the time, with

vivid depictions of the “oxen and horses lying dead in the streets,

skeletons sprawled in all directions” *(STN 1 :*209). He looks for causes

of the turmoil as well as possible solutions in Buddhist scriptures, correlating

the actual situation with his readine. He comes to the conclusion

that the neglect as well as slander of Sakyamuni^ Dharma as

enshrined in the *Lotus Sutra* lay at the bottom of it all. This slander of

the true Dharma was being perpetrated, in Nichiren’s eyes, in large

measure through the spread of H6nen，s teaching of the recitation of

the name of Amida Buddha. On the basis of his reading of the *Lotus*

*Sutra,* Nichiren understood Amida Buddha to be merely one of the

many emanations of the eternal Sakyamuni. To focus one’s devotion

on one or another or the emanations without mention of the true

source would constitute a slight to Sakyamuni Buddha himself, and

would be tantamount to a slander of the true Dharma. And the fact

that the political authorities/military rulers allowed the proliferation

of tms practice was to be considered an official sanction of such slander.

After Nichiren came to this conclusion, namely, that the cause of

the social chaos that was aggravating the suffering of the people of the

time lay in this flagrant slander of the true Dharma, the logical step

for him to take was to try to stop such a state of affairs, sparing no

efforts toward this objective. *Rissho ankoku ron* was written and presented

to the political authorities precisely to convince them to take the necessary

steps that would ease the prevailing social turmoil by attacking

the root of the problem.

Throughout his life, Nichiren would keep having recourse to the

*Lotus Sutra* to shed light on the social and political events of his time,

reading these events in the light of the *Lotus Sutra* and, vice versa,

reading the *Lotus Sutra* in the light of what was actually happening

around him.

The threat of Mongol invasions (brought to official attention with a

written message delivered in 1268, and actually initiated in 1274 and

1281), and the internal political intrigues within the ruling families of

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the time, in particular, were significant events that reconfirmed

Nichiren in his convictions, as they were events that he “predicted” on

the basis of his reading of the *Lotus Sutra.*

Nichiren’s public pronouncements and actions, in particular those

enjoining the political and military authorities to take specific measures

to stop what he saw as the slander of the Dharma, clearly derive

from this religious conviction, based on his reading of the *Lotus Sutra*

in the light of the events of his day. Such pronouncements and actions

in turn led to his persecution and exile by the authorities. These experiences

of persecution further reaffirmed his conviction of the truth

of the teaching and the accuracy of his own reading of the *Lotus Sutra.*

Nichiren’s fundamental attitude came to be manifested in and

through this cross-reading of the *Lotus Sutra* on the one hand, and the

events of his day and general situation of his time on the other: it was

not a mere “disinterested，objective reading,” as it were, but a thoroughly

committed stance that presupposed his willingness and readiness

to give his whole life to what the Dharma entailed一“setting aside

all attachment to one’s own life and limb” *(ware shinmyd o aisezu*

我个愛身命）. This is a phrase that appears in the *Lotus Sutra* that Nichuren

cites time and again in his many writing's *(STJS/* 1:102). In other

words, Nichiren was ready and willing to give his very life for the

Dharma in whatever way it entailed, with a stance that the *Lotus Sutra*

itself required. And this stance was maintained throughout his career,

as he endured persecution after persecution on behalf of the Dharma.

Durine his exile in Sado (1271-1274), Nichiren undergoes a period

of self-examination, reflecting over the events of his life that led to

this present state of isolation and intense sufferine. It is during this

time that the sense oi his own identity and calling as a practitioner of

the *Lotus Sutra* comes to him in all clarity, confirming him in all he

did and stood for since commencing his public career.

A passage from the *Nirvana Sutra,* which Nichiren considers a “sister

sutra” to the *Lotus,* goes into particular detail about persecutions

and sufferings that will inevitably be the lot of those who propagate

the Dharma. Nichiren takes this passage as a mirror of his own life,

and as he looks at the recent events that occurred to him he is able to

affirm the correspondence.

This passage of the sutra corresponds exactly with what I have

experienced bodily. By now all doubts have melted away, and

the tens of thousands ot barriers have been overcome. Let me

match each phrase of the sutra with my own bodily experience.

“You will be despised, etc.” As the *Lotus Sutra* says, “You

will be despised, hated, envied, etc.” In the past twenty years

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this is exactly the kind of treatment I have received—contempt

and arrogance. “You will be made to appear ugly.” Or，“you

will be poorly clad.” This is what happened to me. “You will be

poorly fed.” 1 his is what happened to me “You will seek worldly

wealth in vain.” This happened to me. “You will be born to a

poor family.” This happened to me. “You will meet with persecution

from rulers, etc.” This happened to me. How can one

ever doubt these words of the sutra? The *Lotus Sutra* says, “You

will be banished time and again.” The above passage refers to

many similar things. *(STNI:* 602)

In short, Nichiren comes to a very deep and personal realization that

what he reads in the *Lotus Sutra* has come to be actualized in his own

life experience, and vice versa, that his own life experience is precisely

the very realization and authentication of the *Lotus Sutra.*

Looking at the present society, is there anyone other than

Nichiren who is maligned and despised, hit with sticks, etc., on

behalf of the *Lotus Sutra}* Indeed, if it were not for Nichiren,

this one phrase of prediction would be false. *(STN1:* 559)

The same point is emphasized in a letter to Toki Jonin 虽不常忍，one

of his closest followers, written soon after his pivotal treatise *Kaimoku*

*sho* 開目抄(The opening of the eyes, 1272).

In the *Lotus Sutra* (chapter on Beholding the Precious Stupa)

it is written “If in time of the final conflagration one carried a

load of dry grass and entered it without getting it burned, that

would not be difficult. But after my final nirvana, to keep this

sutra and expound it to even one person, that indeed would

be difficult.” It is Nichiren nimself that these words refer to.

Again (in the chapter on the Exhortation to Steadfastness) it is

written: “There will be those ignorant people who will slander

and malign us, and beat us with swords and sticks, etc.” Again,

(in the chapter on the Story of the Bodhisattva Medicine King,

the chapter on Exhortation to Steadfastness, etc. ) the Buddha

makes a prediction: “In the fifth five hundred years after my

final nirvana, there will be a practitioner of the *Lotus Sutra* who

will be subjected to slanderous treatment by ignorant persons,

and who will be struck with swords and sticks and stones and

bricks, and will be exiled and condemned to death，” etc. Now

if it were not for Nichiren, all these predictions of Sakyamuni,

Prabhutana Buddha, and the Buddhas of the ten directions

would be great lies. *(STNI:* 639)

Nichiren’s experience of persecutions and hardships on account of

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his mission of propagating the *Lotus Sutra* becomes the very confirmation

of the truth of the teaching of the *Lotus Sutra,* as its words are

realized in his very body. In this sense he understands himself as an

embodiment of the Dharma as taught in the *Lotus Sutra.*

This is the source of Nichiren’s joy that pervades his being even in

the midst of his tribulations, in the face of the outward failure of his

endeavors to get a hearing with the leaders of Japan of his day, and in

spite of his utter inability to convert but a handful of people to his

message. This apparent failure at obtaining external results leads him

to a self-imposed retreat at Mt. Minobu，where he spent his final years.

During this last period of his life at Mt. Minobu, he looks back at the

main events of his life, especially the different kinds of trials and tribulations

undergone in his mission of propagation of the *Lotus Sutra,*

and writes the following:

O what a joy it is to be able to give one’s life for the *Lotus*

*Sutral* If one is able to let go of this stinking head that one carries

about, it is like trading sand for gold, exchanging a stone

for a pearl. *(STN 1..*963)

In these musings of Nichiren in the later period of his life，we find a

confirmation of the same structure that has been operative throughout

his career, as regards his way of reading the *Lotus Sutra.* It is a way

of reading the *Sutra* in the light of the events oi his day and age and of

the vicissitudes of his own life, and vice versa, of reading the events of

his age and the various ups and downs of his own life in the light of

the *Lotus Sutra.*

O what great joy! It is just as King Dan was beleaguered by the

hermit Ashi and attained the merits of the *Lotus Sutra,* and the

bodhisattva Fugyo was beaten by sticks of arrogant bhikkus

and thus became a Practitioner of the One Vehicle. And now,

Nichiren, born in the Latter Age of the Dharma and propagating

the five-character Myoho-renge-kyo, is also subjected to the

same treatment. For more than two thousand two hundred

years after the final nirvana of the Buddha, perhaps not even

the Great Teacher Tiantai was able to put into practice the

passage of the *Sutra* that says “the whole world will resent the

Dharma and will find it very hard to believe.” Regarding the

passage “they will be banished time and again,” it is Nichiren

alone who has fulfilled it. The Buddha has predicted: “Those

who receive and keep even a single stanza, a single verse of

this sutra, I will confer buddhahood.” This refers to myself.

There is not the slightest doubt of the attainment of supreme

perfect enlightenment. Thus, the Regent Hojo Tokimune

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himself has been my worthy friend in the Dharma. Taira no

Saemon is to me as Devadatta was to Sakyamuni. The *nenbutsu*

followers are like Kokalika，and the Vinaya followers are like

Sunaksatra Bhikkhu. Sakyamuni^ lifetime on earth is right

now. Now is Sakyamuni^ lifetime on earth. This is the very

essence of the *Lotus Sutra* that teaches the true nature of all

phenomena, and the ultimate nature of beginning and end.

*(STNI: 971)*

Nichiren is thus able to read every event of his life and every element

surrounding it as a fulfillment of particular predictions of the *Lotus*

*Sutra.* Conversely, he is able to read the text of the *Lotus Sutra* as the

very mirror of the events happening in his life.

We are given a glimpse of Nichiren’s inner life throughout all these

vicissitudes in a passage from his treatise *Senji sho* (On the selection

of the time), also written at Mt. Minobu, as he recalls the public

pronouncements he had made to the authorities on three separate

occasions. These were predictions of his that had just been fulfilled,

namely, internal rebellion and invasion (by the Mongols) from the

outside.

These three pronouncements were not made by myself,

Nichiren. They were solely made by the spirit of Sakyamuni

Tathagata that entered my own body. As for me I am beside

myself with joy. The Great Matter of *ichinen sanzen* that is

taught by the *Lotus Sutra* is no other than this. *(STN*2:1054)

The above passage in particular enables us to recall the three points

(outlined in the previous section) related to how Nichiren understood

what is involved in the reading of the *Lotus Sutra.* These three

points loom in the background as we view the course of Nichiren’s

career, thoroughly grounded, empowered, and propelled as it was by

his habitual reading of the *Lotus Sutra.*

First, the awareness of the living presence of Sakyamuni Buddha

accompanies Nichiren throughout the vicissitudes or his career. He is

assured oi this, of course, in his habitual reading of the *Lotus Sutra,*

not just in a conceptual manner, but in a very immediate and experiential

一one could say—bodily manner. His major treatises and his

numerous letters to his followers overflow with this awareness that one

could only describe as mystical.A more detailed elaboration of this

kind of awareness as it comes to be manifested in his writings throughout

his career remains as an ongoing task that would throw fresh

relief on Nichiren’s religious personality and vision. This kind of

awareness cannot be ignored nor downplayed in attempts to elucidate

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traditional doctrinal themes, such as Nichiren’s views of Buddha, his

understanding of the relationship between Buddha (Sakyamuni) and

Dharma (the *Lotus Sutra)*, and so on.

Second, this mystical awareness is also grounded in the experience

of what one could call a “cosmic plenitude” accompanying every

thought, word, and action on behalf of the *Lotus Sutra.* Based on the

latter,s teaching of *ichinen sanzen,* every thought (or word, or deed) is

in itself a manifestation of the three thousand worlds. For Nichiren

what most clearly manifested this cosmic plenitude—encompassing

every thought, word，and deed~was no other than the very act of

recitation of the five-character title of the *Lotus Sutra.* Nichiren doctrinal

scholars refer to this as *j i no ichinen sanzen* 事の一念三千，a concretized,

particularized cosmic plenitude, as opposed to *ri no ichinen*

*sanzen* 理の一念三千，or conceptual, universal cosmic plenitude.Ihe

latter teaching is attributed to Chinese Master Tiantai, who developed

it in the context of his exposition of Buddhist meditative practice.

Nicniren is said to have taken a step further, bringing this notion

down to a very practical and concrete level, as he taught the direct

way to the realization of this cosmic plenitude in the recitation of the

five-character title of the *Lotus Sutra,* or *daimoku.*

His message to his listeners was simple: receive and keep the *Lotus*

*Sutra,* and express tms acceptance of the *Lotus Sutra* in the devoted

recitation oi its five-character title. But beneath this simplicity lies an

intricate understanding of ultimate reality that comes to be unraveled

as one further delves into the various levels of this doctrine of “cosmic

plenitude in one thought，，’ a doctrine arising out of Nichiren’s own

mystical awareness.

Third, what we have referred to above as Nichiren’s mystical awareness,

embracing the sense of Sakyamuni，s abiding presence together

with the experience of cosmic plenitude, is realized m a given historical

time (the Latter Age of Dharma ) and concrete geographical location

(Japan), in response to concrete events and situations that precisely

evoked and activated the power of the *Lotus Sutra.* The response Nichuren

made to these situations and events as a practitioner of the *Lotus*

*Sutra* led to certain consequences that further confirmed for him the

truth of its teaching and deepened him in this mystical awareness.

The three points above, describing Nichiren’s understanding of what

is involved in reading the *Lotus Sutra,* constitute the very central features

of his thought and teaching, features that he actualized and embodied

himselr m his own life and career. It was a life and career that can be

characterized from beginning to end as a thoroughgoing bodily reading

of the *Lotus Sutra (hokekyd shikidoku no* 法華経色読の一生）.

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Traditionally, *shikidoku* is a term that has been used in Nichiren

doctrinal circles to refer mainly to the third aspect described above,

namely the confirmation of the truth oi his message in the experience

of persecutions and tribulations (see Asai 1988，Fuse 1951，Kitagawa

1973，Okamoto 1982). What we have offered above is a description of

the underlying ontological and cosmological framework behind

Nichiren’s words and actions in the political and social spheres. These

words and actions led inevitably to the persecutions, which in turn

strengthened and deepened Nichiren’s conviction regarding the truth

of the *Lotus Sutra* and its teaching. He realized this truth in a concrete

and bodily way, in a mystical awareness of the Buddha，s immediate presence

that was simultaneous with an experience of cosmic plenitude—

an awareness that brought untold inner joy and rapture in the face of

his hardships and tribulations.

*Concluding Reflections: Lnderstanding Nichiren，s Buddhism*

The small band of dedicated followers that heeded Nichiren’s message

during his lifetime continued his mission of propagation of the *Lotus*

*Sutra* after his death. In due time adherents grew in numbers to become

a significant force in Japanese society.

As is usual in the process of the development of religious groups in

history, disagreements arose among these followers regarding the

interpretation of Nichiren’s teaching on some key issues, leading to

sectarian divisions. Also, since the Meiji era, various individuals and

groups have taken Nichiren’s teaching and action as an inspiration for

their own, taking adversarial positions vis-a-vis other followers in their

respective ways of interpreting Nichiren’s thought. In the light of this

situation, some concluding remarks are in order, to highlight some

ongoing tasks that would continue the directions taken by our limited

study.

The doctrinal debates that created divisions among Nichiren’s followers

and interpreters include such issues as the primacy of Dharma

vs. Buddha as Object of Worship (*hd-honzon tax nin-honzon* 法本尊対

人本尊），the primacy of meditation/contemplation vs. adherence to

the teaching (of the *Lotus Sutra) (kanjin-shugi tax kyoso-shugi*

孝夂ネ目主義），the centrality of this earthly life versus that of the next life

*(genze-chushin tai raisei-chushin* 現世中心対来世中心），in addition to the

question of the extent of the influence of the doctrine of orieinary

enlightenment *(hongaku* •s/wio 本覚思、想) on Nichiren’s thought, among

others. Intimately related to these debates is the question of authenticity

of certain texts that protagonists of one or other side of these

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disputed issues take as a support of their particular standpoint.4

Without presuming to take sides in these doctrinal disputes, one

can point out that the fluidity as well as the complexity of Nichiren’s

thought have given rise to differing and apparently conflicting interpretations.

For example, as we have seen from our study, Nichiren’s

awareness of the immediate presence of Sakyamuni in the very reading

and recitation of the *Lotus Sutra* is a feature of his religious world

view. But at the same time, his understanding of reality derives from

the doctrine of *ichinen sanzen，*which grounds the experience of cosmic

plenitude in the recitation of the *daimoku.* As such, there are elements

in his religious teaching as evinced from his writings that would

support either side oi the debate on the primacy of Dharma vs. Buddha

as object of worship.

Similarly, with the teaching on cosmic plenitude, or the concrete

realization of the doctrine of “three thousand worlds in one thought”

with each recitation of the *daimoku,* one could maintain that this practice

of recitation of the five-character title of the *Lotus Sutra* indeed

comprises all that is needed for the attainment of supreme and perfect

enlightenment, as well as all kinds of worldly benefit. And with

this, the need of actually perusing, not to mention understanding, the

various intricacies of *Lotus Sutra* doctrine comes to be relegated to secondary

importance. Conversely, however, it can also be affirmed that

it is precisely the teaching of the *Lotus Sutra* wherein the experience

of cosmic plenitude is grounded in the first place. In any case, either

side of the debate on the primacy of contemplation/meditation vs.

adherence to teaching can also find support in Nichiren5s own writings.

Again, the trajectory of Nichiren’s whole career, and his religious

project as delineated m his treatises, testify to his belief in the importance

of this life and this world as the field in which the Lotus land is

to be realized. It is clear enough from his writings that he regarded

this present earthly *(saha)* world as Sakyamuni5s domain, and that one

is able to meet Sakyamuni face to face in the course of one，s eneaeement

in the tasks of propagating the *Lotus Sutra.* However, in his letters,

especially those written at Mt. Minobu in the closing years of his

life, he also expresses his ardent expectation of meeting Sakyamuni

face to face after his death.

The question of the influence of the Tendai doctrine of originary

enlightenment on Nichiren’s thought is a matter of ongoing debate

among Nichiren scholars and doctrinalists, and is also related to the

three issues noted above (see Stone 1990 and 1999).

4 See Stone 1990, and the articles by Sueki and Stone in this volume.

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In short, on a surface level, Nichiren’s religious thought can be said

to manifest a multivalence that opens itself to the conflicting readings

in fact taken by his followers in later eras. Making the distinction of

several phases in Nichiren’s career and consequently in his thinking

has so far been a convenient way of accounting for this multivalence.

Ihis of course is not to be entirely discounted, as there is evidence

that Nichiren did deepen his understanding of or even change his

mind about certain aspects of his own teaching, that is，comparing his

early writings with his later ones, and so on. However, making too

clear-cut distinctions in the periods of his career, such as the sectarian

traditional twofold pre-Sado and post-Sado division, or the threefoldphase

structure proposed by Tamura (1965)，or the fourfold-phase

structure presented by Sasaki (1979)，tends to blur a more important

dimension, namely the thread of continuity in Nichiren’s thought and

vision that one could trace from his early writings to his latest.

While keeping in mind the historical span of time in which Nichiren

set forth his thoughts in his many writings, as we attempt to

plumb Nichiren’s thought on a deeper level, we can perhaps reconsider

what appears as the multivalence in his thought, in the light of what

Mircea Eliade described (as a recurrent theme in his many works)，as

manifestations of a *coincidentia oppositorum.* This term refers to the

convergence of conceptually contradictory features or notions in a

religious phenomenon or experience. For example, the experience of

the immediate presence of Sakyamuni Buddha is simultaneous with

the concrete experience of cosmic plenitude *(ichinen sanzen),* grounding

an affirmation of both the personal as well as impersonal dimensions

of ultimate reality in his religious vision. Also, the figure of

Sakyamuni Buddha in his mind points to a *universal* truth, that is, the

teaching of the *Lotus Sutra,* and at the same time is also a *concrete and*

*particular embodiment* of that truth. Further, Sakyamuni is understood

as beyond the confines of this earthly, historical world, that is, in a

realm of *transcendence,* but yet is also affirmed as continually acting in

this world out of compassion，in a dimension of *immanence.*

We could go on to pursue this lead in examining other facets of

Nichiren’s thought with this heuristic tool, namely, the notion of *coincidentia*

*oppositorum* as operative in Nichiren, ana this may serve us to

better understand and appreciate different sides in the various debated

issues in his religious teaching.1 his heuristic tool could also be useful

in the further investigation of texts in dispute with regard to their

authenticity. There has been a noted tendency on the part of scholars

who have pursued these issues to approach texts with a predetermined

framework of what they regard as Nichiren’s “authentic thought,”

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based on sectarian doctrinal positions (see Asai 1945). An appreciation

of this multivalence, grounded on a recognition of *coincidentia*

*oppositorum* in Nichiren’s religious vision, would at least forestall facile

judgments in this regard (that is, for or against one or the other side

of a contested doctrinal issue, or for or against the authenticity of a

particular text), and would call for a more careful, meticulous, and

systematic investigation of the manifold elements involved.

From our limited study as presented in this essay, we can see how

Nichiren’s Buddhism stands within the wider Mahayana Buddhist tradition,

as a development stemming from the religious world of the

*Lotus Sutra.* And pursuing this heuristic device of *coincidentia oppositorum,*

we can perhaps describe Nichiren’s religious thought as a mysticoprophetic

kind of Buddhism.

The prophetic aspect of his teaching has been well-developed in

Masaharu Anesaki’s classic English language study, entitled *Nichiren,*

*the Buddhist Prophet* (1916). Nichiren’s critiques of the sociopolitical

order of his time, his sense of mission toward a transformation of society

based on his project of establishing Sakyamuni5s domain on earth,

constitute what Anesaki develops as the prophetic aspect of his Buddhist

vision.

The mystical side of Nichiren is also briefly noted by Anesaki (pp.

lOlff.)，though, we might add, inadequately. He bases his treatment

of this mystical dimension of Nichiren’s teaching on a text that later

came to be disputed for its authenticity.5 Anesaki (p. 101) comments

that this “mystical strain is stronger in the writings from the years of

quiet meditation at Minobu than in the preceding period of storm

and stress.”

However, as we have seen in our present study, this mystical dimension

in Nichiren is inseparable from his prophetic words and actions

that occasioned the persecutions he suffered repeatedly throughout

his career. These in turn triggered and furthered the deepening or his

mystical experience of the Buddha’s immediate presence and of cosmic

plenitude. What must be emphasized in this context is the fact

that this mystical dimension is palpable and operative precisely in

those periods of “storm and stress” in Nichiren’s life.

In short, in Nichiren, these two categories, “mystical” and “prophetic,”

which depict differing modes of religious being, are seen in convergence

and mutual interpenetration throughout his career. We are

5 The Testimony Common to all the Buddhas of the Three Ages,” *Sanze shobutsu sokanmon*

*kyoso hairyu* 三世諸仏総勧文教相廃立*，STN 爻..*1686ff. See Asai 1945, pp. 280-81. Others

have followed Asai in questioning the authenticity of this particular treatise. See also Stone

1990，for a full translation and discussion of the issues surrounding this text.

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afforded a glimpse of the richness of his inner life, encompassing

these two modes of religious being, as we behold the intricate dimensions

of his bodily reading of the *Lotus Sutra.*

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