

Bodily Reading of the *Lotus Sūtra* Understanding Nichiren's Buddhism

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Nichiren's reading of the Lotus Sūtra, which he regarded as the quintessence of Śākyamuni 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 Sūtra's teaching on its own reading and then, surveying Nichiren's writings to see how he understood the act of reading the Lotus Sūtra, lays out the elements involved in the way he actually did read it. A closer examination of Nichiren's "bodily reading" (shikidoku) of the Lotus Sūtra offers a key for understanding his teaching and practice in the context of the wider Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition, and also throws fresh light on the mystical and prophetic dimensions of his religious vision.

Keywords: Nichiren — *Lotus Sūtra* — *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 thirteenth-century 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, Satō 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 (SATŌ 1997).

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

In this paper we will pursue the question: how did Nichiren read the *Lotus Sūtra*, 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 Sūtra* 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 Sūtra*, 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 Sūtra on Reading the Lotus Sūtra

The *Lotus Sūtra* 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 Sūtra* 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 Kumārajīva's Chinese translation, the *Miaofalianhuaqing*, 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 Mahāyāna 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 *Sūtra* as the way to the attainment of supreme and perfect enlightenment (1989, pp. 332-36). It is in the context of this theme of receiving and keeping (*dhāraṇā*) the *Sūtra*, that is, in accepting its teaching and keeping it faithfully as one's guide in life, and consequently of propagating and expounding (*desanā*) it to others, that the act of reading the *Sūtra* is situated and understood.

In the tenth chapter, entitled "Teacher of the Dharma" (*dharmabhāṇaka*), we find the following passage, one among several referring to the reception and propagation of the *Lotus Sūtra*.

Those who receive and keep (*dhārayiṣyanti*), read (*vācayīṣyanti*), make known (*prakāṣayīṣyanti*), expound (*saṃgrāhayīṣyanti*), copy (*likhiṣyanti*), and, having copied, constantly keep in memory (*anumariṣyanti*), and from time to time consider (*vyavalokayīṣyanti*) even a single stanza of this Teaching; who,

at that book (being read and recited), feel veneration for the Tathāgatas, 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-à-vis the *Sūtra* 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 *Sūtra* to others underlies each act. Such devoted reception of the *Sūtra*, leading to its proclamation and exposition, calls forth the very presence of the Tathāgata himself in bodily form.

Again, Medicine King, on any place on earth where this teaching is discussed (*bhāṣyeta*) or taught (*deśyeta*) or copied (*likhyeta*) or studied (*svādhyāyeta*) or recited in chorus (*samgāyeta*), on that very place, Medicine King, one should construct a Tathāgata shrine (*caitya*), high and spacious, and consisting of my magnificent treasures, though without need for placing any relics of the Tathāgata. Why not? For the body of the Tathāgata is all together there already in that place. Whatever place on earth this teaching is expounded or taught or read (*paṭhyeta*) or recited in chorus or copied, or kept in written form, there, honoring and venerating it as one would a stūpa, 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 Tathāgata 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)

The significant point to note in this passage is the identification of this Teaching (*dharma-paryāya*) with the body of the Tathāgata (*tathāgata-*

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

śāriṛa), 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 Sūtra*, whose message is the efficacy of the veneration of the Tathāgata's relics for attaining enlightenment, and the second part, whose underlying theme is the importance of receiving and keeping and expounding this (*Lotus*) *Sūtra* on behalf of others.

In other passages throughout the *Lotus Sūtra* there is a warning of the persecution that the bearers and expounders of the Teaching (of the *Lotus Sūtra*) will be inevitably subjected to and will need to endure. In all this they will be under the special protection of the Tathāgatas.

This Teaching, Medicine King, has been rejected by many people even during the lifetime of the Tathāgata. 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 Tathāgata. Further, the Tathāgatas of the different regions will watch over them and be with them, who, after the Tathāgata's entry into final nirvana, will accept in faith (*śraddhadhiṣyanti*), read (*vācayisyanti*), copy (*likhiṣyanti*), do homage to (*sat-kariṣyanti*) and honor as Teacher (*guru-kariṣyanti*), and proclaim this Teaching on behalf of others.

(KERN and NANJIO, pp. 230: 9–231: 6)

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

This sutra, during the time when the Tathāgata 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 Tathāgata's entry into nirvana, those who copy, keep, read, recite, venerate, and expound it to others, will be covered by the Tathāgata's robe. They will also be protected and watched over by the Tathāgatas 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 Sūtra* as it was transmitted from India to China. Since for Nichiren the authoritative text was Kumārajīva'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 *Sūtra*.

In short, the underlying attitude that supports the entire series of meritorious acts regarding the *Sūtra* 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 *Sūtra* 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 *Sūtra*” 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” (*dhāraṇā*) scriptures as efficacious in attaining supreme enlightenment is also taught in the *Prajñāpāramitā* sutras, some of which are considered to have been composed earlier than the *Lotus Sūtra*, 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 Prajñāpāramitā* on receiving and keeping and reading the sutra, in fact closely resemble those in the *Lotus Sūtra* (CONZE 1962, pp. 76–77, 272–74).

Receiving and keeping scriptures is presented not only as ensuring one’s realization of supreme perfect enlightenment (*anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*), 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 *dhāraṇī* tradition, which flowered later into forms of practice cultivated in esoteric Buddhism (UJIE 1987, pp. 54–68).

The twenty-first chapter of the Sanskrit *Lotus Sūtra* (twenty-sixth in Kumārajīva’s Chinese version) deals with various *dhāraṇī* 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 *dhāraṇī* 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 (*dhārayet*), reads (*vācayet*), comprehends (*pariyavāpnu-yāt*), and practices (*pratipattiyā*) and follows (*samṣādayet*) even a single stanza from the teaching of this *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, 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 (*kāya-gato*) and bear in a book (*pustaka-gato*) the teaching of this *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, we will give these verses to keep in mind and recite (*dhāraṇī-mantra-padāni*) for their guard, defense, and protection.

(KERN and NANJIO 1977, pp. 395:9–396:3)

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

In the larger (and later) *Prajñāpāramitā* sutras there are passages that suggest the connection between *dhāraṇā* and *dhāraṇī*. Here we find the compound *dhāraṇā-dhāraṇī*, which is understood to mean “the (unborn) dharma heard and kept to heart” (UJIE 1987, pp. 55–56). In short, to receive and hold on to this unborn dharma, which is no other than the truth of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), the central theme of the *Prajñāpāramitā* sutras, is thereby to be in possession of great wisdom (*mahā-prajñā*) itself, and such possession of wisdom accompanies twentyfold kinds of merit and power. This power is related to wondrous abilities (*abhijñā*) and the use of skillful means (*upāya*) 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 (*dhāraṇā*) 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 (*dhāraṇī-mantra-padāni*) whose recitation is understood to bring about such merit and benefit, is a point that calls for further textual and historical inquiry (UJIE 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 bring-

ing 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 Sūtra* in the series of meritorious acts as we saw in several passages quoted above is *vāc*—which implies “to read aloud” or “to recite.” The use of this verb *vāc* instead of *adhi-i* in the *Lotus Sūtra* would thus imply a type of reading that involves vocalization (recitation). In Kumārajīva’s Chinese, the verb frequently used is the compound *duşong* 誦誦, 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-à-vis the *Lotus Sūtra* remains a task for further investigation.

For Nichiren, the recitation of the very title of the *Lotus Sūtra* (Myōhō-rengē-kyō), the Japanese pronunciation of Kumārajīva’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 reciting the title of the *Lotus Sūtra* (題目, *daimoku*), which had different stages of development in his own career, brings together the *Lotus Sūtra* teaching on *dhāraṇā* on the one hand, and *dhāraṇī* 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 Hōnen’s recitation of *nenbutsu*, and other factors in Japanese Buddhist history (TAKAGI 1973). Extending the scope of inquiry to include Mahāyāna (or even to the Nikāya) Buddhist tradition would offer a more comprehensive picture of the backgrounds of Nichiren’s religious thought and Buddhist character.³

Mystic Truth (妙法 Myōhō): 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 *dhāraṇī* and mantra practices with *vidyā* (Pāli, =incantations) as depicted in the Pāli Buddhist canon deserves further attention in this regard. See MIYASAKA 1971, pp. 274–332.

account of his religious project: the propagation of the teaching of the *Lotus Sūtra* 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 Śākyamuni'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 妙樂 (Zhanran 湛然), offers us an initial lead on how Nichiren understood the reading of the *Lotus Sūtra*:

Great Teacher Miaolo writes: “If foolish and ignorant persons of the Latter Age practice the *Lotus Sūtra*, they will behold the bodhisattva Samantabhadra, as well as the Buddha Prabhūtaratna, 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 samādhi, sitting, standing, walking, singleminded, keep the *Lotus Sūtra* 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 samādhi.” “To read and recite the *Lotus Sūtra*” 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 *Sūtra*), and up to the fiftieth person in succession who hears the *Sūtra* being expounded in turn, in whom the merits of hearing and rejoicing accrues. “Sitting, standing, walking” means one does not discriminate among the four postures. “Singleminded” refers neither to the mind of samādhi nor to the universal mind, but to the singlemindedness of a mind normally dispersed in everyday life. “To keep the letters of the *Lotus Sūtra* in mind” means that the letters of this *Sūtra* 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. (STN 1: 110–11)

The citation from Miaolo Zhanran (from the *Zhiguan Fuxing Chuan Hongjueh* 止觀輔行伝弘決, T. no. 1912) is a summary of several passages in the *Lotus Sūtra* (Ch. 28, “The Encouragement of Samantabhadra,” T. 9.61b,c) that describe the merits of “practicing” (that is, receiving and keeping, reading, copying, and expounding to others) the *Lotus Sūtra* in this earthly realm. It affirms that those who do so practice the

Lotus Sūtra in this way will “behold Samantabhadra, as well as Prabhūtaratna Buddha, and the Buddhas of the ten different directions.” This equation of “practicing the *Lotus Sūtra*” 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 Sūtra*.

In the *Lotus Sūtra* is written: “If there is anyone who practices the *Lotus Sūtra*, 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 Sūtra*, 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 Sūtra*, know that such a person sees Śākyamuni Buddha. It is the same as being able to hear this *Sūtra* preached from the very mouth of the Buddha himself. Let it be known that such a person does homage to Śākyamuni Buddha himself. According to this passage in the *Sūtra*, the *Lotus Sūtra* and Śākyamuni Buddha are one and the same. (STN 1: 123)

This, then, is the first point we can note about Nichiren’s understanding of reading the *Lotus Sūtra*: to do so is no less than to encounter Śākyamuni himself face to face. In other words, the *Lotus Sūtra* is taken by Nichiren to be the very embodiment of Śākyamuni Buddha, and thus calls for reception and homage as such. To read the *Lotus Sūtra*, 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 *Sūtra*, including reciting, copying, expounding it to others, doing homage to it with offerings of flowers and incense, and so on.

In short, to receive and keep the *Lotus Sūtra* is by that very act to receive and keep Śākyamuni Buddha himself. For Nichiren, “reading the *Lotus Sūtra*” is placing oneself in the very presence of Śākyamuni 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 Sūtra* 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 Sūtra* is the emphasis that “even to read one letter

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 Sūtra* itself on the matter (KERN and NANJIO 1977, pp. 224ff., T. 9.30c).

Nichiren’s exposition of the character *myō* 妙, the first in the five-character title of the *Lotus Sūtra* in Kumārajīva’s translation, develops the *Lotus Sūtra* teaching further.

The character *myō* derives from *sad* in the language of India, and is rendered *miao* in Chinese. *Myō* means “endowed” and “endowed” has the meaning of “perfection.” Each character of the *Lotus Sūtra*, each and every letter, contains within it all the other 69,384 characters that comprise the *Sūtra*. 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 wish-fulfilling jewel, though only the size of a mustard seed, has the capacity to shower all the treasures one could wish for.

(STN 1: 398)

This *Sūtra* consists of eight volumes in twenty-eight chapters, with 69,384 characters. Each and every character contains the character *myō*, and is thus a manifestation of Buddha with thirty-two 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). (STN 1: 570)

This notion that one contains all derives from a Mahāyāna tradition expounded in the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, developed in different ways by Chinese and Korean Buddhist commentators. One important exposition of this notion is Tiantai Master Zhiyi’s notion of “one thought encompassing three thousand realms” (*ichinen sanzen* 一念三千), 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 life” (*Nichiren tōshin no ichidaiji* 日蓮当身の一大事), *Kanjin honzon shō* 観心本尊抄 (On contemplating the true object of worship, STN 1: 702ff.). For Nichiren, the principle of *ichinen sanzen* is what undergirds the teaching on the buddhahood of all sentient beings. It is the father and mother of all Buddhas (STN 1: 897), as well as the seed of buddhahood (STN 1: 711). This seed of buddhahood becomes something very concrete as Nichiren equates it

with the five characters of the title of the *Lotus Sūtra*—Myōhō-rence-kyō.

Manifesting great compassion for those who do not know this *ichinen sanzen*, the Buddha wrapped up this gem in a five-character phrase which he adorned around the necks of the childish ones of the Latter Age. (STN 1: 720)

The recitation of the five-character phrase Myōhō-rence-kyō thus becomes the concrete and practical way wherein this principle of *ichinen-sanzen* 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 Sūtra* 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 Sūtra* 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-à-vis the *Lotus Sūtra*, 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 Sūtra*. Through the major part of his career he carried with him a manuscript of the *Lotus Sūtra* 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 in the *Lotus Sūtra*, 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 Sūtra* (*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 *sahā* 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

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 Sūtra*: 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 Śākyamuni are in fact going against it, even persecuting those who are its true bearers. Nichiren sees this situation as already predicted in the *Lotus Sūtra*, referring to the passage already cited above, wherein this *Sūtra* had "aroused envy and enmity among many" (STN 1: 327).

Nichiren's view of his country Japan, with regard to its suitability for the practice of the *Lotus Sūtra*, 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 Sūtra*" (STN 1: 324).

Reading the *Lotus Sūtra* 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 Hōnen's practice of the recitation of Amida's name (*nenbutsu*), Nichiren takes a further step regarding the reading (and practice) of the *Lotus Sūtra*.

Even if one does a great good deed, even if one reads and copies the entire *Lotus Sūtra* 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 fail to denounce the enemies of the *Lotus Sūtra*, one will not be able to attain the Way. (STN 1: 321)

In other words, given a situation wherein the *Lotus Sūtra* 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 Sūtra*) 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

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. (STN 1: 321–22)

In sum, we have noted three points regarding the way Nichiren understood what reading the *Lotus Sūtra* involved. First, reading the *Lotus Sūtra* is encountering Śākyamuni 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 Sūtra* 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 Sūtra* itself, encompassing all its contents. Third, to read the *Lotus Sūtra* 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 Sūtra*. 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 Sūtra*, 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 Sūtra* constitute basic components of his self-understanding and Buddhist vision.

Ōtani Gyōkō, a noted Nichiren doctrinal scholar, has authored a volume focusing on the Chinese-Japanese compound *juji* 受持 (*ju*, to receive; *ji*, to keep) as a key to understanding Nichiren's whole outlook and religious vision (ŌTANI 1984). Ōtani 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 of *juji* in the whole structure of Nichiren's thought. Taking the cue from Ōtani, we can affirm this attitude of receiving and keeping the *Lotus Sūtra* as defining Nichiren's life and career and enabling him to present his own sense of identity as a "practitioner of the *Lotus Sūtra*" (*Hokekyō no gyōja* 法華經の行者). And in the light of the three points noted above regarding Nichiren's reading of the *Lotus Sūtra*, such a practitioner is one who embodies the Buddha's mystic Dharma (*myōhō* 妙法) 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 Sūtra* determined the course of action Nichiren took in his life, and how this in turn brought about consequences that confirmed him in his reading.

Practicing the Lotus Sūtra: Prophetic Mission

In the treatise “On Protecting the Nation,” as Nichiren lays out his religious vision based on the teaching of the *Lotus Sūtra*, 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 *Risshō ankoku ron* 立正安国論 (On establishing the right Dharma and 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 reading. He comes to the conclusion that the neglect as well as slander of Śākyamuni’s Dharma as enshrined in the *Lotus Sūtra* 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 Hōnen’s teaching of the recitation of the name of Amida Buddha. On the basis of his reading of the *Lotus Sūtra*, Nichiren understood Amida Buddha to be merely one of the many emanations of the eternal Śākyamuni. To focus one’s devotion on one or another of the emanations without mention of the true source would constitute a slight to Śākyamuni 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 this 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. *Risshō 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 Sūtra* to shed light on the social and political events of his time, reading these events in the light of the *Lotus Sūtra* and, vice versa, reading the *Lotus Sūtra* 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

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 Sūtra*.

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 Sūtra* 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 Sūtra*.

Nichiren’s fundamental attitude came to be manifested in and through this cross-reading of the *Lotus Sūtra* 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—“setting aside all attachment to one’s own life and limb” (*ware shinmyō o aisezu* 我不愛身命). This is a phrase that appears in the *Lotus Sūtra* that Nichiren cites time and again in his many writings (*STN* 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 Sūtra* itself required. And this stance was maintained throughout his career, as he endured persecution after persecution on behalf of the Dharma.

During 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 suffering. It is during this time that the sense of his own identity and calling as a practitioner of the *Lotus Sūtra* comes to him in all clarity, confirming him in all he did and stood for since commencing his public career.

A passage from the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*, 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 of 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 Sūtra* says, “You will be despised, hated, envied, etc.” In the past twenty years

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.” This 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 Sūtra* says, “You will be banished time and again.” The above passage refers to many similar things. (STN I: 602)

In short, Nichiren comes to a very deep and personal realization that what he reads in the *Lotus Sūtra* 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 Sūtra*.

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 Sūtra*? Indeed, if it were not for Nichiren, this one phrase of prediction would be false. (STN I: 559)

The same point is emphasized in a letter to Toki Jōnin 富木常忍, one of his closest followers, written soon after his pivotal treatise *Kaimoku shō* 開目抄 (The opening of the eyes, 1272).

In the *Lotus Sūtra* (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 himself 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 Sūtra* 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 Śākyamuni, Prabhūta Buddha, and the Buddhas of the ten directions would be great lies. (STN I: 639)

Nichiren’s experience of persecutions and hardships on account of

his mission of propagating the *Lotus Sūtra* becomes the very confirmation of the truth of the teaching of the *Lotus Sūtra*, 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 Sūtra*.

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 Sūtra*, and writes the following:

O what a joy it is to be able to give one's life for the *Lotus Sūtra*! 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 Sūtra*. It is a way of reading the *Sūtra* in the light of the events of 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 Sūtra*.

O what great joy! It is just as King Dan was beleaguered by the hermit Ashi and attained the merits of the *Lotus Sūtra*, and the bodhisattva Fugyō 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 Myōhō-rengē-kyō, 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 *Sūtra* 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 Hōjō Tokimune

himself has been my worthy friend in the Dharma. Taira no Saemon is to me as Devadatta was to Śākyamuni. The *nenbutsu* followers are like Kokalika, and the Vinaya followers are like Sunakṣatra Bhikkhu. Śākyamuni's lifetime on earth is right now. Now is Śākyamuni's lifetime on earth. This is the very essence of the *Lotus Sūtra* that teaches the true nature of all phenomena, and the ultimate nature of beginning and end.

(STN 1: 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 Sūtra*. Conversely, he is able to read the text of the *Lotus Sūtra* 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 shō* 選時抄 (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 Śākyamuni Tathāgata 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 Sūtra* 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 Sūtra*. 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 Sūtra*.

First, the awareness of the living presence of Śākyamuni Buddha accompanies Nichiren throughout the vicissitudes of his career. He is assured of this, of course, in his habitual reading of the *Lotus Sūtra*, not just in a conceptual manner, but in a very immediate and experiential—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

traditional doctrinal themes, such as Nichiren's views of Buddha, his understanding of the relationship between Buddha (Śākyamuni) and Dharma (the *Lotus Sūtra*), 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 Sūtra*. 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 Sūtra*. Nichiren doctrinal scholars refer to this as *ji 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. The latter teaching is attributed to Chinese Master Tiantai, who developed it in the context of his exposition of Buddhist meditative practice. Nichiren 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 Sūtra*, or *daimoku*.

His message to his listeners was simple: receive and keep the *Lotus Sūtra*, and express this acceptance of the *Lotus Sūtra* in the devoted recitation of 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 Śākyamuni's abiding presence together with the experience of cosmic plenitude, is realized in 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 Sūtra*. The response Nichiren made to these situations and events as a practitioner of the *Lotus Sūtra* 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 Sūtra*, constitute the very central features of his thought and teaching, features that he actualized and embodied himself in 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 Sūtra* (*hokekyō shikidoku no isshō* 法華經色読の一生).

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 of 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 Sūtra* 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: Understanding 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 Sūtra* 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-à-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 (*hō-honzon tai nin-honzon* 法本尊対人本尊), the primacy of meditation/contemplation vs. adherence to the teaching (of the *Lotus Sūtra*) (*kanjin-shugi tai kyōsō-shugi* 観心主義対教相主義), the centrality of this earthly life versus that of the next life (*genze-chūshin tai raisei-chūshin* 現世中心対来世中心), in addition to the question of the extent of the influence of the doctrine of originary enlightenment (*hongaku shisō* 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

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 Śākyamuni in the very reading and recitation of the *Lotus Sūtra* 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 of 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 Sūtra* 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 Sūtra* doctrine comes to be relegated to secondary importance. Conversely, however, it can also be affirmed that it is precisely the teaching of the *Lotus Sūtra* 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 Nichiren's own writings.

Again, the trajectory of Nichiren's whole career, and his religious project as delineated in 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 (*sahā*) world as Śākyamuni's domain, and that one is able to meet Śākyamuni face to face in the course of one's engagement in the tasks of propagating the *Lotus Sūtra*. 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 Śākyamuni 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.

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. This 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 threefold-phase 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 Śākyamuni 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 Śākyamuni Buddha in his mind points to a *universal* truth, that is, the teaching of the *Lotus Sūtra*, and at the same time is also a *concrete and particular embodiment* of that truth. Further, Śākyamuni 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, and this may serve us to better understand and appreciate different sides in the various debated issues in his religious teaching. This 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,"

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 Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition, as a development stemming from the religious world of the *Lotus Sūtra*. And pursuing this heuristic device of *coincidentia oppositorum*, we can perhaps describe Nichiren's religious thought as a mystico-prophetic 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 Śākyamuni's 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. 101ff.), 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 of 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 sōkanmon kyōsō hairyū* 三世諸仏総勸文教相廃立, *STN* 2: 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.

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 Sūtra*.

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