

4.3 Joining the Eagle Peak Assembly: Text, Image, and Religious Identity in Nichiren's 'Great Maṇḍala'

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Abstract: The medieval Japanese Buddhist teacher Nichiren (1222–1282), known for his message of exclusive devotion to the *Lotus Sūtra*, devised a calligraphic mandala as an object of veneration (*honzon*) for his followers. Down its center is inscribed the title of the *Lotus Sūtra* in the mantric formula *Namu Myōhō-rence-kyō*, flanked by the names of the two buddhas Śākyamuni and Tahō (Skt. Prabhūtaratna) as attendants and surrounded by the names of representatives of the *Lotus Sūtra* assembly on Eagle Peak. Composed entirely of Chinese characters, along with two Siddham glyphs, Nichiren's 'great maṇḍala' (*daimandara*) or *gohonzon* embodies the dual aspects of image and text. As image, it represents an enlightened cosmos, the realm of the primordially awakened buddha of the *Lotus Sūtra*. At the same time, its use of characters, rather than anthropomorphic or symbolic images, preserves and underscores its continuity with the *Lotus* text. This chapter offers an introduction to Nichiren's *daimandara*. It first discusses the content and formal aspects of his maṇḍala and its doctrinal foundations. It also locates the *daimandara* within broader medieval discourses about the *Lotus* assembly as a timeless, ever-present reality as well as Nichiren's

* This essay expands on material from presentations made at multiple conferences organized by Kōichi Shinohara and Phyllis Granoff. I offer this version here in tribute.

own thinking about the liberative power of the *Lotus Sūtra*'s words. It then considers how Nichiren's *daimandara* has functioned within his community of followers, both during his lifetime and after his death, and suggests its ongoing role as an identity marker for the Nichiren tradition.

Keywords: *daimandara*, Eagle Peak, Fuji school, *gohonzon*, *Lotus Sūtra*, maṇḍala, Nichiren, object of veneration, original enlightenment

The medieval Japanese Buddhist teacher Nichiren 日蓮 (1222–1282) taught exclusive devotion to the *Lotus Sūtra* (Ch. *Miaofa lianhua jing*, Jp. *Myōhō-rence-kyō* 妙法蓮華經), a scripture revered across sectarian boundaries for its promise that all shall attain buddhahood. Nichiren had trained in the Tendai school 天台宗, which holds the *Lotus Sūtra* to be complete and true, and all other teachings, provisional; now in the degenerate Final Dharma age (*mappō* 末法), Nichiren asserted, the *Lotus Sūtra* represents the sole vehicle of liberation. Nichiren promoted the practice of chanting the *daimoku* 題目 or title of the *Lotus Sūtra* in the mantric formula *Namu Myōhō-rence-kyō* 南無妙法蓮華經, said to contain the entirety of the sūtra within itself. And, as an object of worship or veneration (Jp. *honzon* 本尊), the focus of *daimoku* practice, he also devised for his followers a calligraphic maṇḍala depicting the assembly of the *Lotus Sūtra* in the open space above Eagle Peak (Skt. *Gṛdhrakūṭa-parvata*), where the two buddhas, Śākyamuni and Tahō 多寶 (Abundant Jewels, Skt. Prabhūtaratna), sat side by side in the jeweled stūpa, just as described in the *Lotus Sūtra* text. This maṇḍala, known as the 'great maṇḍala' (Jp. *daimandara* 大曼荼羅) or 'revered object of worship' (*gohonzon* 御本尊), is written entirely in logographs: Chinese characters, along with two Siddham glyphs (Figure 1). The *daimandara* was unique to Nichiren's followers and helped to unify their community and define it vis-à-vis the larger religious establishment. At the same time, Nichiren's *daimandara* participated in broader iconographic conventions of the day and holds especial relevance for understanding how medieval Japanese Buddhists conceived the relation between sacred images and sacred texts.



FIG. 1 Nichiren's calligraphic maṇḍala depicting the assembly of the *Lotus Sūtra*. This particular example, inscribed by Nichiren in 1280, is said to have been enshrined at his bedside during his last hours. It has been designated the official object of worship (*shūtei honzon*) of the Nichiren sect (Nichirenshū). Courtesy of Hikigayatsu Myōhonji, Kamakura, and Futaba publishers.

This chapter is intended as an introduction to Nichiren's *daimandara*, which to date has drawn little scholarly attention outside the Nichiren sect.¹ Part I introduces the content and formal aspects of Nichiren's maṇḍala and its doctrinal foundations. It also attempts to locate the *daimandara* within broader medieval discourses about the *Lotus Sūtra*, with particular attention to its significance as an object of worship embodying both image and text. Part II examines how Nichiren's *daimandara* functioned within his community of followers, both during his lifetime and after his death, and suggests its role as an identity marker for the Nichiren tradition. This essay is by no means an exhaustive treatment; rather, I hope it will serve to encourage further research.

PART I: NICHIREN'S *DAIMANDARA* AS IMAGE AND TEXT

The most obvious characteristic of Nichiren's *daimandara* is that it is written entirely in characters. Pragmatic reasons, such as ease of production, may have played a role in his decision to produce a calligraphic *honzon*. But that choice was also rooted in Nichiren's understanding of the unique characteristics of the written words of the *Lotus Sūtra*, his doctrinal grounding in both Tendai thought and esoteric ritual practice, as well as broader trends in the visual and scriptural religious culture of early medieval Japan. This first part of the present chapter addresses the question of why, in devising an object of worship, Nichiren used the image of the *Lotus* assembly in open space and why he depicted it using written characters. It discusses the content of the *daimandara*, its doctrinal foundations, and the significance of the *Lotus* assembly that it depicts, especially in light of interpretive trends of the time. I also argue that Nichiren's own thinking about scriptural language and its perceived power to consecrate buddha images may be related to his inscription of a calligraphic maṇḍala.

¹ The exception is Dolce's groundbreaking 'Esoteric Patterns', especially 103–214.

Content and Doctrine

What is Written on the Great Maṇḍala?

More than one hundred and twenty maṇḍalas survive in Nichiren's hand, inscribed over roughly a decade between 1271 and 1282.² Additional records suggest that he may have produced somewhere around two hundred.³ Their size, composition, accompanying

² The 1952 *Gohonzon shū*, compiled by Kataoka Zuiki 片岡隨喜 (1887–1966) and completed and edited by Yamanaka Kihachi 山中喜八 (1902–1995), contained photographic reproductions of 123 maṇḍalas, described in Yamanaka's accompanying catalogue, *Gohonzon shū mokuroku* (hereafter *Mokuroku*; see Bibliography 3: Secondary Sources, Yamanaka). A revised edition of the photographic collection together with the catalogue was published in 1992 as vol. 1 of Yamanaka's *Nichiren Shōnin shinseki no sekai* (hereafter *Shinseki*), which included four additional maṇḍalas in Nichiren's hand that had subsequently been discovered. A revised catalogue compiled by Kimura Chūichi 木村忠一 appears in the 2021 *Mandara honzon* (hereafter *MH*; see Secondary Sources, Nakao and Terao), 100–06, and lists 125 maṇḍalas. (*MH* also includes exquisite colour photos of more than fifty of Nichiren's holographic maṇḍalas along with explanatory notes and background essays; it does not, however, use Yamanaka's *Mokuroku* catalogue numbers.) The *MH* catalogue is informed by an extensive project of restoring many of Nichiren's holographic maṇḍalas (see note 139 below). By my rough count, it eliminates eleven maṇḍalas found in *Shinseki* but adds another nine not contained there. Several of those eliminated were already listed in *Mokuroku* as 'present whereabouts unknown'; Nakao explains that some of them included in Yamanaka's original catalogue were lost in the Pacific War or through natural disasters, although their colotypes have been preserved (Nakao, 'Nichiren no "gohonzon"', 53). In referring to individual maṇḍalas in this article, I give the catalogue numbers from Yamanaka's *Mokuroku* (also used in *Shinseki*) and the relevant page numbers in *Shinseki* both for the photographic plates and, in parentheses, the explanatory notes; where relevant, I provide page references to *MH* as well. Missing from these collections are those of Nichiren's holographic maṇḍalas held by Nichiren Buddhist temples in the lineage of Fuji Taiseikiji 富士大石寺, which does not permit the maṇḍala to be photographed (Mochizuki, *Nichiren kyōgaku*, 170).

inscriptions, and other formal features vary somewhat over time and according to the circumstances of individual recipients. Various attempts have been made to categorize Nichiren's holographic maṇḍalas according to differences in their compositional elements.⁴ However, the simplest division, and the most useful for purposes of this discussion, is between those that Nichiren composed in the 'formal style' (*kōshiki* 公式), which include most or all of the elements, and those written in the 'abbreviated style' (*ryakushiki* 略式), which have only a few elements. The following general description is based on a maṇḍala Nichiren inscribed in 1280 for his disciple Daikoku Ajari Nichirō 大國阿闍梨日朗 (1245–1320) to be enshrined in Nichirō's Hokkedō 法華堂 or chapel in Kamakura. This maṇḍala is said to have been hung beside Nichiren on his deathbed and is therefore known as the 'object of veneration for the time of passing' (*rinmetzu doji no honzon* 臨滅度時の本尊).⁵ In 1965, Nichirenshū, the largest of the

Versions of Yamanaka's collection have been posted online. See *Nichiren Shōnin daimandara ichiran* 日蓮聖人大漫荼羅一覽, which includes 123 maṇḍalas, published by the Juhōkai 鷲峰会, a Nichirenshū affiliate organization for the promotion of Nichiren's teaching (see Juhōkai, 'Nichiren Shōnin daimandara ichiran'). A version in English aimed at practitioners, the 'Nichiren Shonin Gohonzon Shu', appears at the Buddha-Dharma Archives (Buddha-Dharma Archives, 'Nichiren Shonin Gohonzon Shu'). Also in English, see Finocchiaro and the Nichiren Mandala Study Workshop, 'Nichiren Mandala Study Workshop Bookstore'.

³ Takagi, 'Nikkō to sono montei', 33–34. This estimate factors in holographic maṇḍalas of Nichiren mentioned in the Fuji lineage documents *Honzon bun'yo chō* 本尊分与帳 (*Nichirenshū shūgaku zensho* [hereafter *NSZ*; see Secondary Sources, Risshō Daigaku] 2: 112–18), discussed below, and *Mandara waki-gaki tō* 曼荼羅脇書等, a record of inscriptions on maṇḍalas held by Taiseiki and its branch temples as well as other Fuji-school temples (*Fuji shūgaku yōshū* [hereafter *FSY*; see Secondary Sources, Hori] 8: 177–226). Yamaguchi, using these sources, counts 216 maṇḍalas of record, still or formerly extant, inscribed by Nichiren (*Nichiren Shōshū shi*, 161).

⁴ *Shinseki*, 6–31; see also Dolce, 'Esoteric Patterns', 104–05.

⁵ *Mokuroku* 81, *Shinseki*, 256–57 (383–84); *MH*, 82–83; see also *Nichirenshū jiten* (hereafter *NJ*; see Secondary Sources, Risshō Daigaku), s.v. 'rinmetzu

traditional temple denominations of Nichiren Buddhism, designated it as its *shūtei mandara* 宗定曼荼羅 or 'official' version of the great maṇḍala.⁶ Member families or individuals are encouraged to enshrine replicas in their home altar.⁷

On Nichiren's *daimandara*, the *daimoku* or title of the *Lotus Sūtra*, *Namu Myōhō-rengē-kyō*, is inscribed vertically down the center, occupying the place of the central deity. Nichiren held that the *daimoku* encompasses not only the entirety of the *Lotus Sūtra* itself but also the whole of Buddhism; it is 'the heart of the eighty thousand sacred teachings and the eye of all buddhas' 八萬聖教の肝心一切諸佛の眼目.⁸ The *daimoku* is both object of veneration and mantric

doji no bonzon', 425a, and Nakao, 'Myōhonji zō no "rinmetzu doji honzon"'. For Nichiren's conferral of this maṇḍala on Nichirō, see Nakao, 'Nichiren no "gohonzon"', 56, 61. The first extant reference to this maṇḍala being hung by Nichiren's deathbed appears sixty-one years later, in a letter from Iyo Ajari Nichidai 伊予阿闍梨日代 (1297–1394) to Nichigo 日郷, a fellow disciple in the Fuji lineage (*Saishō Ajari gobenji* 宰相阿闍梨御返事, NSZ 2: 235). Some later accounts say that Nichiren's disciples were about to set up by his deathbed a small standing image of Śākyamuni Buddha that he had possessed for many years but then moved it to the side and hung the *daimandara* at Nichiren's request (see for example the 1478 *Ganso kedōki* 元祖化導記 of Gyōgakuin Nitchō 行学院日朝 [1422–1500], in Nichirenshū Zensho Shuppankai, *Nichiren Shōnin denkishū*, 58).

⁶ 'Nichirenshū' is often used to designate both the specific sect of Nichiren Buddhism having its head temple at Mount Minobu in Yamanashi prefecture, and the Nichiren tradition as a whole. For clarity, this article uses it only in the former sense.

⁷ Nichirenshū, 'Butsuji ni tsuite' 仏事について, Q & A 4 and 5. Copies of the *shūtei mandara* are not sold but are conferred through one's temple of affiliation, and receiving one entails a faith commitment. In Japan it is possible to buy Nichirenshū maṇḍalas through stores selling Buddhist altars and accoutrements; in such cases, one would properly have the maṇḍala consecrated by the one's family temple (see also note 101 below). I thank Rev. Michael Ryūei McCormick for clarifying this for me.

⁸ *Hokke daimoku shō* 法華題目鈔, *Shōwa teihon Nichiren Shōnin ibun* (hereafter *Teihon*; see Secondary Sources, Risshō Daigaku) 1: 392.

invocation, and we will return in the next section to its significance at the *daimandara*'s center. Flanking the *daimoku* are the names of the two buddhas Śākyamuni and Tahō, just as they sat together in the jeweled stūpa at the *Lotus* assembly.⁹ Surrounding the *daimoku* and arranged in hierarchical registers are the names of other figures who were present at that assembly. Collectively they represent the ten dharma realms (*jikkai* 十界), or categories of living beings from hell dwellers to buddhas, a key principle in both Tendai doctrine and Nichiren's teaching (and also discussed below). The brushstrokes of the central *daimoku* inscription extend outward into the surrounding characters. Called *kōmyōten* 光明点, they are said to represent golden light rays illuminating all beings of the ten realms.¹⁰ As Nichiren explains in a letter to a follower, a woman known as Nichinyo gozen 日女御前:

The 'Jeweled Stūpa' chapter [of the *Lotus Sūtra*] states: 'All in that great assembly were lifted and present in open space'. All the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and great saints, and in general all the beings of the two worlds [of desire and form] and the eight kinds of [non-human] beings who assembled in the introductory chapter, dwell in this *gohonzon*, without a single exception. Illuminated by the five characters of the Wonderful Dharma [*myō hō ren ge kyō*], they assume their originally inherent enlightened attributes. 寶塔品云接諸大衆皆在虛空云云。此等の佛・菩薩・大聖等、摠じて序品列坐の二界八番の雜衆等、一人ももれず。此御本尊の中に住し給と、妙法五字の光明にてらされて本有の尊形となる。¹¹

⁹ This scene is described in Chapter 11 ('Apparition of the Jeweled Stūpa', Jp. *Ken hōto-bon* 顯寶塔品), *Miaofa lianba jing* 妙法蓮華經, T no. 262, 9: 4.32b16–34b22). See also Hurvitz, *Lotus Blossom*, 167–76.

¹⁰ On the *kōmyōten*, see *MH*, 156.

¹¹ *Nichinyo gozen gobenji* 日女御前御返事, *Teihon* 2: 1375. The sūtra quotation is at *Miaofa lianba jing*, T no. 262, 9: 4.33c12. Among scholars within Nichiren Buddhism, Nichiren's authorship of this writing has been questioned. The prevailing scholarly trend is to rely only on those of Nichiren's writings that survive in his own hand or as copies made by immediate disciples and to mar-

In the top register, the two buddhas, Śākyamuni and Tahō, are themselves flanked by four bodhisattvas: Jōgyō 上行 (Superior Conduct, Skt. Viśiṣṭacāritra), Muhengyō 無辺行 (Boundless Conduct, Anantacāritra), Jyōgyō 淨行 (Pure Conduct, Viśuddhacāritra), and Anryūgyō 安立行 (Firm Conduct, Supraṭiṣṭhitacāritra), the four leaders of a vast throng of bodhisattvas who emerge from beneath the earth in chapter fifteen of the *Lotus Sūtra*.¹² These bodhisattvas are associated with the 'origin teaching' (Jp. *honmon* 本門), or latter fourteen chapters of the *Lotus Sūtra*, in which Śākyamuni reveals himself to be the primordial or eternal buddha (*kuonbutsu* 久遠佛).¹³ They are Śākyamuni's original disciples (*honge bosatsu* 本化菩薩),

ginalize or treat as secondary those works existing solely in the form of transcriptions by later disciples. This stance is often allied to suspicion of any writing in the Nichiren collection employing vocabulary or concepts drawn from esoteric Buddhism or medieval Tendai original enlightenment thought (*hongaku shisō* 本覺思想). However, relying solely on Nichiren's holographic writings is not the hermeneutically safe option it appears to be. Due to vicissitudes in the long process of collection and transmission, a number of writings attributed to him survive only as later transcriptions. Many among them are likely to be genuine; it is not always possible to draw a definitive line between authentic and apocryphal texts (Sueki, 'Nichiren's Problematic Works'). Moreover, it is no longer tenable, in light of recent scholarship, to deny that Nichiren drew upon esoteric and medieval Tendai traditions to support his teaching (e.g., Dolce, 'Esoteric Patterns'; Stone, *Original Enlightenment*; Hanano, *Tendai hongaku shisō to Nichiren kyōgaku*). For specific points of disagreement concerning the *Nichinyō gozen gobenji*, see Hanano's polemical but detailed 'Nichiren no honzon ron'. Whatever its status, *Nichinyō gozen gobenji* has been and continues to be highly valued by Nichiren Buddhist practitioners for its explanation of the *daimandara* and its relation to personal faith.

¹² *Miaofa lianba jing*, T no. 262, 9: 5.39c18–42a28; Hurvitz, *Lotus Blossom*, 206–16.

¹³ Different English expressions have been used to refer to Śākyamuni of the origin teaching: the primordial buddha (underscoring the inconceivable length of time that he has been enlightened); the eternal buddha (emphasizing that he transcends time); the constantly abiding buddha (stressing his ongoing presence

薩), taught by him since the time of his original awakening in the inconceivably remote past. In chapter twenty-one ('Transcendent Powers', *Jinriki-hon* 神力品), Śākyamuni entrusts them with disseminating the *Lotus Sūtra* in an evil age after his nirvāṇa. Nichiren understood the content of that entrustment to be the *daimoku*, *Namu Myōhō-rengē-kyō*, and identified his own proselytizing efforts with the work of these bodhisattvas. Below them in the next register are the names of representatives of the bodhisattvas associated with the pre-*Lotus Sūtra* teachings and with the 'trace teaching' or *shakumon* 迹門, the first fourteen chapters of the *Lotus*, which represent Śākyamuni in his 'trace' or provisional manifestation as the historical buddha. These 'bodhisattvas taught by the Buddha in his provisional guise' (*shakke bosatsu* 迹化菩薩) include Fugen 普賢 (Skt. Samantabhadra) and Monjushiri 文殊師利 (Mañjuśrī), traditionally depicted as the historical Śākyamuni's attendants, who are paired one on either side of the central inscription of the *daimoku*. On some of Nichiren's maṇḍalas, including the *shūtei mandara*, the names of another pair of bodhisattvas, usually Miroku 彌勒 (Maitreya) and Yakuō 藥王 (Bhaiṣajyarāja), are inscribed.¹⁴ In the same register

in the world); and the original buddha (*honbutsu* 本仏, interpreting him as originally enlightened or as the source of, and fundamental to, all buddhas). I have reservations about 'eternal Buddha'; while easy to understand, it carries overtones of Western metaphysics and obscures a history of debate over whether this buddha had a beginning in time or is originally innate, along with other interpretive issues. While I use it here occasionally for convenience, I vary it with other expressions. On the history of interpretation of the Buddha of the 'Lifespan' chapter, see Hanano, *Tendai hongaku shisō*, 23–158, and for Nichiren's reading, see Dolce, 'Between Duration and Eternity'.

¹⁴ One bodhisattva, widely revered in Japan, who never appears on any of Nichiren's maṇḍalas is Kannon 觀音 (Avalokiteśvara). Perhaps this is because Kannon had become closely associated with Pure Land devotion, to which Nichiren was implacably opposed. Another possibility is that he understood Kannon to be a bodhisattva from another world. Zhiyi, the Tiantai patriarch, grouped the bodhisattvas present in the *Lotus* assembly into three categories: those who emerged from beneath the earth; those who had come from other worlds; and

as these bodhisattvas appear the great śrāvaka disciples Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana, representing persons of the two vehicles; they in turn are flanked by the Buddhist tutelary deities Brahmā and Indra and King Māra of the deva realm. In the lower rows are representatives of the six saṃsāric realms: the devas of the sun, moon, and stars, King Ajātaśatru, the wheel-turning king, the asura king, the dragon king, the *rākṣasa* demon Kishimojin 鬼子母神 (Skt. Hārītī) and her ten daughters, and the Buddha's cousin and traitorous disciple Devadatta. Also included in the maṇḍala in a lower register are the sun goddess Tenshō Daijin 天照大神 (a.k.a. Amaterasu Ōmikami) and Great Bodhisattva Hachiman (Hachiman Daibosatsu 八幡大菩薩), representing the *kami* 神 or deities of Japan. In the four corners are the four deva kings who protect the four directions.

Although not immediately obvious in the *daimandara*'s logographic form, Nichiren's *honzon* depicts a three-dimensional assembly. Of the individual figures, Śākyamuni Buddha has the seat of honour to the right of the central inscription—stage right, we might say. He and the tathāgata Tahō are facing outward from the maṇḍala, toward the practitioner. Of the four bodhisattvas who attend these two buddhas, Jōgyō is the foremost leader and also has the place of honour on the right, but in his case, it is the practitioner's right as one faces the maṇḍala: Jōgyō and all the other figures are facing in the same direction as the practitioner, toward the two buddhas.¹⁵

Two logographs on the *daimandara* are not Chinese characters. These are the Siddham letters representing the 'seed syllables' (Jp. *shuji* 種字) for the esoteric deities Fudō Myōō 不動明王 (Skt. Acala) and Aizen Myōō 愛染明王 (Ragarāja), which appear on either side of the maṇḍala. According to *kuden* 口傳 or 'secret transmissions' of the medieval Nichiren tradition, they represent respectively the doctrines that 'saṃsāra is none other than nirvāṇa' (Jp. *shōji soku nehan* 生死即涅槃) and 'defilements are none other than enlightened wisdom

those who had long dwelt in the Sahā world (*Miaofa lianhua jing wenju*, T no. 1718, 34: 9b.129c25–26). Nichiren assigns specific bodhisattvas to these categories in *Gebō tabō kujū bosatsu ji* 下方他方舊住菩薩事 (*Teihon* 3: 2323).

¹⁵ Nakao, 'Mandara honzon o meguru shinkō sekai', *MH*, 196–97.

(bodhi)' (*bonno soku bodai* 煩惱即菩提),¹⁶ both key concepts in the medieval Japanese Tendai tradition. They also reflect Nichiren's early training in both Tendai and Shingon esoteric traditions (respectively, Taimitsu 台密 and Tōmitsu 東密) and appear to have held particular significance for him.¹⁷ In 1254, at age thirty-three, Nichiren made two iconographic representations, one of 'the living Fudō' 生身不動明王 and the other of 'the living Aizen' 生身愛染明王, that he transmitted to a disciple as part of an esoteric initiation.¹⁸ The Siddham seed characters for these two esoteric deities appear on virtually every maṇḍala he ever inscribed.

The lower portion of Nichiren's *daimandara* can be understood as a lineage chart. Here we find Nāgārjuna, through whom most East Asian Mahāyāna schools trace their lineages, as well as the Tiantai

¹⁶ For example, *Mandara sōden*, *NSZ* 1: 225; *Honzon ron shiryō* (hereafter *HRS*; see Secondary Sources, Minobu-san Tanki Daigaku), 250.

¹⁷ As Dolce has noted, Nichiren's maṇḍala represents the earliest visual depiction pairing Fudō and Aizen with a central deity; this configuration is especially striking in Nichiren's maṇḍalas inscribed in the 'abbreviated form', whose few elements often consist of little more than the Siddham characters for Fudō and Aizen flanking the central inscription of the *daimoku*. By the early fourteenth century, the Shingon Daigoji 醍醐寺 lineage developed a ritual initiation known as *sanzon gōgyō hō* 三尊業行法 ('Joint Ritual of the Three Worthies', in Faure's translation), whose *honzon* depicts Fudō and Aizen to either side of a five-element stūpa or a wish-fulfilling jewel. Nichiren may have had Daigoji connections during his early studies in Kyoto, and Dolce suggests that his use of Fudō and Aizen on the *daimandara* may have drawn on the Daigoji ritual in the early stages of its development (Dolce, 'Reconsidering the Origins'). On the pairing of the two deities more broadly, see Faure, *Gods of Medieval Japan* 1: 200–15, which also discusses the *sanzon gōgyō hō* (210–15).

¹⁸ *Fudō Aizen kankenki*, *Teihon* 1: 16. Traditionally these drawings have been taken as depicting Nichiren's own visualization experiences; however, a recent study argues that they represent an already existing iconography of Fudō and Aizen, said to have first been visualized by, and transmitted in a direct line from, Dainichi Nyorai 大日如来, the buddha of the esoteric teachings himself (Kikuchi, 'Saikō: Jikyōsha kara Nichiren e', 664–67).

masters Zhiyi 智顛 (538–597; on the *daimandara*, Tendai Daishi 天台大師) and Zhanran 湛然 (711–782; Myōraku Daishi 妙樂大師) and the Japanese Tendai founder Saichō 最澄 (766/767–822; Dengyō Daishi 傳教大師). Of these, Śākyamuni, Zhiyi, and Saichō constitute the linchpins of Nichiren's historical lineage: together with himself, they represent, in his terms, the 'four teachers in three countries' (*sangoku shishi* 三國四師).¹⁹ Also in the lower register are Nichiren's name and written seal (*kao* 花押) and the words: 'This is the great maṇḍala never before revealed in Jambudvīpa during the more than 2,220 years since the Buddha's nirvāṇa' 佛滅度後二千二百二十余年之間一閻浮提之內未曾有大曼荼羅也.²⁰ Nichiren claimed that, in inscribing the *daimandara*, he had given concrete expression to a profound dharma hidden within the depths of the *Lotus Sūtra* text, known in essence to Zhiyi and Saichō but not previously made explicit because the proper time—the beginning of the Final Dharma age—had not yet arrived.²¹

Doctrinal Foundations

A maṇḍala represents an enlightened cosmos—in Buddhist traditions, the realm of a particular buddha or bodhisattva. Nichiren's *daimandara* represents the realm of the Wonderful Dharma (*myōhō* 妙法) of the *Lotus Sūtra* and its buddha, the eternal, ever-present Śākyamuni Buddha, who is awakened to that truth. In inscribing it, Nichiren drew on concepts drawn both from traditional Tiantai/Tendai doctrine and from esoteric teachings.

The *daimandara* is rooted first of all in Nichiren's understanding of the 'three thousand realms in a single thought-moment' (Ch. *yinian sanqian*, Jp. *ichinen sanzen* 一念三千), the interpenetration

¹⁹ *Kenbutsu miraikki*, *Teihon* 1: 743.

²⁰ Nichiren took 949 BCE as the date of the Buddha's death, a date widely accepted in East Asia at the time. Between 1278 and 1280, this inscription on his maṇḍalas shifts to '...more than 2,230 years since the Buddha's nirvāṇa'. See *Shinseki*, 24–25 and especially the table on 24.

²¹ *Toki Nyūdō-dono gobenji*, *Teihon* 1: 516; *Kaimoku shō*, 1: 539; *Kanjin honzon shō*, 1: 709.

of all dharmas taught by the Chinese Tiantai founder Zhiyi.²² In essence, this means that the most minute phenomenon (a single thought-moment) and the entire cosmos (three thousand realms) are mutually encompassing: the one and the many, good and evil, delusion and awakening, subject and object, self and other, and all sentient beings from hell dwellers, hungry ghosts, and animals up through buddhas and bodhisattvas as well as their corresponding insentient environments—indeed, all existents in the universe—are inseparable from the mind at each moment. Zhiyi used this concept to interpret the 'true aspect of the dharmas' 諸法實相, mentioned in chapter two ('Skillful Means', Jp. *Hōben-bon* 方便品) of the *Lotus Sūtra*, which refers to the inconceivable truth that only buddhas have realized.²³ While Zhiyi mentions the *ichinen sanzen* concept only briefly, Nichiren deemed it the 'father and mother of the buddhas' 佛の父佛の母 and made it the conceptual foundation of his thought.²⁴

The soteriological significance of this complex, architectonic concept lies in its claim that the Buddha and living beings 'interpenetrate'; the buddha realm is inherent in all. Nichiren accordingly focused on what might be termed a 'short form' or key component principle of *ichinen sanzen*: the mutual inclusion of the ten realms (*jikkai gogu* 十界互具). The ten realms are a Tendai categorization of living beings. To the six saṃsāric or deluded realms—hell dwellers, hungry ghosts, animals, asuras, humans, and gods—are added those who have achieved four successively higher levels of understanding: persons of the two vehicles (śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas), bodhisattvas, and buddhas. Mutual inclusion means that, being empty of fixed essence, each of the ten pervades and contains all others; this is the nondual ground upon which all can realize buddhahood. In his major work, *Kanjin honzon shō* 觀心本尊抄 [On the Contemplation of the Mind and the Object

²² *Mōbe zhiyuan*, T no. 1911, 46: 5a.54a5–18; Swanson, trans., *Clear Serenity* 2: 815–16. For discussion of this doctrine, see Kanno, *Ichinen sanzen*, and Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 178–81.

²³ *Miaofa lianhua jing*, T no. 262, 9: 1.5c10–11.

²⁴ *Shōmitsu-bō gosho*, *Teihon* 1: 822. For the place of *ichinen sanzen* in

of Worship], in which he puts forth the theoretical basis of the *daimandara*, Nichiren devotes considerable space to this concept as explaining how 'our base hearts are endowed with the buddha realm' 我等が劣心=具スルコト佛法界²⁵. The mutual inclusion of the ten realms underlies a striking difference between the *Lotus* assembly as described in the sūtra's narrative and as depicted on Nichiren's *daimandara*. In the text of the *Lotus Sūtra* itself, when the jeweled stūpa rises into the air, before it is opened, Śākyamuni Buddha purifies the present, Sahā world to make room for the buddhas who are his emanations and their retinues, who assemble from throughout the ten directions. All beings of the lower realms—hell dwellers, hungry ghosts, animals, asuras, ordinary humans, and gods—are removed to other worlds; only beings with some degree of enlightenment—śrāvakas, bodhisattvas, and buddhas—remain at the 'assembly in open space' that forms the sūtra's core.²⁶ On Nichiren's maṇḍala, however, representatives of all ten dharma realms are present.

Crucially, for Nichiren, *ichinen sanzen* has two aspects: abstract principle (*ri* 理) and concrete actuality (*ji* 事), which he correlated respectively with the trace teaching (*shakumon*) and the origin teaching (*honmon*) of the *Lotus Sūtra*. The *shakumon* section represents buddhahood as a potential open to all. 'Of those who hear this dharma', the sūtra declares, 'there is none who shall not attain buddhahood' 若有聞法者無一不成佛。²⁷ In contrast, the origin teaching represents buddhahood as a reality manifested in the person of Śākyamuni, who is now revealed to be the ever-present, primordially awakened buddha, constantly active in this world for the beings' sake. In unenlightened persons, the buddha realm remains dormant and unrealized, and they suffer the pains of the nine deluded realms. In buddhas, the buddha

Nichiren's thought, see Asai, 'Nichiren's View of Humanity', and Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 263–88 *passim*.

²⁵ *Kanjin honzon shō*, *Teihon* 1: 706.

²⁶ *Miaofa lianhua jing*, T no. 262, 9: 4.33a9–14, 20–24; Hurvitz, *Lotus Blossom*, 169–70.

²⁷ *Miaofa lianhua jing*, T no. 262, 9: 1.9b3.

realm is fully expressed, and the other nine realms are thereby uplifted and reoriented in soteriologically meaningful ways. It is this actualization (*ji*) of the buddha realm that is expressed on Nichiren's maṇḍala. In the letter to his follower Nichinyo, mentioned above, he writes:

Being endowed with the ten realms means that that [all] ten realms, not excepting a single one, are contained within a single realm [that of buddhahood]. That why this is called a maṇḍala. Maṇḍala is a word from India. Here [in Japan] it is translated as 'round and perfect, all-encompassing' (*rinnen gusoku* 輪圓具足) and 'cluster of merits' (*kudokuju* 功德聚). 十界具足とは十界一界もかけず一界にある也。依之=曼陀羅とは申す也。曼陀羅と云は天竺の名也。此には輪圓具足とも功德聚とも名くる也。²⁸

For Nichiren, the 'contemplation of *ichinen sanzen*'—the practice for realizing buddhahood—also has two aspects: *ri*, meaning the abstract, introspective contemplation taught by Zhiyi for discerning the three thousand realms in one's own mind, which Nichiren saw as appropriate in prior ages, and *ji*, the concrete ritual forms of the *daimoku* and the *daimandara*, which he held were intended by the Buddha specifically for the present, Final Dharma age.²⁹ The five characters of the sūtra's title, *Myōhō-rence-kyō* 妙法蓮華經, instantiate the Wonderful Dharma, the all-encompassing truth, while *Namu* 南無 indicates devotion, commitment, or the taking of refuge. Chanting *Namu Myōhō-rence-kyō* is thus the concrete practice that connects devotees to that truth, actualizing abstract principle as living reality. Hence its significance as the central inscription of the *daimandara*, illuminating all ten realms. The *daimoku* and the maṇḍala are *ji* or 'actuality' in the senses both of having concrete form and of embodying the primordial buddha's enlightenment, thus enabling the practitioner to elicit buddhahood from within. In the same letter

²⁸ *Nichinyo gozen gohenji*, *Teihon* 2: 1376.

²⁹ *Toki Nyūdō-dono gohenji*, *Teihon* 2: 1522. On 'actuality' or *ji* in Nichiren's thought, see Mochizuki, *Nichiren kyōgaku*, 118–22; Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 264, 266–67, and 'Placing Nichiren in the "Big Picture"', 405–09.

to Nichinyo, Nichiren writes:

Never seek this *gohonzon* outside yourself. It exists only in the fleshly heart within the breasts of us ordinary persons who embrace the *Lotus Sūtra* and chant *Namu Myōhō-renge-kyō*.... This *gohonzon* is encompassed solely within the single word, faith. The sūtra's words, 'gaining entry through faith', refer to this. 此御本尊全く餘所に求ゝる事なかれ。只我等衆生ノ法華經を持テ、南無妙法蓮華經と唱ゝる胸中の肉團にくだんにおはしますなり。.....此御本尊も只信心の二字にをさまれり。以信得入とは是也。³⁰

Nichiren's emphasis on *ji*, or actuality, has multiple sources. It participates in a broader emphasis—encouraged by but by no means limited to esoteric Buddhism—on concrete ritual forms. Esoteric teachings posit two kinds of maṇḍalas: those having form (*usō* 有相), or the painted maṇḍalas used in ritual practice and suited for persons of limited attainments, and formless (*musō* 無相) maṇḍalas inherent in the cosmos itself and accessible only to advanced practitioners. Thus, as Lucia Dolce notes, there is no contradiction between Nichiren's injunction to find the *gohonzon* within oneself and his use of a material object of worship as especially appropriate for persons of the Final Dharma age.³¹ Nichiren may also have drawn on the original enlightenment teachings (*hongaku hōmon* 本覺法門) that flourished in the Tendai tradition of his day and that valorized the realm of concrete, visible reality over abstract principle, regarding the phenomenal world of our ordinary perception as the sole locus of truth.³²

While Nichiren himself explains his *daimandara* in terms of the mutual inclusion of the ten realms, classical Tendai doctrine alone cannot account for its logic. This point has been stressed by Dolce, who more than any previous scholar has demonstrated Nichiren's indebtedness to esoteric Buddhist thought and practice. She notes, for

³⁰ *Nichinyo gozen gohenji, Teihon 2*: 1376. The sūtra quote is at *Miaofa lian-bua jing*, T no. 262, 9: 2.15b18. See also Dolce, 'Esoteric Patterns', 128–31.

³¹ Dolce, *Esoteric Patterns*, 157.

³² Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 27–29, and *passim*.

example, that the idea of expressing the mutual inclusion of the ten dharma realms in maṇḍalic form can be traced to Annen 安然 (841?–), the great systematizer of Tendai esoteric thought. Although Annen himself did not devise a maṇḍala of the ten realms, he identified the concept of their mutual inclusion with esoteric teachings and even interpreted the unity of the Diamond World (Skt. *vajradhātu*, Jp. *kongōkai* 金剛界) and Womb World (*garbhadhātu*, *taizōkai* 胎藏界) maṇḍalas, the two major esoteric maṇḍalas, as expressing the mutual possession of the ten realms. Annen further equated the Tendai concept of the 'the three thousand realms in a single-thought moment' with Mahāvairocana (Jp. Dainichi Nyorai 大日如来), the omnipresent buddha of the esoteric teachings.³³ The identification of Dainichi with the primordially enlightened, ever-present Śākyamuni of the 'Fathoming the Lifespan' chapter (*Nyorai juryōhon* 如来壽量品) of the *honmon* section of the *Lotus Sūtra* was itself integral to Taimitsu thought and had been well established by Nichiren's time.

As Dolce also notes, Nichiren's very definition of 'maṇḍala' given in the letter to Nichinyo ('round and perfect, all-encompassing' and 'cluster of merits') closely resembles that appearing in the esoteric master Yixing's 一行 (683–727) famous commentary on the *Mahāvairocanasūtra*: 'Maṇḍala means circle....Maṇḍala is a name for assembly, as all the true merits and virtues of the Tathāgata are gathered and present in a single place' 漫荼羅是輪圓之義.....夫漫荼羅者名爲聚集。今以如來真實功德集在一處。³⁴ The logic of practice centered on Nichiren's *daimandara*, too, is similar to that of esoteric maṇḍalas, where the devotee is said to realize union with the buddha (*nyūga ganyū* 入我我入) in the act of practice. By embracing the *Lotus Sūtra* exclusively and chanting its *daimoku*, Nichiren taught, one in effect enters the maṇḍala and participates in the enlightened reality that it depicts.

How is the ever-present Śākyamuni related to Nichiren's *daimandara*? In different writings Nichiren identifies the object of

³³ Asai, *Jōko Tendai*, 661–66; Dolce, 'Esoteric Patterns', 122–28, and 'Criticism and Appropriation', 368–69.

³⁴ *Dari jing shu*, T no. 1796, 39: 4.625a21, 626a9–11.

reverence for the Final Dharma age in different ways. In some works, he speaks of the eternal Śākyamuni Buddha as the object of worship: '[The people of] Japan and all of Jambudvīpa [i.e., the world] should as one take Śākyamuni of the origin teaching, the master of teachings, as their object of worship' 日本乃至一閻浮提一同に本門の教主釋尊を本尊とすべし.³⁵ But elsewhere he insists it should be the *daimoku* of the *Lotus Sūtra*:

Question: ...Why do you take the *daimoku* of the *Lotus Sūtra* as the object of worship, and not Śākyamuni Buddha? Answer: ... This is not my interpretation. Lord Śākyamuni and Tiantai [Zhiyi] both established the *Lotus Sūtra* as the object of worship. ...The reason is that the *Lotus Sūtra* is the father and mother of Śākyamuni and the eye of all buddhas. Śākyamuni, Dainichi, and the buddhas of the ten directions were all born of the *Lotus Sūtra*. Therefore I now take as object of worship that which gives birth [to the buddhas]. 問云、.....何釋迦を以て本尊とせずして、法華經の題目を本尊とするや。答、.....私の義にはあらず。釋尊と天台とは法華經を本尊と定給へり。.....其故は法華經は釋尊の父母、諸佛の眼目也。釋迦大日總十方諸佛は法華經より出生し給へり。故に今能生を以て本尊とする也。³⁶

Such passages at first seem contradictory and have given rise to much debate in the history of Nichiren Buddhist scholasticism over whether Nichiren placed primary emphasis on the object of worship as person (*nin honzon* 人本尊) or as dharma (*bō honzon* 法本尊).³⁷ This in turn has fueled a related controversy over whether

³⁵ *Hōon shō*, *Teihon* 2: 1248.

³⁶ *Honzon mondō shō*, *Teihon* 2: 1574–75.

³⁷ Exchanges on this issue from the late 1920s and early 1930s are summarized in Takahashi, 'Shimizu Ryūzan', 265–69; see also *NJ*, s.v. '*Honzon ron*', 377d–79b. Among postwar contributors to the debate, Mochizuki Kankō (1881–1967) argued that Nichiren intended the eternal Śākyamuni to have primacy as the object of worship (*Nichiren kyōgaku no kenkyū*, 141–83); Tokoro Shigemoto (1911–1977) asserted that the dharma as object of worship represents orthodoxy

the primary physical icon of veneration should be an image of the eternal Śākyamuni Buddha or Nichiren's calligraphic maṇḍala; both have been and are employed in Nichiren Buddhist communities, as we shall see. On closer examination, however, the apparent conflict resolves. The first passage cited above, enjoining all people of the world to take Śākyamuni Buddha of the origin teaching as their object of worship, immediately goes on to qualify, '...that is to say, Śākyamuni and Tahō within the jeweled stūpa and all other buddhas together with Jōgyō and the others of the four bodhisattvas as their attendants' 所謂寶塔の内の釋迦多寶・外の諸佛、竝に上行等の四菩薩脇士となるべし.³⁸ This in fact describes what is written on the *daimandara*. It should be noted that, on the maṇḍala, the Śākyamuni inscribed to the side of the *daimoku* represents the historical buddha, while the maṇḍala as a whole represents the ever-abiding, eternal buddha and his realm. Nichiren's 'object of worship of the origin teaching' (*bonmon no honzon* 本門の本尊) has the two aspects of 'buddha' and 'dharma'; *ichinen sanzen* as actuality refers both to the enlightenment of the original buddha and the reality to which that buddha is enlightened.³⁹

Assembly, Text, and Empowerment in Nichiren's Daimandara

We turn now to the question of why Nichiren chose to establish a maṇḍala, and particularly a calligraphic maṇḍala, as the object of worship for *Lotus* devotees in the Final Dharma age. 'This [maṇḍala]', Nichiren wrote, 'is by no means my invention but perfectly depicts

(*Nichiren kyōgaku no shisōshi kenkyū*, 409–62); and Motai Kyōkō (1904–2000) maintained that the object of worship unites the aspects of both 'buddha' and 'dharma' ('*Honzon no genri to keitai*'). More recently, Kuwana has also asserted an underlying unity among the two concepts and the various forms taken by the object of worship ('*Nichiren Shōnin ni okeru honzon*', esp. 65–66).

³⁸ *Hōon shō*, *Teihon* 2: 1248. This writing was in fact accompanied by a maṇḍala that Nichiren conferred on his disciples Jōken-bō 淨顯房 and Gijō-bō 義城房 at Kiyosumidera 清澄寺 (a.k.a. Seichōji) in Awa (*Hōon shō sōmon*, 2: 1250).

³⁹ Dolce, 'Esoteric Patterns', 132–49; Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 272–74.

Lord Śākyamuni in the jeweled stūpa and the other buddhas who were present [at the *Lotus* assembly], just as a print matches the woodblock' 是レ全く日蓮が自作にあらず。多寶塔中'大牟尼世尊・分身の諸佛すりかたぎ(摺形木)たる本尊也。⁴⁰ Historically speaking, Nichiren did indeed devise the *daimandara*; nonetheless, it was informed, not only by the description of the *Lotus* assembly in the sūtra text, but also by broad conceptual, ritual, and iconographic currents of his day. This section of the present chapter addresses the *daimandara* as both image and text. Specifically, it considers the *daimandara* as a representation of the jeweled stūpa and the *Lotus* assembly. Here I first summarize possible precedents and parallel developments in visual representation, which other scholars have noted. I then address contemporaneous interpretive trends on which Nichiren may have drawn but which, to my knowledge, have not previously been explored in connection with his *daimandara*. I also turn to Nichiren's own claims for the unique nature of the written words of the *Lotus Sūtra* and their ability to empower Buddhist images—ideas that may well have informed his creation of the *daimandara*. Finally, I reflect on what insights the *daimandara* may offer in considering texts as sacred objects and the relationship of doctrine to practice.

The Jeweled Stūpa, the Ten Realms, and the Ongoing *Lotus* Assembly

One of the most visually dramatic moment in the *Lotus Sūtra* occurs in chapter eleven, when a vast, jeweled stūpa arises from beneath the ground and hovers in mid-air, and a voice within it declares, 'Well done, well done! O Śākyamuni, World-Honoured One...what you preach is all true reality' 善哉善哉。釋迦牟尼世尊.....如所說者。皆是眞實。⁴¹ The voice belongs to the tathāgata Tahō, who has vowed that, even after entering parinirvāṇa, he will appear within his stūpa wherever the *Lotus Sūtra* may be preached and offer praise in testimony to its truth.

⁴⁰ *Nichinyo gozen gobenji, Teibon 2*: 1375.

⁴¹ *Miaofa lianhua jing, T no. 262, 9*: 4.32b28–c2.

Those gathered ask to see this buddha. After assembling the countless buddhas who are his emanations from throughout the ten directions, Śākyamuni Buddha opens the door to the stūpa and takes a seat beside Tahō. Using his supranormal powers, he lifts the entire assembly into space on a level with the two buddhas. The core chapters of the *Lotus Sūtra* are preached at this 'assembly in open space' (*kokūe* 虚空會). Zhiyi wrote that the marvelous apparition of the jeweled stūpa served to verify what Śākyamuni had already preached about the one buddha vehicle and to set the stage for his revelation of his true identity as the primordially awakened buddha.⁴²

Representations of the two buddhas seated in the jeweled stūpa were produced across East Asia and were variously used as maṇḍalas, objects of worship, and funerary offerings.⁴³ Jeweled stūpa images (*tabōtō* 多寶塔) were produced in Japan from very early on, such as a bronze bas-relief *tabōtō* plaque dating to the seventh century that belongs to the temple Hasedera 長谷寺 in Nara.⁴⁴ By the eleventh century, representations of the *Lotus* assembly, including the jeweled stūpa, appear in what Halle O'Neal has identified as a 'burst of innovation in text and image collaboration' seen, for example, in illustrated sūtra copying, especially of the *Lotus Sūtra*.⁴⁵ Some of the most striking examples contain frontispieces for each scroll illustrating scenes from the sūtra's narrative, with both illustrations and text exquisitely rendered in gold and silver ink on dark indigo paper.⁴⁶ These illustrated

⁴² *Miaofa lianhua jing wenju, T no. 1718, 34*: 8b.113a17–18, 26–27.

⁴³ Kawakatsu, *Tabōtō*; Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra*, 3–66.

⁴⁴ For a detailed discussion, see Ishibashi, 'Hakuhō Sculpture', 461–98.

⁴⁵ O'Neal, *Word Embodied*, 137–39.

⁴⁶ Nichiren evidently owned one of these gold-on-indigo *Lotus Sūtra* transcriptions, which he kept before an image of Śākyamuni Buddha in his hermitage at Mount Minobu (not the same sūtra copy as his annotated *Lotus Sūtra* or *Chū Hokekyō* 注法華經, in which he transcribed relevant passages from commentaries and other Buddhist texts). Seven of an original eight or ten scrolls of this illuminated sūtra survived into the twentieth century and were kept before a statue of Nichiren in the founder's hall of the Nichirenshū temple Ikegami Honmonji 池上本門寺 in Tokyo. However, six of the seven were lost in 1945 when the hall was

sūtra copies presage the 'character stūpas' or *mojitō* 文字塔, such as the famous Kamakura-period (1185–1333) scrolls held by Ryūhonji 立本寺. On these scrolls, the characters of the sūtra text, similarly inscribed in gold ink on an indigo background, are arranged so as to form the shape of a stūpa, surrounded by illustrations of scenes from the sūtra. O'Neal argues that *mojitō*, in their fluid interplay of image and text, invoke a host of associations of Buddhist scripture with the Buddha's body, his relics, and the stūpas that enshrine them.⁴⁷ She sees Nichiren's *daimandara* as a parallel development, but one where

what emerges after brush has left paper is not just the written word, but a portrait of the infinite soteriological powers of the *Lotus Sūtra*, in effect a textual image...an increasingly textualized dynamic between word and picture. Rather than the cohabitation of text and image, this group of scrolls demonstrates a complete usurpation of picture by text in a realm traditionally dominated by its counterpart.⁴⁸

Although the characters of the *daimandara* are not arranged to form the precise shape of a stūpa as they are on *mojitō*, the *kōmyōten* brush-strokes, extending diagonally downward and out, may have been intended to suggest the tiered roofs of a stūpa constructed in the East Asian pagoda style, and the maṇḍala's vertically arranged registers, the pagoda's stories.⁴⁹ Nichiren sometimes refers to the *daimandara* itself as the 'jeweled stūpa', for example, where he writes, 'By believing undividedly in [the *Lotus Sūtra*, in accordance with its words], "honestly discarding skillful means" and "not accept[ing] even a single

destroyed in an air raid during the Pacific War. The statue survived, together with one remaining scroll, which had been placed in its hand (Nakao, 'Myōhonji zō', 8). Nakao speculates that Nichiren may have derived inspiration for the *daimandara* from depictions of Śākyamuni preaching on Eagle Peak that appear in illustrated sūtras of this kind.

⁴⁷ O'Neal, *Word Embodied*, esp. 168–91. O'Neal's is the most detailed study of *mojitō* to date. See also Tanabe, *Paintings*, 102–08, and Dolce, 'Esoteric Patterns', 185–89.

⁴⁸ O'Neal, *Word Embodied*, 153–55.

verse from other sūtras", Nichiren's disciples and lay followers shall enter the jeweled stūpa of this *gobonzon*' 日蓮が弟子檀那等、正直捨方便 不受餘經一偈と無二に信ずる故によて、此御本尊の寶塔の中へ入ルべきなり, or, 'Because [this teaching] is so very rare and wondrous, I have inscribed the jeweled stūpa for you' あまりにありがたく候へば寶塔をかきあらはしまいらせ候ぞ.⁵⁰

While rooted in the common religious culture, jeweled stūpa images also had specific Tendai connections: a gilt bronze image of the stūpa of Tahō is said to have formed the central *honzon* of the ordination platform erected at Enryakuji 延暦寺, the great Tendai center on Mount Hiei, five years after the founder Saichō's death.⁵¹ The jeweled stūpa also figures in the Tendai esoteric tradition: The *honzon* of the *Hokke hō* 法華法 or *Lotus* rite, a Taimitsu ritual conducted to eradicate sin, prolong life, and quell disasters, depicts the two buddhas on a lotus pedestal in its central court, sometimes inside a jeweled stūpa. Dolce has established striking correspondences between Nichiren's *daimandara* and this maṇḍala.⁵²

Nichiren's *daimandara* shows connections, not only with earlier representations such as the maṇḍala of the *Hokke hō*, but also with Tendai iconographic developments of his own time linked to the *Lotus* assembly and the concept of the ten realms. By the late thirteenth century, the practice hall of the cloister Ryōzen'in 靈山院 at the Yokawa 横川 precinct on Mount Hiei is said to have been adorned with a group of large paintings depicting the *Lotus Sūtra* assembly. Centering on a lifesize image of Śākyamuni Buddha, the configuration included, to one side, a jeweled stūpa flanked right and left by paintings of the four leaders of the bodhisattvas of the earth and bodhisattvas of the provisional teachings, and to the other side, by paintings of other bodhisattvas and great śrāvaka disciples. The two

⁴⁹ Dolce, 'Esoteric Patterns', 186.

⁵⁰ *Nichinyō gozen gobenji*, *Teihon* 2: 1376; *Abutsu-bō gosho*, 2: 1145. The *Lotus Sūtra* phrases are at *Miaofa lianhua jing*, *T* no. 262, 9: 1.10a19 and 2.16a28–29.

⁵¹ *Ichijōkai kengan ki*, *Dengyō Daishi zenshū* (hereafter *DDZ*; see Secondary Sources, Hieizan Senshūin) 1: 429; Asai, *Jōko Nihon Tendai*, 108.

⁵² Dolce, 'Esoteric Patterns', 235–39.

adjoining walls were hung with silk paintings of further bodhisattvas, deities, King Ajātasatru of the human world, the dragon kings and other nonhuman beings, as well as other figures present at the *Lotus Sūtra*'s preaching.⁵³ As on Nichiren's *daimandara*, these figures seem to represent the ten dharma realms, and the overall effect would have been to make those entering the hall feel as though they were actually present in the *Lotus* assembly.

Annen's interpretation of the two major esoteric maṇḍalas in terms of the mutual possession of the ten dharma realms has already been mentioned. Another textual reference, this one recommending concrete visual representation of the ten realms, occurs in the medieval Tendai work *Shuzenji-ketsu* 修禪寺決 [Doctrinal Decisions from (the Temple) Xiuchan si], roughly contemporaneous with Nichiren. *Shuzenji-ketsu* purports to be a record of secret teachings conferred upon Saichō during his journey to China by the Tiantai master Daosui 道邃 (d.u.). The relevant passage reads:

The transmission concerning the master [Daosui]'s profound and secret practice states: 'You should make pictures of images representing the ten realms [of beings] and enshrine them in ten places. Facing each image, you should, one hundred times, bow [with your body], chant *Namu Myōhō-renge-kyō* with your mouth, and contemplate [the image] with your mind. When you face the image of hell, contemplate that its fierce flames are themselves precisely emptiness, precisely conventional existence, and precisely the middle, and so on for all the images. When you face the image of the Buddha, contemplate its essence being precisely the threefold truth'. 和尚の深秘じんびの行法の傳に云く、「十界じゅうがいの形像けいざうを函繪して十処じゅうしよにこれを安んじ、一像に向ふ毎におのおのおの一百反、禮拜を行ずべし。口には南無妙法蓮華經を唱ふべし。心に念ずべし。もし地獄

⁵³ Yokawa Ryozen'in zōryū anmon 横川靈山院造立案文 (1296), reproduced in Kageyama, *Hieizanji*, 124–27; see also Kageyama's discussion on 128–29. Since this document includes a request for necessary repairs, the iconographic configuration itself would be older than this. The paintings are also mentioned in *Keiran shūyō shū*, T no. 2410, 76: 92.800b7–11.

の像に向はば、彼の猛火の當體即空・即假・即中なりと。乃至、佛の像に向ふの時も、彼の體は即ち三諦なりと觀ずべし」。⁵⁴

It is not clear whether this practice was actually conducted as described here, and Nichiren himself did not promote the practice of the Tendai threefold contemplation. Nor do the images of the ten realms indicated in this passage suggest a maṇḍalic assembly, as they are to be enshrined 'in ten places'. Nonetheless, the use of iconographic representations of the ten realms as a support for meditation as described here resonates with the *daimandara* as a visual representation of the mutual inclusion of the ten realms. Since neither the Ryōzen'in configuration nor the *Shuzenji-ketsu* has been precisely dated, it is impossible to say whether they came before or after Nichiren's *daimandara* or whether there is any possibility of direct influence one way or another. It is more useful to see Nichiren's maṇḍala and these Tendai configurations as stemming from shared conceptions of *Lotus*-related thought and imagery of Japan's early medieval period.

Reconceiving the *Lotus* Assembly

While broadly connected to a number of earlier and contemporaneous iconic forms representing the jeweled stūpa, Nichiren's *daimandara* also participates in a very specific shift, occurring within medieval Tendai, in conceptualizing the *Lotus* assembly. Let us look briefly at the idea of the '*Lotus* assembly' in Tendai thought and its reinterpretation in Nichiren's time.

Within the broader Tiantai/Tendai tradition, the Eagle Peak assembly where the *Lotus Sūtra* was said to have been preached had long been imagined as an *illo tempore*, a point of mythic origins. This

⁵⁴ Tada et al., *Tendai hongaku ron*, 71–72. As seen in this passage, the *Shuzenji-ketsu* also recommends the practice of chanting the *daimoku* of the *Lotus Sūtra*, and its dating and possible relation to Nichiren have been much disputed. Although not widespread, the *daimoku* was chanted before Nichiren (Dolce, 'Esoteric Patterns', 294–314, and 'Criticism and Appropriation', 375–76; Stone, 'Chanting the August Title').

idea derives from the biography of Zhiyi by his disciple Guanding 灌頂 (561–632), which tells how the patriarch Huisi 慧思 (515–577) welcomed Zhiyi as a disciple, saying, ‘In the past, we heard the *Lotus* together on sacred [Eagle] Peak; impelled by this karmic connection, you have now come again!’ 昔日靈山同聽法華。宿緣所追今復來矣。⁵⁵ As Taira Ryōshō has noted, the tradition that the patriarchs Huisi and Zhiyi had together heard the Buddha’s original preaching of the *Lotus Sūtra* on Eagle Peak was widespread in China, even outside the Tiantai school, and appears to have expressed admiration for their shared mastery of the ‘*Lotus samādhi*’, the insight into the profound meaning of the *Lotus Sūtra* that Zhiyi would theorize as the threefold truth.⁵⁶ In Japan, the notion of a direct transmission to Zhiyi on Eagle Peak was appropriated early on for purposes of legitimation. Saichō, who established Tendai Buddhism in Japan, constructed for his school a lineage identifying Huisi and Zhiyi in the line of transmission as ‘auditors on sacred [Eagle] Peak in India’.⁵⁷ In this lineage, Śākyamuni

⁵⁵ *Sui Tiantai Zhibzhe Dashu biezhuān*, T no. 2050, 50: 191c22. This same wording occurs in Zhiyi’s biography in *Xu Gaozeng zhuān*, T no. 2060, 50: 17.564b15–16.

⁵⁶ Taira, ‘Ryōzen dōchō’.

⁵⁷ *Naishō buppō sōjō kechimiyaku fu*, DDZ 1: 225; on Saichō’s lineage construction, see Groner, *Saichō*, 257–62. According to Saichō, the lineage of the bodhisattva precepts originated with Vairocana, the central Buddha of the *Fanwang jing* 梵網經 (T no. 1484), the locus classicus for those precepts, and was transmitted from Vairocana to Śākyamuni (*Kechimiyaku fu*, DDZ 1: 230); he also placed Huisi and Zhiyi within that lineage as ‘auditors on sacred [Eagle] Peak’ (232). Saichō was probably the first to incorporate the idea of a transmission originating with Śākyamuni on Eagle Peak into the lineages of both the Tiantai/Tendai school and the bodhisattva precepts (Taira, ‘Ryōzen dōchū’, 10; Shioiri, ‘Dengyō Daishi no hongaku shisō’, 22, 24; Groner, *Saichō*, 259). The story of Huisi and Zhiyi’s prior connection at the Eagle Peak assembly evidently impressed Saichō, as he mentions it in several of his writings (*Shugo kokkai shō*, DDZ 2: 183, 236; *Hokke shūku*, DDZ 3: 279; *Ebyō Tendai gi shū*, DDZ 3: 364; and *Tendai Hokkeshū fuhō engi*, DDZ 5: 33). It also appears in works by Saichō’s immediate disciples, such as Kōjō’s 光定 (779–858) *Denjutsu isshin*

Buddha, who directly transmits the teachings to Huisi and Zhiyi, is not the historical Śākyamuni but Śākyamuni who is ‘Vairocana permeating everywhere’ 毘盧遮那遍一切處 and who would come to be identified in Taimitsu thought with the cosmic buddha Dainichi.⁵⁸

Japan’s medieval period saw a proliferation of interrelated Tendai lineages, including both lineages of esoteric teachings and ritual and also ‘exoteric’ lineages transmitting a variety of at least nominally secret interpretations of *Lotus*-based doctrine, such as the Eshin 惠心 and Danna 檀那 schools and their various sub-lineages. Other lineages passed on secret traditions concerning the bodhisattva precepts; *shōmyō* 声明 chanting; the cult of Mount Hiei’s tutelary Sannō 山王 deity; the shrines and temples of Mount Hiei; and other branches of specialized knowledge.⁵⁹ All these lineages traced themselves in historical time back through Saichō and his Chinese masters to Zhiyi, and, via the person of Zhiyi, leapt back to mythic time, when Zhiyi and his teacher Huisi were said to have received the direct transmission on Eagle Peak.⁶⁰ This grounding of lineage in mythic rather than

kaimon (DDZ 1: 594, 626–27). A biography of Saichō, written by his disciple Ninchū 仁忠 in 824, cites Saichō as saying that Huisi and Zhiyi received the transmission of the threefold bodhisattva precepts when the *Lotus Sūtra* was preached on Eagle Peak (*Eizan Daishi den*, DDZ [furoku 附錄] 5: 33).

⁵⁸ DDZ 1: 215. Śākyamuni is identified with ‘Vairocana appearing everywhere’ in the capping sūtra to the *Lotus Sūtra*, the *Guan Puxian pusa xingfa jing* (T no. 277, 9: 392c15–16). Saichō used this identification to unify the various transmission lineages he received in China. Teachers of esoteric Buddhism on the continent and in Japan also promoted it (Groner, *Saichō*, 260–63; Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 25–26). As noted above, identification of the constantly abiding Śākyamuni of the origin teaching with Dainichi played a key role in defining the *Lotus Sūtra* as an esoteric scripture.

⁵⁹ On medieval Tendai lineages, see Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 102–30, and the sources cited there.

⁶⁰ An influential work in this regard is the *Tendai Hokkeshū denbō ge* 天台法華宗傳法偈, a latter Heian-period writing retrospectively attributed to Saichō, which says that Zhiyi, while practicing the *Lotus samādhi* under Huisi’s instruction on Mount Dasu 大蘇山, perceived himself, together with Huisi, at the assembly on

historical time parallels the Shingon origin myth of the bodhisattva Vajrasattva (Ch. Jingangsattuo, Jp. Kongōsatta 金剛薩埵), who, having been directly initiated into the esoteric teachings by Mahāvairocana, hid himself in an iron stūpa in southern India (*nantian tieta*, *nanten tettō* 南天鐵塔); there, it is said, he was discovered by Nāgārjuna, who received from him the transmission of the esoteric lineage.⁶¹ Some medieval Tendai works explicitly equate the Eagle Peak and Iron Stūpa transmissions.⁶² Additional historical figures were identified as former auditors on Eagle Peak, thus expanding this origin myth's legitimizing scope. One transmission contained in *Keiran shūyō shū* 溪嵐拾葉集, an early fourteenth-century encyclopedic Tendai compilation, asserts for example that Saichō and his patron Emperor Kanmu 桓武天皇 (r. 781–806) had been present in the *Lotus* assembly, and that the two had vowed at that time to be born together and benefit the land of Japan.⁶³ Nichiren, too, spoke of his teaching as the ultimate great secret dharma transmitted by Śākyamuni Buddha on Eagle Peak.⁶⁴

With the flourishing in the latter Heian (794–1185) and Kamakura periods of both Tendai esotericism and original enlightenment doctrine, enlightenment or liberation came increasingly to be understood, not as a future goal to be achieved as the end result of a linear process of spiritual cultivation, but rather as accessible in the very moment of faith or ritual practice. This trend was accompanied by increasingly 'spatial' or maṇḍalicized understandings of the *Lotus Sūtra*.⁶⁵ Accordingly, the

Eagle Peak, listening to the Buddha preach the *Lotus Sūtra* (DDZ 5: 9–10). For the dating and significance of this work, see Ōkubo, 'Tendai Hokkeshū denbō ge'.

⁶¹ Orzech, 'Legend of the Iron Stūpa', and 'Yamano, 'Tettō sōjō'.

⁶² For example, the *Mongu ryaku taikō shikenmon* 文句略大綱私見聞 of Sonshun 尊舜 (1451–1514), *Dai Nihon bukkyō zensho* (hereafter DNBZ; see Secondary Sources, Bussho Kankōkai) 18: 117a.

⁶³ T no. 2410, 76: 857a8–10, 860b4–6.

⁶⁴ 'Although I live in such a forlorn retreat [Mount Minobu], in the fleshly heart within my breast I hold the secret dharma of the sole great matter transmitted from Śākyamuni, the lord of teachings, on sacred Eagle Peak' かゝるいと心細き幽窟 なれども、教主釋尊の一大事の秘法を靈鷲山にして相傳し、日蓮が肉團の胸中に秘して隠し持てり (*Nanjō Hyōe Shichirō-dono gobenji*, *Teibon* 2: 1884).

Lotus assembly on Eagle Peak came to be seen, not solely as an event in the mythic past legitimizing Tendai forebears, but also as a constantly abiding maṇḍalic reality that could potentially be accessed by initiates. Medieval Tendai texts recording oral transmissions (*kuden* 口傳) express this concept by the recurring phrase: 'The assembly on sacred [Eagle] Peak is solemnly present and has not yet dispersed' (*ryōzen ichie gennen misan* 靈山一會儼然未散).⁶⁶

Keiran shūyō shū includes several instances where specific transmissions are said to have originated in a vision of the ever-present *Lotus* assembly experienced by Saichō or some other eminent Tendai forebear. For example, one such transmission, concerning initiation into the highest yogic practice, says that when Saichō first climbed Mount Hiei, the earth shook and split open, and the jeweled stūpa emerged and rose into open space. Within, the two buddhas

⁶⁵ Stone, 'Placing Nichiren in the "Big Picture"', 402–05. This interpretation has a basis in the *Lotus Sūtra* itself, which says that Śākyamuni Buddha dwells constantly on Eagle Peak and that he and his assembly will appear there to those who earnestly seek him (*Miaofa lianhua jing*, T no. 262, 9: 5.43b23–24, 43c5; Hurvitz, *Lotus Blossom*, 223–24).

⁶⁶ The phrase *ryōzen ichie gennen misan* first occurs in a Chinese text recording the teachings of the Chan master Dahui 大慧 (1089–1163), where it is used to praise the enlightenment of Zhiyi (*Dahui Pujue Chanshi yulu*, T no. 1998A, 47: 23.907a20). Its first datable occurrence in a Japanese text is the *Kōzen gokoku ron* of Eisai 榮西 (a.k.a. Yōsai, 1141–1215), where it also refers to Zhiyi's awakening (T no. 2543, 80: 2.9a25–26). A thorough investigation of its early usage, though beyond the scope of this chapter, would likely yield insights into the important but understudied area of interactions between Tendai and Zen traditions. For example, the Tendai *kuden* collection *Nijō shō kenmon* 二帖抄見聞 says that Dahui, fifth in line of succession from Bodhidharma, had originally been a Tiantai monk and established a temple on Mount Jinfeng 金峯山 to the northwest of Mount Tiantai. There he erected a stone stele inscribed with praises of Zhiyi, which included this statement (Tendaishū Shūten Kankōkai, *Tendaishū zensho* 9: 206a). See also Hiroumi, 'Kuden hōmon to Daie Zenji'. For visionary experiences of the Eagle Peak assembly in Chinese sources from the Song period and later, see Sakamoto, 'Ryōzen'e no tsuitaiken'.

Śākyamuni and Tahō sat side by side, and they directly conferred upon Saichō the secrets of yogic initiation; this transmission exemplifies the statement that 'the assembly on sacred Eagle Peak is solemnly present and has not yet dispersed'.⁶⁷

Rituals of initiation into medieval Tendai lineages were themselves frequently staged as enactments of the timeless *Lotus* assembly, and images of the two buddhas seated side by side in the jeweled stūpa were often used as the *bonzon* or central icon of such rituals. A section of *Keiran shūyō shū* dealing with initiation ritual (*kanjō* 灌頂) reads:

Question: Do the initiations of exoteric lineages have a specific ritual form? Answer: The jeweled stūpa emerges and appears in open space; the two buddhas sit side by side; the assembly on sacred Eagle Peak is still solemnly present and has not yet dispersed. 尋云。顯宗灌頂事相有之耶。示云。寶塔涌現於空中。二佛並坐。靈山一會儼然未散。⁶⁸

A specific example may be found in the third, final, and most secret part of the *kai kanjō* 戒灌頂 or consecrated ordination conducted by the Kurodani precept lineage (*kaike* 戒家) based in Mount Hiei's Western Pagoda precinct. Kōen 興圓 (1263–1317), who wrote the first extant description of the rite, says that unlike the ordinary ceremony of conferring precepts, this initiation is conducted 'according to the procedures of the dharma transmission on sacred Eagle Peak' 如靈山付法之習之。Here master and disciple share the

⁶⁷ T no. 2410, 76: 752a10–13. In similar examples, specific deities are linked to visions of the still-in-progress *Lotus* assembly. The deity Daikokuten 大黒天 (Mahākāla), interpreted as a manifestation of Śākyamuni, is said to have appeared to Saichō in such a vision (634b16–19), while the vinaya master Myōdatsu 明達律師 (877–955) is said to have erected a jeweled stūpa on the precincts of the Hie shrines at the foot of Mount Hiei, on the very spot where a vision of the two buddhas in the jeweled stūpa appeared before him and the three major deities of the Sannō shrines conferred on him the essence of the threefold contemplation (517b9–15).

⁶⁸ T no. 2410, 76: 754c15–17.

same seat and are of equal status, like the two buddhas Śākyamuni and Tahō in the jeweled stūpa. Kōen explains that this transmission does not have the meaning of a linear temporal sequence, as from Śākyamuni to Mahākāśyapa [Ch. Mohejiaye, Jp. Maka Kashō 摩訶迦葉] and so on; in the context of the *kai kanjō* initiation, in accordance with the teaching that 'the assembly on sacred [Eagle] Peak is still solemnly present and has not yet dispersed', master and disciple are manifested as the two buddhas in the jeweled stūpa, and the mythic time when the *Lotus Sūtra* was expounded is recovered in the present. He explains, 'The transmission on Eagle Peak does not necessarily indicate the past. It occurs today in the inner and outer practice halls where one receives the precepts' 靈山付法血脈云必非指昔。今日受戒内外之道場是也。⁶⁹ Similar understandings of the 'dharma transmission on sacred Eagle Peak' informed the initiation rituals of other medieval Tendai lineages.⁷⁰ They may also be linked to developments in medieval Tendai iconography, such as the configuration of images at Ryōzen'in.

It is not certain whether Nichiren himself used the phrase *ryōzen ichie gennen misan*.⁷¹ Nonetheless, he seems to have understood the *daimandara* in similar terms, as embodying the ever-present

⁶⁹ *Enkai jūroku chō* 圓戒十六帖, Tendai Shūten Hensanjo, *Zoku Tendaishū zensho*, *Enkai* 圓戒 1: 90. On Kōen and the *kai kanjō* initiation, see Groner, *Precepts, Ordinations, and Practice*, 180–206.

⁷⁰ See for example the *hōtō gyōhōshiki* 寶塔行方式 initiation ritual of the Eshin school, described in *Eshin-ryū sanjū sōden kuketsu* 惠心流三重相傳口決 (Uesugi, *Nihon Tendai shi* 2: 818–21).

⁷¹ This phrase appears in Nichiren's collected works, in the *Hokkeshū naisshō buppō kechimiyaku*, which uses it to characterize Zhiyi's celebrated enlightenment experience on Mount Dasu as a direct transmission from Śākyamuni Buddha; this writing further suggests that Nichiren himself received dharma transmission directly from Śākyamuni and Jōgyō (*Teishon* 1: 697–698). The authenticity of this work has been questioned (*Nichiren Shōnin ibun jiten* [hereafter *NSIJ*]; see Secondary Sources, *Risshō Daigaku*, 1036d–1037a); however, Nichiren did claim elsewhere that his teaching had been transmitted from Śākyamuni at the Eagle Peak assembly (see note 64 above).

enlightened cosmos or maṇḍalic reality represented by the *Lotus Sūtra* assembly above sacred Eagle Peak, which itself expresses the enlightenment of the primordial Śākyamuni Buddha as revealed in the *honmon* section of the *Lotus Sūtra*. In his *Kanjin honzon shō*, in discussing that buddha's realm, he states,

Now the Sahā world of original time is the constantly abiding pure land, liberated from the three disasters and beyond the [cycle of the] four kalpas. Its buddha has not already entered nirvāṇa in the past, nor is he yet to be born in the future. And his disciples are of the same essence. This [reality]...is the three realms and three thousand realms of one's own mind. 今本時娑婆世界離三災出四劫常住淨土。佛既過去不滅未來不生。所化以同體。此即己心三千具足三種世間也。⁷²

Here Nichiren makes clear that the 'original time' of Śākyamuni's enlightenment belongs, not merely to the mythic past, but to the present moment. By chanting the *daimoku* with single-minded faith, he taught, devotees can 'enter the jeweled stūpa of this *gohonzon*' and participate in the original buddha's enlightenment.

While Nichiren's *daimandara* is generally recognized as representing the jeweled stūpa and the assembly in open space above Eagle Peak where the *Lotus Sūtra* was preached, it has not been studied in connection with broader shifts in understanding, outlined above, about what those images represented. As image, the *daimandara* is closely tied to a contemporary move toward visual representations and ritual reenactments of the *Lotus* assembly, understood as the timeless, maṇḍalic realm of the ever-present, primordially awakened buddha. The *daimandara* physically manifests that reality in the present moment, 'just as a print matches the woodblock'. According to medieval Tendai transmission documents, entry into the original buddha's realm is mediated by master-disciple initiation; in Nichiren's teaching, it is accessed solely through faith and chanting the *daimoku*.

The *Daimandara* and the Holographic *Lotus Sūtra*

Nichiren was by no means the first person to inscribe a maṇḍala wholly in logographs. Among the various types of maṇḍalas employed in the Japanese esoteric tradition are 'dharma maṇḍalas', in which buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other figures are represented by their Siddham 'seed syllables'.⁷³ Nor was he unique in combining Chinese logographs with Siddham glyphs. Specific connections between Nichiren's *daimandara* and esoteric iconography remain to be further explored.

Nichiren's use of a calligraphic maṇḍala has sometimes been explained on pragmatic grounds. Requiring for their production only paper, a brush, and ink, these calligraphic *honzon* could be made available to followers lacking the means to commission a painter or sculptor or to pay for expensive materials; thus they represent a popularization of Buddhist imagery previously available only to a few.⁷⁴ Several scholars have noted a similarity in this regard between Nichiren's *daimandara* and other simplified calligraphic *honzon* that came into use during the Kamakura period. Myōe 明恵 (1173–1232), for example, devised the so-called *sanji sanbōrai mandara* 三時三寶禮曼荼羅, consisting of phrases from the *Flower Ornament Sūtra* (Skt. *Avatamsakasūtra*, Ch. *Huayan jing*, Jp. *Kegon-kyō* 華嚴經) for thrice-daily worship of the three jewels. Calligraphic 'icons of the name' or *myōgō honzon* 名号本尊, inscribed with the name of the Buddha Amida 阿彌陀 (Skt. Amitābha), were also used by the followers of Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1262) and Ippen 一遍 (1239–1289).⁷⁵ Whether

⁷³ The dharma maṇḍala is one of the 'four kinds of maṇḍala' adumbrated by Amoghavajra (Ch. Bukong 不空, 705–774) (*Jingangding jing yujia shiba-hui zbigui*, T no. 869, 18.287a12). Examples from Japan's medieval period of maṇḍalas written solely in Siddham syllables are mentioned in Manabe, 'Mandara ni okeru myōji hyōgen', 12.

⁷⁴ Takagi, *Nichiren*, 167–71.

⁷⁵ Noted for example by Takagi, *Nichiren*, 169–70, and Dolce, 'Esoteric Patterns', 190–98. For Myōe's calligraphic *honzon*, see his *Sanji sanbōrai shaku*, *DNBZ* 13: 131a–144b, as well as Tanabe, *Myōe the Dreamkeeper*, 112–14. On Shinran's *myōgō* scrolls, see his *Songō shinzo meimon* 尊號眞像銘文 (Kaneko,

⁷² *Teihon* 1: 712.

Nichiren was aware of these other, new forms of calligraphic *honzon* is not known. Beyond practical considerations, however, I suggest that the use of characters allowed Nichiren to create a visually explicit link between his *daimandara* and the words of the *Lotus Sūtra*. Nichiren made strong claims for the unique soteriological power of the *Lotus Sūtra*'s written characters, a topic that has already drawn scholarly attention. To my knowledge, however, the possibility of a connection between those claims and his inscription of the *daimandara* in logographs has not.

Buddhist scriptures have long been revered, not purely for their discursive content, but also as the Buddha's 'dharma relics', possessing numinous powers in themselves.⁷⁶ A subset of broader discourses about the soteriological potency of Buddhist texts centers specifically on the extraordinary powers of the *Lotus Sūtra* and has a long history. A paradigmatic example of the 'cult of the book', the *Lotus Sūtra* itself equates its physical text with the Buddha's person; any stūpa that enshrines the sūtra text thereby contains a whole-body buddha relic.⁷⁷ Ritualized devotion to the *Lotus Sūtra* as a physical object further developed in the Sinitic sphere, including Japan. Sometimes, the scrolls of the *Lotus* were themselves enshrined and worshipped, a practice attested in both exoteric and esoteric Tendai rituals and legitimized by the sūtra itself.⁷⁸ Nichiren, too, explicitly recommends enshrining the *Lotus* scrolls as a *honzon* in an early (1260) writing:

Shinran chosaku, 481–509, translated in Ueda, *Notes on the Inscription*).

⁷⁶ For medieval Japan, on scriptures as relics, see O'Neal, *Word Embodied*, 168–92, and, on the powers of scripture, Eubanks, *Miracles of Book and Body*.

⁷⁷ *Miaofa lianhua jing*, T no. 262, 9: 4.31b26–29. 'Wherever it may be preached, read, recited, copied, or wherever its rolls of scripture may be lodged, in all those places one is to erect a stūpa of the seven jewels....There is no need further to install *śarīra* in it. Why? Within it is already the entire body of the Tathāgata' 在在處處。若說若讀若誦若書。若經卷所住處。皆應起七寶塔.....不須復安舍利。所以者何。此中已有如來全身 (Hurvitz, *Fine Dharma*, modified, 163). On the 'cult of the book', see Schopen, 'The Phrase "sa pṛthivīpradeśās caityabhūto bhavet"'.

⁷⁸ In China, the scrolls of the *Lotus Sūtra* form the object of worship employed

Question: What should be the object of worship, ritual behaviour, and habitual mode of practice for those who believe in the *Lotus Sūtra*? Answer: First, as to the object of worship: One should use the eight scrolls of the *Lotus Sūtra*, or one scroll, or a single chapter, or one may write out the *daimoku* as the object of worship. This is indicated in the chapters on the 'Dharma Preacher' and 'Transcendent Powers'. Those able to do so may have paintings or statues made of the tathāgata Śākyamuni and the buddha Tahō and place them to the left and right of the *Lotus Sūtra*. And if one is further able, one may also have statues or paintings made of the various buddhas and bodhisattvas such as Fugen [Samantabhadra]. 問云、法華經を信ぜん人は本尊竝に行儀竝に常の所行は何にてか候べき。答云、第一に本尊は法華經八卷・一卷・一品・或は題目を書いて本尊と可し定む。法師品竝に神力品に見えたり。又たへたらん人は釋迦如來・多寶佛を書いても造ても法華經の左右に可し奉立之。又たへたらんは十方の諸佛・普賢菩薩等をもつくりかきたてまつるべし。⁷⁹

This passage seems to suggest the process by which Nichiren's concept began to shift from the enshrined sūtra toward a maṇḍalic representation. He would not begin to inscribe his *daimandara* for more than a decade, but the embryonic concept is visible here: the *daimoku* as the central deity, flanked by the two buddhas who sit together in the jeweled stūpa, and attended by other buddhas and bodhisattvas as well. Yet in his personal practice the maṇḍala did not displace the sūtra: Nichiren himself enshrined the sūtra scrolls before his personal image of Śākyamuni Buddha at his retreat at Mount Minobu 身延山 during his later years.⁸⁰

in the *Fabua sanmei* 法華三昧 or *Lotus samādhi* set forth in Zhiyi's *Fabua sanmei chanyi* 法華三昧懺儀, the third of four kinds of samādhi (Stevenson, 'Four Kinds of Samādhi', 68). In Japan, they occasionally substituted for the Hokke maṇḍala used in the *Hokke hō* 法華法 or *Lotus rite of esoteric Tendai* (Dolce, 'Criticism and Appropriation', 371, and 'Esoteric Patterns', 232–33).

⁷⁹ *Shō Hokke daimoku shō*, *Teihon* 1: 202.

⁸⁰ Mochizuki, *Nichiren kyōgaku*, 162–63; Kuwana, 'Nichiren Shōnin ni okeru

Not only has the *Lotus Sūtra* in its entirety been revered as the Buddha's body, but its individual characters were also revered as living buddhas. This too is an old tradition attested in the works of the Chinese Tiantai patriarchs Zhiyi and Zhanran and among Nichiren's contemporaries, both in the Tendai school and among *Lotus Sūtra* devotees more broadly.⁸¹ It finds a visual analogue in those *Lotus Sūtra* transcriptions in which each character of the sūtra is drawn within a small stūpa, beside a buddha, or atop a lotus pedestal.⁸² Nichiren also shared this conception. He writes:

The words of the *Lotus Sūtra* are all living buddhas. Because we see with the fleshly eye, we perceive them as written characters....Persons of the two vehicles see them as empty; bodhisattvas see them as various forms and colors; and those in whom the buddha seeds have

honzon', 48. In a letter written in 1275 Nichiren also states, retrospectively, that he had enshrined in his dwelling in Kamakura 'Śākyamuni Buddha as honzon, together with all sūtras' 釋尊を本尊とし一切經を安置したり (*Shinkokuō gosho*, *Teihon* 1: 892); based on this passage, Kuwana suggests that Nichiren had enshrined the *Lotus Sūtra* together with the buddha image in this earlier period of his life as well (48; for more on Nichiren's Śākyamuni image, see note 118 below). Kuwana adds that it is not clear whether or not Nichiren enshrined the *daimandara* at Minobu (60).

⁸¹ Kitagawa, *Nichiren kyōgaku*, 58–62, and 'Words of the *Lotus Sūtra*', 30–34; see also Stone, "Not Mere Written Words".

⁸² See O'Neal, *Word Embodied*, 139–43; Nara Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan, *Hokekyō no bijutsu*, 124–30, plates no. 63–69; Kurata and Tamura, *Hokekyō no bijutsu*, nos. 85–87 (nos. 66–68 in Crawford's translation, *Art of the Lotus Sutra*); and plate 1 in Tanabe, *Paintings of the Lotus*. In addition, a transcription of the *Lotus Sūtra* on tiles dating to the Kamakura period, in which each character is drawn inside a seated buddha, has been unearthed from the temple Gakuonji 楽音寺 in the Asago district of Hyōgo Prefecture, suggesting that this idea was fairly widespread (Nara Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan, *Hokekyō no bijutsu*, 200, no. 27). The equation of each character with a living buddha may have informed the practice, observed by some individuals in sūtra copying, of bowing once or even three times after writing each character (Tanabe, *Paintings*, 44, 46).

matured recognize them as buddhas. Thus the sūtra itself states, 'One who can hold this sūtra thereby holds the Buddha's body'. Tiantai [Zhiyi] says, 'I bow my head before the *Sūtra of the Lotus Blossom of the Wonderful Dharma*,/its single case containing eight scrolls, forty-seven chapters, and 69,384 characters./Its every word is a true buddha,/a true buddha preaching the dharma to benefit living beings'. 今の法華經の文字は皆生身の佛なり。我等は肉眼なれば文字と見る也。.....二乗は虚空と見、菩薩は種種の色と見、佛種純熟せる人は佛と見奉る。されば經文云く、若有能持 則持佛身等云云。天台云く 稽首妙法蓮華經 一帙八軸四七品 六萬九千三八四一一一文是真佛 眞佛說法利益衆生等と書れて候。⁸³

Nichiren carries this idea still further to assert that the words of the *Lotus Sūtra* uniquely possess what might be called a holographic quality, such that every word of it contains the whole. 'The words of this [*Lotus*] sūtra are not like those of other sūtras', he writes. 'If one recites even a single word of it, that single word contains the words of the eighty-thousand precious treasures [of the Buddhist teachings] and encompasses the merits of all buddhas' 法華文字者此經不似諸經文字雖誦一字含八萬寶藏文字納一切諸佛の功德也.⁸⁴ The Tiantai tradition had long understood the *Lotus Sūtra* as

⁸³ *Hōren shō*, *Teihon* 1: 950. The *Lotus Sūtra* quote is at *T* no. 262, 9: 4.34b12. The verse quote is taken from the *Ryaku Hokekyō* 略法華經, a work attributed to Zhiyi but probably a Japanese apocryphon. See Kitagawa, *Nichiren kyōgaku*, 65–66, and 'Words of the *Lotus Sūtra*', 37–38. The version of Kumārajīva's Chinese translation of the *Lotus Sūtra* used by both Zhiyi and Nichiren contains twenty-eight, not forty-seven, chapters. This is perhaps an instance of a tendency, noted by Hanano Jūdō, for medieval Tendai transmission texts occasionally to incorporate errors so blatant that they may in fact have been deliberate and intended to convey some tacit significance (*Tendai hongaku shisō*, 400). The *Ryaku Hokekyō* also appears to be the *locus classicus* for the tradition, often mentioned in medieval Japanese writings, that the *Lotus Sūtra* contains 69,384 characters. However, the version of Kumārajīva's *Miaofa lianhua jing* now in use contains more than that (Kabutogi, *Hokke hangyō*, 322–23).

⁸⁴ *Shugo kokka ron*, *Teihon* 1: 111. See also *Hokke daimoku shō*, 1: 396 ('A single

the 'perfect teaching' (*engyō* 圓教), meaning that it encompasses all truth within itself. Zhiyi's commentary on the *sūtra*, for example, notes that, where the various other *sūtras* are 'accommodated to others' minds' and take differing approaches in instructing living beings according to their capacities, the *Lotus Sūtra* is unique in that it draws together these various approaches to the dharma in light of the Buddha's true intent.⁸⁵ This all-encompassing nature of the *Lotus Sūtra* is exemplified by its title, which, long before Nichiren, had been said to contain the meaning of the entire *sūtra* within itself.⁸⁶ Nichiren extended such claims for the all-encompassing nature of the title into the dimension of practice. In a famous passage of the *Kanjin honzon shō*, he writes,

Lord Śākyamuni's causal practices and their resulting merits are inherent in the five characters *myō hō ren ge kyō*. When we embrace these five characters, he will spontaneously transfer to us the merits of his causes and effects. 釋尊'因行果徳'二法'妙法蓮華經'五字'具足。我等受持此五字自然與彼因果'功德'。⁸⁷

That is, the *daimoku* or title of the *Lotus Sūtra* contains all the causal practices carried out by Śākyamuni Buddha over the course of his countless kalpas of bodhisattva practice and also his resulting virtues, and the whole of those merits is directly accessed by the devotee in the act of chanting it. Nichiren was by no means the only medieval Japanese Buddhist thinker to assert that all merits are encompassed in a single practice, but he was distinctive in linking this claim to the words, specifically the title, of a particular text. It is surely no coincidence that, for Nichiren, the quality of 'perfect endowment'

character of this *sūtra* contains all *sūtras* in the dharma realms of the ten directions' (此經の一字の中に十方法界の一切經を納たり).

⁸⁵ *Miaofa lianhua jing xuanyi*, T no. 1716, 33: 10a.800b11–14.

⁸⁶ Almost the entirety of Zhiyi's *Lotus* commentary just cited, the *Fabua xuanyi*, is framed as an elucidation of the five characters of the *sūtra*'s title (Swanson, *Foundations*).

⁸⁷ *Teihon* 1: 711.

(*enman gusoku* 圓滿具足)—possessing all merits and wisdom within itself—defined not only the words of the *Lotus Sūtra* but also the meaning of 'maṇḍala' as expressed in his letter to Nichinyō: 'round and perfect, all-encompassing'. The *Lotus Sūtra* is, as it were, a maṇḍala in discursive form, while the *daimandara* instantiates in visible form the all-encompassing Wonderful Dharma of the *Lotus Sūtra*. While Nichiren does not say so explicitly, it seems altogether possible that notions of the holographic nature of the *Lotus Sūtra*'s words informed his choice of written characters as the medium in which to express the *daimandara*. Such ideas are also closely connected to his thinking about image consecration, to which we now turn.

The Logic of Image Empowerment

At one time, the default position of Western scholarly writing about buddha images was to treat them chiefly as symbolic or as mere aids to recollection of the Buddha. Recent studies, however, emphasize that buddha images have been—and are—revered as living presences, held to instantiate the powers of the holy beings that they represent.⁸⁸ Images have traditionally been animated and made efficacious by a consecration rite, whose protocols vary according to the particular Buddhist culture. Sometimes it is literally a rite of 'eye-opening' (*kaigen kuyō* 開眼供養), in which, along with offerings, recitations, and other ritual protocols, the eyes of the image are painted in.⁸⁹ On occasion Nichiren himself performed an eye-opening rite to empower images of Śākyamuni Buddha made or commissioned by his followers.⁹⁰ A

⁸⁸ For factors contributing to the earlier marginalization of Buddhist images and image reverence in Western scholarship, see Sharf, 'Prolegomenon'. On buddha images as living buddhas, see Sharf and Sharf, *Living Images*; Horton, *Living Buddhist Statues*; and Dobbins, *Behold the Buddha*, 147–58.

⁸⁹ On image consecration, see for example Goepper, 'Icon and Ritual'; Faure, *Visions of Power*, 249–255; Gombrich, 'Consecration of a Buddhist Image'; Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha*, 77–121; and Bentor, *Consecration of Images*, 13–19. On the ritual in Japan today, see Horton, *Living Images*, 10–12.

⁹⁰ *Kaigen kuyō* performed by Nichiren or his disciples for buddha images be-

letter he wrote addressing the subject, later titled 'Mokue nizō kaigen no koto' 木繪二像開眼之事 [On Opening the Eyes of Wooden and Painted Images], offers an unusually systematic account of the logic of image empowerment.⁹¹ Nichiren makes no explicit connection here to the *daimandara*, and what follows in this section may initially appear to digress from the main focus of this essay. Nonetheless, I argue that, as with his understanding of the power of the *Lotus Sūtra*'s words, his thinking about the logic of image consecration is closely related to his reasons for devising a maṇḍala written in logographs.

Mokue nizō kaigen no koto begins with the question: What differentiates a painted or carved buddha image from a living buddha? A living buddha, Nichiren explains, has thirty-two superior physical marks. From the dharma wheels on the soles of his feet to the knot of flesh or *uṣṇīṣa* on the crown of his head, thirty-one of these marks have visible form, occupy space, and can be iconographically represented. Nevertheless, a wooden or painted image of the Buddha is not equal to the Buddha himself, for it lacks one physical mark: the pure voice (Skt. *brahmasvara*, Jp. *bonnonjō* 梵音聲) with which the Buddha preaches the dharma. It also has no mental dharmas and is therefore merely an insentient form.

These twin lacks are supplied, Nichiren explains, by the eye-opening ritual, in which a scripture is placed before the image, thereby endowing it with both voice (completing all thirty-two marks) and also with mind. However, what sort of 'mind' is instilled in the image will depend upon what scripture is used. If one places before it a sūtra or treatise dealing with the five precepts or the ten

precepts, the image will become equivalent, respectively, to a cakravartin or to the deity Indra. If one places before the image a treatise on achieving release from the realm of desire, it will become equivalent to Lord Brahmā. If one places one of the *āgamas* before the image, it will become equivalent to an arhat. In other words, the level of power and attainment instilled in the image is determined by which scripture is employed in the eye-opening rite. Nichiren then begins to invoke categories specific to the Tiantai/Tendai classificatory schema of the Buddha's five teaching periods (Jp. *goji* 五時).⁹² If one places before the image one of the common prajñā teachings expounded during the Extended (Skt. *vaipulya*) and Prajñā periods of the Buddha's teaching career, the image will become equivalent to a pratyekabuddha. If one places before the image the *Flower Ornament Sūtra* or a *vaipulya* or prajñā teaching of the distinct or perfect categories, it will become equivalent to a bodhisattva. Finally, 'when the *Lotus Sūtra* is placed before a buddha [image] possessing thirty-one features, the image will certainly become the Buddha of the pure and perfect [teaching]' 三十一相の佛の前に法華經を置*たてまつれば必*純圓の佛*⁹³. This claim clearly rests on a hierarchical classification of the Buddhist teachings in which the *Lotus Sūtra* ranks foremost. By implication, the level of 'mind' with which a scripture can endow an image via the eye-opening rite depends on its rank in the *kyōhan* 教判 or system of doctrinal classification; its ritual power in this regard is determined by its discursive content.

longing to his followers is mentioned in *Mama Shakabutsu gokuyō oijō*, *Teihon* 1: 457, and *Shijō Kingo Shakabutsu kuyō ji*, *Teihon* 2: 1182.

⁹¹ *Teihon* 1: 791–94. The original of this text in Nichiren's hand was lost in a fire in 1875. Its exact date of writing is uncertain. *Teihon* gives it as 1273, although 1264, 1274, and 1282 have also been suggested (*NSIJ*, 1127a–c). The opening portion appears to be missing. Its final section, not addressed in this essay, mentions offerings for the deceased, so it may possibly have been written in response to a follower's report that an image of Śākyamuni Buddha had been made for funerary rites. However, this is not certain.

⁹² On the Tiantai classificatory schema, see Chappell and Ichishima, *T'ien-t'ai Buddhism*.

⁹³ *Teihon* 1: 792. As noted above (see note 80), Nichiren himself enshrined the sūtra scrolls before his personal image of Śākyamuni Buddha at his hermitage on Mount Minobu. Kuwana suggests that this configuration, of an image of Śākyamuni installed together with the *Lotus Sūtra*, follows the logic of the *Mokue nizō kaigen no koto*: The image becomes a living buddha only when the *Lotus Sūtra* is placed before it (Kuwana, 'Nichiren Shōnin ni okeru honzon no keitai', 60–61). Dolce, too, says that such passages 'suggest that the statue alone is not sufficient' (Dolce, 'Esoteric Patterns', 138).

Nichiren deployed this argument as part of his polemic against esoteric Buddhism (Jp. *mikkyō* 密教), which he saw as having displaced the centrality of the *Lotus Sūtra* within the Tendai school after Saichō's time, and whose mudrās and mantras—especially those of the cosmic buddha Dainichi and the esoteric deity Butsugen 佛眼 (Skt. *Buddhalocanā*)—were commonly used for the *kaigen kuyō* ritual in his day.⁹⁴ Nichiren's agenda in *Mokue nizō kaigen no koto* is in part to deny the efficacy of esoteric mantras while assimilating their putative powers and functions to the *Lotus Sūtra*. These esoteric invocations, he argues, not only lack positive efficacy but actually imbue images with a malignant character, 'like a thief entering a masterless house or a demon taking possession of the body when someone has died' 家に主のなきに^{ぬすびと}盗人が入り、人の死するに其身に鬼神入^ルが如し。⁹⁵ Therefore, he concludes, the eye-

⁹⁴ Nichiren notes the use of these particular mantras for consecrating images in *Mokue nizō kaigen no koto* (*Teibon* 1: 791) and in other writings. For example, 'When it comes to consecrating wooden or painted buddha images, all eight schools alike employ the mūdhas and mantras of Dainichi and Butsugen [Buddha Eye]' 佛事の木畫の開眼供養は八宗一同に大日佛眼の印眞言なり (*Senji shō*, *Teibon* 2: 1044). Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212) also says that, after the artist has painted in the eyes of an image (*ji no kaigen* 事の開眼), 'by means of the Buddha Eye mantra, a priest opens the eyes, and with the mantra of Dainichi, he completes [in it] all the Buddha's merits' (*ri no kaigen* 理の開眼) 開眼と申すは本躰は佛師かまなこをいれひらきまいらせ候を申候也。これをは事の開眼と申候也。つぎに僧の佛眼の眞言をもてまなこをひらき、大日の眞言をもてほとけの一切の功德を成就し候をは理の開眼と申候也 (*Ippyaku shijū gokajō mondō*, *Jōdoshū*, *Jōdoshū zensho* 9: 585b–586a). The esoteric deity Butsugen, or Butsugen Butsumo 佛眼佛母 (Buddha Eye Buddha Mother), is regarded as the mother of buddhas and personifies the buddha 'eye' or wisdom.

⁹⁵ *Teibon* 1: 793. See also Nichiren's *Senji shō*: 'In India, China, and Japan, before the *shingon* teachings were introduced, there were wooden and painted images that walked, preached the dharma, or talked. But ever since mudrās and mantras have been used to open the eyes of buddha [images], the efficacy of such images has waned considerably' 天竺・漢土・日本には眞言宗已前の木畫の像は或は行*、或は説法

opening ritual should be conducted solely with the *Lotus Sūtra*. For Nichiren, only the *Lotus Sūtra* produces buddhas, whether they are human beings awakened by faith in the *Lotus* or insentient images animated by its recitation.

This still leaves open the questions of how, exactly, Nichiren thought the Buddha's voice and mind are contained in the *Lotus Sūtra* text and how ritual recitation of that text can instantiate the Buddha's mind in an insentient wooden or painted image. He addresses these matters in *Mokue nizō kaigen no koto* and elsewhere in terms of the Tiantai/Tendai doctrines of the nonduality of form and mind (*shikishin funi* 色心不二) and the realization of buddhahood by grasses and trees (*sōmoku jobutsu* 草木成佛). Both these principles are implicit in the 'three thousand realms in a single thought-moment'. Because form and mind—physical and mental dharmas—are nondual, Nichiren argues, a person's intent or mind can take concrete form both as verbal utterance and also as written text. Voice or text, and mind, are thus ultimately equated, and the written words of the *Lotus Sūtra* are none other than the Buddha's voice and mind:

The written words of the *Lotus Sūtra* manifest the Buddha's pure voice, which is invisible and intangible, in a form that is both visible and tangible, having both colour and form....The pure voice that once fell silent finds expression again, transformed into written language to benefit living beings....Since the *Lotus Sūtra* manifests the [Buddha's] mind, when it is used to empower a wooden or painted image having thirty-one marks, that wooden or painted image becomes the whole body of a living buddha. 法華經の文字は、佛の梵音聲の不可見無對色を、可見有對色のかたちとあらはしぬれば、顯形の二色となれる也。滅せる梵音聲かへて形をあらはして文字と成て衆生を利益する也。.....法華經を心法とさだめて、三十一相の木繪の像に印すれば木繪二像'全體生身の佛也。⁹⁶

し、或は御物^{ものがたり}語あり。印眞言をもて佛を供養せしよりこのかた利生^{しやう}もかたがた^{うせ}失たるなり (*Teibon* 2: 1044). The word *shingon* here, as is often the case in Nichiren's writings, refers not specifically to the Shingon sectarian tradition but to esoteric Buddhism in general, including both Tōmitsu and Taimitsu lineages.

But how can an inert piece of wood or paper be animated with the Buddha's mind? In another writing, Nichiren explicitly invokes another component of the *ichinen sanzen* principle: the division of all phenomena into three realms (*san seken* 三世間): the realm of the five aggregates or skandhas, the mental and physical constituents into which living beings can be analysed (*go'on seken* 五陰世間) and comprising both form and mind; the realm of living beings, that is, a 'temporary union of the five aggregates' considered as an individual being belonging to any of the ten dharma realms from hell dwellers to buddhas (*shujō seken* 衆生世間); and the realm of the land, the insentient container world on which living beings depend and which is shaped by their past and present deeds (*kokudo seken* 國土世間). Nichiren writes:

Setting aside the first two, the third, the realm of the land, is the realm of grasses and trees. The realm of grasses and trees includes those plants from which are derived the five pigments used in painting. From these pigments, painted images are made, and from wood, carved statues are produced. It is by the power of the *Lotus Sūtra* that wooden and painted images are infused with a spirit. This was the insight of Tiantai Dashi [Zhiyi]. With respect to living beings, this doctrine is termed 'the realization of buddhahood with this very body', and, with respect to paintings and statues, it is called 'the realization of buddhahood by grasses and trees'. 前の二は且よく置おく之の、第三の國土世間と申まは草木世間なり。草木世間と申まは五色の糸(繪)のぐ(具)は草木なり、畫像これより起る。木と申まは木像是より出来す。此畫木に魂魄と申ま神たましひを入るる事は法華經の力ちからなり。天台大師のさとり也。此法門は衆生にて申せば即身成佛といはれ、畫木にて申せば草木成佛と申まなり。⁹⁶

⁹⁶ *Teihon* 1: 792. 'Intangible' here renders the technical term *mutaishiki* 無對色, not physically obstructing other objects. Elsewhere, Nichiren describes the eye-opening rite as reciting the entire *Lotus Sūtra* to invest an image with the Buddha's six sense faculties, thus making it into the living Śākyamuni Buddha (*Mama Shakabutsu gokuyō ojō*, *Teihon* 1: 457).

Nichiren frequently interpreted the 'buddhahood of grasses and trees' in terms of the *ichinen sanzen* concept and the use of images as objects of veneration, for example, in his *Kanjin honzon shō*:

Both inner and outer writings permit the use of wooden and painted images as objects of worship, but the reason for this has emerged [only] from the Tiantai school. If plants and trees did not possess cause and effect [i.e., the nine realms and the buddha realm] in both physical and mental aspects, it would be useless to rely on wooden and painted images as objects of worship...Were it not for the buddha-seed which is the three thousand realms in one thought-moment, the realization of buddhahood by sentient beings and [the efficacy of] wooden and painted images as objects of worship would exist in name but not in reality. 於こ木畫ノ二像ニ者外典内典共ニ許シテ之ヲ爲ス本尊ト。於こ其義ニ出テ自ら天台一家。草木之上ニ不レ置ク色心ノ因果ヲ木畫ノ像ヲ奉ル持ツ本尊ニ無益也。..... 所レ詮スル非レ一念三千ノ佛種ニ者有情ノ成佛・木畫ニ像之本尊ノ有名無實也。⁹⁷

Mind and form, sentient and insentient, are interpenetrating and nondual; in this holistic reality of the Buddha's enlightenment—accessible in Nichiren's eyes through the *Lotus Sūtra* alone—the Buddha's mind becomes text, text empowers image, and image embodies the Buddha's mind. For Nichiren, a *honzon*, to be efficacious as such, implicitly unites both image—a material object—and text. While he discusses this relationship in terms of buddha images, the same logic would also seem to apply to the *daimandara*. In a cover letter to a couple who were his followers, accompanying a maṇḍala written and sent for the protection of their young daughter, he wrote, 'I have inscribed [this maṇḍala], imbuing it with my spirit in black ink' (*Nichiren ga tamashii o sumi ni somenagashi kakite sōrō zo* 日蓮がたましひをすみ(墨)にそめながしてかきて候ぞ).⁹⁸ Glosses on this

⁹⁷ *Shijō Kingo Shakabutsu kuyō ji*, *Teihon* 2: 1183. On *sōmoku jōbutsu*, see for example Sueki, 'How Can Grasses and Trees Attain Buddhahood?' and Groner, 'Early Japanese Tendai Views'.

⁹⁸ *Teihon* 1: 703, 711.

passage within the Nichiren tradition typically read it to mean that Nichiren embodied his enlightenment in the form of the maṇḍala *honzon*. However, one may also note the similarity here to the phrase 'invest with a spirit' (*tamashii o ireru* 魂を入れる) commonly used to describe the image consecration rite. While Nichiren's wording here differs from the more doctrinally precise language of nonduality that he employs in *Mokue nizō kaigen no kuyō*, it is not hard to imagine that he thought of inscribing the maṇḍala in terms similar to image empowerment. Just as a painted or sculpted image becomes 'the Buddha of the pure and perfect teaching' when the *Lotus Sūtra* is placed before it, paper and ink manifest that Buddha's enlightenment when inscribed with the *Lotus Sūtra*'s title.

As Sarah Horton notes, 'Eye-opening ceremonies are not limited to objects that actually have eyes, such as statues and paintings; memorial tablets (*ibai* 位牌), Buddhist altars, stūpas, maṇḍalas and other objects that do not take a human form also undergo similar eye-opening ceremonies'.¹⁰⁰ Nichiren himself does not state explicitly whether he performed such a ritual for the maṇḍalas that he inscribed, but the practice is attested among his disciples soon after his death. Today, an eye-opening rite is performed for copies of Nichiren's *daimandara* conferred on families or individual devotees. This is a rite conducted, depending upon the particular Nichiren sect, by the local priest or the lineage head—an 'eye-opening' in the formal sense that empowers the maṇḍala as an object of worship.¹⁰¹ It also underscores the authority

⁹⁹ *Kyōō-dono gohenji, Teihon* 1: 751

¹⁰⁰ Horton, *Living Buddhist Statues*, 11; see also Rambelli, *Buddhist Materiality*, 84–85.

¹⁰¹ A guide for Nichirenshū practitioners explains that the eye-opening rite 'breathes life into the object of worship, so that it can fulfill its originally inherent function' (Fujii, *Uchi no otera wa Nichirenshū*, 191). Particulars vary according to the Nichiren Buddhist sectarian organization. Nichirenshū's web portal recommends having the eye-opening ceremony performed by one's temple of affiliation (see Nichirenshū, 'Butsuji ni tsuite', Q & A 8). In Nichiren Shōshū, as discussed below, the consecration rite is performed by the sect's chief priest before the *daigohonzon* 大御本, the main object of worship enshrined at its head temple,

of Nichiren Buddhist temple institutions and works to maintain orthopraxy in producing and disseminating the *daimandara*. At the same time, as others have noted, performance of the eye-opening rite does not exhaust the senses in which devotees regard images as living presences, and scholars have accordingly expanded the idea of 'consecration' to include devotional acts such as the washing, anointing, and garlanding of images.¹⁰² A *honzon*, after all, does not function as such until it is worshipped.¹⁰³ Perhaps one could say that, in addition to the formal eye-opening rite, the *daimandara* is also consecrated in an informal, non-official sense by the practitioner's devotion, expressed in reciting the *Lotus Sūtra*, chanting the *daimoku*, bowing, and offering candles and incense before it.

Some Critical Reflections

Robert Sharf observes, as a general problem in religion, that 'whether the divine or absolute is construed in transcendent or immanent terms, in either case it must remain essentially noncontingent and nonrelational, and thus cannot properly be the ostensive referent or signified of a word, symbol, or image'.¹⁰⁴ Broadly speaking, Sharf says, this problem is addressed, across traditions, in one of two ways: by prohibiting direct representation of the sacred, whether in speech or

Taiseikiji 大石寺, for all maṇḍalas to be conferred upon devotees. As with buddha images, a rite of 'eye-closing' is also performed when repairs are necessary (Fujii, *Uchi no otera*, 191.) During the recent project of restoring Nichiren's holographic maṇḍalas (see note 139), a rite of 'removing the spirit' (*dakkon* 脱魂) was performed for each one, with the abbot of the temple holding that particular maṇḍala officiating. After the restoration was completed, a ceremony was again held for 'instilling the spirit' (*nyūkon* 入魂) at each participating temple (Nakao and Aramaki, 'Nichiren Shōnin shinseki mandara honzon no shūri jigyō', *MH*, 216).

¹⁰² Freedberg, *Power of Images*, 96.

¹⁰³ Here one can note a similarity with Wu Hung's observation about icons generally: Their composition is 'not self-contained...its significance relies on the presence of a viewer or worshipper outside it' (Hung, 'What is *Bianxiang*?', 130).

¹⁰⁴ Sharf, 'Allure of Buddhist Relics', 81.

visual form, or by collapsing, 'by fiat if necessary, the distance between signifier and signified, such that pure substance—that which is devoid of all representational or contingent qualities—is held to be immanent within the sign itself'.¹⁰⁵ The latter case, he argues, is well represented in the East Asian Buddhist sphere by the *honzon*, the central image of any given rite, which corresponds to an icon in the technical sense of 'a specific sort of religious image that is believed to partake or participate in the substance of that which it represents....An icon does not merely bear the likeness of the divine, but shares in its very nature'.¹⁰⁶ By their devotees, buddha images are not deemed merely symbolic but revered as living buddhas in their own right, instantiating the holy figures that they depict.

A similar logic informs Nichiren's *daimandara*, which is understood not merely to symbolize but to actually manifest the realm of the original buddha, the ever-present Śākyamuni Buddha, that is, the three thousand realms in a single thought-moment *in actuality (ji)*. The *daimandara*, however, is not an anthropomorphic image but is inscribed with logographs. Thus it also entails particular understandings of words and language. In his study of tantric language, Richard Payne notes that standard caveats about the limits of words as relational and thereby incomplete—the famous 'finger pointing at the moon'—do not exhaust Buddhist attitudes toward language. There is also what he terms 'extraordinary language': language that does not communicate propositional or discursive content in any ordinary sense but is presumed to have profound thaumaturgical or soteriological power because of its distinct ontological status.¹⁰⁷ Long before modern semiotic theory, 'extraordinary language' was understood as collapsing the distinction between signifier and signified. Payne cites the Chinese Pure Land master Tanluan 曇鸞 (c. 476–542), who wrote: 'There are names that are the same as things and names that differ from things. Names that

¹⁰⁵ Sharf, 'Allure of Buddhist Relics', 81–82.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., see 83 for the meaning of *honzon*.

¹⁰⁷ Payne, *Language in the Buddhist Tantra*, 23–41. For the origins and meaning of the term 'extraordinary language', see 7–21.

are the same as things include the names of buddhas and bodhisattvas, the *Prajñāpāramitā* and its dhāraṇī, and also other spells and chants' 有名即法。有名異法。名即法者。諸佛菩薩名號般若波羅蜜及陀羅尼章句禁咒音辭等是也。¹⁰⁸ Unlike solely referential language, the presumption underlying 'names that are the same as things' is that they actually embody what they refer to, which is the reason for their ritual efficacy. Nichiren clearly understood the *daimoku* in such terms: 'People today think of the five characters *Myōho-renge-kyō* as merely a name, but that is not so; it is the essence, that is to say, the heart... *Myōho-renge-kyō* is neither the text, nor the meaning, but the heart of the entire [*Lotus*] *Sūtra*' 妙法蓮華經の五字をば當時の人人は名と計り思へり。さにては候はず、體也。體とは心にて候。.....妙法蓮華經と申すは文にあらず、義にあらず、一經の心なり。¹⁰⁹ 'Extraordinary language', we might say, is the linguistic equivalent of the icon; both are held, not merely to symbolize the sacred, but to instantiate it. Nichiren's *daimandara*, which has the *daimoku* as its central deity, embodies this logic in both visual and linguistic registers. Thus it offers an ideal site for reflecting on intersections of text and sacred objects.

The recent expansion of Buddhist Studies beyond its original privileging of texts and doctrine has opened the field to embrace the approaches of material culture, archaeology, art history, and other disciplines. This move has drawn increasing attention to the cultic and material dimensions of Buddhist scripture: Robert Campany, for example, authored a landmark study on the devotional uses of scripture in early Chinese Buddhism, and Daniel Veidlinger, working in a Southeast Buddhist Asian context, has distinguished between 'discursive' and 'cultic' categories of manuscript usage.¹¹⁰ Fabio Rambelli, focusing on Japan, has proposed the categories of 'hermeneutic' and 'nonhermeneutic' textual practices, defining 'nonhermeneutic' practices as an approach to Buddhist texts in which

¹⁰⁸ *Wuliangshou jing youpotishe yuanshengjie zhu*, T no. 1819, 40: 2.835c5–8; cited in Payne, *Language in the Buddhist Tantra*, 74, translation modified.

¹⁰⁹ *Sōya Nyūdō-dono gobenji*, Teibon 2: 1410.

¹¹⁰ Campany, 'Notes on Devotional Uses'; Veidlinger, *Spreading the Dharma*, 5–7.

'their materiality is not a secondary effect of their being "reading matter" but rather their primary characteristic' and might include chanting, copying, enshrining, or talismanic uses of scripture.¹¹¹ The singling out of such practices in their own category draws scholarly attention to a long neglected aspect of Buddhist practice that has been, and remains, foundational to Buddhist traditions.

What about Nichiren's *daimandara*? Its most salient characteristic is, undeniably, that of a material object. Without some background in the *Lotus Sūtra* and Nichiren's thought, even those able to recognize the characters will not understand their significance. And indeed, the power of the *daimandara* is not thought to hinge on the practitioner's ability to read it—a point well illustrated by a maṇḍala that Nichiren inscribed in 1280 for a recipient identified as 'blind Jōren' 盲目乘蓮.¹¹² Some followers for whom Nichiren inscribed maṇḍalas were presumably illiterate and could not read the *daimandara*'s characters; non-Japanese readers among Nichiren Buddhists today are in a similar position (although some printed and online explanations are available, especially for Anglophone readers). The same observation applies to chanting the *daimoku*, whose merit Nichiren declared to be independent of one's level of doctrinal comprehension: like water, which extinguishes fire without deliberate intent or an infant drawing nourishment unaware from its mother's milk, the *daimoku* works naturally and its benefits are the same, whether or not one understands its meaning.¹¹³

Yet as we have seen, the *daimandara* is firmly grounded in text

¹¹¹ Rambelli, *Buddhist Materiality*, 89; see also 88–128.

¹¹² *Mokuroku*, no. 91; *Shinseki*, 164–65, (390–91). A document fragment in the records of Nichiren's disciple Nikkō identifies Jōren with Gyōbin 行敏, a disciple of the Pure Land teacher Nen'a Ryōchū 念阿良忠 (1199–1287) (*Zōroku* 雜錄, NSZ 2: 144; *Kōzen*, 46). In 1271, when Ryōchū and others complained of Nichiren to Bakufu officials, Gyōbin acted as their agent, submitting their petition in his name. If the 'Jōren' who received this maṇḍala is indeed the same person, he presumably underwent a radical change of heart and converted at some point to Nichiren's teaching.

¹¹³ *Shishin gobon shō*, *Teibon* 2: 1298.

and doctrine: in the narrative of the *Lotus Sūtra*; in esoteric teachings about maṇḍalas; in Tiantai commentaries and doctrinal concepts such as three thousand realms in a single thought-moment and the mutual possession of the ten dharma realms; and in a *kyōhan* or classification of teachings that elevates the *Lotus Sūtra*, and especially its latter fourteen chapters, the origin teaching, above all others. And Nichiren's discussion of image consecration suggests that, for him, it was precisely the intellectual content of particular texts, and their place in the hierarchy of teachings, that determined their relative efficacy in empowering images. Distinctions such as 'cultic' and 'discursive', 'hermeneutic' and 'nonhermeneutic', are heuristically useful, but the case of the *daimandara* underscores that the boundary is a fluid, interactive one and far from clear-cut. Rather than nonhermeneutic practices or uses of text, one might more appropriately speak of nonhermeneutic attitudes, as the same textual practice might encompass both approaches.¹¹⁴

This caveat has implications for the broader question of how doctrine relates to practice. In the move away from purely text-based research, doctrinal study—the preeminent 'hermeneutic' textual practice—has often come to be characterized as the province of an elite minority; in its presumed normative emphasis, it is seen as divorced from, and even working to obscure, what the mass of ordinary Buddhists actually do.¹¹⁵ To be sure, some very technical formulations are beyond the reach (and probably the interest) of many practitioners, but notions of doctrine as unrelated to real-world Buddhist activity need reexamination. A more productive approach has been suggested

¹¹⁴ This may actually be what Rambelli has in mind. See his discussion of 'the ontology of texts' (Rambelli, *Buddhist Materiality*, 112–25).

¹¹⁵ Greene identifies Schopen's 'Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions' as a locus classicus for present assumptions of doctrine as normative, elite, and not reflective of ordinary Buddhists' concerns (Greene, 'Seeing *Avijñapti-rūpa*', 109–10). A Japan-specific instance is McMullin's 'Historical and Historiographical Issues', esp. 10–12. This criticism does not diminish the importance of either essay in highlighting the need to study non-textual sources as well as social and institutional contexts.

by Eric Greene, who writes that doctrine is not necessarily taken as normative, nor does it precede practice, but rather represents 'the formal elaborations, within a particular technical idiom, of intuitions that were themselves grounded in religious practice...an attempt to ground the things that everyone knew that Buddhists did and believed in a rigorous, scripturally sanctioned metaphysics'.¹¹⁶ Nichiren's discussion of the power of scripture to embody the Buddha's mind and to animate buddha images is just such a 'formal elaboration' and 'scripturally sanctioned' metaphysical grounding of the practices of sūtra recitation and the empowerment and veneration of buddha images. In Nichiren's case, these doctrinal elaborations are inflected through his *Lotus* exclusivism, in effect appropriating very widespread activities and legitimating them by assimilation to the *Lotus Sūtra* alone. His *Lotus*-only stance may in fact account for why he offered more detailed doctrinal explanation than such practices have often received. Nonetheless, albeit in a *Lotus*-specific mode, he articulates a formal understanding of ideas about the interrelationships of text, image, and bodily practice that were probably already embraced intuitively, in a less rigorously formulated way.

Not all Nichiren Buddhist practitioners, then or now, may understand what is written on the *daimandara*, let alone what is meant by the 'three thousand realms in a single thought-moment in actuality'. But many have at least some idea of what the maṇḍala depicts and, even if they are not personally curious, are well aware that more detailed knowledge is available within the tradition. For those interested, doctrine is a resource—to be tapped as access, time, and other factors permit—that deepens and enriches practice. Nichiren followers, one imagines, might shift from 'hermeneutic' to 'nonhermeneutic' mode and back again, any number of times in any single session of sūtra recitation or *daimoku* chanting in front of the maṇḍala. A consideration of Nichiren's *daimandara* suggests that the 'nonhermeneutic' use of texts as ritually efficacious material objects may be more closely linked to their intellectual content than is often assumed. Of course, such observations would hold for any Buddhist tradition.

¹¹⁶ Greene, 'Seeing *Avijñapti-rūpa*', 158, 159.

PART II: THE *DAIMANDARA* AND NICHIREN BUDDHIST IDENTITY

Many Buddhists have revered the *Lotus Sūtra* and paid reverence to images of Śākyamuni Buddha, but the *daimandara* is unique to Nichiren's tradition. No other Buddhist school has been so consistently defined by a single object of veneration. The second portion of this chapter examines how Nichiren's *daimandara* functioned within his community, both during his lifetime and after his death. It considers how the *daimandara* became an identity marker that served to unite Nichiren Buddhists, even as it became the focus of internal controversies concerning its significance and ritual handling that expressed, and sometimes exacerbated, divisions within Nichiren Buddhism. Here again, the treatment is by no means exhaustive; my aim is simply to give some idea of the centrality of the *daimandara* to the Nichiren tradition over time and to encourage further research.

The Daimandara in Nichiren's Early Community

During Nichiren's lifetime, the *Lotus Sūtra* as object of veneration took several forms. Sometimes, the scrolls of the *Lotus Sūtra* were themselves enshrined, a practice found early on in both exoteric and esoteric Tendai rituals and legitimized by the sūtra itself.¹¹⁷ Nichiren himself kept by him an image of Śākyamuni Buddha; this was a *zuishinbutsu* 隨身佛 or personal image small enough to carry.¹¹⁸ His

¹¹⁷ 'Wherever it may be preached, read, recited, copied, or wherever its rolls of scripture may be lodged, in all those places one is to erect a stūpa of the seven jewels.... There is no need further to install *śarīra* in it. Why? Within it is already the entire body of the Tathāgata' 在在處處。若說若讀若誦若書。若經卷所住處。皆應起七寶塔極.....不須復安舍利。所以者何。此中已有如來全身 (*Miaofa lian-bua jing*, T no. 262, 9: 4.31b26–29; Hurvitz, *Lotus*, 163, modified). Nichiren himself enshrined the scrolls of the sūtra, placing them before an image of Śākyamuni, in his small temple on Mount Minobu (Mochizuki, *Nichiren kyōgaku*, 162–63). See notes 80 and 93 above.

¹¹⁸ Nichiren mentions his personal image of Śākyamuni in several of his let-

enshrining of the *Lotus Sūtra* scrolls before an image of Śākyamuni Buddha in his hermitage at Minobu has already been mentioned. Several of his followers also enshrined buddha images.¹¹⁹ The buddha, in such cases, was understood, not as the historical Śākyamuni, but as the original, eternal buddha of the origin section of the *Lotus Sūtra*; for example, Nichiren praises a follower for 'creating and making manifest the Buddha who is the three thousand realms in a single-thought-moment within one's mind' 己心の一念三千の佛、造り願ひます。¹²⁰ But the *honzon* most commonly employed among Nichiren's followers was the *daimandara*.

Nichiren first inscribed the *daimandara* in embryonic form in 1271. By that point, he had for several years been openly denouncing other Buddhist teachings as no longer efficacious in the Final Dharma

ters. Tradition holds that Nichiren acquired this image while exiled to Izu (1261–1263). According to one account, in gratitude for Nichiren's prayers that had cured him of illness, the local steward (*jitō* 地頭) gave him a buddha image that had emerged from the sea with a catch of fish. This event is mentioned only in one letter among the works attributed to Nichiren (*Funamori Yasaburō moto gosho*, *Teihon* 1: 229–31), and its authenticity has been questioned (on this controversy, see Stone, 'Disputed Writings', 193–203). Another account, by Sanmi Ajari Nichijun (1294–1354), says that Nichiren himself carved the image (*Nichijun zōshū*, *FSY* 2: 92; see also Ikeda, 'Gonin shoba shō shohon', 475–76). In either case, this is probably the standing image of Śākyamuni mentioned in Nichiren's will, which instructs that it be placed near his grave (*Shūso gosenge kiroku*, *NSZ* 2: 105; *Nikkō Shōnin zenshū* [hereafter *Kōzen*; see Secondary Sources, Ikeda], 111); however, another source says that it passed after his death to his disciple Nichirō (*Goyūmotsu haibun no koto*, *NSZ* 1: 55, 2: 107; *Kōzen*, 119).

¹¹⁹ See Kuwana, 'Nichiren Shōnin ni okeru honzon', 49. See also the examples in note 90 above. In addition, other letters from Nichiren mention followers offering prayers for the deceased 'before the tathāgata Śākyamuni' 釋迦如来之御前 (*Hōren shō*, *Teihon* 1: 945) or 'before Śākyamuni Buddha' 釋迦佛の御寶前 (*Kōnichibō gosho*, 2: 1160), suggesting that they had buddha images as *honzon*. *Nichigennyō Shakabutsu kuyō ji* (2: 1623–25) specifically mentions a follower fashioning an image of Śākyamuni.

¹²⁰ *Mama Shakabutsu gokuyō oijō*, *Teihon* 1: 457.

age and also criticizing governing authorities for supporting them, thus provoking the anger of both leading prelates and officials of the Bakufu 幕府 or military government. He had already been exiled once, to the Izu Peninsula (1261–1263), but had eventually returned to Kamakura and resumed his preaching. In 1271, he was again arrested, possibly as part of a Bakufu effort to strengthen the country's defenses against an impending Mongol attack by quelling unruly elements at home.¹²¹ By his own account, on the twelfth day of the ninth month, Nichiren was seized, taken by night to the execution grounds outside Kamakura, and nearly beheaded.¹²² Tradition holds that his life was saved by a luminous object that streaked across the sky, terrifying his would-be executioners. While some scholars have disputed the historicity of that event, Nichiren himself clearly believed that he had in some sense undergone a death and rebirth on that occasion. He was then sentenced to exile on Sado 佐渡 Island in the Sea of Japan and remanded to the custody of Sado's deputy constable, Honma Shigetsura 本間重連. The day before his party departed for Sado, while in custody as a prisoner at Honma's estate at Echi in Sagami province, Nichiren is said to have broken off a twig from a willow tree in the garden and used it to inscribe a maṇḍala. This first expression of the *daimandara* is written in the so-called 'abbreviated form' (*ryakushiki* 略式). It contains only the central inscription of the *daimoku*, the Siddham glyphs for Fudō and Aizen, the date, the place, and Nichiren's name and written seal.¹²³ Later maṇḍalas that he produced in the abbreviated style sometimes also include the two buddhas and a few additional figures.

Nichiren's exile to Sado, while entailing great suffering and privation, was also a period of intellectual creativity, when he wrote some of his major works. These include the *Kanjin honzon shō*, mentioned above, which lays out the conceptual basis for the *daimandara*. On the eighth day of the seventh month, 1273, while still in exile, Nichiren for the first time inscribed the full *daimandara* in the so-called 'formal style'

¹²¹ Takagi, *Nichiren to sono montei*, 189–90.

¹²² *Shuju onfurumai gosho*, *Teihon* 2: 963–67.

¹²³ *Mokuroku*, no. 1, *Shinseki*, 34–35 (310–11); *MH*, 1: 38–39.

(*kōshiki*), expanded to include representatives of all ten realms. This particular maṇḍala is termed the 'object of veneration revealed for the first time on Sado' (*Sado shiken honzon* 佐渡始顯本尊). It was lost in a fire at the Nichirenshū head temple on Mount Minobu in 1875, but its appearance is known from an early eighteenth-century copy.¹²⁴

The vast majority of Nichiren's surviving maṇḍalas date from the last nine years of his life, inscribed after his pardon from exile and during his reclusion on Mount Minobu in Kai province (1274–1282). During this period he conferred maṇḍalas on a number of followers, either as personal *honzon*, as a focus for their practice, or as *omamori* お守り to be worn for protection, as discussed below. Often Nichiren sent these maṇḍalas to their recipients via his trusted disciples, sometimes with a cover letter. For example, to a woman who was his follower, he wrote:

I am conferring on you the *gobonzon* of the *Sūtra of the Lotus Blossom of the Wonderful Dharma*. Although this maṇḍala consists of only five or seven characters [i.e., the *daimoku*], it is the teacher of all buddhas throughout the three periods of time and the seal that guarantees the buddhahood of all women. It will be a lamp on the dark path to the next world and a fine horse to carry you over the mountains of death. It is like the sun and moon in the heavens and Mount Sumeru on earth. It is a ship to cross the sea of birth and death and the teacher who guides one to realize the way of buddhahood. 妙法蓮華經御本尊供養候¹²⁴。此曼陀羅は文字は五字七字にて候へども、三世諸佛の御師、一切の女人の成佛の印文也。冥途にはともしびとなり、死出の山にては良馬となり。天には日月の如し、地には須彌山の如し。生死海の船也。成佛得道の導師也。¹²⁵

For the most part, these letters do not focus on doctrinal explanations of the *daimandara* but rather speak of the benefits of embracing faith

¹²⁴ Included in *Gobonzon kagami* 御本尊鑑 (1712), compiled by the thirty-third chief abbot of Minobu, Enten'in Nichikō 遠沾院日亨 (1646–1721). See *Shinseki*, 60–61, and *NJ*, s.v. 'Sado shiken honzon', 117b–d.

¹²⁵ *Myōhō mandara kuyō ji*, *Teihon* 1: 698–99.

in it, which include security in this life, protection in the next, and the realization of buddhahood.

During the Minobu years, although no longer directly engaged in proselytizing, Nichiren was still actively teaching; his hermitage bustled with disciples in training and with other followers, lay and clerical, who had traveled to visit him. By his own account, the number of persons with him on the mountain numbered between forty to sixty in 1278 and by 1279 had risen to more than a hundred.¹²⁶ In addition, during this period, he produced the greater part of his voluminous doctrinal writings and carried on a tireless correspondence with devotees. Nichiren's following—whom he referred to collectively as *waga ichimon* 我が一門 ('my family', 'my clan')—consisted of small communities of devotees, both clerics and laity, scattered throughout the Kantō or eastern provinces and on Sado Island.¹²⁷ All these followers had to be instructed in faith and practice and encouraged to remain steadfast in the face of recurring harassment, even outright persecution, from local and Bakufu officials. By this point, Nichiren had entrusted the direct leadership of these communities to his most reliable clerical disciples. These priests either maintained a base of residence at a local Tendai temple from which they traveled to instruct and encourage followers, or they lived near a congregation of Nichiren's followers under their care. A few maintained Hokkedō 法華堂 or chapels of their own where believers could congregate. Along with Nichiren's own letters to followers and the instruction provided by his disciples, use of the maṇḍala *honzon* was an important factor in uniting Nichiren's *ichimon*.

Maṇḍalas Conferred on Individual Devotees

The *daimandara* provided a personal link between Nichiren and individual followers. When the recipients were lay devotees, Nichiren's conferral of the maṇḍala seems in many cases to have followed upon

¹²⁶ *Hyōe sakan-dono gobenji*, *Teihon* 2: 1606; *Sōya-dono gobenji*, 2: 1664.

¹²⁷ Takagi, *Nichiren to sono montei*, 96–98. For the composition and organization of Nichiren's following, see 51–81.

the occasion of their making offerings to him of food, money, or clothing—whether directly, in the course of a pilgrimage to Mount Minobu made expressly to visit Nichiren or sent from a distance by messenger.¹²⁸ Nonetheless, Nichiren did not confer maṇḍalas indiscriminately but gave them only to persons of demonstrated commitment in faith. We can infer this from a troubled letter he wrote in 1275 declining to give the *gobonzon* to a follower who had proved unreliable by abandoning her faith after he was exiled to Sado.¹²⁹ Nichiren's bestowal of a maṇḍala would have expressed confidence on his part in the recipient's faith and dedication, while for the recipient, it would have been a signal honor and a trust to be upheld. Maṇḍalas inscribed by Nichiren each bear his name and written seal; thus receiving a maṇḍala from him also served as proof of a personal master-disciple connection. Some *gobonzon* are further personalized with an inscription of the recipient's name, a practice that, judging from his surviving maṇḍalas, Nichiren adopted increasingly from the Kōan era (1278–1288).¹³⁰ Of his more than one hundred and twenty extant holographic maṇḍalas, sixty-six bear such a personal inscription: twenty-one were given to priests; thirty-one to lay men; six to women identified with the title 'bikuni' 比丘尼 or 'ama' 尼, indicating that they had taken religious vows; and eight to lay women. Another five once bore a personal inscription that was later erased.¹³¹

¹²⁸ The connection between Nichiren's receipt of offerings and his conferring of maṇḍalas is noted by Ueda, 'Nichiren Shōnin shoki no mandara ni tsuite', 'Nichiren Shōnin chūki no mandara ni tsuite', and 'Nichiren Shōnin kōki no mandara ni tsuite' (1)–(3). See also Dolce, 'Esoteric Patterns', 165–69.

¹²⁹ *Nii-ama gozen gobenji, Teihon* 1: 868–69; see also Dolce, 'Esoteric Patterns', 166–67. Nichiren did, however, bestow a maṇḍala on another member of the woman's household.

¹³⁰ Ueda, 'Chūki no mandara', 75.

¹³¹ Figures based on *Shinseki*. Eight of the lay men are identified as *ubasoku* 優婆塞 (Skt. *upāsaka*), and two of the lay women, as *ubai* 優婆夷 (*upāsikā*). These terms probably designate a high level of lay commitment, although the precise sense in which Nichiren uses them is not clear. Erasures may have occurred when the original recipient died or left the group, or when a maṇḍala originally conferred

Many of these personal inscriptions include a *nichigō* 日号, a dharma name beginning with the character 'nichi' of Nichiren. The *nichigō* represents a variant of broader Buddhist naming practices in which disciples receive dharma names that include one character taken from their teacher's name. The *nichigō* was adopted by virtually all priests of the Nichiren tradition until the Meiji period (1868–1912) and is still given to high-ranking clerics. Nichiren, however, conferred the *nichigō* not only on clerical disciples but also on lay people, both men and women.¹³² Receipt of the *nichigō* would in effect confirm a follower's membership in Nichiren's *ichimon*, and its inscription on a maṇḍala would have further enhanced the recipient's sense of personal connection to him.

Nichiren's community was once studied chiefly through the large corpus of his surviving personal letters written to followers. These letters yield the image of a fairly well-educated warrior following, including minor Bakufu officials. However, as the historian Takaki Yutaka 高木豊 (1928–1999) first noted, when one considers the evidence of Nichiren's surviving holographic maṇḍalas, a more diverse picture of his community emerges. Takaki turned his attention to maṇḍala inscriptions and a record made in 1296, seventeen years

on an individual became the *bonzon* of a congregation (Ueda, 'Kōki no mandara' [1], 30).

¹³² Takagi, *Nichiren to sono montei*, 98. By my rough count, of Nichiren's 66 extant maṇḍalas bearing personal inscriptions, 40 include a *nichigō*: 16 on maṇḍalas given to priests; 4, to nuns; 18, to lay men; and 4 to lay women. The figure for priests includes one or two cases where the same individual received a maṇḍala on different occasions: two were conferred upon Nisshō, one of Nichiren's leading disciples (see notes 146 and 147 below), and another two were inscribed for a priest named Nippō 日法, who may or may not be the same individual in both cases (*Mokuroku* nos. 57 and 100; see also Ueda, 'Kōki no mandara' [1], 36–37). On one maṇḍala, all but the *nichi* character in the recipient's name has been erased (*Mokuroku* no. 78, *Shinseki*, 287 [381]; see also Ueda, 'Kōki no mandara' [2], 38–39). Three names of the lay women recipients include the character *myō*, the first character in the *Lotus Sūtra*'s title, which appears in several dharma names that Nichiren conferred on women.

after Nichiren's death, by one of his leading disciples, Byakuren Ajari Nikkō 白蓮阿闍梨日興 (1246–1333), recording the distribution of sixty-four of Nichiren's holographic maṇḍalas to his, Nikkō's, clerical and lay followers and noting their places of residence.¹³³ In these cases, Nikkō had acted as intermediary, requesting a maṇḍala from Nichiren on behalf of individual devotees. Of forty-nine lay followers known to have received a maṇḍala inscribed by Nichiren, only about ten percent are also mentioned in his surviving written correspondence, and several of them—especially in the Fuji area—appear to have been peasants.¹³⁴ Thus the evidence of Nichiren's maṇḍalas provides a picture of his following as more socially varied and perhaps less literate *in toto* than do his letters alone.

Nichiren's maṇḍala *honzon* served to cement bonds, not only directly, between himself and individuals or families, but also indirectly, through his main clerical disciples to their own converts or congregations, thus reinforcing sub-lineage ties and bonds to 'second generation' followers (*mago deshi* 孫弟子). Among maṇḍalas given to disciples' disciples, we find, for example, a *gohonzon* Nichiren conferred in 1275 on a seven-year-old boy called Kyōichimaro 經一丸.¹³⁵ This boy had just been ordained as a novice priest by Nichirō, a close disciple of Nichiren and mentioned above as the recipient of the *shūtei mandara*. Nichirō was based in Kamakura and had probably taken his young disciple along on a trip to visit and report to

¹³³ *Honzon bun'yo chō* 本尊分与帳, a.k.a. *Deshibun honzon mokuroku*, NSZ 2: 112–118; *Kōzen*, 121–29. See also Takagi, 'Nikkō to sono montei', 30–38, and NJ, s.v. 'Honzon bun'yo chō', 377a–c.

¹³⁴ Takagi notes that very few of those lay persons known to have received maṇḍalas from Nichiren also appear in his letters (*Nichiren to sono montei*, 78, note 5). The possibility that some of them were peasants can be glimpsed from *Honzon bun'yo chō*, cited in the preceding note. Nikkō divides his lay disciples into the categories of *zoku deshi* 俗弟子, who include *bushi* 武士 (warriors); *onna deshi* 女弟子 (female disciples); and *zaikenin deshi* 在家人弟子 (disciples in lay households), who appear to be predominantly peasants.

¹³⁵ *Mokuroku* no. 28; *Shinseki*, 38–39 (336–37). See also Ueda, 'Chūki no mandara', 67–68.

Nichiren at Minobu. Here, the connection expressed by conferral of the maṇḍala was not directly between Nichiren and the young novice but was mediated by their common tie to Nichirō. Kyōichimaro, later known as Higo Ajari Nichizō 肥後阿闍梨日像 (1269–1342), would become the first of Nichiren's disciples to proselytize in Kyoto, the imperial capital. Tradition has it that Nichiren discerned the boy's future abilities and charged him with the task.¹³⁶ This is probably a retrospective invention, based on the fact that Nichizō eventually won the favor of the newly restored emperor Go-Daigo 後醍醐天皇 (1288–1339) and thus opened the way for other Nichiren lineages to establish themselves in the capital.¹³⁷

Nichiren's surviving holographic maṇḍalas are of widely varying sizes. In general, those inscribed using only one or two sheets of paper were conferred on individuals, while larger ones, using three or more sheets, glued together, were intended for communal devotion. Not all those inscribed for individuals were intended for enshrinement as objects of veneration (*honzon*); some were folded and worn on the person as protective talismans (*omamori* お守り).¹³⁸ The extent of the latter practice has only recently been recognized. During a massive conservation effort of Nichiren's holographic maṇḍalas launched by Nichirenshū in 2000, historian Nakao Takashi 中尾堯 (1931–), an expert on Nichiren's holographic writings, discovered that many of his maṇḍalas inscribed on a single sheet of paper bear parallel creases both vertically and horizontally, suggesting that they were once folded and worn as amulets. The maṇḍala conferred on Nichizō, mentioned above, is one such example. On that maṇḍala, the corners along one fold show small holes from wear and tear; what appears to be a small sweat stain is also in evidence. Nakao suggests that Nichizō, a dedicated proselytizer who through years of effort first won a foothold for Nichiren's following in the capital at Kyoto, was

¹³⁶ See Nichirō's 1320 *Genshi honzon soejō*, NSZ 1: 34.

¹³⁷ On Nichizō's proselytizing activities, see Takagi, 'Ryūge Nichizō', and Kawauchi, *Nichirenshū to sengoku Kyōto*, 22–38.

¹³⁸ Nakao, 'Nichiren no "gohonzon"', esp. 63–69. Nakao also suggests (54) that those requesting maṇḍalas from Nichiren probably supplied the paper.

sustained throughout the hardships and opposition he encountered by his confidence in the holy object that he wore next to his skin.¹³⁹ If so, this practice accords with passages in Nichiren's writings suggesting that some of the maṇḍalas he inscribed were intended to be worn. For example, in a letter to a widow, the lay nun Myōshin-ama 妙心尼, that accompanied a maṇḍala he sent her as protection for her child, Nichiren wrote in part: 'When one carries this maṇḍala on one's person, then just as warriors guard their lord, as parents love their children... all buddhas and deities will gather round and protect them, watching over them as closely as a shadow day and night. You should believe wholeheartedly' このまんだら(曼荼羅)を身にたもちぬれば、王を武士のまほるがごとく、子ををやのあいするがごとく.....一切の佛神等のあつまりまほり、晝夜にかげのごとくまほらせ給⁷法にて候。¹⁴⁰ However, not all of Nichiren's maṇḍalas inscribed on single sheet of paper were intended for talismanic use. Some were mounted on rollers as hanging scrolls, while others were pasted on a wooden backing to protect them, surrounded with decorative borders, and placed on altars. Others, originally worn as protective talismans, were later mounted in this way.¹⁴¹

Where multiple household members were devotees, Nichiren usually conferred the maṇḍala on one person as their representative. However, there were exceptions. On the first day of the second month, 1280, Nichiren inscribed a maṇḍala for his follower Nichirai 日頼 (Shijō Kingo 四條金吾) and another for his wife Nichigennyō 日眼女 in the same month.¹⁴² In this case, the maṇḍala given to Shijō Kingo, inscribed on three sheets of paper, is large enough to be hung where

¹³⁹ Nakao, 'Nichiren no "gohonzon"', 65. On the conservation project, see Nakao and Aramaki, 'Nichiren Shōnin shinseki mandara honzon no shūri', *MH*, 215–21.

¹⁴⁰ *Myōshin-ama gozen gobenji*, *Teihon* 2: 1105. For others of Nichiren's letters suggesting that the maṇḍala was to be worn on the person, see *Kyōō-dono gobenji*, *Teihon* 1: 750, and *Nii-ama gozen gobenji*, 1: 867–68.

¹⁴¹ Nakao, 'Nichiren no "gohonzon"', 59, 71–73.

¹⁴² *Mokuroku* nos. 71 and 72, *Shinseki*, 146–47, 294 (376–77), and *MH*, 79 (no. 71); see also Ueda, 'Kōki no mandara' (2), 35.

several devotees might congregate, befitting his status as a leader among the believers in Kamakura, while the maṇḍala given to his wife, inscribed on a single sheet of paper, was probably intended for her personal devotion. On another occasion, Nichiren inscribed three maṇḍalas on two successive days, the thirteenth and fourteenth of the eighth month, 1276, for three siblings of the Chiba family in Shimōsa province. Their father, Chiba no suke Yoritane 千葉介頼胤, who was Nichiren's follower, was the provincial constable and also held lands in Kyushu, where the Mongols had struck in 1274. Yoritane had fought against them in that first attack and been killed in battle. His elder son Munetane 宗胤, who inherited his father's responsibility to join the defense effort, then transferred headship of the family to his younger brother Tanemune 胤宗, who was only ten, and set out for Kyushu. Before he left, Nichiren inscribed a protective maṇḍala for him, designating it with Munetane's childhood name Kameya 亀弥, along with two others, one for the young Tanemune and another for their sister; these too he inscribed with the brother and sister's childhood names: Kamewaka 亀若 and Kamehime 亀姫, respectively.¹⁴³ While the location of the maṇḍala given to the elder brother is unknown, the other two eventually passed out of the hands of the Chiba family and are now held by temples in Kyoto. Nakao notes that no fewer than twenty of Nichiren's extant holographic maṇḍalas inscribed on a single sheet of paper date to 1280. The year before, the empire of the southern Song had fallen to the Mongols, and anxieties mounted as a new attack on Japan was expected at any time. In this period of heightened uncertainty, Nakao suggests, whether they were heading west to join the defense forces or remaining behind to care for families and retainers, devotees sought these protective maṇḍalas from Nichiren.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ *Mokuroku* nos. 38–40, *Shinseki*, 84–87 (345–47); *MH*, 70 (no. 40) and 166–67 (no. 38). See also Ueda, 'Chūki no mandara', 72; Nakao, 'Nichiren no "gohonzon"', 68–69, and *Nichiren Shōnin no Hokke mandara*, 45–52. According to Yamanaka's catalogue, the maṇḍala inscribed for the elder brother Munetane (no. 39), is held by an unidentified Osaka family (*Shinseki*, 346); Nakao says its current whereabouts is unknown (*Hokke mandara*, 52).

¹⁴⁴ Nakao, 'Nichiren no "gohonzon"', 67–68.

The *Daimandara* and Congregations

In addition to those bestowed on individuals, Nichiren also seems to have conferred maṇḍalas on local congregations via his leading disciples. These maṇḍalas were usually made by gluing together multiple sheets of paper. Maṇḍalas of middle size, made from three sheets, of which twenty-seven survive, were conferred almost entirely upon monastics, male and female, and on lay devotees committed enough to have received dharma names. Nakao suggests that they were intended for personal chapels (Hokkedō) of some of Nichiren's clerical disciples or the image halls (*jibutsudō* 持佛堂) of influential devotees, where several believers might gather; larger maṇḍalas, using four, five, or more sheets of paper, may have been enshrined in those Hokkedō, maintained by some of his disciples, that could accommodate larger congregations.¹⁴⁵ For example, a maṇḍala that Nichiren conferred in 1276 on his disciple Nisshō measures 133.4 by 98.5 cm.¹⁴⁶ This seems too large for a personal *honzon*, and the personalized inscription is also extremely grand and inclusive, designating the maṇḍala as having been given to 'Nisshō, śramaṇa of the great country of Japan' (*Dainihonkoku shamon Nisshō* 大日本國沙門日昭).¹⁴⁷ Nisshō was

¹⁴⁵ Nakao, 'Nichiren no "gohonzon"', 56–63. Nakao builds on the research of Watanabe Hōyō, who had already recognized the connection between Nichiren's larger holographic maṇḍalas and chapels that served as centers for gatherings of his followers (Watanabe, 'Daimandara to Hokkedō').

¹⁴⁶ *Mokuroku* no. 37; *Shinseki* 114–115 (343–344); *MH*, 68–69. Measurements of Nichiren's holographic maṇḍalas given in *MH* were taken after conservation and sometimes differ slightly from those given in *Shinseki* (*MH*, 106); for this maṇḍala, they are given as 127.6 by 99.8 cm (68).

¹⁴⁷ A second maṇḍala, conferred upon the same Nisshō in 1280, is even larger, 197.6 x 108.8 cm, and is inscribed for 'Nisshō, disciple of Śākyamuni Buddha' (Shakushi Nisshō 釋子日昭) (*Mokuroku* no. 101, *Shinseki*, 262–63 [399]; *MH*, 90–91). A letter from Nichiren dated 1279 indicates that one Daishin Ajari 大進阿闍梨, a disciple who had recently died, had deeded his own lodging temple to Nisshō, and Nichiren urges followers to make necessary repairs so that Nisshō can move to this location. If the place is enlarged and the leaks repaired, Nichiren

Ben Ajari Nisshō 弁阿闍梨日昭 (1221–1323), Nichiren's most senior disciple, who headed the community of followers in Kamakura during Nichiren's two sentences of exile and after he went to live at Mount Minobu. Nisshō had his own *bō* 坊 or lodging temple in Kamakura, where followers congregated and presumably the site of the Daishikō 大師講, a monthly service honoring the Tiantai founder Zhiyi. The Daishikō was a major event in the ritual calendar of the early Nichiren community and was almost certainly the occasion for sermons and instruction of assembled followers.¹⁴⁸ This maṇḍala was probably enshrined in Nisshō's lodging temple. The *shūtei mandara* is another of this type, having been conferred on Nichirō, who also headed a congregation in Kamakura and probably enshrined this maṇḍala in his Hokkedō. During the restoration process, some deterioration on this maṇḍala came to light, especially in the lower part around the characters of Nichiren's name and his written seal—resulting, Nakao suggests, from the many devotees who, eager to make direct contact with the maṇḍala's sacred power, had touched them repeatedly.¹⁴⁹

In some cases, the evidence of Nichiren's original maṇḍalas points to the existence of local *kō* 講 or congregations entirely unknown from his extant writings. For example, the largest of his surviving holographic maṇḍalas, inscribed in 1278, is made from twenty-eight variously sized sheets of paper and measures 234.9 x 124.9 centimeters.¹⁵⁰ It

says, 'It will become a treasure for everyone' 諸人の御ために御たからにてこそ候はんずらめ, suggesting that it would be used as a gathering place for disciples in Kamakura (*Ryōnin onchū gosho*, *Teihon* 2: 1802). The second maṇḍala conferred upon Nisshō in 1280 may have been inscribed for this newly renovated lodging (Takagi, *Nichiren to sono montei*, 54–56; Watanabe, 'Daimandara to Hokkedō', 92–95).

¹⁴⁸ On the Daishikō, see Nakao, *Nichiren*, 98–99, and Okuno, 'Nichiren Shōnin ni okeru "gesetsu"', 35–37.

¹⁴⁹ Nakao, 'Nichiren no "gohonzon"', 59.

¹⁵⁰ *Mokuroku* no. 57, *Shinseki*, 216–17 (363–64); *MH*, 102. For a study of this maṇḍala, see Harai, 'Nijū hasshi daimandara'. Although traditionally called the '*daimandara* of twenty-eight sheets [of paper]', restoration work in 1969 revealed that twenty-nine sheets were actually used (Harai, 'Nijū hasshi

bears Nichiren's inscription conferring it upon 'the *ubasoku* Fuji Tayū Nitchō' 優婆塞藤太夫日長. This man appears nowhere in Nichiren's extant letters, and virtually nothing is known about him. The maṇḍala was once held by Myōhōji 妙法寺, a temple in Kodate village in the Minamitsuru district of Kai province (Yamanashi prefecture), and many legends have grown up around it, for example, that twenty-eight believers from Kodate each donated one sheet of paper for the maṇḍala, which was then conferred upon one Watanabe Fuji Tayū as their head.¹⁵¹ While such traditions are likely retrospective creations, the unusually large size and inscription on this maṇḍala point to the existence during Nichiren's lifetime of a congregation of followers, not mentioned in his surviving writings and seemingly headed by a lay person.

Nichiren's larger maṇḍalas, presumably intended for group devotion, share a common characteristic seen less commonly on smaller ones that he inscribed for personal devotion: namely, the inscription on one or both sides of the maṇḍala of *sanmon* or *gosanmon* 御讚文, 'passages of praise' taken from the *Lotus Sūtra* itself or from its commentarial literature, extolling the blessings of the *Lotus* and warning against the offense of slandering it. The *sanmon* most commonly occurring on Nichiren's holographic maṇḍalas are the pair: 'Those who slander [this dharma] shall have their heads broken into seven pieces' 若惱亂者頭破七分, and 'One who makes offerings [to this sūtra] shall have good fortune exceeding the [Buddha's] ten honorable titles' 有供養者福過十號.¹⁵² *Sanmon* inscribed on the 1276

daimandara', 74). *MH* gives the dimensions as 245.9 x 124.9 cm.; see note 146 above.

¹⁵¹ See Ueda, 'Kōki no mandara' (1), 32–33, and the sources listed there. Harai suggests that Watanabe may have been a lay supporter of Nichiren's disciple Izumi Ajari Nippō 和泉阿闍梨日法 (1258–1341), founder of Kōchōji 光長寺 in Suruga province (Shizuoka prefecture), where the maṇḍala was transferred in 1352 and is presently held (Harai, 'Nijū hasshi daimandara').

¹⁵² These passages are taken from Zhanran's *Fabua wenju ji*, T no. 1719, 34: 4a.234a24–25. On *sanmon*, see Watanabe, 'Daimandara to Hokkedō', 95–110. Ueda has suggested that maṇḍalas carrying inscriptions from the *Lotus Sūtra*

maṇḍala entrusted to Nisshō read in part: 'This sūtra is good medicine for the illnesses of people in Jambudvīpa. If one is sick and can hear this sūtra, his illness will vanish at once, and he shall neither age nor die' 此經則為閻浮提人病之良藥。若人有病，得聞是經。病即消滅。不老不死, and, 'There are in the world three kinds of people whose illness is difficult to cure: those who slander the Great Vehicle, those who commit the five heinous offenses, and the *icchāntika*' 世有三人其病難治。一謗大乘。二五逆罪。三一闍提¹⁵³—sūtra passages that convey the same paired concepts of benefit and punishment using the metaphor of illness. If these maṇḍalas were, as seems likely, enshrined in Hokkedō or other places where congregations assembled for sermons or other ritual events, the priest responsible for preaching may have called attention to and expounded on these passages for the benefit of the assembly. Believers may have understood that they were under the protective power of the *Lotus Sūtra*, thereby deriving reassurance in a time marked by recurrent epidemics, the threat of invasion from the Mongol empire, and the ever-present danger of persecution from the authorities on account of their allegiance to the controversial teacher Nichiren.

The Daimandara and the Later Nichiren Hokkeshū

After Nichiren's death, his followers, intent on proselytizing, moved beyond their initial bases in the eastern provinces and Sado Island into the capital at Kyoto and eventually, throughout the archipelago. Their efforts gave rise to the Hokkeshū 法華宗, as the medieval Nichiren sect was generally called.¹⁵⁴ Nichiren's holographic maṇḍalas were regarded

about its healing powers were conferred upon devotees suffering from illness, especially during epidemics ('Chūki no mandara', 72; 'Kōki no mandara' (1), 26–27). Watanabe, however, sees these inscriptions as referring to healing in the broader sense of salvation in the Final Dharma age (Watanabe, 'Daimandara to Hokkedō', 104, 106).

¹⁵³ *Miaofa lianhua jing*, T no. 262, 9: 6.54c25–26; *Da banniepan jing*, T no. 374, 12: 11.431b24–25.

¹⁵⁴ In the Muromachi period (1336–1573), the terms 'Nichiren's following'

as treasures of the sect, and great care was taken to preserve them. At the same time, the rapid growth of adherents and the resulting establishment of permanent temples required that the *daimandara* be reproduced, as *honzon* both for individual practice and for enshrining in temples. Nichiren's leading disciples began to inscribe the *daimandara* very shortly after his death, adding their own signature to the side in the maṇḍala's lower register.¹⁵⁵ Hokkeshū temple abbots inscribed the *daimandara* as personal *honzon* for individual devotees; a lineage head might also inscribe the *daimandara* for his chief disciple, as a proof of succession. The story of the *daimandara* after Nichiren has been little studied outside sectarian histories, and the subject is too vast to treat comprehensively in a single essay. What follows here is simply an introduction, summarizing major developments and underscoring how the *daimandara* as an object of worship continued to reinforce both Nichiren Buddhist identity as well as specific lineage ties within the tradition.

Formal Developments

While the maṇḍala inscribed with ink on paper continued to be the *honzon* most commonly employed by individual devotees, variations began to appear from around the late thirteenth and fourteenth

(Nichirensū 日蓮衆 or Nichirentō 日蓮党) and 'Nichiren sect' (Nichirensū 日蓮宗) were used pejoratively by persons outside the sect. However, in the late medieval era, that is, from the Azuchi-Momoyama period (1573–1603), both Nichirensū ('Nichiren sect') and Hokkeshū came to be used concurrently by Nichiren followers and others alike (Risshō Daigaku, *Nichiren kyōdan zenshi*, 80).

¹⁵⁵ These sometimes reached considerable numbers. Using available sources, Yamaguchi provisionally lists 263 maṇḍalas, extant or formerly so, attributed to Nikkō (*Nichiren Shōshū shi*, 171–91). Jōgyōin Nichiyū 淨行院日祐 (1298–1374), third in the Nakayama lineage, wrote that, in the summer of 1373, he had inscribed a hundred *honzon*, acknowledging one 'Shirō, descendant of Mutsuura' 六浦孫四郎 who supplied him with the requisite paper (*Ichigo shōshū zenkon kiroku*, NSZ 1: 445).

centuries, especially among *honzon* enshrined in temples. Sometimes decorative elements were added to maṇḍalas inscribed by Nichiren, such as a lotus pedestal painted beneath, and a canopy above, the central inscription of the *daimoku*. Examples occur from the generation immediately following Nichiren.¹⁵⁶ Another development was the production of pictorial maṇḍalas on which, apart from the central inscription of the *daimoku*, the characters for some or nearly all of the names, including that of Nichiren himself, were replaced by painted images. Known as *emandara* 繪曼荼羅, painted versions of the *daimandara* generally assumed two forms. One depicts the jeweled stūpa with the figures of the two buddhas Śākyamuni and Tahō seated inside. In such instances, the *daimoku* is inscribed vertically in a cartouche placed between the two buddhas. In a second form, the stūpa is not represented, and only the *daimoku* is inscribed in characters, while all the other figures are rendered as pictorial images.¹⁵⁷ Unlike the *daimandara* written solely with logographs, pictorial versions required colored inks and the skills of a professional painter of Buddhist images and would have been more expensive to produce.

In addition to *daimandara* inscribed by leading clerics within the several Hokkeshū lineages, copies of Nichiren's holographic maṇḍalas were made by tracing—executed so accurately that it is often difficult to distinguish them from the originals. Examples of *daimandara* produced by woodblock also began to appear in the fourteenth century. These became common in the early modern period (1603–1868), when government census policy required all families to affiliate with a Buddhist temple. The cabinet-style household altar, still in use today, also dates to that time.¹⁵⁸

Except for two written on silk, all of Nichiren's extant holographic maṇḍalas were inscribed on paper. Initially, those intended for

¹⁵⁶ Terao, *Nichiren Shōnin shinseki*, 8–21; Ōhara and Yamakawa, 'Mandara honzon sōgon no jirei to igi', *MH*, 158–63.

¹⁵⁷ *NJ*, s.v. 'Emandara', 1097d–98a. For examples, see Kyōto Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan, *Nichiren to Hokke no meihō*, plates 49–52, 55.

¹⁵⁸ Nakao, 'Mohon no keifu', *MH*, 182–84. For examples of maṇḍalas printed by woodblock, see *MH*, 187–89.

congregations were probably unrolled and displayed only when devotees gathered on ceremonial occasions. Growth in the number of Hokkeshū temples demanded *honzon* that could be permanently enshrined. During the Muromachi period (1336–1573)—probably as an extension of the earlier practice of mounting Nichiren’s maṇḍalas on wooden boards to spare them the wear and tear of repeated rolling and unrolling—some Hokkeshū temples began to enshrine ‘plank maṇḍalas’ (*ita mandara* 板曼荼羅). These are copies of Nichiren’s *daimandara* that were traced onto wooden boards. Often the boards were painted with black lacquer and the characters carved out and inlaid with gold, enhancing their dramatic effect.¹⁵⁹

Honzon were also produced using three-dimensional images to represent the central elements of the *daimandara*. One such configuration comprised a statue of Śākyamuni flanked by statues of the four leaders of the bodhisattvas of the earth. By their presence, these bodhisattvas indicate that the central figure is not the historical Śākyamuni but the primordially awakened, constantly abiding buddha revealed in the ‘Fathoming the Lifespan’ chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*; they also serve to emphasize the mission of propagation in the Final Dharma age. This configuration of ‘one buddha and four attendants’ (*isson shishi* 一尊四士) seems to have appeared very shortly after Nichiren’s death.¹⁶⁰ Another assemblage consisted of

¹⁵⁹ *NJ*, s.v. ‘*Ita mandara honzon*’ 板曼荼羅本尊, 11c–d; Nakao, ‘Mohon no keifu’, *MH*, 184. For examples, see *MH*, 190–93.

¹⁶⁰ On the concept of *isson shishi*, see Kuwana, ‘Nichiren Shōnin ni okeru honzon’, 56–60. The earliest notices of actual examples occur in the Nakayama lineage, which derives from Nichiren’s disciple Toki Jōnin 富木常忍 (1261–1299). After Nichiren’s death, Toki became a priest, taking the name Nichijō 日常, and converted his residence into a temple that would become Nakayama Hokekyōji 中山法華經寺 in Shimōsa province (Chiba prefecture). The earliest notices of *isson shishi* assemblages are: (1) Toki’s own, 1299 index of writings and other sacred objects received from Nichiren and others, to be transmitted as temple treasures (*Jōshūin honzon shōgyō no koto*, *Teihon* 3: 2729); and (2) a further index compiled in 1344 by Jōgyōin Nichiyū, Hokekyōji’s third abbot (*Honzon shōgyō roku*, *Teihon* 3: 2733, 2734). Only one work in the Nichiren

statues of the two buddhas, with a *daimoku* stele placed between them, and sometimes enclosed within a stūpa (*ittō ryōson* 一塔兩尊). A more complex configuration also consisted of the two buddhas seated together in a stūpa and flanked by the four bodhisattvas (*ittō ryōson shishi* 一塔兩尊四士).¹⁶¹ These sculptural forms, and variations thereon, are well attested in leading Hokkeshū temples of the medieval period.¹⁶² However, they were beyond the reach of most ordinary followers and never replaced the calligraphic maṇḍala as the *honzon* most widely used by Hokkeshū devotees.

collection—addressed to Toki—suggests that images of the four bodhisattvas flanking the primordial buddha may have been used as an object of worship in Nichiren’s lifetime (*Shibosatsu zōryū shō*, *Teihon* 2: 1647–1650). Some scholars, however, have questioned its authenticity (e.g., Yamagami, ‘*Fuji isseki*’, 57; Hanano, ‘Nichiren no honzon ron’, 72). Recent research suggests that the idea of *isson shishi* as a sculptural assemblage may have had connections with Nichiren’s disciple Byakuren Ajari Nikkō of the Fuji lineage, who insisted that any buddha images used as *honzon* by Nichiren’s followers must be accompanied by images of the four leaders of the bodhisattvas of the earth, to make clear that the Śākyamuni represented is the original buddha and not merely his transient historical manifestation. See note 194 below. Another possibly relevant, art historical source for dating the appearance of *isson shishi*, designated an Important Cultural Property, is an early portrait of Nichiren on silk passed down by Myōhorenji in Tamazawa 玉沢妙法蓮寺伝来の絹本着色日蓮上人像, which depicts this configuration in the background. However, scholarly opinion divides as to whether it was painted in Nichiren’s lifetime or after his death (see Kuwana, ‘Nichiren Shōnin ni okeru honzon’, 72–73, note 59).

¹⁶¹ The earliest attested grouping of this kind was made by Jōgyōin Nichiyū (see previous note) in 1335 (*Ichigo shoshū zenkon kiroku*, *NSZ* 1: 445).

¹⁶² Such carved assemblages are often seen in Nichirenshū temples today. However, few examples have survived from the medieval period; most are from the early modern period or later (Nakao, ‘Nichirenshū shoki no honzon kanjō’, 1–2). In Nichirenshū today, some practitioners enshrine a small image of Nichiren together with the maṇḍala in the family altar (Fujii, *Uchi no otera wa Nichirenshū*, 191).

Secret Transmissions on the *Daimandara* and the Japanese *Kami*

Nichiren wrote very little explaining the technical aspects of the *daimandara*, such as how it should be inscribed, or the specific meanings of its individual elements. At least initially, instruction on these topics appears to have been handed down orally. Written records of these oral transmissions (*kuden* 口傳) concerning the *daimandara* began to appear around the latter fifteenth century; how far back the transmissions themselves may go before then is difficult to know. Such *kuden*, nominally secret and passed only from master to disciple, were by no means confined to Nichiren Buddhism but formed a prevalent mode by which knowledge in medieval Japan was produced and transmitted in religion, literature, and the arts. Records of oral transmissions were compiled and passed down as the proprietary knowledge of specific lineages.¹⁶³ Within the Hokkeshū, the majority of *kuden* concern the *daimandara*.¹⁶⁴ Although purporting to transmit the secret teachings of particular Hokkeshū lineages, their commonalities are more striking than their differences, and overlapping content suggests communication and cross-fertilization among Hokkeshū branches. Study of this literature promises to tell us more about the development of interpretations concerning the *daimandara* and about Nichiren Buddhist appropriations from esoteric teachings, original enlightenment discourse (*bongaku ron* 本覺論), ideas about the *kami*, and other major currents of medieval Japanese Buddhism.

In general, these transmissions take a strongly immanentist stance, stressing the power of faith in the *daimandara*, as the manifestation of the ever-present buddha and his realm, to manifest one's innate enlightenment. A collection of transmissions in Nichirō's lineage contains the following:

¹⁶³ On the culture of secret transmission in Tendai Buddhist circles, see Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, esp. 97–152.

¹⁶⁴ These transmissions are collected in *HRS*. See also Shigyō, 'Honzon kuden', and Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 328–34, which is indebted to Shigyō's research.

The ultimate teaching of the *Lotus Sūtra* is the original inherence of the ten realms. When you face this object of veneration, the realm of the self, the realm of the Buddha, and the realm of all living beings are all the essence of the Wonderful Dharma, the suchness that is original enlightenment . . . Now [in our school, we] do not establish contemplation [of the principle of three thousand realms in one thought-moment]. We directly observe, manifested on paper, the actuality of the three thousand realms. 法華終窮極說十界本有之義也。奉_レ向_レ此本尊_一已界佛界衆生界全妙法眞如本覺體也.....今者不_レ立_レ觀念_一顯_レ紙上_一直覽_レ三千_一即事也。¹⁶⁵

Other transmissions interpret the significance of individual figures whose names appear on the *daimandara* and the conventions to be observed in inscribing it. For example, in the same collection, we read

As to the way of writing the characters: According to worldly transmissions, there are various styles, such as the tapered needle, fish scales, tiger claws, and sword shapes . . . In the teachings of this sect, we take *shakubuku* 折伏 as our pride, so the brush method of sword shapes and tiger claws should naturally be used. 書_レ文字_一法、俗傳有_レ懸針魚鱗虎爪劍形等之習_一.....當宗'法以_レ折伏_一為_レ面目_一故自然_レ劍形虎爪之筆法可_レ用_レ之也。¹⁶⁶

This transmission, using a logic of resemblance common to medieval *kuden* literature, assimilates the bold calligraphic styles of 'sword shapes' and 'tiger claws' to the Hokkeshū ethos of *shakubuku* 折伏 or aggressive proselytizing that rebukes attachment to provisional teachings.

Still other transmissions focus on the significance of the two Japanese *kami*, Amaterasu and Hachiman, appearing on the *daimandara*. By Nichiren's time, it was widely maintained that the Japanese *kami* are the local avatars or traces manifested out of compassion by the buddhas and bodhisattvas, who are their original

¹⁶⁵ *Mandara sōden*, *HRS*, 247, 248; *NSZ* 1: 221, 222.

¹⁶⁶ *Mandara sōden*, *HRS*, 253; *NSZ* 1: 228.

ground. This discourse of ‘origins and traces’ (*honji suijaku* 本地垂迹) represented an effort to incorporate local deities into a Buddhist interpretive frame.¹⁶⁷ Nichiren’s particular reading of this concept was that all *kami* are manifestations of the primordial Śākyamuni of the *Lotus Sūtra* and protect the sūtra’s devotees; hence the presence of Amaterasu and Hachiman, arguably the two most prominent of the Japanese *kami*, on his maṇḍala.

One intriguing article of transmission, framed in question-and-answer format, enlists the presence of these two deities to assert the timeless, immediate nature of the buddhahood that the *daimandara* embodies. It poses the question: according to the Japanese origin myths, the Sun Goddess belongs to the fifth generation of earthly gods and thus may have been roughly contemporaneous with the historical Śākyamuni Buddha, yet Japan is far from India. And Hachiman is the apotheosis of Emperor Ōjin 応神天皇 (trad. r. 270–310), who lived well after Śākyamuni’s passing. How then could these two deities have been present when Śākyamuni preached the *Lotus Sūtra*? The response shifts perspective from a linear-temporal, historical perspective to one that is timeless and maṇḍalic. The *daimandara*, it says, embodies the enlightenment of the three thousand realms in one thought-moment; it encompasses in a single moment past, present, and future without beginning or end and all space without limit. How could it not include the *kami*?¹⁶⁸ Here again we see how Nichiren’s *daimandara* participates in a larger shift in understanding of the *Lotus* assembly, from a point of origin in the remote past to an ever-present reality accessible through faith and practice.

The underlying unity of buddhas and *kami* remained a common assumption within Japanese religion from Heian times (794–1185) throughout Japan’s early modern era (1603–1868), and different systems of association between them developed. These include Ryōbu Shintō 両部神道, which identifies the inner and outer Ise shrines with the Womb and Diamond Realm maṇḍalas of the esoteric teachings,

¹⁶⁷ For an introduction to this concept, see Teeuwen and Rambelli, ‘Introduction’, *Buddhas and Kami*, 1–53.

¹⁶⁸ *Minobu sōden*, *HRS*, 190–91.

or Sannō Shintō 山王神道, which identifies the Sannō tutelary deity of Tendai’s Mount Hiei with the Tendai doctrine of the threefold truth and the primordial Śākyamuni Buddha of the *Lotus Sūtra*. The Hokkeshū evolved its own *kami* practices and interpretations in a tradition known as Hokke Shintō 法華神道, which included a cult of thirty protector *kami* associated with the days of the month.¹⁶⁹ *Honji suijaku* ideas began to be challenged, however, with the rise of the *kokugaku* 國学 or Nativist movement of the early modern era. Hirata Atsutane 平田篤胤 (1776–1843), one of its leading exponents, excoriated the Nichiren and Shin Buddhist sects for slighting the *kami*. He denounced the Nichiren maṇḍala for its inclusion of the national deities, Amaterasu and Hachiman, where they ‘are treated as minions of [Buddhism’s] beggarly founder Shaka’, probably referring to their placement in the maṇḍala’s lower register.¹⁷⁰ The *daimandara* was among the targets of the Meiji government’s directive to separate Buddhist and Shinto elements (*shinbutsu bunri* 神仏分離) in the early 1870s.¹⁷¹ Atsutane’s criticisms were again revived during the Fifteen Years’ War (1931–1945), when rightwing ideologues harshly criticized the *daimandara* as insulting to the Sun Goddess and the Japanese *kami*. Nichiren temples hid their maṇḍalas or papered over the names of the two *kami* and burned writings explaining their presence on the *daimandara*. Government pressures to remove the two deities from the maṇḍala met with fierce resistance from Nichiren Buddhist clerics and laity alike and ceased only with the end of the Pacific War in 1945.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ Dolce, ‘Hokke Shintō’. See also Miyazaki, *Nichirensbū no shugojin*, which includes discussion of other deities, some of Indian origin, adopted by Nichiren temples as tutelary deities.

¹⁷⁰ *Shinteki nishū ron*, 259. See also Ono, “‘Fukei jiken’ kō”, 422.

¹⁷¹ Tsuji, *Meiji ishin*, 1: 125. On the separation edicts, see Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs*, esp. 43–86.

¹⁷² Ono, “‘Fukei jiken’ kō”, 431–33.

The *Daimandara* and Death Ritual

Nichiren stressed that chanting *Namu Myōhō-renge-kyō* enables the ‘realization of buddhahood with this very body’ (*sokushin jōbutsu* 即身成佛). But what happens after death? Nichiren assured his followers that those who embrace the *Lotus Sūtra* would meet again in the ‘pure land of Eagle Peak’ (Ryōzen jōdo 靈山淨土).¹⁷³ Unlike, for example, the buddha Amida’s pure land in the west, the pure land of Eagle Peak does not have a specific cosmological direction but rather corresponds to the realm of the constantly abiding Śākyamuni Buddha of the *Lotus Sūtra* that is depicted on Nichiren’s *daimandara*, a realm encompassing both the living and the deceased. Over time, Nichiren’s later followers came to employ the *daimandara*, or specific versions of it, in deathbed, funerary, and mortuary contexts.

Throughout the Buddhist world, one’s thoughts at the moment of death have been said to exert a profound influence on one’s postmortem fate. In premodern Japan, Buddhists across sectarian boundaries developed rituals to help the dying focus their last thoughts on the Buddha. Instructions for deathbed practice in the Nichiren tradition begin to appear around the turn of the seventeenth century; probably they codified ritual protocols to assist the dying that had already been established.¹⁷⁴ First, the maṇḍala is to be hung close to the dying person, where that individual can see it. This practice may have been based on the tradition, mentioned above, that Nichiren himself instructed that the *daimandara* be hung beside his deathbed.¹⁷⁵ The seventeenth-century *Chiyo migusa* 千代見草, the most detailed of the deathbed ritual instructions compiled among Nichiren Buddhists, says that, when the last moment approaches, one should

¹⁷³ On the genealogy of this concept as a postmortem destination and Nichiren’s particular understanding, see Tsumori, ‘Ryōzen jōdo’, and Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 292–94, and ‘The Moment of Death’, 41–46.

¹⁷⁴ For Nichiren Buddhist deathbed practices in early modern Japan, see Stone, *Right Thoughts*, 355–57.

¹⁷⁵ See note 5 above.

give the dying person the *daimandara* bearing the words ‘directly arriving at the place of enlightenment’ and have them hold it firmly. Ring the bell a while, and when their thoughts have quieted and focused, chant the *daimoku* in rhythm with the dying person’s breathing, neither too fast nor too slow. 先直至道場の印文の、大まんだらを手^てにわたして、しかともたせ、りんをしぼしならし、正念^{しょうねん}にしづめて、だいもくを、病人^{びょうにん}の息^{いき}に合^あて、はやからず、おそからず、となへてすゝむべし。¹⁷⁶

Here the phrase ‘directly arriving at the place of enlightenment’ suggests that the author had in mind the *rinjū mandara* 臨終曼荼羅 or ‘maṇḍala for the time of death’, a version of Nichiren’s maṇḍala thought to have first appeared shortly before the early modern period and expressly intended for deathbed use. In addition to this phrase from the *Lotus Sūtra*, this version of the *daimandara* was inscribed with the name of King Enma 閻魔王 (Skt. Yāma), lord of the afterworld who judges the dead, and his five officials (Jp. *godō myōkan* 五道冥官), who preside over the five realms of rebirth, and was evidently intended to enlist the powers of these figures on behalf of the deceased. At least twenty-six *rinjū mandara*, inscribed between 1592 and 1763, survive.¹⁷⁷

There are also indications from the medieval period and later that a copy of Nichiren’s maṇḍala, especially inscribed for the purpose, was sometimes placed in the coffin with the deceased person.¹⁷⁸ This practice calls to mind such passages from Nichiren’s writings as, ‘This maṇḍala...will be a lamp on the dark path to the next world and a fine horse to carry you over the mountains of death’ 此曼荼羅は.....

¹⁷⁶ Kashiwahara and Fujii, *Kinsei bukkō*, 448. *Chiyo migusa* is attributed to Shinshōin Nichion 心性院日遠 (1572–1642) but is probably slightly later. The phrase quoted is from the *Lotus Sūtra*: ‘Mounting this jeweled vehicle, they will directly arrive at the place of enlightenment’ 乘此寶乘直至道場 (*Miaofa lianhua jing*, T no. 262, 9: 2.15a13–14).

¹⁷⁷ Matsumura, *Nichirensū gireishi*, 69–97; Stone, ‘Moment of Death’, 47–50.

¹⁷⁸ Matsumura, *Nichirensū gireishi*, 78; Stone, ‘Moment of Death’, 50–51.

冥途にはともしびとなり、死出^{して}の山にては良馬となり, and 'The *Lotus Sūtra* is the robe that will cover your nakedness in the next life. The sūtra states, "like a naked person who obtains clothing". This *gohonzon* will be your clothing on the path of the afterworld' 法華經は後生のはちをかかす衣なり。經云く如し裸者得タルカレ衣云云。此御本尊こそ冥途のいしやうなれ。¹⁷⁹ It also suggests that some of Nichiren's later followers may have thought that the maṇḍala's physical presence would protect the deceased on their journey to the next existence.

Burial of the maṇḍala with the body was likely connected with the widespread talismanic use, in late medieval and early modern times, of the *kyō katabira* 經帷子 or *kyōe* 經衣 (literally, 'sūtra robe'), a robe for wrapping the corpse on which sūtras, mantras, or other holy texts had been written, the specific text differing according to the deceased person's sectarian affiliation.¹⁸⁰ Among Nichiren followers, the maṇḍala was sometimes inscribed on the *kyō katabira*, along with the names of King Enma and his officials, as on the *rinjū mandara*. Within Nichirenshū, this practice continues to the present.¹⁸¹

Related mortuary practices also include *itabi* 板碑, stone steles erected widely during the medieval period for votive purposes, most commonly for the enlightenment of the deceased. *Itabi* were often inscribed with the *nenbutsu*, the invocation of the name of the buddha Amida, or the names of other buddhas or bodhisattvas, or with Siddham letters representing various esoteric deities. Among Nichiren Buddhists, *itabi* were inscribed with the *daimoku*. Some of these *daimoku itabi* bore only the inscription 'Namu Myōhō-rengēkyō', while on others, the *daimandara* itself was inscribed, either in abbreviated form or, less commonly, in the full, expanded form with representatives of all ten realms.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ *Myōhō mandara kuyō ji*, *Teihon* 1: 698–99; *Jakunichi-bō gosho*, 2: 1670. The *Lotus Sūtra* quote is at *Miaofa lianhua jing*, T no. 262, 9: 6.54b15, where it appears as one of ten similes illustrating the power and blessings of the *Sūtra*.

¹⁸⁰ Mochizuki, *Mochizuki bukkyō daijiten* 1: 568a–c.

¹⁸¹ Matsumura, 'Kinsei no mandara honzon no shujusō', *MH*, 212.

¹⁸² *Daimoku itabi* are briefly introduced in Sakata, 'Daimoku itabi to mandara honzon', *MH*, 180. See also Sakata's *Daimoku itabi*.

Nichiren's maṇḍala depicts the ever-present realm of the original Śākyamuni Buddha revealed in the 'Fathoming the Lifespan' chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*. By faith in the *Lotus Sūtra* and the chanting of its title, Nichiren taught, devotees can in the present moment enter into that buddha's enlightenment. By maintaining faith until the end, one would also be assured of that enlightenment in one's next life. Given this all-embracing significance of the maṇḍala, believers desired its presence, not only for daily practice, but at the moment of death. Enshrining it at the deathbed would have helped them to face the end with a fearless and composed mind, while interring it with the body or inscribing it on the *kyō katabira* or on an *itabi* would have been seen as providing protection for the deceased in their transition from this life to the next.

Maṇḍalas and Legends

A widespread temple practice in Japan's late medieval and early modern or Tokugawa (1603–1868) periods, across sectarian boundaries, was the periodic display of temple treasures (*kaichō* 開帳, literally 'opening the curtain'), in which sacred objects ordinarily kept hidden were unveiled on dates of particular significance, attracting worshippers eager to form auspicious karmic connections (*kechien* 結縁) by viewing them.¹⁸³ At Nichiren Buddhist temples, maṇḍalas inscribed by Nichiren often formed the centerpiece of such displays, and legends about them sometimes formed in this context. Legends about specific maṇḍalas also appeared in the many biographies of Nichiren that, stimulated by the rise of a flourishing print culture, were composed and circulated at this time.

One such legend concerns a maṇḍala *honzon* inscribed by Nichiren in 1276 and held by the temple Kitayama Honmonji 北山本門寺 in Suruga province (Shizuoka prefecture). At some point, the area at the maṇḍala's lower edge where Nichiren's written seal would have appeared became damaged and was pasted over with a small

¹⁸³ Matsumura, 'Kinsei no mandara honzon no shuju sō', *MH*, 212–14. On *kaichō*, see Kitamura, *Kinsei kaichō*.

square of paper. The following story evolved to explain this repair. When Tokugawa Ieyasu 徳川家康 (1543–1616), who would unify Japan after a long period of civil war, was headed to fight Takeda Katsuyori 武田勝頼 (1546–1582), the temple lent him this maṇḍala for protection. It was carried aloft into battle, where it intercepted a bullet intended for Ieyasu, saving his life. This story represents a Nichiren Buddhist version of *migawari* 身代わり legends in which a buddha or bodhisattva image receives vicariously the wounds of an attack intended for its devotee. This particular legend linked Kitayama Honmonji to the authority of the recently ascendant Tokugawa house and underscored the protective power of the maṇḍala in its possession, which in consequence came to be known as the ‘gunshot maṇḍala’ (*teppō mandara* 鉄砲曼荼羅).¹⁸⁴

Another legend involves the *shūtei mandara*, discussed above, which is held by Hikigayatsu Chōkōzan Myōhonji 比企谷長興山妙本寺 in Kamakura. On this maṇḍala, in the central inscription of the *daimoku*, a quirk of the brush gives the long, horizontal stroke in the character *ren* the appearance—to some eyes—of a wriggling snake. The following story attempts to account for it. It is set during a real event, the Satake Disturbance (Satake no ran 佐竹の乱) of 1422, when Satake Tsunemoto 佐竹常元 rebelled against Ashikaga Mochiuji 足利持氏 (1398–1439), the shōgun’s deputy in Kamakura, and Mochiuji ordered Uesugi Norinao 上杉憲直 to attack him. Outnumbered, Tsunemoto took refuge at Myōhonji, but his enemies pursued him there. In the fighting, the temple’s main hall caught fire. According to

the legend, the abbot rescued the maṇḍala and other treasures from the flames, placing them for safety in a well on the temple precincts. The well stood beside the shrine of a local *kami*, believed to ward off snakes, that had been incorporated into the temple complex as a protector deity. Immediately dark clouds arose and torrential rain fell, quenching the fire and saving the other temple structures. When the maṇḍala was retrieved, it was found that the brushstroke in question had assumed the form of a snake or dragon ascending into the sky. This legend, while underscoring the maṇḍala’s protective workings, also links it to a complex web of associations, rooted in the broader religious culture, among *kami*, snakes, and dragons, which were believed to produce rain.¹⁸⁵

In these and other instances, features of Nichiren’s holographic maṇḍalas inspired stories about them touting their numinous powers. But the opposite also occurred, where legends inspired the production of novel forms of the *daimandara*. One such legend involves the attempted Mongol invasions of Japan in 1274 and 1282. An early account suggests that, when Nichiren was summoned back to Kamakura from exile to Sado in 1274, Bakufu officials offered him official patronage if he would conduct prayer rites for the country’s protection along with those being performed by adepts of other Buddhist schools. However, Nichiren refused, convinced that only by faith in the *Lotus Sūtra* could the disaster be forestalled.¹⁸⁶ This version of events is widely accepted in contemporary accounts of Nichiren’s life. However, during the Tokugawa period, a legend emerged to the effect that the emperor himself had sought Nichiren’s ritual aid against the Mongols and that Nichiren, in response, inscribed the *daimandara* within a sun disk on a great banner. When it was unfurled atop a hill overlooking Hakata Bay in Kyūshū, a great typhoon arose

¹⁸⁴ *Mokuroku* no. 33; *Shinseki*, 102–03 (340–41); *MH*, 66–67, 213. Nakao notes that the damage to the maṇḍala does not penetrate the paper and is thus inconsistent with a bullet hole (*MH*, 66). It also seems unlikely that one of Nichiren’s original maṇḍalas would have been lent out for this purpose. However, copies of the *daimandara*—or at least the *daimoku*—written on banners were sometimes carried into battle, as were inscriptions of the *nenbutsu* and other mantras. Katō Kiyomasa 加藤清正 (1562–1611), an ardent Hokkeshū devotee and one of Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s senior generals during the Imjin War (1592–1598), is said to have carried with him a banner inscribed with the *daimoku* that he received from the abbot of Honkokuji 本圀寺 in Kyoto (Fukunishi, ‘Kiyomasa kō shinkō’, 23).

¹⁸⁵ Nakao, ‘Myōhonji zō’, 17. This legend occurs in several variants. In one version, when Uesugi’s men plundered the temple and opened the well in search of treasure, all they found there was a small snake. But when the abbot opened it later after the fighting, the maṇḍala was still there, safe and unharmed (Yokoyama and Morikawa, *Kamakura monogatari* 3: 126–27).

¹⁸⁶ *Sanshi goden dodai* (c. 1333), *NSZ* 2: 250.

and destroyed the enemy fleet. This legend appears in several Nichiren hagiographies beginning in the eighteenth century and contributed to the formation of images of Nichiren as a spiritual protector of the nation.¹⁸⁷

This particular legend seems to have generated its own artifacts. By the late nineteenth century, we find actual 'banner maṇḍalas' (*bata mandara* 旗曼荼羅) being used by some Nichiren Buddhist temples in their version of the nation-protecting rites that were then being performed across sectarian lines. Gazetteers and other contemporaneous sources refer to a pair of such maṇḍalas, both said to have been inscribed by Nichiren himself for protection against the Mongols: One, held by Nichirenshū's head temple at Mount Minobu, was inscribed on a moon disk, and another, held by Saikyōji 最教寺, a branch temple of Minobu in Edo, was inscribed on a sun disk. Both were in fact used in prayer rites to dispel Western ships from Japanese coastal waters. These banner maṇḍalas, displayed in traveling *kaichō* or exhibitions of temple treasures, seem to have impressed the women of the shōgun's household, who on three occasions, in 1853, 1854, and 1857, requested and sponsored nation-protecting prayer rituals performed by priests of Mount Minobu and using the banner maṇḍala.¹⁸⁸

Another instance of a Nichiren-attributed maṇḍala inspired by the failure of the Mongol invasion attempts was 'discovered' in 1912, beneath the stūpa at Tōmyōji 燈明寺, a derelict Nichiren

¹⁸⁷ To my knowledge, this legend first appears in the *Honge betsu zu kōsoden* 本化別頭高祖傳 by Chijakuin Nisshō 智寂院日省 (1636–1721) (Fujimoto, *Shiryō sakuin*, 280; for the account itself, see Nichirenshū Zensho Shuppankai, *Nichiren Shōnin denkishū*, 293). Its most famous and influential retelling occurs in the 1867 popular biography of Nichiren by the lay Nichiren Buddhist scholar Ogawa Taidō 小川泰堂 (1814–1878); see Ogawa, *Nichiren Daishi shinjitsuden*, 341–42). However, some elements in Ogawa's narrative, such as the request coming from the emperor, and Nichiren declaring, 'Now is the time to repay my debt to my country!' 國恩を報じ奉るは唯今なり, have been removed from the postwar edition of Ogawa's collected works (*Ogawa Taidō zenshū*).

¹⁸⁸ Mochizuki, 'Bakumakki no shakai'.

temple undergoing demolition in Kyoto. This maṇḍala presented some unusual features: Right between the central inscription of the *daimoku*, *Namu Myōhō-enge-kyō*, and Nichiren's signature were inscribed the characters for 'the holy son of heaven, the gold wheel [-turning] great king' 聖天子金輪大王 (on Nichiren's holographic maṇḍalas, the *cakravartī-rāja*—designated simply as the 'wheel-turning sage king' 轉輪聖王—appears to the side.) This 'nation-protecting maṇḍala' (*gokoku mandara* 護国曼荼羅), as it came to be called, also bore the inscription: 'Night and day for the sake of this dharma, the devas constantly protect the great country of Japan' 諸天晝夜常為法故, 而衛護大日本國. Rumor spread that Nichiren himself had inscribed and used it in prayers to defeat the Mongols. Nichiren had taught that faith in the *Lotus Sūtra* would one day spread widely, making this world an ideal buddha land, a vision summed up in the phrase *rishhō ankoku* 立正安國 ('establishing the true teaching and bringing peace to the land'). At the time this maṇḍala came to light, Japan had begun to emerge as a modern imperial power. From the late nineteenth century through the Pacific war, some Nichiren Buddhist figures, both clerics and laity, interpreted Nichiren's message of *rishhō ankoku* in light of Japan's modern nationalist, emperor-centered ideology. For them, the 'holy son of heaven' inscribed on the newly discovered maṇḍala pointed to the Japanese emperor and Japan's presumed sacred destiny of world spiritual leadership. Over the vociferous protests of scholars within the Nichiren sect who denounced it as a forgery, the maṇḍala was presented to the Taishō emperor in 1915, in honour of his accession.¹⁸⁹ Since the end of the Pacific War in 1945, however, nationalistic readings of Nichiren's vision of a this-worldly buddha land have been largely displaced by interpretations stressing world peace and liberal democratic values.

The power of the *daimandara* to generate legends speaks to its ongoing importance as the living center of faith and practice for Nichiren Buddhists. Legends about the maṇḍalas of specific temples, such as those of Kitayama Honmonji and Myōhonji in Kamakura, discussed above, no doubt worked to express and strengthen the

¹⁸⁹ Takahashi, 'Taishō yonen hōken honzon'.

identity of specific congregations. At the same time, perhaps more than any other medieval Buddhist figure, Nichiren had stressed the social dimension of Buddhist faith and practice as the foundation for an ideal world. The *daimandara* itself expresses the realm of the eternal buddha, to be realized in the actual world through the spread of faith in the *Lotus Sūtra*. Thus it is not surprising that its protective powers have been understood in collective as well as individual terms, giving rise to a tradition attributing the repulsion of the Mongol invading fleet in the thirteenth century to Nichiren's inscription of a maṇḍala for ritual prayers of nation protection. That tradition has in turn been variously interpreted with shifts in Japan's place in the modern world.

The *Daimandara* in the Fuji School

Precisely because of its centrality to faith and practice, the *daimandara* has played a key role in defining Nichiren Buddhist identity. But that very importance has also engendered controversy concerning its interpretation and the ritual protocols surrounding it, reinforcing distinctions between particular lineages within the Nichiren tradition. Nowhere is this more evident than in the case of the Fuji school. The Fuji lineage originated with Byakuren Ajari Nikkō, mentioned above, whose differences with Nichiren's other five leading disciples led, shortly after Nichiren's death, to the first schism within his following. Early in 1289, Nikkō departed Mount Minobu, the site of Nichiren's grave, and established an independent base near Mount Fuji in Suruga province.¹⁹⁰ Today the Fuji school is best known through its most prominent (although not only) representative, Nichiren Shōshū 日蓮正宗. Nichiren Shōshū was for most of its history a small branch of the larger Nichiren tradition; however, Japan's largest lay Buddhist organization, Sōka Gakkai 創価学会, was affiliated with Nichiren Shōshū from the time of its founding in 1930 until a decisive split in 1991. A majority of Nichiren Buddhist practitioners outside Japan

¹⁹⁰ For the background of the split, see *Kyōdanshi*, 67–79, and Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 335–36, along with the sources cited there.

either belong or once belonged to Sōka Gakkai and/or Nichiren Shōshū, and it is this stream of Nichiren Buddhism that persons living outside Japan are most likely to have encountered. This section will touch briefly on several issues that, from early on, distinguished the Fuji lineage from other branches of the Nichiren sect in its understanding and treatment of the *daimandara*.

Most lineages of the Nichiren tradition accept as the object of worship either the *daimandara* or images of the primordial Śākyamuni Buddha. In contrast, the Fuji school insists that only Nichiren's *daimandara* should be revered as the *honzon* and rejects the use of buddha images altogether.¹⁹¹ The *Fuji isseki monto zonchi no koto* 富士一跡門徒存知事 [What adherents of the Fuji school should know], an early document of the school attributed to Nikkō himself, reads,

Nikkō says: '[Nichiren] Shōnin's doctrine disallows entirely the use of wooden or painted images of buddhas and bodhisattvas as objects of veneration. Trusting to the intent of his writings, we take only the five characters of [the title of] the *Lotus Sūtra* as the object of veneration, that is, the object of worship that he himself inscribed'. 日興云、於^レ聖人御立^レ法門^ニ者、全以^テ繪像木像^ノ佛菩薩^ヲ不^レ為^レ本尊^ト。唯任^セ御書^ノ意^ニ以^テ妙法蓮華經^ノ五字^ヲ可^レ為^レ本尊^ト、即^チ自筆^ノ本尊是也。¹⁹²

Nikkō appears to have been deeply uneasy about the use of buddha images as objects of veneration. On one occasion, the local Bakufu-appointed steward (*jitō* 地頭) of the Minobu area, Hakii (a.k.a.

¹⁹¹ Images of Nichiren and Nikkō—regarded in Nichiren Shōshū as Nichiren's sole legitimate successor—are sometimes placed flanking the *daimandara* in Nichiren Shōshū temples; however, it is the maṇḍala that is object of worship.

¹⁹² *Kōzen*, 308; *NSZ* 2: 124. Some scholars have seen this work as a later production retrospectively attributed to Nikkō (e.g., Mochizuki, *Nichiren kyōgaku*, 286; *NJ*, s.v. 'Fuji isseki monto zonchi no koto', 325c), while others uphold Nikkō's authorship (Takahashi, *Nichiren Shōshū shi*, 179–86; Kawasaki, 'Fuji isseki monto'; Yamagami, 'Fuji isseki monto'). At stake in the question of Nikkō's authorship is the issue of how early the Fuji 'daimandara only' stance emerged.

Hakiri) Sanenaga 波木井実長 (1222–1297)—originally Nikkō's convert, who had welcomed Nichiren to the mountain—made such an image. Nikkō instructed Hakii that, to be acceptable as a *honzon*, an image of Śākyamuni must be attended by images of the four leaders of the bodhisattvas of the earth—that is, the *isson shishi* configuration. Otherwise, Nikkō admonished, one is in effect worshipping not the original buddha but his transient manifestation, contravening Nichiren's teaching.¹⁹³ Nikkō's willingness to allow the *isson shishi* assemblage at first seems at odds with his purported statement, cited above, that Nichiren's teaching 'disallows entirely the use of wooden or painted images'. One recent study offers the following explanation. Although Nichiren had endorsed the use of images of Śākyamuni as *honzon* during his lifetime, after his death, it became increasingly difficult to make clear that such images represented the primordial buddha of the origin teaching of the *Lotus Sūtra* and not his provisional manifestation. Accordingly, Nikkō and his disciples stressed the preeminence of the *daimandara* while reluctantly permitting images of Śākyamuni only as a provisional arrangement for those deeply attached to them, provided they were accompanied by images of the four bodhisattvas.¹⁹⁴ This interpretation gains

¹⁹³ *Hara-dono gohenji, Kōzen*, 354; *NSZ* 2: 172. Nikkō was a strict purist, and, although he was Hakii's original teacher, after Nichiren's death, Hakii shifted his loyalties to the more accommodating Minbu Ajari Nikō 民部阿闍梨日向 (1253–1314), another of Nichiren's leading disciples who was then head of doctrinal instruction at Minobu. Fuji documents cite friction between the two, aggravated by Nikō's failure to support Nikkō in countering Hakii's multiple violations of orthopraxy, as one reason why Nikkō eventually decided that he would have to leave Minobu in order to protect the integrity of Nichiren's teachings. See note 190 above.

¹⁹⁴ Yamagami, 'Fuji isseki montō', 54–60. An appendix to *Fuji isseki* specifically names disciples of Nichiren in other lineages who had made *isson shishi* images, saying that, in so doing, they had 'stolen Nikkō's teaching' (*NSZ* 2: 127–28; *Kōzen*, 313). Yamagami reads this to mean that they misappropriated Nikkō's idea of an *isson shishi* sculptural configuration, reading it as a positive suggestion to be actively implemented and not the reluctant compromise that Nikkō had

support from a somewhat later Fuji document, which asserts that Nichiren's *daimandara* is the proper object of worship for the Final Dharma age; allowance may be made for the use of personal images of Śākyamuni by persons firmly devoted to them, but such images must be accompanied by the those of the four bodhisattvas, and solitary images of the Buddha are never to be employed.¹⁹⁵

The Fuji lineage not only regards the *daimandara* as the sole legitimate object of veneration but also sought to oversee the transmission of Nichiren's holographic maṇḍalas. This concern is also traceable to Nikkō. As we have seen, Nikkō kept detailed records of those among his own disciples and lay followers for whom Nichiren had inscribed maṇḍalas. Several of Nichiren's extant holographic maṇḍalas even bear Nikkō's accompanying inscriptions (*soegaki* 添書), written to the side in small characters, to the effect that the maṇḍala had been conferred upon so-and-so, the recipient, at his, Nikkō's, request.¹⁹⁶ A few of these *soegaki* indicate that Nikkō had approved the transfer of the maṇḍala to a second individual, for example, after the original recipient's death.¹⁹⁷

In a letter from Minobu to the lay priest (*nyūdō* 入道) Abutsu-bō Nittoku 阿佛房日得, a convert during his exile to Sado Island, Nichiren had written: 'Because it is so very rare and wondrous, I am inscribing the jeweled stūpa for you. Do not bequeath it to anyone except your own son. Do not show it to others unless they are firm in faith' あまりにありがたく候へば寶塔をかきあらはしまいらせ候ぞ。子にあらざるばゆづる事なかれ。信心強盛の者に非んば見する事なかれ。¹⁹⁸

intended. Horie ('Shoki Nikkō monryū', 139) adds in support of Yamagami's argument the fact that Nikkō himself never produced an *isson shishi* assemblage.

¹⁹⁵ *Gonin shoba shō, Kōzen*, 295; *NSZ* 2: 83.

¹⁹⁶ Takagi, 'Nikkō to sono montei', 31–33; Nakao, 'Nakao, 'Nichiren no "gohonzon"', 54–55. This seems to have been a practice unique to Nikkō; no such *soegaki* by the other leading disciples appear on any of Nichiren's extant maṇḍalas, although one bears the written seal of Nichirō and another, that of the later figure Kuonjōin Nisshin 久遠成院日親 (1407–1488) (*Mokuroku* nos. 17 and 47; *Shinseki*, 142–43 (325–26); 140–41 (353–54); *MH*, 72–73 (no. 47).

¹⁹⁷ Ueda, 'Kōki no mandara' (3), 29, 31, 34–45.

This injunction reflects the status of the maṇḍala as a sacred object to which only those committed to the *Lotus Sūtra* and to Nichiren should have access. However, it clearly indicates that Abutsu-bō could pass on the maṇḍala to his son. Abutsu-bō's son, Moritsuna 守綱, was in fact a devout and energetic follower who helped solidify the early community of converts on Sado Island after Nichiren was pardoned from his sentence of exile there and had returned to Kamakura.

Nikkō, however, would eventually assert that the main temple, or more specifically, the lineage head, should oversee and approve such transfers. This is indicated, for example, in a letter he wrote in 1332, fifty years after Nichiren's death, to his disciple Sado Ajari Nichiman 佐渡阿闍梨日滿 (1272–1360), who was Abutsu-bō's great grandson. Nichiman was then heading the Sado community; he had just relocated the temple Myōsenji 妙宣寺, founded at Abutsu-bō's former residence, establishing it as the center for followers in northern Japan. Nichiman had inherited one of Nichiren's original maṇḍalas that had been passed down in his family, a fact known from Nikkō's own inscription on the maṇḍala itself, confirming its transfer to Nichiman.¹⁹⁹ Nikkō's letter reaffirms Nichiman's inheritance of the maṇḍala but qualifies that 'it is a treasure of Honmonji, to be enshrined in the main hall of Abutsu-bō's temple'; otherwise, it should be kept 'at the main hall at Fuji'. Nikkō continues,

One who transfers [the *daimandara*] privately, even to his own child or grandchild, commits the same sin as one who sells it. From now on, you must not confer the *honzon* on those persons, guilty of grave dharma slander (*hōbō* 謗法), who refuse to heed their teacher's instruction and violate this admonition. If such violations occur, you should appeal to the local steward or to the provincial governor's office. 縱雖_レ為_二子孫_一私與_レ之若又賣買者可_レ為_二同罪_一也。背_二此旨_一不_レ用_二師匠之教訓_一於_二大謗法之輩_一者自今以後永不_レ可_レ付_二與本尊_一之。猶以違背之時者地頭守護所訴訟申可_レ沙汰取給_二也。²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ *Abutsu-bō gosho*, *Teihon* 2: 1145.

¹⁹⁹ *Mokuroku* no. 12, *Shinseki*, 72 (320).

²⁰⁰ *Sado no kuni Hokkeshū tō honzon shōgyō no koto*, *Kōzen*, 132; *NSZ* 2: 142.

Nikkō's letter makes clear the status of this particular maṇḍala as a temple *honzon*, transmitted to Nichiman for an entire congregation. But we can also glimpse here Nikkō's efforts as lineage head to assert the lineage's proprietorship of Nichiren's holographic maṇḍalas and its authority to monitor and approve their transmission, contrary to followers who presumably regarded maṇḍalas they had received from Nichiren as their own or their family's property to pass on. What lay behind Nikkō's stance? The above-mentioned *Fuji isseki monto zonchi no koto* offers clues. One passage says that Nichiren's holographic maṇḍalas represent

...the object of worship that has never before spread in the world, whether in the True, Semblance, or Final Dharma ages. Therefore, those among Nikkō's followers who hold them must absolutely never transfer them to their children or descendants. They should be enshrined in the same place, and my six disciples must all protect and revere them, until the time when this teaching has widely spread (*kōsen-rufu* 廣宣流布) and a ruler who embraces it will make inquiry concerning them. 一閻浮提_レ未_レ流布_二、正像未_レ弘通_二本尊也。然_レ則_レ於_二日興_一門徒所持之輩_二者、無_レ左右_一子孫等_レ讓_レ、弟子等_レ不_レ可_レ付_二囑_一。同_レ一所_レ奉_二安置_一、六人一同_レ可_レ奉_二守護_一。是_レ偏_二廣宣流布_一時_レ、本化國王御尋有_レ期_二深_一敬重_二奉_一。²⁰¹

The text then mentions Nikkō's inscriptions on Nichiren's holographic maṇḍalas:

To sully the sacred inscriptions [i.e., Nichiren's maṇḍalas] with my vulgar brush is a truly fearful thing. But it happens that parents receive [the *daimandara*] on account of their strong faith but their descendants discard it, or that teachers confer it on their disciples in recompense for their devoted service, only for those disciples to

See also Ueda, 'Nichiren Shōnin no shoki mandara', 77–78, and Nakao, 'Nichiren no "gohonzon"', 70–71.

²⁰¹ *Kōzen*, 308–09; *NSZ* 2: 124. Here the 'six disciples' are the leading clerical disciples, not of Nichiren, but of Nikkō.

abandon it. Thus some [among Nichiren's maṇḍalas] have been turned into commodities for trade or been stolen by others. Because such instances are many, recording the identity of the original recipients preserves their good name for future ages. 誠^ニ以^テ凡^ノ筆^ヲ直^ニ讀^ミ聖^ノ筆^ノ事^尤雖^レ有^ト其^ノ恐^ト、或^ハ親^ハ以^テ強^盛之^信心^ヲ雖^レ賜^ハ之^ヲ孫^等捨^テ之^ヲ、或^ハ師^ハ酬^ニ常^隨給^仕之^功ニ^雖授^レ與^ト之^ヲ弟^子等捨^テ之^ヲ、依^テ之^ニ或^ハ以^テ交^易シ、或^ハ以^テ為^シ他^ノ被^テ盜^マ、如^ク此^ノ之^類其^數多^也。故^ニ書^キ付^クル^ハ所^賜之^本主^ノ交^名ヲ^為後^代之^高名^也。²⁰²

These passages convey Nikkō's conviction that the maṇḍalas inscribed by Nichiren were unprecedented sacred treasures to be preserved for the future, when his teaching would spread and even the ruler would embrace it. The second passage in particular also suggests that problems had arisen in the transmission of these holograph maṇḍalas to the next generation, and that Nikkō's insistence on the right of the lineage head to monitor their transfer may have been intended to protect them from mishandling, loss, or destruction.

Also significant in Nikkō's letter to Nichiman is the phrase 'treasure of Honmonji'. This phrase, or a variant thereof, appears in Nikkō's inscriptions on five of Nichiren's extant holographic maṇḍalas.²⁰³ 'Honmonji' 本門寺 was the name of a temple that Nikkō founded at Kitayama in Omosu in the Fuji area, after he had left Minobu and established Taisekiji 大石寺, later Nichiren Shōshū's head temple, in Suruga province. Nikkō spent the latter part of his life at Kitayama and also opened a seminary there to train disciples. At the same time, in the broader Nichiren tradition, 'Honmonji' is the name to be given to a

temple housing a future imperially sponsored ordination platform, the *bonmon no kaidan* 本門戒壇, which is to be erected when the emperor and his ministers will have come to embrace Nichiren's teaching. 'Treasure of Honmonji' could thus refer to this ideal future sacred site or to the actual Honmonji at Kitayama. Both meanings likely come together in Nikkō's inscriptions.²⁰⁴ In either case, this phrase reinforces the idea that Nichiren's holographic maṇḍalas ultimately belong not to the recipient but to the lineage, as a trust for the future.

Such strictures applied, not only to Nichiren's holographic maṇḍalas, but to copies of the *daimandara* made within the Fuji tradition. From early on, Fuji documents asserted that only the lineage head had the legitimate authority to inscribe the *daimandara*, an exclusive empowerment said to have been passed down from Nichiren himself in a direct line of master-disciple transmission. This claim, maintained to the present day, has been retrospectively attributed to Nikkō, though it is not clear whether this was indeed his intent.²⁰⁵ The ninth chief abbot of Taisekiji, Nichiu 日有 (1402–1482), who codified many procedures and regulations of the Fuji tradition, allowed priests in remote branch temples to inscribe the *daimandara* for their followers but not to affix their written seal, the authority for which was confined to the lineage head.²⁰⁶ In the medieval Japanese Buddhist world, claims of 'transmission to a single person' (*yuiju ichinin* 唯授一人) formed a common device for asserting the importance of particular teachings and ensuring the legitimacy of lineage succession; in this case, it would seem to have been instituted to maintain both orthopraxy and the authority of the lineage head.²⁰⁷

²⁰² *Kōzen*, 309; *NSZ* 2: 124.

²⁰³ *Mokuroku*, nos. 32–2, 55, 92, 104, and 107; *Shinseki*, 100 (340), 202–03 (361), 260–61 (392), 174–75 (401), and 246–47 (404); no. 107 also appears in *MH*, 92–93. Two additional examples of Nikkō's maṇḍala inscriptions mentioning the 'treasure of Honmonji' are cited in Takahashi, *Nichiren Shōshū*, 157–58 (nos. 9 and 10); these are drawn from *Mandara wakigaki tō* (see note 3 above; *FSY* 8: 177 [maṇḍala conferred on the lay follower Nichizō 俗日増] and 178 [conferred on the priest Nichizen 日禪]).

²⁰⁴ Hori, *Fuji Nikkō Shōnin*, 2: 221–22. A complete list of Nikkō's references to 'Honmonji' is given in Takahashi, *Nichiren Shōshū shi*, 157–58, which together suggest that the future site is meant. Nakao, however, reads 'treasure of Honmonji' in at least one case as referring specifically to Kitayama ('Nichiren no "gohonzon"', 70).

²⁰⁵ For example, a 1340 work by Nichidai 日大, a later disciple in Nikkō's line, writes that this was 'the will of Nikkō Shōnin' (*Sonshi jitsuroku*, *NSZ* 2: 418).

²⁰⁶ *Ushi kegi shō* 有師化儀抄, Articles 25 and 26, *FSY* 1: 111, along with commentarial notes (*chūge* 註解) by the fifty-ninth chief abbot, Hori Nichiko 堀日己亨 (1867–1957), on 112–14.

Another distinguishing feature of the Fuji school with respect to the *daimandara* concerned mortuary practices. By the early fourteenth century, the Fuji school was developing distinct positions on ritual and doctrinal matters, often defined in contrast to those of lineages descended from Nichiren's other main disciples. Here again we turn to the *Fuji iseki monto zonchi no koto*, which accuses followers of the other lineages of disrespecting the maṇḍala by wrapping it around the corpses of deceased believers prior to burial.²⁰⁸ Unfortunately, we have only the criticism from the Fuji side and do not know precisely what practice this refers to. It would seem to have been an early precursor to the widespread use in later medieval times of the *kyō katabira*, mentioned above, and the custom of enclosing a copy of the *daimandara* in the coffin, both practices rejected by Fuji adherents.

The same work also mentions reports to the effect that priests of other Nichiren lineages were making woodblocks from Nichiren's original maṇḍalas and distributing the prints to nonbelievers, presumably in the same manner that itinerant Pure Land preachers distributed talismans printed with the *nenbutsu*, the name of the buddha Amida. This too is condemned as an act of disrespect, with the added comment:

Among Nikkō's disciples, both clergy and laity, the maṇḍala *honzon* has been copied and conferred upon those who have demonstrated a considerable degree of faith by sacrificing their lives, by sustaining wounds, or by being expelled from their places of residence. Among

²⁰⁷ Some controversy exists as to how thoroughly this stricture was implemented. Matsuoka ('Taisekiji monryū no honzon shoshaken') deems it only a regulatory ideal, often honoured in the breach rather than the observance. Takahashi (*Nichiren Shōshū shi*, 433–51) criticizes Matsuoka for careless use of sources, arguing that several of the examples he cites of priests other than the lineage head inscribing maṇḍalas refer to individuals who had already broken with the Fuji lineage, or had not yet joined it, and were thus not under its authority. Both essays were written against the backdrop of the 1991 break between Nichiren Shōshū and Sōka Gakkai. See note 212 below.

²⁰⁸ *NSZ* 2: 124; *Kōzen*, 308.

those who received the *honzon* are some who were banished or beheaded [for the sake of their faith]. 於^レ日興^ノ弟子分^ニ者、在家出家^ノ中^ニ或^ハ捨^テ身命^ヲ或^ハ被^シ疵^ヲ若^ハ又在所^ニ追放^{タレテ}、一分信心^ノ有^ル輩^ニ忝^ク奉^リ書写^シ授^メ與^ス之^ヲ者也。本尊人数等、又追放^セ人等、頸切^ラ致^ス死^ス人等。²⁰⁹

Here, too, while the context remains unclear, we can glimpse a divide over how the maṇḍala was understood: whether it should be reproduced and distributed widely, as an opportunity to create karmic bonds with the *Lotus Sūtra*, or strictly reserved for those with a proven commitment in faith.

To this day, Nichiren Shōshū recognizes as legitimate only those maṇḍalas inscribed and transmitted within its own lineage. Its head temple, Tahō Fuji Dai Nichirengesan Taisekiji 多寶富士大日蓮華山大石寺 in Shizuoka, enshrines an *ita mandara* known as the *ichienbudai sōyō no daigohonzon* 一閻浮提總與之大御本尊, the 'supreme object of worship bestowed on the entire world (Jambudvīpa)', or simply the *daigohonzon*. This is an *ita mandara*, with characters incised and inlaid with gold on a black-lacquered plank of camphor wood. Its original is said to have been inscribed by Nichiren himself. Individual maṇḍalas based on the *daigohonzon* are bestowed on devotees through their temple for enshrinement in home altars. Nichiren Shōshū holds that, at a future time when Japan has converted and the *kaidan* has been built, that structure will enshrine this *daigohonzon* of Taisekiji. Criticisms from other Nichiren schools questioning this *ita mandara*'s authenticity have in no way diminished its significance as an object of reverence, and pilgrimage, for Nichiren Shōshū devotees.²¹⁰

On the whole, Nichiren Shōshū upholds a stricter attitude toward the treatment of the *daimandara* than do other Nichiren lineages. It has attempted to maintain close control over its distribution and to prohibit photographing it, although such efforts have been

²⁰⁹ *Kōzen*, 309; *NSZ* 2: 124–25.

²¹⁰ This issue exceeds the scope of this essay. Finocchiaro, 'Honmon Kaidan Daigohonzon', summarizes in English the existing Japanese scholarship on Taisekiji's *daigohonzon*.

undermined in recent years by the internet.²¹¹ How the 1991 split between Nichiren Shōshū and Sōka Gakkai has affected teachings and practices concerning the *daimandara* within Nichiren Shōshū's former affiliate, the Sōka Gakkai, is a fascinating topic but one too large to explore here.²¹²

SUMMATION

Nichiren's *daimandara* drew on classical Tendai doctrine but also participated in larger interpretive trends of his day, including esoteric teachings and medieval Tendai original enlightenment thought. By Nichiren's time, the *Lotus* assembly on Eagle Peak had come to be understood, not simply as an event of the mythic past but as an ongoing reality accessible in the act of practice. That concept—the ever-present realm of the eternal, all-encompassing buddha of the *Lotus Sūtra*—is what Nichiren embodied as the *daimandara*, materializing it in concrete ritual form so that ordinary practitioners of the Final Dharma age might 'enter through faith'. Requiring for its production only paper, brushes, and ink, Nichiren's maṇḍala honzon in effect made Buddhist iconography accessible to those unable to afford to commission paintings or statues or to acquire a copy of the *Lotus Sūtra*. At the same time, Nichiren's use of logographs to inscribe the *daimandara* had a deeper significance. It preserved the maṇḍala's connection to the *Lotus Sūtra* as text and reflects broader medieval thinking about the words of scripture as embodying the Buddha's mind and their capacity to empower insentient images as living buddhas. From a scholarly perspective, it is thus an ideal object for considering the interface of text and image and underscores the fluid nature of the boundary between hermeneutic and nonhermeneutic, or discursive and cultic, uses of sacred texts.

The *daimandara* served as an identity marker during Nichiren's

²¹¹ On these issues see MacWilliams, 'Techno-Ritualization', and Wallinder-Pierini, 'Buddhist Dharma for Sale'.

²¹² See Finocchiaro, 'Mandalas of Sōka Gakkai'.

lifetime and continued to do so after his death. It remains distinctive of Nichiren's followers and was never adopted by other *Lotus* devotees. According to the late Shioiri Ryōdō 塩入良道 (1922–1989), an eminent scholar of East Asian Buddhism, Nichiren's *daimandara* was of 'epochal significance in the history of [Japanese] Buddhism' in establishing the power of a particular tradition's honzon to unify its faith and doctrine and to express its sense of unique identity.²¹³ Inscription of the maṇḍala *honzon* by leading clerics of the sect's various branches strengthened specific lineage ties within the Nichiren tradition. At the same time, as with sacred objects more generally, internal disputes arose concerning issues of access, proprietorship, transmission, and interpretation, at times making the maṇḍala a focus of internal contention between rival parties. The very heat of these disputes speaks to the centrality of the maṇḍala to Nichiren Buddhist practice and identity. Intersecting the doctrinal, ritual, and institutional dimensions of the tradition, the *daimandara* is inseparable from the history of Nichiren Buddhism itself and merits further research.

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Abbreviations

- DDZ *Dengyō daishi zenshū* 傳教大師全集. Edited by Hieizan Senshūin Fuzoku Eizan Gakuin.
- DNBZ *Dai Nihon bukkyō zensho* 大日本佛教全書. Edited by Bussho Kankōkai.
- FSY *Fuji shūgaku yōshū* 富士宗学要集. Edited by Hori Nichiko.
- HRS *Honzon ron shiryō* 本尊論資料. Edited by Minobu-san Tanki Daigaku Shuppanbu.
- Kōzen *Nikkō Shōnin zenshū* 日興上人全集. Edited by Ikeda Ryōdō.

²¹³ Shioiri, "Honzon" zakkō, 20.

- MH* *Mandara honzon* 曼荼羅本尊. Edited by Nakao Takashi and Terao Eichi.
- Mokuroku* *Gobonzon shū mokuroku* 御本尊集目錄. By Yamanaka Kihachi.
- NJ* *Nichirensū jiten* 日蓮宗事典. Edited by Nichirensū Jiten Kankō Iinkai.
- NSIJ* *Nichiren Shōnin ibun jiten* 日蓮聖人遺文辭典. Edited by Risshō Daigaku Nichiren Kyōgaku Kenkyūjo.
- NSZ* *Nichirensū shūgaku zensho* 日蓮宗宗學全書. Edited by Risshō Daigaku Nichiren Kyōgaku Kenkyūjo.
- Shinseki* *Nichiren Shōnin shinseki no sekai* 日蓮聖人真蹟の世界. By Yamanaka Kihachi.
- Teihon* *Shōwa teihon Nichiren Shōnin ibun* 昭和定本日蓮聖人遺文. Edited by Risshō Daigaku Nichiren Kyōgaku Kenkyūjo.
- T* *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經. Edited by Takakusu Junjirō and Watanabe Kaigyoku.

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