# Nichiren Shū Contemporary Frameworks: Inochi ni Gassho and Grand Design 2025

*A Comparative Strategic and Theological Synthesis of 21st-Century Propagation Movements*

## 1. Executive Summary & Overview

Over the past two decades, Nichiren Shū has systematically re-engineered its religious mission, moving from insular, hereditary temple maintenance toward proactive social engagement, ethical universalism, and structural modernization. Two comprehensive frameworks define this transformative arc: the Inochi ni Gassho (いのちに合掌 / 'Bowing in Gassho to All Life') movement, which served as the behavioral and spiritual heart of the multi-decade Risshō Ankoku Odaimoku Kechien Campaign leading to the 2021 800th anniversary of Nichiren Shōnin's birth; and the Nichiren Shū Grand Design 2025, a forward-looking institutional and strategic roadmap designed to navigate demographic decline, digital transition, and global crises ahead of the 750th Memorial of Nichiren's passing in 2031.

While Inochi ni Gassho articulated a deep theological and ethical pivot rooted in universal reverence and social compassion, Grand Design 2025 operationalizes this ethos into empirical governance, fiscal restructuring, global outreach, and administrative agility. Together, they represent the contemporary fulfillment of Nichiren's founding ideal: Risshō Ankoku—establishing the peace and dignity of the land through the Lotus Sutra.

## 2. The Inochi ni Gassho Framework (2007–2022+)

Inaugurated as the overarching slogan and guiding ethos of the 15-year Risshō Ankoku Odaimoku Kechien Campaign (2007–2021/2022), Inochi ni Gassho ('Bowing in Gassho to All Life' or 'Palm to Palm with All Life') emerged as a direct response to contemporary social suffering, including climbing suicide rates, severe domestic isolation, loneliness, environmental disruption, and global conflict.

### Theological Foundations: Tangyō Raihai and the Four Infinite Virtues

Inochi ni Gassho shifts sectarian focus from passive ritualism to an active, lived practice grounded in two primary doctrinal anchors of the Lotus Sutra:

• **Bodhisattva Never-Disparaging & Tangyō Raihai:** The behavioral model of Bodhisattva Never-Disparaging (Jōfukyō), described in Chapter 20 of the Lotus Sutra, who bowed in profound veneration to every person he encountered, proclaiming that all possess innate Buddha-nature and will achieve enlightenment. Nichiren Shōnin identified this 24-character statement of universal reverence as functionally equivalent to the Odaimoku (Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō). Inochi ni Gassho elevates this practice into daily interpersonal ethics.

• **The Four Infinite Virtues (Shi-muryōshin):** Formally integrated during the third phase of the campaign, derived from Chapter 12 (Devadatta): Benevolence (giving joy and happiness to others),

Compassion (actively relieving suffering), Giving Joy (rejoicing in the virtue and happiness of others), and Selflessness/Equanimity (impartiality and freedom from attachment).

## The Four Agricultural Stages

The movement was structured chronologically around an organic agricultural metaphor, mirroring the natural maturation of religious conviction:

| Phase & Period | Slogan & Metaphor | Strategic & Practical Focus |
|---|---|---|
| Phase 1: Planting (2007–2010) | Sowing the Seeds (Geshu Kechien) | Publicizing core principles, establishing domestic Gohonzon altars, and restoring Minobusan's five-story pagoda as the symbolic dispatch base. |
| Phase 2: Nurturing (2011–2014) | Nurturing the Sown Seeds (Inochi ni Gassho) | Deepening internal faith, promoting peaceful minds amidst natural disasters (2011 Tohoku earthquake), and centering absolute respect for life. |
| Phase 3: Flowering (2015–2018) | Flowering from Seeds (Four Infinite Virtues) | Expanding outward social welfare, suicide prevention hotlines, disaster relief, community support, and interfaith engagement. |
| Phase 4: Harvesting (2019–2021+) | Bearing Fruit / The Harvest (800th Anniversary) | Commemorating Nichiren's 800th birth anniversary; adapting to COVID-19 via 24-hour virtual Odaimoku chanting to form a borderless Global Sangha. |

## Action Plan: Extending Ethics to Nature and Daily Life

In its mature expression, Inochi ni Gassho evolved into a comprehensive practical code covering multiple dimensions of 21st-century life:

• **Ecological & Animal Welfare:** Recognizing the non-duality of human life and the environment (eshō funi), the movement warns against ecological exploitation, deforestation, and the commodification of wildlife (which heightens pandemic risks), advocating resource conservation, waste reduction, and energy mindfulness.

• **Human Dignity & Social Justice:** Fostering active listening, counseling, and direct support for those experiencing isolation, depression, or economic hardship. It explicitly prohibits discrimination, demanding total respect across diverse backgrounds, including gender and LGBTQ communities, while rejecting cyberbullying and social media slander.

• **Domestic and Personal Well-Being:** Encouraging followers to avoid self-destructive overwork, cultivate gratitude ('arigatai'), voice needs, seek help when burdened, and greet family and neighbors with empathy and gentle eyes.

# 3. The Grand Design 2025 Framework

While Inochi ni Gassho instilled a spirit of universal compassion, the Nichiren Shū Grand Design 2025 serves as the operational and structural master plan. Formalized in 2024–2025 under Chief Administrator Eshin Tanaka and enacted under Archbishop Nisshū Inoue and Secretary General Chōkei Mitsuoka, the Grand Design targets the upcoming 750th Memorial of Nichiren Shōnin's passing on October 13, 2031.

Unlike earlier commemorative efforts that relied on uncoordinated fundraising or vague slogans, the Grand Design was born from the 'Long-Term Comprehensive Plan Proposal' (日蓮宗長期総合計画提案書), developed by a dedicated project team led by Prof. Yōsei Ikegami. Grounded in demographic projections, the framework directly addresses Japan's shrinking population, rural depopulation, the collapse of hereditary temple affiliations (danka), and fiscal unsustainability.

## The 11 Fields and 31 Projects Architecture

The administrative blueprint organizes the sect's total revitalization across two core divisions comprising 11 fields and 31 specific target projects:

**1. Mission & Propagation (布教伝道部門):** Encompasses 5 fields and 14 items, including making Lotus Sutra doctrines accessible to contemporary generations, advancing global branding, standardizing educational resources, and fostering proactive peace advocacy (Risshō Ankoku).

**2. Institutional & Organizational Structure (組織機構部門):** Encompasses 6 fields and 17 items, focusing on administrative and fiscal rationalization, digital transformation (DX), modernizing clergy training, supporting lay householder clergy (zaike shukke), establishing crisis management systems, and facilitating regional temple mergers or shared administration to prevent abandoned temples (aki-dera).

## The Five Pillars of the Global Grand Design

To project Nichiren Shū's mission onto the international stage, the Grand Design outlines five global strategic pillars:

• **Pillar 1: Global Religious Network:** Transcending isolationism to partner with interfaith coalitions and world Buddhist bodies, ensuring institutional resilience and shared moral authority on the global stage.

• **Pillar 2: Climate Crisis & Global South Collaboration:** Operationalizing Buddhist interdependence (pratītyasamutpāda) by allying with Global South communities most vulnerable to climate collapse, treating ecological stewardship as a religious mandate.

• **Pillar 3: Non-Armed Peace & Political Dialogue:** Translating Nichiren's Risshō Ankoku-ron into modern diplomatic non-violence, nuclear non-proliferation, and constructive policy dialogue with secular leaders.

• **Pillar 4: Economic Disparity & Financial Ethics:** Confronting economic inequality by addressing the 'Three Poisons' (Greed, Anger, and Ignorance) in global commerce, promoting ethical business conduct, and supporting community welfare via the Annon Fund.

• **Pillar 5: Grassroots Communities & Human Connectivity:** Revitalizing local temples as sanctuaries of mental health, genuine human warmth, and community hubs ('Terakoya') to counteract digital isolation.

### Digital Transition and Administrative Agility

The Grand Design embraces modern technological 'skillful means' (upāya) while safeguarding doctrinal integrity. Practical innovations include the launch of the 'Gassho no Akashi' smartphone app for digital pilgrimages and Dharma study, pilot deployments of immersive Virtual Reality (VR) spiritual experiences, study groups examining the ethical parameters of AI in bereavement and pastoral care, and the consolidation of international hubs (such as relocating the Nichiren Buddhist International Center to San Jose and expanding Ichinenji Temple in Malaysia).

## 4. Comparative Synthesis: Inochi ni Gassho vs. Grand Design 2025

Rather than competing initiatives, Inochi ni Gassho and Grand Design 2025 function as mutually reinforcing pillars of modern Nichiren Buddhism. The table below illustrates their structural and thematic synergy:

| Dimension | Inochi ni Gassho (2007–2022+) | Grand Design 2025 (2025–2031) |
|---|---|---|
| Core Horizon & Landmark | Culminated in the 800th Anniversary of Nichiren's Birth (2021/2022). | Pivots toward the 750th Memorial of Nichiren's Passing in 2031 (Chion Hōon). |
| Primary Character | Spiritual ethos, ethical consciousness, and liturgical propagation campaign. | Structural roadmap, empirical demographic reform, and institutional strategy. |
| Doctrinal Center | Bodhisattva Never-Disparaging (Tangyō Raihai) and the Four Infinite Virtues. | Risshō Ankoku (social peace) through Skillful Means (Upāya) and Itai Dōshin. |
| Key Execution Mechanisms | Four agricultural phases (Planting to Harvesting); public Odaimoku chanting. | 11 Fields & 31 Projects; 5 Global Pillars; DX & administrative restructuring. |
| Modern Contribution | Redefined Buddhist faith as daily reverence for biological and human life. | Created a viable, data-backed operational foundation for the global 21st-century Sangha. |

## 5. Strategic Outlook

The progression from Inochi ni Gassho to Grand Design 2025 illustrates an established religious order consciously reinventing its role in secular society. By uniting the moral imperative of universal reverence with rigorous institutional stewardship and digital innovation, Nichiren Shū demonstrates how an ancient Mahayana tradition can remain spiritually vibrant, socially beneficial, and institutionally resilient in an interconnected world.