# CHAPITRE SIX

# Point de vue de Nichiren sur le mikkyo

# Une grande partie des érudits qui se penchent sur les interprétations de Nichiren ont été grandement influencés par sa personnalité fervente et les nombreuses "critiques" qu'il a formulées à l'encontre des différentes écoles bouddhistes influentes à son époque et avant.

# C’est particulièrement le cas pour l’opinion de Nichiren sur le *mikkyo* et l’ésotérisme associés aux écoles Tendai (*taimitsu*) et Shingon (*tomitsu*). On admet généralement que Nichiren a critiqué et rejeté le *mikkyo* pour son manque de reconnaissance de l'importance du *Sutra du Lotus*, le sutra sur lequel Nichiren mettait exclusivement l'accent. La majorité des textes sur les écoles citent les textes de Nichiren lui-même, notamment que "les calamités [causées] par les deux écoles (Terre pure et Zen) n'ont pas d’équivalent avec celles du Shingon dont les vues sont grandement déformées" (traduit dans Dolce 1999 : 350 ; Senjisho 1275 : 1033).

# Certains historiens du bouddhisme japonais ont classé celui de Nichiren dans la catégorie "hétérodoxe" ou "nouveau bouddhisme de Kamakura", le séparant ainsi complètement du "bouddhisme orthodoxe", une catégorie qui inclut cependant le bouddhisme ésotérique (Kuroda 1994 : 8-9). Cela pourrait ondiquer que l'ésotérisme, qui était un aspect important de la religion japonaise médiévale, n'était pas présent dans les écoles "hétérodoxes" ou les nouvelles écoles de l'époque (Dolce 1999 : 350). De même, de nombreux érudits influents du bouddhisme de Nichiren, dont Asai Yorin, s'interrogent sur le fondement des critiques de Nichiren à l'égard du *mikky*o si l'on admet qu'il l'avait accepté.

# Par conséquant, la plupart des spécialistes proposent trois phases dans la vie de Nichiren avec ses différentes positions à l'égard du *mikkyo*. Sa première critique du *mikkyo* date de son exil à Izu et était dirigée contre Kukai, le fondateur de la tradition Shingon. Nichiren note que Kukai a classé le *Sutra du Lotus* dans la catégorie des sutras ésotériques. Il n'était pas le premier à formuler cette critique, ce même commentaire ayant été fait par des adeptes du *taimitsu*. La seule différence est que Nichiren fait appel à "goshitsu" (cinq erreurs) concernant la catégorisation de Kukai, et déclare qu'elle n'était pas basée sur la classification faite par les principaux textes ésotériques. Annen (841- ?), un prêtre taimitsu qui a précédé l'époque de Nichiren, avait déjà écrit à propos ces révisions nécessaires dans l'un de ses écrits, le Kyojimondo (Asai 1973 : 681-688).

# La deuxième phase de la critique de Nichiren commence pendant son séjour sur l'île de Sado. Elle est dirigée contre les patriarches du bouddhisme ésotérique en Inde et en Chine. Les deux patriarches visés sont Amoghavajra (705-774), l'un des patriarches chinois de la lignée Shingon, et Subhakarasimha (637-735), un patriarche indien du bouddhisme ésotérique qui s'était rendu à Chang'an et a traduit le *Mahavairocanasutra*. Nichiren critique Amoghavajra en ce qui concerne la paternité d'un texte sur le " sokushin jobutsu ", un idéal de taimitsu qui a été intégré à l'enseignement de Nichiren (Asai 1973 : 581-587). Pourtant, on attribue également à Amoghavajra la traduction de textes sur le hokkehoji (" rituels du Lotus ") et la création d’un honzon centré sur le *Sutra du Lotus* (Dolce 1999 : 359-360). Nous reviendrons plus loin sur ce point.

# Quant à Subhakarasimha, Nichiren lui reproche d'avoir classé le *Darijing* (*Dainichikyo*), un texte tantrique, à égalité avec le *Sutra du Lotus*, tout en affirmant que le *Darijing* lui était supérieur. Cependant, cette notion et les différences entre la doctrine et la pratique ont été notées par Ennin (794-864), une figure majeure de la tradition tendai, et non par Subhakarasimha, qui avait seulement énoncé les similitudes entre les deux sutras (Asai 1973 : 264).

# La dernière phase de la critique de Nichiren envers le taimitsu ou l'ésotérisme tendai apparait dans ses écrits après sa retraite au Mont. Minobu. Dolce pense que, contrairement à la croyance populaire, la critique de Nichiren envers ces patriarches a eu lieu avant son séjour sur l'île de Sado. Ainsi, bien qu’avant son instellation au Mont Minobu Nichiren ne mentionne ni Ennin ni Enchin (814-889), deux figures majeures du Tendai, il est possible que sa critique du *taimitsu* ait commencé avant même son séjour sur l'île de Sado. La principale critique de Nichiren à l'égard des moines tendai reste d’avoir rejeté la supériorité du *Sutra du Lotus* par rapport aux enseignements du bouddhisme ésotérique, connu sous le nom de *rido jiretsu* ou "équivalence conceptuelle de réalité absolue dans le *Sutra du Lotus* et des sutras ésotériques, infériorité du *Sutra du Lotus* dans la pratique qui ouvre à la bouddhéité" (Dolce 1999 : 360). Nichiren a critiqué Enchin pour ses perspectives hésitantes entre la prévalence du *Sutra du Lotus* et le bouddhisme ésotérique, bien que sur le Mont Hiei, l'abbé était censé maîtriser les deux points de vue. Nichiren exprime moins de critiques sur Annen, une figure majeure de la promotion du *taimitsu*. Cependant, une grande partie de la compréhension de Nichiren du taimitsu provient des écrits d'Annen, y compris la corrélation entre *rido* (équivalence conceptuelle) et *ichinen sanzen* (trois mille mondes-états en un instant-pensée) que l’on trouve à la fois dans le *Sutra du Lotus* et dans la pensée bouddhiste ésotérique. *Ichinen sanzen*, en corrélation avec *jikkai* ou "dix mondes-états (états de bouddha, de bodhisattva, de pratyakabuddha, de sharavakas, de devas, des humains, des ashura, des animaux, des esprits affamés et de l'enfer), constitue un Eveil possible pour les êtres de tous les mondes-états (*Kanjin honzonsho* 1273 : 702-707). Dolce pense qu'Annen étai donc moins impliqué n'ayant jamais été abbé du Mont Hiei comme l'ont été Ennin et Enchin (1999 : 361).

# Lors des deux premières phases, Nichiren fondait ses critiques sur l'incapacité de Kukai et des patriarches indiens et chinois à attester la supériorité du *Sutra du Lo*tus. En revanche, dans la troisième phase, Nichiren critique Ennin et Enchin pour leur incapacité à rester fidèles aux enseignements tendai originaux de Saicho, qui n'avait pas fait de distinction entre le *Sutra du Lotus* et les enseignements bouddhistes ésotériques (Dolce 1999 : 361). Par conséquent, la critique de Nichiren à l'égard du *mikkyo* n'était peut-être pas dirigée vers la doctrine même, mais plutôt vers les figures influentes du bouddhisme ésotérique japonais. Les propres interprétations de Nichiren sur le *mikkyo* étaient basées sur ses études des textes pertinents, allant jusqu'à écrire des essais tels que *Shingon tendai shoretsu-ji* et *Shingon shichiju shoretsu*, dans lesquels il notait les différences entre le *Sutra du Lotus* et plusieurs autres textes ésotériques.

# CHAPTER SIX:

**Nichiren’s Views of *Mikkyo***

Much of the scholarship focusing on interpretations of Nichiren and his views have been greatly influenced by his fervent personality and the many “criticisms” he made of the different influential Buddhist sects prior to and also of his time.

One such topic is that of Nichiren’s views of *mikkyo*, the esoteric Buddhist teachings and practices most commonly recognized to be associated with the Tendai (*taimitsu*) and the Shingon (*tomitsu*) Schools. The common suggestion is that Nichiren himself criticized and rejected *mikkyo* due to its lack of recognition of the importance of the *Lotus Sutra*, the sutra that he exclusively emphasized within his teachings. The majority of the sectarian texts primarily quote texts of Nichiren’s own writings, including that “the calamities [caused] by the two schools [Pure Land and Zen] have no parallel with those caused by the Shingon school; the views of the Shingon school are greatly distorted” (translated in Dolce 1999: 350; *Senjisho* 1275: 1033).

Some historians of Japanese Buddhism have also categorized Nichiren Buddhism with that of “heterodox” or “Kamakura New Buddhism” and thus separate it completely from “orthodox Buddhism”, a category that includes esoteric Buddhism (Kuroda 1994: 8-9). This could suggest that esotericism, which was an important aspect of medieval Japanese religion was not seen in the “heterodox” or new Buddhist sects formulated during the time (Dolce 1999: 350). Similarly, many influential Nichiren Buddhist scholars, including Asai Yorin question the basis for Nichiren’s own criticisms of *mikkyo* if given his acceptance of it.

As a result, most scholars suggest three separate phases in Nichiren’s life that show his differing positions to *mikkyo*. His initial criticism of *mikkyo* started during his exile in Izu and was directed against Kukai, the founder of the Japanese Shingon tradition. Nichiren notes how Kukai categorized the *Lotus Sutra* below the esoteric sutras. However, Nichiren was not the first to provide this criticism as this same comment had been made by followers of *taimitsu*. The only difference included that Nichiren provided *“goshitsu*” or “five mistakes” regarding Kukai’s categorization, stating that it was not based on the categorization made by the major esoteric texts. Annen (841-?), a *taimitsu* priest who preceded Nichiren’s time, had already written about such necessary revisions in one of his writings, the *Kyojimondo* (Asai 1973: 681-688).

Nichiren’s second phase of criticism began during his time on Sado Island and focused on patriarchs of esoteric Buddhism in both India and China. Two patriarchs of focus included both Amoghavajra (705-774), one of the Chinese patriarchs in the Shingon lineage as well as Subhakarasimha (637-735), an Indian patriarch of Esoteric Buddhism who traveled to Chang’an and translated the Mahavairocana Sutra. Nichiren criticized Amoghavajra with respect to the authorship of a text that focused on “*sokushin jobutsu*”, a *taimitsu* ideal that was incorporated into Nichiren’s teaching (Asai 1973: 581-587). Yet, Amoghavajra is also attributed with translating texts relating to *hokkehoji* (“Lotus rituals”) and his creation of the *honzon* focused on the *Lotus Sutra* (Dolce 1999: 359-360). This will be further elaborated later in the paper.

Nichiren criticized Subhakarasimha for classifying the Darijing (“*Dainichikyo*”), a tantric text, as being similar to *Lotus Sutra*, yet stating that *Darijing* was more superior to the latter. However, this notion and the differences between the doctrine and practice was noted by Ennin (794-864), a major figure in the Tendai tradition and not Subhakarasimha, who had only stated the similarities between the two sutras (Asai 1973: 264).

The last phase of Nichiren’s criticism of *taimitsu* or Tendai esotericism is noted in his writings after his retreat to Mount. Minobu. Dolce suggests that contrary to popular belief, Nichiren’s criticism of these patriarchs occurred before his time on Sado Island and thus although Nichiren fails to mention Ennin and Enchin (814-889), two major figures of the Tendai sect, until moving to Mount. Minobu, it is possible that his criticism of *taimitsu* began prior to his stay on Sado Island. Nichiren’s main criticism of the Tendai monks remains that they had rejected the notion that the *Lotus Sutra* was more superior to the teachings of esoteric Buddhism, known as *rido jiretsu* or the “equivalence in the concept of absolute reality of the *Lotus Sutra* and esoteric sutras, inferiority of the *Lotus Sutra* in the practice which opens to Buddhahood” (Dolce 1999: 360). Nichiren criticized Enchin for his wavering perspectives in his writings between the prevalence of the *Lotus Sutra* and esoteric Buddhism, although on Mount. Hiei, the abbot was expected to master both views. Nichiren provides less criticism on Annen, a major figure in promoting *taimitsu*. However, much of Nichiren’s understanding of *taimitsu* came from Annen’s writings, including the correlation between *rido* (“equivalence of principle”) and *ichinen sanzen* (“three thousand worlds contained in one single moment”) seen in both the *Lotus Sutra* and esoteric Buddhist thought. *Ichinen sanzen* in correlation with *jikkai* or “ten realms” (the Buddha, Bodhisattva, Pratyaka Buddha, Sharavakas, heavenly beings, human beings, Ashura, animals, hungry spirits and hell beings) provides possible enlightenment for the beings in all realms (*Kanjin honzonsho* 1273: 702-707). Dolce suggests that another possibility includes that Annen was never an abbot of Mount. Hiei as both Ennin and Enchin were and therefore thought less of him (1999: 361).

In the first two phases, Nichiren’s basis for his criticisms was the inability of Kukai and the Indian and Chinese patriarchs to attest to *Lotus Sutra* being the most superior sutra. In contrast, in the third phase, Nichiren criticized both Ennin and Enchin for their inability to stay faithful to the original Tendai teachings of Saicho, who had not made a distinction between the *Lotus Sutra* and esoteric Buddhist teachings (Dolce 1999: 361). As a result, Nichiren’s criticism of *mikkyo* may not have been towards the doctrines of esoteric Buddhism itself, but rather the influential figures of Japanese esoteric Buddhism. Nichiren’s own interpretations of *mikkyo* were based on his studies of relevant texts, even writing essays such as *Shingon tendai shoretsu-ji* and *Shingon shichiju shoretsu*, in which he noted the differences between *Lotus Sutra* and several other esoteric texts.

In the most recent years, more scholars have provided a contrasting view of Nichiren’s interpretation of *mikkyo*, suggesting his incorporation and adaptation of selected aspects of the already existent teachings and rituals of esoteric Buddhism of the sects that he had criticized. Although many of Nichiren’s criticisms of different sects focus on its contribution to the “ruin of [Japan]”, some are quick to note that this was initially used to refer to the Pure Land school and later also incorporated the esoteric Buddhist traditions (Ienaga 1976: 105-106).

Despite the limited number of English-written sources on this topic and Nichiren Buddhism as a whole, Lucia Dolce has been one of the first scholars to write about this topic in English. She provides her own interpretation on the matter, particularly promoting the view that Nichiren incorporated *mikkyo* into his own teachings. Thus her writings are one of the only sources on this topic of *mikkyo* and Nichiren. Therefore, the majority of this section of the paper will be focus on her writings including my own interpretations on the topic as well.

Dolce pinpoints three flaws in particularly Asai’s argument that Nichiren rejected *mikkyo*, suggesting that it 1) fails to recognize the historical moment in which Nichiren lived, 2) lacks consideration of the implications behind his categorization of *mikkyo* as a wrong teaching and 3) denotes that Nichiren did study esoteric Buddhism as well as understood the distinction between *tomitsu* and *taimitsu* (1999: 352). She also challenges the historical distinctness of *mikkyo* from

the Kamakura Buddhist traditions, suggesting that in particular for Nichiren, *mikkyo* served as a means of self-validation (1999: 361). However, this self-validation was a result of his desire to adhere to the teachings of the *Lotus Sutra* and to demonstrate to others, his own analysis made from his several years of study. Nichiren’s own background and accounts of having studied several Buddhist traditions and Buddhist texts provide the basis for his conclusions and the criticisms he made. Although Nichiren seemed rather narrow-minded due to his acceptance of solely the *Lotus Sutra*, his acceptance of specific aspects of *mikkyo*, as we will see, are the result of his knowledge gained from his textual study. By considering the chanting of the *odaimoku* and his use of the calligraphic mandala as forms of esoteric Buddhism of the Nichiren tradition, it provides support that both Nichiren’s thought and practice convey his incorporation of *mikkyo*.

Nichiren’s own writings and autobiographical records have provided many means for understanding much of his thought and experiences, therefore lacks a clear record of his initial introduction to *mikkyo* and leading some to conclude this as his attempts to portray himself as a strict follower of the *Lotus Sutra* (Dolce 1999: 353). However, Nichiren’s background and his earlier education of several types of Buddhism give basis for his influences from several sources outside that of the *Lotus Sutra* that helped to formulate his own teachings.

His earliest encounter with *mikkyo* is suggested to be that of *taimitsu* due to his early education at Kiyosumi-dera, a temple of the Tendai School (Takagi 1970: 20-21). However, this did not prevent him from gaining his possible *tomitsu* influence around the same period especially because of Kiyosumi-dera’s later noted affiliation to the *Shingi* (“Reformed”) *Shingon* School, a form of the Shingon sect initiated by Kakuban (1095-1143), which may have initiated during Nichiren’s training at Kiyosumi-dera. He also received *kuketsu souden*, meaning teachings that were orally passed down for several generations. In 1251, Nichiren copied one of

Kakuban’s famous writings, *Gorin kuji myo himitsu shaku* (often shortened to *Gorin kuji hishaku*), later sent to one of his followers by the name of Toki Jonin. The writing included the notion of “*tongo oujo*”, meaning that individuals do not have to practice and can achieve Enlightenment after death. This is the basis of Pure Land Buddhism, the teachings spread by Honen and Shinran, who were contemporaries of Nichiren—they suggested that one can go to Amida Buddha’s world by chanting the *nenbutsu*, repetition of Amida Buddha’s name. More on this will be explained later on in the paper (Fujimaki 2004: 123).

One of his earlier essay written in 1242, titled “*Kaitai sokushin jobutsugi*” focuses on the notion of two *taimitsu* ideas that Nichiren develops in his later writings. The first one is “*sokushin jobutsu*” or the “attainment of immediate Buddhahood”, which becomes especially important in Nichiren’s later writings when emphasizing that all beings in *jikkai* (“the ten realms of beings”) with the exclusion of the Buddha, can all attempt at attaining immediate Buddhahood. The second *taimitsu* teaching is the representation of *dharmakaya* (*Japanese. hosshin*) or the “truth body”. One example of a specific doctrinal teaching unique to Mahayana Buddhism is *dharmakaya*, one of the three *kayas* (“bodies”) of the Buddha that is known as the *trikaya* doctrine, which reflects both the nature of reality in the context of the Buddha. *Trikaya* also consists of *Nirmankaya* (the physical body of the Buddha) and *Sambhogakaya* (the “reward body” whereby for example, a Bodhisattva completes their tasks and becomes a Buddha) (Fowler 1999: 227). In contrast, *Dharmakaya*, as noted before, is literally the “truth body” that can also reflect the Buddha becoming one with the Dharma. Specifically in the *Lotus Sutra*, the *dharmakaya* consists of both the *Sakyamuni* Buddha and the *Prabhutaratna* Buddha (“*Taho nyorai*” or “Abundant treasures” Buddha). The *Prabhutaratna* Buddha appears in Chapter 11 of

the *Lotus Sutra* sitting next to the *Sakyamuni* Buddha whom all of the buddhas from the “ten directions” come to hear the Dharma (Frederic 2005: 250).

If not at Kiyosumi-dera, his *mikkyo* influence probably preceded or occurred during his time at Mount. Hiei, most specifically around 1251, the date he transcribed the *Gorin kuji hishaku*, a work of Kakuban. Dolce notes that the transcribed work bears a “*tomitsu* signature” by Nichiren (1999: 554). More importantly, Nichiren kept a close relationship with a *tomitsu* monk even following the proclamation of his faith in the *Lotus Sutra* in 1253. In 1254, Nichiren drew two pictures of Acala (*Fudo-Myoo*) and Rangaraja (*Aizen*), the two Kings of Knowledge that are venerated in the esoteric Buddhist traditions (see Appendix, Figure 1). Nichiren includes inscriptions in the paintings as well that identify himself as being the 23rd generation of the Shingon lineage that descends from Mahavairocana. However, Nichiren’s “*Shugo kokkaron*”, an essay written in 1259 during his time traveling and studying Buddhism, also incorporates a *taimitsu* perspective in the form of “*hokkeshingon”*, a term he created to emphasize the merging of both esoteric teachings and notions from the *Lotus Sutra*.

From such writings left by Nichiren, some assume this as signifying Nichiren’s own lack of clear distinction between *tomitsu* and *taimitsu* and thus his classification of all forms of esoteric Buddhism under the term “*shingon*” or “*shingonshu*”. As stated prior, “*shingon*” in the present day refers to the Shingon school. Nichiren used the terms “*toji no shingon”* (“Shingon of the Eastern Temple”) to refer to *tomitsu* and “*hiei no shingon*” (“Shingon of Mt. Hiei”) to refer to *taimitsu*, yet never distinguished the doctrinal differences between the two forms of esoteric Buddhism in his writings. Dolce suggests that Nichiren’s understanding of *shingon* can be seen from his “*Ichidai goji-zu*” or his categorization of the different Buddhist doctrines, texts and lineages (1999: 355). In this, Nichiren classifies the *Lotus Sutra* as the “last teaching” of the

Buddha, the same classification seen by Tendai monks to promote the superiority of the *Lotus Sutra*. This contrasts with the teachings of the Ennin and Enchin who are said to have placed the esoteric teachings in the same category as that of the *Lotus Sutra*.

This leads many to suggest that Nichiren focused more on *taimitsu* forms of *mikkyo*, especially because Nichiren did not comment on one of Kukai’s most important ideas of the difference between the esoteric and exoteric teachings. However, this notion appears in his “*Ichidai goji-zu*”, showing that Nichiren did not ignore this idea. It is likely that Nichiren associated the term “esoteric” with the use of mudras and mantras, which differs from the definition prescribed by Kukai. Nichiren wanted to find a different version of the *Lotus Sutra* in India that noted the existence of mantras and considered the possibility that such a text still had not been translated to Chinese. Another possibility was that the Darijing had been a form of the *Lotus Sutra* containing mantras and mudras (*Teradomari gosho* 1271: 514; *Senjisho* 1275: 1034- 35) primarily due to its great similarities in doctrinal teachings. This helped to provide the possibility of categorizing the *Lotus Sutra* as an esoteric text, in the same way that previous *Taimitsu* writers had also pinpointed specific parts of the *Lotus Sutra* as representing esoteric ideals.

This lack of distinction between the two categories is not only seen with Nichiren, but is also reflected in the Buddhist teachings and understanding of the Kamakura period. One example is seen in both *Kakuzensho*, considered a *tomitsu* text compiled by Kakuzen between 1183 and 1213 as well as *Asabasho*, considered a *taimitsu* text compiled between 1242 and 1281 by Shocho. Despite their differences, both texts contain interpretations of *taimitsu* and *tomitsu* (Bowring 2005: 342).

Nichiren’s interest in *mikkyo* can best be observed in his own copy of the *Chu-hokkekyo* (the “three-fold *Lotus Sutra*”) that consists of over 200 passages that Nichiren transcribed along with notes made by Nichiren himself. Much of the notes state “relationships” that he sees between *Lotus Sutra* and other Buddhist texts that he had previously read. Approximately one- fourth of the transcribed passages come from esoteric texts, including esoteric sutras as well as important points made in essays written by Kukai, Ennin, Enchin and Annen. Although this is only a partial representation of Nichiren’s knowledge of esoteric Buddhism, the absence of the his views on both Zen and Pure Land thought has led scholars to suggest that it was written probably during his exile on Sado Island (Yamanaka 1980: 648-650). Although Yamanaka suggests that Nichiren compiled his notes on esoteric Buddhism to prepare for his criticism of *mikkyo* (1980: 650), Dolce provides a contrasting view, suggesting that rather the text was an important way of understanding how he developed the notion of both the *honzon*, worship of the mandala, as well as the emphasis on the *odaimoku*, reciting the title of the *Lotus Sutra* in the form of a mantra (1999: 364).

## Mandala

Within the Nichiren Shu School, the main *honzon*, or the object demonstrating one’s faith is the *mandala*, which contains deities that protect the *gyoja*. These deities include Hariti, the ten raksasis, the *Shichimen tennyo* and Mahakala among many others, who protect the devotees of the *Lotus Sutra* (Toyoshima 2004: 130).

There are 128 mandalas inscribed by Nichiren between 1271 and 1282 that have been preserved to this day, which all vary in size, format and pattern (Dolce 1999: 364). Figure 2 (see appendix) shows an example of Nichiren’s mandala at the Kuonji Temple. Nichiren’s mandala

consists of calligraphic inscriptions, in contrast to the pictures seen in the Shingon mandalas. In the center of Nichiren’s mandala is the *odaimoku* or the title of the *Lotus Sutra*, *Namu myoho renge kyo*, often called a “*higedaimoku*” for the brush strokes are extended to look like the ends of whiskers (*“hige*”) (Toyoshima 2004: 130). This is surrounded by names of deities considered relevant by Nichiren, including those that were associated or became associated with the *Lotus Sutra* during the Kamakura period. The *mandala* itself shows the Buddha’s world of salvation, called “*hokkejoudou*”, which can literally be translated as the “Pure Land of the *Lotus Sutra*.”

Despite slight differences in Nichiren’s mandalas, most typically include the Sakyamuni and Prabhutratna Buddhas directly next to the *odaimoku* (one on the left and the other on the right); Samantabhadra, Manjusri, Maitreya and Bhaisajya-raja, the four bodhisattvas mentioned in the *Lotus Sutra* who are noted as the first disciples of when Sakyamuni Budha attained Enlightenment (Toyoshima 2004: 130); a few disciples of the Buddha; the guardian deities, which include demons; the Four Heavenly Kings; and Acala and Ragaraja, the Kings of Knowledge. The mandala also includes Amaterasu, the goddess of the sun and the universe in Shinto, as well as Hachiman, the god of war in both Shinto and Buddhism (Ives 2009: 33).

Within the list of four disciples is the name of the Bodhisattva of Superior Practices, whom Nichiren is considered to be the reincarnation of.

Specific aspects of the mandala are correlated to certain characteristics seen in an “esoteric mandala”. One includes *shosonzu* (“charting of the venerables”) where Nichiren prescribes the names of the deities with respect to their status that is framed by the guardian deities. Similarly, this is also a representation of the *jikkai gogu*, an important Tendai doctrine that corresponds to *ichinen sanzen*. Nichiren suggests that the ten realms are within “one world”, which is represented by the mandala. In *Nichinyo gozen gohenji*, Nichiren provides his own

definition of *mandala* as representing *rin-en gusoku* (“the perfect endowment of a circle”) and *kudoku-shu* (“the gathering of merits”). This definition is most similar to that of the *taizokai* mandala where “mandala means circle” and also assembly where the merits of the Tathagata can exist and gather in one designated location (Snodgrass 1985: 105). However, Dolce notes that Annen was one of the first individuals to note this connection between *jikkai* (considered to be a Tendai thought) and the mandala, by suggesting that *mikkyo* texts also contain this notion of *jikkai*. Annen associated the central section of the *kongokai* and *taizokai* mandala with the last two realms of *jikkai* (bodhisattvas and buddhas) and the surrounding sections of the mandalas as the first eight realms of *jikkai* (Asai 1973: 661-666). Nichiren noted Annen’s interpretation in his *Chu-hokekyo* in the same way that Nichiren adopted Annen’s emphasis on *ichinen sanzen* as being the basis of the correlation between esoteric Buddhism and the *Lotus Sutra* (Dolce 1999: 369). In this way, Annen suggests that the identity of *ichinen sanzen* is “another name for Mahavairocana” (Dolce 1999: 369) or the *dharmakaya*. Nichiren also provides the same claim and thus incorporates Mahavairocana in his mandala.

Nichiren places Mahavairocana included in both the Diamond and Womb realm mandalas after both the Sakyamuni Buddha and Prabhutaratna (Yamanaka 1992: 65), placing Mahavairocana under *funjin* (“emanations of *Sakyamuni*”). Many believe that Nichiren’s inclusion of Mahavairocana was to show his understanding that all Buddhas are *funjin*, yet that Mahavairocana was inferior to Sakyamuni (Dolce 1999: 374). However, provided this argument, it seems questionable that Nichiren would not include the Amida Buddha, who is also considered a *funjin* in the mandala.

This can be understood in the context of *Kakuzensho* and *Asabasho*, both of which contain explanations of important esoteric rituals, including *hokkeho* or rituals based on the *Lotus*

*Sutra* that was popular in the late Heian and early Kamakura periods. Nichiren mentions specific details of the Lotus rituals in both *Zenmuisho* (410) and *Hoonsho* (1219). Many suggest that much of Nichiren’s thoughts and practices were influenced by *hokkeho*, including the creation of the mandala. The mandala used in *hokkeho* consists of the similar aspects described in Nichiren’s mandala except in the form of paintings, including a lotus flower in the center of the mandala surrounded by the respective buddhas and deities. In his *Honzon mondosho*, Nichiren recognizes this mandala as being the predecessor to his own mandala and Nichiren’s use of the term “*namu*”, signifying praise, was likely adapted from *Kakuzensho* (Chaudhuri 2003: 17). As a result, the incorporation of Mahavairocana into his mandala could result from the inclusion of Mahavairocana in the mandala of *hokkeho*. Specifically in *hokkeho*, Mahavairocana of the *taizokai* is the transformation of Sakyamuni Buddha, while the Mahavairocana of the *kongokai* is the transformation of *Prabhutaratna* Buddha, both of which are reflected in Nichiren’s mandala.

Interestingly, *Acala* and *Ragaraja* appear in *hokkeho*, but not in the *Lotus Sutra*. The Chinese sources of *hokkeho* include Acala, yet Ragaraja was later added during the late Heian period (Dukes 1994: 272). However, Nichiren also includes these two figures in his mandala, further signifying his adaptation of the *hokkeho* mandala (Dolce 1999: 373). Yet Nichiren’s earlier drawings of *Fudo Aizen kankenki* depicting both *Fudo-myoo* and *Aizen* shows that he found them significant even prior to learning about *hokkeho* and as a result, his early influence was provided by his childhood education.

After Nichiren’s death, the mandala was only to be written by the head minister of the Kuonji Temple, the current main headquarters of the Nichiren Shu sect. However, we currently see that the head minister of other temples have also written mandalas.

### Odaimoku

Yet along with the mandala, Nichiren’s emphasis on the *odaimoku,* an individual’s vow to take refuge in the Lotus sutra and the “honzon”, also shows esoteric roots. This contrasts from the common belief by many of equating the *odaimoku* to *nembutsu* (“*Namu Amida Butsu*”), which is the continuous recitation of Amida’s name (Sansom 1969: 427). Often the purpose of reciting the *nembutsu* commonly coincides to rebirth in Amida’s Western Pure land after death. In a similar respect, some have suggested that many recite the *odaimoku* on one’s deathbed in the hopes of attaining rebirth and as a last means of showing one’s devotion to the *Lotus Sutra* after death (Dolce 1999: 375; Takagi 1973: 430-450), although this view is not necessarily supported. Others consider the chanting of the *odaimoku* as an “exclusive practice” and thus very similar to *nembutsu* (Stone 1999: 248), yet the explanation of the true meaning behind the *odaimoku* will prove otherwise.

This *nenbutsu* is often suggested as a product of the “reductionist” perspective (Toho Bukkyo Kyokai 2007: 36) of the time—vast numbers of samurai were killed in wars, which necessitated a quick and short way of relieving themselves of the spiritual concerns that they had with respect to their life after death. Thus, condensing the main teaching to just one phrase helped the individuals to obtain the feeling that they were not lacking in their spiritual practice or training. Similarly, religion that prior to the Kamakura period could only be practiced by the rich or the educated, could now also be studied by the illiterate who could not possibly read the Buddhist sutras.

Yet, if we correlate the *odaimoku* to its use in *hokkeho*, we see a different purpose of the *odaimoku* and its use of attaining enlightenment through the *Lotus Sutra* (Dolce 1999: 375). The *odaimoku* focuses not only on the scripture, but also the other buddhas and bodhisattvas that

appear within the *Lotus Sutra*. Nichiren himself considered the *odaimoku* to be the most important and powerful mantra, even referring to its as the *hokke kanjin dharani* (“mantra of the essential meaning of the *Lotus Sutra*”) in many of his writings including *Chu-hokekyo* (Yamanaka 1980: 633), a term that had been used in *hokkekho* as explained in *Kakuzensho* (Dolce 1999: 375). In contrast to *nembutsu*, the *odaimoku* represented his faith not to a savior figure, but to the Dharma of the *Lotus Sutra* primarily because Nichiren emphasized salvation through faith (Stone 1998: 139). More importantly, the *odaimoku* provided an accessibility to the *Lotus Sutra* (Stone 1998: 154) and a thus a way for the devotee to “internalize” the mandala and use it as an object of meditation and maybe even magical defense (Ingram 1977: 219). In this way, the *odaimoku* can represent the seed of Buddhahood and thus a way to purify the mind (Stone 1998: 141).

The five characters within the *odaimoku* have all of the benefits provided by the Buddha compressed within it and thus chanting the *odaimoku* will help the practitioner attain more benefits often in the form of good karma. Chanting the *odaimoku* is one way to save people who are living in in the period of *mappo*. Thus in his *Kanjin Honzon Sho*, Nichiren states that people in *mappo* do not need to specifically understand the meaning of the *Lotus Sutra* or all of the teachings stated within it in the same way that scholars attempt to, yet that they should understand the main teaching, which is to respect the *Lotus Sutra*. Nichiren also wrote in his *Hoonsho* that the *odaimoku* can open the eyes of the blind, equating this to the people living in *mappo*, and thus prevent people from falling to the pit of the bottomless hell (Hubbard 1999: 210).

### Kito Kyo

One of Nichiren’s most important writings that demonstrate his understanding of *kaji kito* is his *Kito Kyo*, also known as *Gokito-kyo*, *Sen-hokekyo* or *Senkyo* and can be translated as “prayers of *kaji kito*”. The writing contains parts of the *Lotus Sutra* that Nichiren compiled and deemed important specifically for *kaji kito* practice. More formally, when individuals read the *Kito Kyo*, they make sure to start by stating “*mappo ichijou no gyoja, sokusai enmei shoganjouju kito kyo no mon*”, which means that those that believe the *Lotus Sutra* will be able to live a normal life, avoiding troubles that may come their way and have their wishes come true (Igarashi). Those that desire to become *gyoja/gyoso* or practitioners of *kaji kito*, will have to read the *Kito Kyo*, which is mandatory of those that enter *aragyo*, where the *Kito Kyo* is read everyday. Those that complete *aragyo* also hand-copy the text onto parchment that is later rolled up and wrapped in cloth and often strung around their neck when actually doing *kaji kito* (see Appendix, Figure 3). The text itself is considered to have a specific “power of prayer” due to the names of specific deities that are transcribed in the *Kito Kyo* from the original text of the *Lotus Sutra* that promise to help the believers of the *Lotus Sutra*. Therefore, many *gyoja* place the *senkyo* on specific parts of the individual’s body to relieve physical problems or illnesses and also to rid of evil spirits that may be causing these problems (Toyoshima 2004: 128).

Those that have the ability to do *kaji kito*, explained in the next subsection, remains limited to the *gyoso*, the individuals that have completed at minimum, the first 100 days (first level) of the *aragyo* training. However, Nichiren stated that those that did not undergo the training could chant the *odaimoku* to attain several benefits. Thus, although many may suggest that the purpose behind the *odaimoku* was because of the emphasis on “reductionist” perspective of the Kamakura Period, Nichiren himself did not suggest that solely chanting the *odaimoku*

would relieve people of their duties in their spiritual practice—their daily actions had to reflect their appraisal of the *Lotus Sutra*. For Nichiren, the main objective behind encouraging the chanting of the *odaimoku* came from the desire of many to live a peaceful life and therefore the fulfillment of *rissho ankoku*, the notion of bringing peace to Japan (Toyoshima 2004: 131).

Out of the several letters written by Nichiren, one of the most important in the context of the development of *kaji kito* within the Nichiren School is called *Kito kyo Okurijo*, a letter sent to Sairenbo, also known as Nichijo, one of his disciples. Within the letter, Nichiren focused on the importance of “*sokusai enmei”*(meaning no calamities and living a long life) *kaji kito* methods and sent this along with the *Kito Kyo*. Sairenbo first met Nichiren on Sado Island, following completion of his training and studies at Mount. Hiei. During this time, he became devoted to the teachings of Nichiren and the *Lotus Sutra*. Following this, Sairenbo became the first individual to have received the teachings of the *Kito Kyo* (Miyazaki 1978: 45). Within the letter, Nichiren included a narrative of *Kito Kyo* and also stated that Nichiren himself read the *Kito Kyo* at least once a day without fail for the purpose of “*sokusai enmei*” and suggested that Sairenbo do the same. Nichiren also noted that since the day that he vowed to become a devotee of the *Lotus Sutra*, he prayed to the Buddha and *Shotenzenji*, deities or the protective forces of nature.

Therefore, despite all of the persecutions and problems that occurred in his life, he received the benefits of the *Lotus Sutra* and attained the Buddha’s wisdom, which allowed him to gain more benefits and always avoid disastrous endings or death. His main suggestion included that the *gyoja* should always maintain a strong faith in the teachings of the *Lotus Sutra* after putting one’s mind to believing in the *Lotus Sutra*. By devoting themselves to the practice of their faith, one can leave the fate of their life and their body to this faith in the *Lotus Sutra* and there would not be any need to worry about one’s life after death. Nichiren suggested that one should focus on

attaining one’s benefits from the *Lotus Sutra* so that they may be able to fulfill one’s wishes (Toyoshima 2004: 129).

Nichiren thought that anyone who wanted to spread the *Lotus Sutra* should be provided the opportunity to be taught the teachings in the *Kito Kyo*. Nichiren is also said to have given the *Kito Kyo* to his other disciples, including Hijoajari Nichizo, whom Nichiren sent to Kyoto to spread the teachings of the *Lotus Sutra*. After Nichizo refined his knowledge of *kaji kito*, in 1319, 37 years after Nichiren’s death, he wrote a book explaining the *Kito Kyo* and gave it to his own disciples. However, the book has become one of the secrets of *kaji kito* practice in Nichiren Shu. Several other texts following Nichizo’s such as *Kito Byosui Sho*, also explain how to chant the *Kito Kyo*, such as where to take breaths between the characters of the sutra (Miyazaki 1978: 45).

## Conclusions

Dolce suggests that Nichiren’s purpose behind his criticisms resulted from his need to self-legitimize himself as a religious leader and make his teaching a worthy alternative to the prevalent esoteric Buddhist religions of the time (1999: 376). Nichiren Buddhism in itself could be considered separate from (Kuroda 1994: 20) or rather a part of these “orthodox Buddhist” religions due partly to his acceptance of *mikkyo* (Dolce 1999: 350) depending on one’s interpretation and understanding of the term, “orthodox”. Although many of Nichiren’s writings show his incorporation of aspects from the esoteric Buddhist traditions, it seems still slightly questionable that his incorporation of *mikkyo* was primarily as a means of self-legitimization.

Seeing his views, it seems as if it would take more than just *mikkyo* to truly understand Nichiren’s thoughts and teachings. Given his fervent personality, it is most likely that his

incorporation of *mikkyo* was more for a means of finding particular methods and ways of demonstrating his view on the importance of the *Lotus Sutra*. As further elaborated in the next section, Nichiren’s main objective in using the *Lotus Sutra* was to find a way to bring happiness to people. It is likely that objects demonstrating and providing several means of showing faith in the *Lotus Sutra* would allow a better understanding of the importance that Nichiren saw in the *Lotus Sutra*.