

Risshō Kōsei Kai

Risshō Kōsei Kai (立正佼成会); until June 1960, 大日本立正交成会 (***Dai-Nippon Risshō Kōsei Kai***) is a Japanese new religious movement founded in 1938 by Nikkyō Niwano and Myōkō Naganuma. Risshō Kōsei Kai is organized as a lay Buddhist movement, which branched off from the older Reiyūkai, and is primarily focused around the *Lotus Sutra* and veneration of ancestors.



Risshō Kōsei Kai headquarters (The Great Sacred Hall) in Tokyo, Japan.

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History

Risshō Kōsei Kai was founded on March 5, 1938 by Nikkyō Niwano and Myōkō Naganuma, both former members of the Buddhist sect Reiyūkai.^[1] Rev. Niwano met Ms. Naganuma while he was engaged in missionary work with Reiyūkai and the two became close friends. In 1938, they attended a Reiyūkai meeting in which its president made remarks that lectures and study of the *Lotus Sutra* were out of date. After hearing that and consulting with each other, they determined that they could not support such ideas and left Reiyūkai.^[2] It was then that they decided to form a new organization. The first meeting was held at Mr. Niwano's house and some 30 people joined at that time.



Inside of the Great Sacred Hall

The organization grew quickly, and by 1941, membership had reached 1000. For a short period between 1949 and 1950, Risshō Kōsei Kai served as a lay auxiliary organisation of Nichiren-shū, but Niwano could not stem what he considered to be the liberal



Original Headquarters

policies of Nichiren-shū.^[3] No longer able to meet at Rev. Niwano's house, construction on a new headquarters began.

However, as membership continued to grow the new headquarters also became too small and work on the Great Sacred Hall, or **daiseidō** (大聖堂), began in the late 1950s. Myōkō Naganuma, who had been serving as Vice-President, died before the Great Sacred Hall was completed, dying on September 10, 1957. Seven years later, it would be completed.

It was also then that Risshō Kōsei Kai began to become active in interfaith co-operation. Nikkyō Niwano had a private audience with Pope Paul VI at the Second Vatican Council in 1965 and later attended the 20th world congress of the IARF in 1969. In 1970 Rev. Niwano helped to form the World Conference of Religions for Peace and became a leader of the WCRP.^[4]

In 1991, Nikkyō Niwano stepped down as President and his son, Nichiko Niwano, who had been appointed successor and was at that time serving as vice president, took over as president in a special ceremony.^[5]

Nichiko Niwano had been designated his successor in 1960. In 1994, Nichiko's eldest daughter, Mitsuyo Niwano, was made Vice President and designated successor.^[2] She was given the Buddhist name Koshō by her father and grandfather and is known to members as “Koshō-sama” with “Sama” being an honorary title. Nikkyō Niwano continued to engage in interfaith activities and participate in Risshō Kōsei Kai activities even though he handed over the presidency in 1991. He died on October 4, 1999.

In 2008, Risshō Kōsei Kai International of North America was established because of growth of interest in the group in America and Canada. In summer 2009, the United States celebrated the 50th anniversary of the group there, holding a gathering in Las Vegas, Nevada, which President Niwano attended.^[6]

As of 2010, there are over 240 churches and centers in 20 countries.^[7] Membership currently stands at 6.5 million members,^[2] with the majority living in Japan.

Structure

Risshō Kōsei Kai is run, both religiously and administratively, by a board of directors, with the Chairman being the head. The office of the President is the highest spiritual office, and he is the chief spiritual leader and master of ceremony. The office of the President is a hereditary office held only by the direct descendants of Nikkyō Niwano. Duties include visiting churches and centers, representing Risshō Kōsei Kai at interfaith and cultural events, giving sermons, speeches and greeting guests. He holds much importance and plays an active role in how the church is run. However, it is the board of directors that holds the final say on all matters.

Characteristics

Even though being regarded as a descendant of Reiyūkai and Nichiren Buddhism it has developed distinct features in terms of doctrine and objects of worship to the extent, that some regard Risshō Kōsei Kai as a separate Buddhist denomination outside of Nichiren Buddhism, thus it has a number of features in common with other Nichiren sects:^[8]

- Devotion to the *Lotus Sutra* as the highest teaching in Buddhism.
- Belief in Buddha-nature of all beings.
- Recitation of Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō as a Buddhist practice.
- Evangelism of Buddhist teachings, and in particular the *Lotus Sutra*.
- Veneration of Nichiren as teacher and bodhisattva. He is frequently referred to as **daibosatsu** (大菩薩, "Great Bodhisattva") in Risshō Kōsei Kai liturgy.

Object of Devotion

Risshō Kōsei Kai venerates the Eternal Buddha, the central figure of the *Lotus Sutra*, instead of a gohonzon.^[9] The central temple, the Great Sacred Hall, features a statue of the Eternal Buddha that is 6.09 meters long and 3.03 meters wide. The imagery of the Eternal Buddha used in the Great Sacred Hall, and all temple altars, is of a standing Buddha enveloped in a fiery halo, within are four, smaller Bodhisattvas:

- Bodhisattva Eminent Conduct
- Bodhisattva Boundless Conduct
- Bodhisattva Pure Conduct
- Bodhisattva Steadfast Conduct

Further above the Buddha's head is a small image of the stupa of Prabhutaratna, featured in Chapter 11 of the *Lotus Sutra*.

Additionally, members enshrine a **Sōkaimyō** (総戒名, "Family Posthumous Name"), which is a kind of certificate and object of veneration that represents the collective ancestors of that member. Because it is not feasible to provide each ancestor with a posthumous Buddhist name, the ancestors as a whole are venerated through the Sokaimyo.^[9]

Basic Teachings

Risshō Kōsei Kai places a strong emphasis on studying the *Lotus Sutra* and the Buddha's teachings. They affirm the basic teachings of Buddhism, such as the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path and the Three Seals of the Law, among their core teachings.^{[10][11]} The *Threefold Lotus Sutra* is the group's chief scripture. It is viewed as containing the highest teachings of Gautama Buddha.

The Buddha and the Dharma

Adherents believe that Gautama Buddha was the first human to be awakened to the Dharma, which is believed to be an invisible entity that sustains, guides and improves the lives of all living things.^[12] They refer to this life force as the Eternal Buddha, teaching that it is omnipresent and universal.

Daily Practice

Members begin and end each day by chanting parts of the *Lotus Sutra* and saying various prayers and vows before family altars in their home.^[13] The center of the altar is the Focus of Devotion, either a scroll with an image of the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni on it or a small statue of the Eternal Buddha. Members leave offerings of rice, water and tea before the image.

Hōza or Dharma Circle

Another practice frequently found in Risshō Kōsei Kai services and meetings is the **hōza** (法座, "Dharma Circle") which is a kind of informal, group session led by a trained leader, in which members sit in a circle, discuss their problems or their shortcomings, and other members listen and provide advice. The discussions usually will explore how Buddhism and insight can be applied to help the person with the problem, and encourage a sense of trust and community between members.^[9]

Holidays

Risshō Kōsei Kai observes various Buddhist and Japanese holidays, including Parinirvana Day, Buddha's Birthday, Bodhi Day, and Higan. They also have special gatherings to mark important events in the organizations history, such as memorial services for the Founder and Co-Founder and the Anniversary of the Founding of Risshō Kōsei Kai.^[14]

Interfaith and peace activities

Since its founding, Risshō Kōsei Kai has sought to cooperate with other religions and work with the United Nations and a variety of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).^[15]

Interfaith co-operation

Nikkyō Niwano was one of the founders of the World Conference of Religions for Peace. Since the founding of the WCRP in 1970, Risshō Kōsei Kai has been actively involved with the organization ^[16] and currently President Nichiko Niwano is a president of the WCRP.^[5]

In 1981 Nikkyō Niwano was elected as the President of the International Association for Religious Freedom and in 1984 hosted the IARF at the Great Sacred Hall.^[17]

Nichiko Niwano is currently the President of the Japanese branch of the WRCF and Chairman of Shinshuren. The organization is also involved with the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace^[18] and maintains close ties to the Unitarian Universalist Association. The interfaith relationship with the Unitarian-Universalist Association is the closest one the latter American liberal organization has ever achieved.^[19]

UNICEF and United Nations

Risshō Kōsei Kai has supported UNICEF since 1979 and members regularly participate in campaign activities related to UNICEF. It has also supported and participated in a number of UN programs, including the second Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly Devoted to Disarmament held in 1982.^[20]

Humanitarian projects

Risshō Kōsei Kai engages in numerous campaigns to end hunger and poverty, support the environment and work for peace. In the late 1960s, Risshō Kōsei Kai began to advocate the Brighter Society Movement, a public-spirited undertaking through which the local churches of Risshō Kōsei Kai cooperate with local governments, welfare organizations, and volunteer groups throughout Japan.^[21]

In 1974, it launched the Donate a Meal Movement in which one skips a meal twice a month and contribute the money saved to the Movement. During the last thirty years, over 11 billion yen has been donated in Japan and thousands more worldwide to the movement.^[22]

There is also the Little Bags of Dreams Campaign started in 1999 in which local churches have the youth members prepare cloth bags full of toys, small gifts and cards with well wishes, for children in war torn nations. Children in Northern Ireland, Palestine and the former Yugoslavia.^[23]

The Niwano Peace Foundation was established in 1978 to promote research for world peace and religious, cultural, scientific and educational endeavors.^[24] Starting in 1983, with the exception of 1988, it has on a yearly basis given out the Niwano Peace Prize to an individual or organization that contributes to world peace.^[25]

Music

Risshō Kōsei Kai is world-renowned in the field of music for its generous support of several leading professional music ensembles, most notably the Tokyo Kosei Wind Orchestra. Its facilities are also used to host the world's largest music competition, the All-Japan Band Association national band contest.

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External links

- Official Rissho Kosei Kai Website (<http://www.rk-world.org/>)
 - Rissho Kosei-kai International of North America (<http://www.buddhistcenter-rkina.org/>)
 - Risho Kossei-kai do Brasil (<http://www.rkk.org.br/>)
 - Niwano Peace Foundation (<http://www.npf.or.jp/english/index.html/>)
 - Nikkyo Niwano obituary (<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/makeprfy.pl5?nn20000907b8.htm>)
 - Catholic news site from Asia on Niwano Prize (<http://www.asianews.it/view.php?l=en&art=424>)
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Nichiren Buddhism

Nichiren Buddhism (Japanese: 日蓮仏教) is a branch of Mahayana Buddhism based on the teachings of the 13th-century Japanese Buddhist priest Nichiren (1222–1282) and is one of the Kamakura Buddhism schools.^{[1]:239}^[2] Its teachings derive from some 300–400 extant letters and treatises attributed to Nichiren.^[3]^[4]^[5]

Nichiren Buddhism focuses on the Lotus Sutra doctrine that all people have an innate Buddha-nature and are therefore inherently capable of attaining enlightenment in their current form and present lifetime. There are three essential aspects to Nichiren Buddhism, the undertaking of faith, the practice of chanting *Nam Myōhō Renge Kyō* accompanied by selected recitations of the Lotus Sutra, and the study of Nichiren's scriptural writings, called *Gosho*.^[6]

The Nichiren *Gohonzon* is a calligraphic image which is prominently displayed in the home or temple buildings of its believers. The *Gohonzon* used in Nichiren Buddhism is composed of the names of key bodhisattvas and Buddhas in the Lotus Sutra as well as *Namu-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō* written in large characters down the center.^{[7]:225}

After his death, Nichiren left to his followers the mandate to widely propagate the *Gohonzon* and *Daimoku* in order to secure the peace and prosperity of society.^{[8]:99}

Traditional Nichiren Buddhist temple groups are commonly associated with Nichiren Shōshū and various Nichiren-shū schools. There are also lay groups not affiliated with temples such as Soka Gakkai and Soka Gakkai International, Kenshokai, Shoshinkai, Risshō Kōsei Kai, and Honmon Butsuryū-shū. Several Japanese new religions are Nichiren-inspired lay groups.^[9] With the advent, and proselytizing efforts, of the Soka Gakkai International, called "the most prominent Japanese 'export' religion to draw significant numbers of non-Japanese converts", Nichiren Buddhism has spread throughout the world.^[10]

Nichiren proposed a classification system that ranks the quality of religions^[11]^{[12]:128} and various Nichiren schools can be either accommodating or vigorously opposed to any other forms of Buddhism or religious beliefs. Within Nichiren Buddhism there are two major divisions which fundamentally differ over whether Nichiren should be regarded as a bodhisattva of the earth, a saint, great teacher—or the



A bronze garden statue of Nichiren Daishonin in the Honnoji Temple of Nichiren Shu in Teramachi Street, Kyoto, Japan



An illustrated image of the Lotus Sūtra, which is highly revered in Nichiren Buddhism. From the Kamakura period, circa 1257. Ink, color, and gold leaf on paper.

actual Buddha of the third age of Buddhism.^{[13][7][14]} It is practiced worldwide,^[15] with practitioners throughout the United States, Brazil and Europe, as well as in South Korea and southeast Asia.^[16] The largest groups are Soka Gakkai International, Nichiren Shu, and Nichiren Shōshū.^[17]

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Basic teachings

Nichiren's teachings encompass a significant number of concepts. Briefly, the basic practice of Nichiren Buddhism is chanting the invocation Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to a mandala inscribed by Nichiren, called the Gohonzon.^{[18][19]} Embracing Nam-myoho-renge-kyo entails both chanting and having the mind of faith (shinjin).^{[1]:270} Both the invocation and the Gohonzon, as taught by Nichiren, embody the title and essence of the Lotus Sutra,^[20] which he taught as the only valid scripture for the Latter Day of the Law,^[21] as well as the life state of Buddhahood inherent in all life.^[22]

Nichiren considered that in the Latter Day of the Law – a time of human strife and confusion, when Buddhism would be in decline – Buddhism had to be more than the theoretical or meditative practice it had become, but was meant to be practiced "with the body", that is, in one's actions and the consequent results that are manifested.^{[8]:25} More important than the formality of ritual, he claimed, was the substance of the practitioner's life^{[8]:107} in which the spiritual and material aspects are interrelated.^[23] He considered conditions in the world to be a reflection of the conditions of the inner lives of people; the premise of his first major remonstrance, Risshō Ankoku Ron (Establishing The Correct Teaching for the Peace of The Land), is that if a nation abandons heretical forms of Buddhism and adopts faith in the Lotus Sutra, the nation will know peace and security. He considered his disciples the "Bodhisattvas of the Earth" who appeared in the Lotus Sutra with the vow to spread the correct teaching and thereby establish a peaceful and just society.^{[8]:22–23} For Nichiren, enlightenment is not limited to one's inner life, but is "something that called for actualization in endeavors toward the transformation of the land, toward the realization of an ideal society."^{[24]:313–320}

The specific task to be pursued by Nichiren's disciples was the widespread propagation of his teachings (the invocation and the Gohonzon) in a way that would effect actual change in the world's societies^{[8]:47} so that the sanctuary, or seat, of Buddhism could be built.^[25] Nichiren saw this sanctuary as a specific seat of his Buddhism, but there is thought that he also meant it in a more general sense, that is, wherever his Buddhism would be practiced.^{[26][8]:111} This sanctuary, along with the invocation and Gohonzon, comprise "the three great secret laws (or dharmas)" found in the Lotus Sutra.^[27]

Nichiren

Nichiren and his time

Nichiren Buddhism originated in 13th-century feudal Japan. It is one of six new forms of *Shin Bukkyo* (English: "New Buddhism") of "Kamakura Buddhism."^[28] The arrival of these new schools was a response to the social and political upheaval in Japan during this time as power passed from the nobility to a shogunate military dictatorship led by the Minamoto clan and later to the Hōjō clan. A prevailing pessimism existed associated with the perceived arrival of the Age of the Latter Day of the Law. The era was marked by an intertwining relationship between Buddhist schools and the state which included clerical corruption.^{[8]:1–5}

By Nichiren's time the Lotus Sūtra was firmly established in Japan. From the ninth century, Japanese rulers decreed that the Lotus Sūtra be recited in temples for its "nation-saving" qualities. It was the most frequently read and recited sutra by the literate lay class and its message was disseminated widely through art, folk tales, music, and theater. It was commonly held that it had powers to bestow spiritual and worldly benefits to individuals.^{[29][30][31]} However, even Mount Hiei, the seat of Tiantai Lotus Sutra devotion, had come to adopt an eclectic assortment of esoteric rituals and Pure Land practices as "expedient means" to understand the sutra itself.^{[32]:79[33]:385}

Development during Nichiren's life

Nichiren developed his thinking in this midst of confusing Lotus Sutra practices and a competing array of other "Old Buddhism" and "New Buddhism" schools.^{[34]:544–574} The biographical development of his thinking is sourced almost entirely from his extant writings as there is no documentation about him in the public records of his times. Modern scholarship on Nichiren's life tries to provide sophisticated textual and sociohistorical analyses to cull longstanding myths about Nichiren that accrued over time from what is actually concretized.^{[35]:441–442[36][37]:334}

It is clear that from an early point in his studies Nichiren came to focus on the Lotus Sutra as the culmination and central message of Shakyamuni. As his life unfolded he engaged in a "circular hermeneutic" in which the interplay of the Lotus Sutra text and his personal experiences verified and enriched each other in his mind.^{[38]:198} As a result, there are significant turning points as his teachings reach full maturity.^{[1]:239–299} Scholar Yoshirō Tamura categorizes the development of Nichiren's thinking into three periods:

- An early period extending up to Nichiren's submission of the "*Risshō Ankoku Ron*" ("*Establishment of the Legitimate Teaching for the Protection of the Country*") to Hōjō Tokiyori in 1260;
- A middle period bookmarked by his first exile (to Izu Peninsula, 1261) and his release from his second exile (to Sado Island, 1273);
- A final period (1274–1282) in which Nichiren lived in Mount Minobu directing his movement from afar.^{[35]:448–449}

Early stage: From initial studies to 1260

For more than 20 years Nichiren examined Buddhist texts and commentaries at Mount Hiei's Enryaku-ji temple and other major centers of Buddhist study in Japan. In later writings he claimed he was motivated by four primary questions: (1) What were the essentials of the competing Buddhist sects so they could be ranked according to their merits and flaws?^{[35]:451} (2) Which of the many Buddhist scriptures that had reached Japan represented the essence of Shakyamuni's teaching?^{[38]:190} (3) How could he be assured of the certainty of his own enlightenment? (4) Why was the Imperial house defeated by the Kamakura regime in 1221 despite the prayers and rituals of Tendai and Shingon priests?^{[39]:119} He eventually concluded that the highest teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha (c. 563 – c. 483 BC) were to be found in the Lotus Sutra. Throughout his career Nichiren carried his personal copy of the Lotus Sutra which he continually annotated.^{[38]:193} The mantra he expounded on 28 April 1253, known as the *Daimoku* or *Odaimoku*, Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō, expresses his devotion to the Lotus Sutra.^{[8]:34[35]:451}

From this early stage of his career, Nichiren started to engage in fierce polemics criticizing the teachings of Buddhism taught by the other sects of his day, a practice that continued and expanded throughout his life. Although Nichiren accepted the Tendai theoretical constructs of "original enlightenment" (*hongaku shisō*) and "attaining Buddhahood in one's present form" (*sokushin jobutsu*) he drew a distinction, insisting both concepts should be seen as practical and realizable amidst the concrete realities of daily life. He took issue with other Buddhist schools of his time that stressed transcendence over immanence. Nichiren's emphasis on "self-power" (Jpn. *ji-riki*) led him to harshly criticize Honen and his Pure Land Buddhism school because of its exclusive reliance on Amida Buddha for salvation which resulted in "other-dependence." (Jpn. *ta-riki*)^{[40]:39[41]} In addition to his critique of Pure Land Buddhism, he later expanded his polemics to criticisms of the Zen, Shingon, and Ritsu sects. These four critiques were later collectively referred to as his "four dictums."^[42] Later in his writings, Nichiren referred to his early

exegeses of the Pure Land teachings as just the starting point for his polemics against the esoteric teachings, which he had deemed as a far more significant matter of concern.^{[41]:127} Adding to his criticisms of esoteric Shingon, Nichiren wrote detailed condemnations about the Tendai school which had abandoned its Lotus Sutra-exclusiveness and incorporated esoteric doctrines and rituals as well as faith in the soteriological power of Amida Buddha.^{[43]:3–4}

The target of his tactics expanded during the early part of his career. Between 1253 and 1259 he proselytized and converted individuals, mainly attracting mid- to lower-ranking samurai and local landholders^{[35]:445} and debated resident priests in Pure Land temples. In 1260, however, he attempted to directly reform society as a whole by submitting a treatise entitled "*Risshō Ankoku Ron*" ("*Establishment of the Legitimate Teaching for the Protection of the Country*") to Hōjō Tokiyori, the de facto leader of the nation.

In it he cites passages from the Ninnō, Yakushi, Daijuku, and Konkōmyō sutras. Drawing on Tendai thinking about the non duality of person and land, Nichiren argued that the truth and efficacy of the people's religious practice will be expressed in the outer conditions of their land and society. He thereby associated the natural disasters of his age with the nation's attachment to inferior teachings, predicted foreign invasion and internal rebellion, and called for the return to legitimate dharma to protect the country.^{[43]:6–7,12[30][44][45]} Although the role of Buddhism in "nation-protection" (*chingo kokka*) was well-established in Japan at this time, in this thesis Nichiren explicitly held the leadership of the country directly responsible for the safety of the land.^{[1]:250–251}

Middle stage: 1261–1273

During the middle stage of his career, in refuting other religious schools publicly and vociferously, Nichiren provoked the ire of the country's rulers and of the priests of the sects he criticized. As a result, he was subjected to persecution which included two assassination attempts, an attempted beheading and two exiles.^[46] His first exile, to Izu Peninsula (1261–1263), convinced Nichiren that he was "bodily reading the Lotus Sutra (*Jpn. Hokke shikidoku*)," fulfilling the predictions on the 13th chapter (*Fortitude*) that votaries would be persecuted by ignorant lay people, influential priests, and their friends in high places.^{[1]:252[47]}

Nichiren began to argue that through "bodily reading the Lotus Sutra," rather than just studying its text for literal meaning, a country and its people could be protected.^{[38]:190–192} According to Habito, Nichiren argued that bodily reading the Lotus Sutra entails four aspects:

- The awareness of Śākyamuni Buddha's living presence. "Bodily reading the Lotus Sutra" is equivalent to entering the very presence of the Buddha in an immediate, experiential, and face-to-face way, he claimed. Here Nichiren is referring to the primordial buddha revealed in Chapter 16 ("Life Span of the Thus Come One") who eternally appears and engages in human events in order to save living beings from their state of unhappiness.^{[38]:191–192,201}
- One contains all. Nichiren further developed the Tiantai doctrine of "three thousand realms in a single thought-moment". Every thought, word, or deed contains within itself the whole of the three thousand realms; reading even one word of the sūtra therefore includes the teachings and merits of all buddhas. Chanting *Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō*, according to Nichiren, is the concrete means by which the principle of the three thousand realms in a single thought-moment is activated and assures the attainment of enlightenment as well as receiving various kinds of worldly benefit.^{[38]:190,192,201}

- The here and now. Nichiren held that the bodily reading of the sūtra must be applicable to time, place, and contemporary events. Nichiren was acutely aware of the social and political turmoil of his country and spiritual confusion of people in the Latter Day of the Law.^{[38]:193,201}
- Utmost seriousness. True practitioners must go beyond mental or verbal practices and actively speak up against and oppose prevailing thoughts and philosophies that denigrate the message of the Lotus Sutra. Nichiren set the example and was willing to lay down his life for its propagation and realization.^{[38]:201}

His three-year exile to Sado Island proved to be another key turning point in Nichiren's thinking.^[48] Here he began inscribing the *Gohonzon* and wrote several major theses in which he claimed that he was functioning, at first, in the role of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging of the 20th chapter of the Lotus Sutra and, later, as Bodhisattva Superior Practices, the leader of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. In his work *The True Object of Worship*, he identified himself as functioning as the primordial Buddha, one and the same as the eternal Law represented by the mantra *Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō* which he physically embodied as the *Gohonzon* mandala. This has been described as embodying the same condition or state he attained in a physical object of devotion worship so that others could attain that equivalent condition of enlightenment.^{[49]:28–30[8]:39–42,61–68[1]:258–259} During this time the *daimoku* becomes the means to directly access the Buddha's enlightenment.^{[1]:260}

He concludes his work *The Opening of the Eyes* with the declaration "I will be the pillar of Japan; I will be the eyes of Japan; I will be the vessel of Japan. Inviolable shall remain these vows!"^[50] His thinking now went beyond theories of karmic retribution or guarantees of the Lotus Sutra as a protective force. Rather, he expressed a resolve to fulfill his mission despite the consequences.^{[1]:259} All of his disciples, he asserted, should emulate his spirit and work just like him in helping all people open their innate Buddha lives even though this means entails encountering enormous challenges.^{[8]:75}

Final stage: 1274–1282

Nichiren's teachings reached their full maturity between the years 1274 and 1282 while he resided in primitive settings at Mount Minobu located in today's Yamanashi Prefecture. During this time he devoted himself to training disciples,^{[1]:261} produced most of the *Gohonzon* which he sent to followers,^{[51]:377} and authored works constituting half of his extant writings^{[1]:191[52]:115} including six treatises that were categorized by his follower Nikkō as among his ten most important.^[53]

In 1278 the “Atsuhara Affair” (“Atsuhara Persecution”) occurred, culminating three years later.^{[54]:153[55]} In the prior stage of his career, between 1261 and 1273, Nichiren endured and overcame numerous trials that were directed at him personally including assassination attempts, an attempted execution, and two exiles, thereby “bodily reading the Lotus Sutra” (*shikidoku* 色読). In so doing, according to him, he validated the 13th (“Fortitude”) chapter of the Lotus Sutra in which a host of bodhisattvas promise to face numerous trials that follow in the wake of upholding and spreading the sutra in the evil age following the death of the Buddha: slander and abuse; attack by swords and staves; enmity from kings, ministers, and respected monks; and repeated banishment.^{[54]:154}

On two occasions, however, the persecution was aimed at his followers. First, in 1271, in conjunction with the arrest and attempted execution of Nichiren and his subsequent exile to Sado, many of his disciples were arrested, banished, or had lands confiscated by the government. At that time, Nichiren stated, most recanted their faith in order to escape the government's actions. In contrast, during the Atsuhara episode twenty lay peasant-farmer followers were arrested on questionable charges and

tortured; three were ultimately executed. This time none recanted their faith.^{[54]:155–156} Some of his prominent followers in other parts of the country were also being persecuted but maintained their faith as well.^{[52]:117}

Although Nichiren was situated in Minobu, far from the scene of the persecution, the Fuji district of present-day Shizuoka Prefecture, Nichiren held his community together in the face of significant oppression through a sophisticated display of legal and rhetorical responses. He also drew on a wide array of support from the network of leading monks and lay disciples he had raised, some of whom were also experiencing persecution at the hands of the government.^{[54]:165, 172}

Throughout the events he wrote many letters to his disciples in which he gave context to the unfolding events by asserting that severe trials have deep significance. According to Stone, “By standing firm under interrogation, the Atsuhara peasants had proved their faith in Nichiren’s eyes, graduating in his estimation from ‘ignorant people’ to devotees meriting equally with himself the name of ‘practitioners of the Lotus Sutra.’”^{[54]:166, 168–169} During this time Nichiren inscribed 114 mandalas that are extant today, 49 of which have been identified as being inscribed for individual lay followers and which may have served to deepen the bond between teacher and disciple. In addition, a few very large mandalas were inscribed, apparently intended for use at gathering places, suggesting the existence of some type of conventicle structure.^{[35]:446}

The Atsuhara Affair also gave Nichiren the opportunity to better define what was to become Nichiren Buddhism. He stressed that meeting great trials was a part of the practice of the Lotus Sutra; the great persecutions of Atsuhara were not results of karmic retribution but were the historical unfolding of the Buddhist Dharma. The vague “single good of the true vehicle” which he advocated in the *Risshō ankoku ron* now took final form as chanting the Lotus Sutra’s *daimoku* or title which he described as the heart of the “origin teaching” (*honmon* 本門) of the Lotus Sutra. This, he now claimed, lay hidden in the depths of the 16th (“The Life Span of the Tathāgata”) chapter, never before being revealed, but intended by the Buddha solely for the beginning of the Final Dharma Age.^{[54]:175–176, 186}

Nichiren's writings

A prolific writer, Nichiren's personal communiques among his followers as well as numerous treatises detail his view of the correct form of practice for the *Latter Day of the Law* (*mappō*); lay out his views on other Buddhist schools, particularly those of influence during his lifetime; and elucidate his interpretations of Buddhist teachings that preceded his. These writings are collectively known as *Gosho* (御書) or *Nichiren ibun* (日蓮遺文).^{[56][57]}

Out of 162 historically identified followers of Nichiren, 47 were women. Many of his writings were to women followers in which he displays strong empathy for their struggles, and continually stressed the Lotus Sutra's teaching that all people, men and women equally, can become enlightened just as they are. His voice is sensitive and kind which differs from the strident picture painted about him by critics.^{[58]:165[59]:141[57]:280–281}

Which of these writings, including the *Ongi Kuden* (orally transmitted teachings), are deemed authentic or apocryphal is a matter of debate within the various schools of today's Nichiren Buddhism.^{[60][61][62]} His *Risshō Ankoku Ron*, preserved at Shochuzan Hokekyo-ji, is one of the National Treasures of Japan.^{[63][64]}

Post-Nichiren development in Japan

Development in Medieval Japan

After Nichiren's death in 1282 the Kamakura shogunate weakened largely due to financial and political stresses resulting from defending the country from the Mongols. It was replaced by the Ashikaga shogunate (1336–1573), which in turn was succeeded by the Azuchi–Momoyama period (1573–1600), and then the Tokugawa shogunate (1600–1868). During these time periods, collectively comprising Japan's medieval history, Nichiren Buddhism experienced considerable fracturing, growth, turbulence and decline. A prevailing characteristic of the movement in medieval Japan was its lack of understanding of Nichiren's own spiritual realization. Serious commentaries about Nichiren's theology did not appear for almost two hundred years. This contributed to divisive doctrinal confrontations that were often superficial and dogmatic.^{[58]:174}

This long history of foundings, divisions, and mergers have led to today's 37 legally incorporated Nichiren Buddhist groups.^{[65][66]:312} In the modern period, Nichiren Buddhism experienced a revival, largely initiated by lay people and lay movements.^{[39]:93–95,122[67]:251[68]}

Development of the major lineages

Several denominations comprise the umbrella term "Nichiren Buddhism" which was known at the time as the *Hokkeshū* (Lotus School) or *Nichirensū* (Nichiren School).^{[37]:383[69]:166} The splintering of Nichiren's teachings into different schools began several years after Nichiren's passing. Despite their differences, however, the Nichiren groups shared commonalities: asserting the primacy of the Lotus Sutra, tracing Nichiren as their founder, centering religious practice on chanting *Namu-myoho-rence-kyo*, using the *Gohonzon* in meditative practice, insisting on the need for propagation, and participating in remonstrations with the authorities.^{[37]:398}

The movement was supported financially by local warlords or stewards (*jitō*) who often founded tightly-organized clan temples (*ujidera*) that were frequently led by sons who became priests.^{[58]:169} Most Nichiren schools point to the founding date of their respective head or main temple (for example, Nichiren Shū the year 1281, Nichiren Shōshū the year 1288, and Kempon Hokke Shu the year 1384) although they did not legally incorporate as religious bodies until the late 19th and early 20th century. A last wave of temple mergers took place in the 1950s.

The roots of this splintering can be traced to the organization of the Nichiren community during his life. In 1282, one year before his death, Nichiren named "six senior priests" (*rokurōsō*) disciple to lead his community: Nikkō Shonin (日興), Nisshō (日昭), Nichirō (日朗), Nikō (日向), Nitchō (日頂), and Nichiji (日持). Each had led communities of followers in different parts of the Kanto region of Japan and these groups, after Nichiren's death, ultimately morphed into lineages of schools.^{[70][1]:303}

Nikkō Shonin, Nichirō, and Nisshō were the core of the Minobu (also known as the Nikō or Kuon-ji) *monryū* or school. Nikō became the second chief abbot of Minobu (Nichiren is considered by this school to be the first). Nichirō's direct lineage was called the Nichirō or Hikigayatsu monryū. Nisshō's lineage became the Nisshō or Hama monryū. Nitchō formed the Nakayama lineage but later returned to become a follower of Nikkō. Nichiji, originally another follower of Nikkō, eventually traveled to the Asian continent (ca. 1295) on a missionary journey and some scholarship suggests he reached northern China, Manchuria, and possibly Mongolia. Kuon-ji Temple in Mount Minobu eventually became the head

temple of today's Nichiren Shū, the largest branch among traditional schools, encompassing the schools and temples tracing their origins to Nikō, Nichirō, Nisshō, Nitchō, and Nichiji. The lay and/or new religious movements Reiyūkai, Risshō Kōsei Kai, and Nipponzan-Myōhōji-Daisanga stem from this lineage.^{[1]:303[71][72][73]}

Nikkō left Kuon-ji in 1289 and became the founder of what was to be called the Nikkō monryu or lineage. He founded a center at the foot of Mount Fuji which would later be known as the Taisekiji temple of Nichiren Shōshū.^{[1]:335–336} Soka Gakkai is the largest independent lay organization that shares roots with this lineage.^{[74]:119–120}

Fault lines between the various Nichiren groups crystallized over several issues:

Local gods. A deeply embedded and ritualized part of Japanese village life, Nichiren schools clashed over the practice of honoring local gods (*kami*) by lay disciples of Nichiren. Some argued that this practice was a necessary accommodation. The group led by the monk Nikkō objected to such syncretism.^{[1]:335–336}

Content of Lotus Sūtra. Some schools (called *Itchi*) argued that all chapters of the sūtra should be equally valued and others (called *Shōretsu*) claimed that the latter half was superior to the former half. (See below for more details.)

Identity of Nichiren. Some of his later disciples identified him with Visistacaritra, the leader of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth who were entrusted in Chapter Twenty-Two to propagate the Lotus Sūtra. The Nikkō group identified Nichiren as the original and eternal Buddha.^{[1]:355[75]:117–119[32]:102–104}

Identification with Tiantai school. The Nisshō group began to identify itself as a Tiantai school, having no objections to its esoteric practices, perhaps as an expedient means to avoid persecution from Tiantai, Pure Land, and Shingon followers. This deepened the rift with Nikkō.^{[76]:141}

The Three Gems. All schools of Buddhism speak of the concept of The Three Gems (the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha) but define it differently. Over the centuries the Nichiren schools have come to understand it differently as well. The Minobu school has come to identify the Buddha as Shakyamuni whereas the Nikkō school identifies it as Nichiren. For Minobu the Dharma is Namu-myōho-renge-kyō, the Nikkō school identifies it as the Namu-myōho-renge-kyō that is hidden in the 16th "Lifespan" Chapter of the Lotus Sutra (the Gohonzon). Currently, Nichiren Shoshu claims this specifically refers to the Dai Gohonzon, whereas Soka Gakkai holds it represents all Gohonzon. The Sangha, sometimes translated as "the priest", is also interpreted differently. Minobu defines it as Nichiren; Nichiren Shoshu as Nikkō representing its priesthood; and the Soka Gakkai as Nikkō representing the harmonious community of practitioners.^{[77]:120–123,132[78]:106[79]:71[80]:582–583}

The cleavage between Nichiren groups has also been classified by the so-called *Itchi* (meaning unity or harmony) and *Shoretsu* (a contraction of two words meaning superior/inferior) lineages.^{[1]:304–366}

- The *Itchi* lineage today comprises most of the traditional schools within Nichiren Buddhism, of which the Nichiren Shū is the biggest representative, although it also includes some Nikkō temples. In this lineage the whole of the Lotus Sutra, both the so-called theoretical (*shakumon* or "Imprinted Gate") and essential (*honmon* or "Original Gate") chapters, are venerated.^{[81]:192} While great attention is given to the 2nd and 16th chapter of the Lotus Sutra, other parts of the sutra are recited.
- The *Shoretsu* lineage comprises most temples and lay groups following the Nikkō *monryu*. The *Shoretsu* group values the supremacy of the essential over the theoretical part of the Lotus Sutra. Therefore, solely the 2nd and 16th chapters of the Lotus Sutra are recited.^[82] There are additional subdivisions in the *Shoretsu* group which splintered over whether the

entire second half was of equal importance, the eight chapters of the second half when the assembly participates in "The Ceremony of the Air," or specifically Chapter Sixteen (Lifespan of the Tathāgata).^{[1]:304–366}

Origin of the Fuji School

Although there were rivalries and unique interpretations among the early Hokkeshū lineages, none were as deep and distinct as the divide between the Nikkō or Fuji school and the rest of the tradition.^{[1]:334} Animosity and discord among the six senior disciples started after the second death anniversary of Nichiren's 100th Day Memorial ceremony (23 January 1283) when the rotation system as agreed upon the "*Shuso Gosenge Kiroku*" (English: Record document of founder's demise) and *Rimbo Cho* (English: Rotation Wheel System) to clean and maintain Nichiren's grave. By the third anniversary of Nichiren's passing (13 October 1284), these arrangements seemed to have broken down. Nikkō claimed that the other five senior priests no longer returned to Nichiren's tomb in Mount Minobu, citing signs of neglect at the gravesite. He took up residency and overall responsibility for Kuonji temple while Nikō served as its doctrinal instructor. Before long tensions grew between the two concerning the behavior of Hakii Nanbu Rokurō Sanenaga, the steward of the Minobu district and the temple's patron.^{[1]:335}

Nikkō accused Sanenaga of unorthodox practices deemed to be heretical such as crafting a standing statue of Shakyamuni Buddha as an object of worship, providing funding for the construction of a Pure Land *stupa* in Fuji, and visiting and worshipping at the Mishima Taisha Shinto shrine which was an honorary shrine of the Hōjō clan shogunate. Nikkō regarded the latter as a violation of Nichiren's *Rissho ankoku ron*.^{[1]:335}

In addition, Nikkō made accusatory charges that after Nichiren's death, other disciples slowly began to gradually deviate from what Nikkō viewed as Nichiren's orthodox teachings. Chief among these complaints was the syncretic practices of some of the disciples to worship images of Shakyamuni Buddha. Nikkō admonished other disciple priests for signing their names "Tendai Shamon" (of the Tendai Buddhist school) in documents they sent to the Kamakura government. Furthermore, Nikkō alleged that the other disciples disregarded some of Nichiren's writings written in Katakana rather than in Classical Chinese syllabary.

Sanenaga defended his actions, claiming that it was customary for his political family to provide monetary donations and make homage to the Shinto shrine of the Kamakura shogunate. Nikō tolerated Sanenaga's acts, claiming that similar incidents occurred previously with the knowledge of Nichiren. Sanenaga sided with Nikō and Nikkō departed in 1289 from Minobu. He returned to his home in Suruga Province and established two temples: Taiseki-ji in the Fuji district and Honmonji in Omosu district. He spent most of his life at the latter, where he trained his followers.^{[1]:335–336}

According to Stone, it is not absolutely clear that Nikkō intended to completely break from the other senior disciples and start his own school. However, his followers claimed that he was the only one of the six senior disciples who maintained the purity of Nichiren's legacy. Two documents appeared, first mentioned and discovered by Taiseki-ji High Priest Nikkyo Shonin in 1488, claiming Nichiren transferred his teaching exclusively to Nikkō but their authenticity has been questioned. Taiseki-ji does not dispute that the original documents are missing but holds that certified copies are preserved in their repositories. In contrast, other Nichiren sects vehemently claim them as forgeries since they are not in the original handwriting of Nichiren or Nikkō, holding they were copied down by Nikkō's disciples after his death."^{[83]:169}^{[1]:336}

In addition to using the letters to defend its claim to orthodoxy, the documents may have served to justify Taiseki-ji's claimed superiority over other Nikkō temples, especially Ikegami Honmon-ji, the site of Nichiren's tomb. Even though there had been efforts by temples of the Nikkō lineage in the late 19th century to unify into one single separate Nichiren school the *Kommon-ha*, today's Nichiren Shōshū comprises only the Taiseki-ji temple and its dependent temples. It is not identical to the historical Nikkō or Fuji lineage. Parts of the *Kommon-ha*, the *Honmon-Shu*, eventually became part of Nichiren Shu in the 1950s. New religious movements like Sōka Gakkai, Shōshinkai, and Kenshōkai trace their origins to the Nichiren Shōshū school.

15th century through the early 19th century

In the early 14th century Hokkeshū followers spread the teachings westward and established congregations (Jpn. *shū*) into the imperial capital of Kyoto and as far as Bizen and Bitchu. During this time there is documentation of face-to-face public debates between Hokkeshū and Nembutsu adherents.^{[84]:101} By the end of the century Hokkeshū temples had been founded all over Kyoto, only being outnumbered by Zen temples. The demographic base of support in Kyoto were members of the merchant class (Jpn. *machishū*), some of whom had acquired great wealth. Tanabe hypothesizes they were drawn to this faith because of Nichiren's emphasis on the "third realm" (Jpn. *daisan hōmon*) of the Lotus Sutra, staked out in chapters 10-22, which emphasize practice in the mundane world.^{[85]:43–45,50}

In the 15th century, the political and social order began to collapse and Hokkeshū followers armed themselves. The *Hokke-ikki* was an uprising in 1532 of Hokke followers against the followers of the Pure Land school in 1532. Initially successful it became the most powerful religious group in Kyoto but its fortunes were reversed in 1536 when Mt. Hiei armed forces destroyed twenty-one Hokkeshū temples and killed some 58,000 of its followers. In 1542 permission was granted by the government to rebuild the destroyed temples and the Hokke *machishū* played a crucial role in rebuilding the commerce, industry, and arts in Kyoto. Their influence in the arts and literature continued through the Momoyama (1568–1615) and Edo (1615–1868) periods and many of the most famous artists and literati were drawn from their ranks.^{[39]:122[85]:50}

Although the various sects of Nichiren Buddhism were administratively independent, there is evidence of cooperation between them. For example, in 1466 the major Hokke temples in Kyoto signed the Kanshō-era accord (Kanshō *meiyaku*) to protect themselves against threats from Mt. Hiei.^{[1]:304[83]:160} Despite strong sectarian differences, there is also evidence of interactions between Hokkeshū and Tendai scholar-monks.^{[1]:352}

During the Edo period, with the consolidation of power by the Tokugawa shogunate, increased pressure was placed major Buddhist schools and Nichiren temples to conform to governmental policies. Some Hokkeshū adherents, the followers of the so-called Fuju-fuse lineage, adamantly bucked this policy based on their readings of Nichiren's teachings to neither take (*fuju*) nor give (*fuse*) offerings from non-believers. Suppressed, adherents often held their meetings clandestinely which led to the Fuju-fuse persecution and numerous executions of believers in 1668.^{[86]:150} During this time of persecution, most likely to prevent young priests from adopting a passion for propagation, Nichiren seminaries emphasized Tendai studies with only a few top-ranking students permitted to study some of Nichiren's writings.^[87]

During the Edo period the majority of Hokkeshū temples were subsumed into the shogunate's Danka system, an imposed nationwide parish system designed to ensure religious peace and root out Christianity. In this system Buddhist temples, in addition to their ceremonial duties, were forced to carry out state administrative functions. Thereby they became agents of the government and were prohibited to

engage in any missionary activities.^[82] Hokkeshū temples were now obligated, just like those of other Buddhist schools, to focus on funeral and memorial services (*Sōshiki bukkyō*) as their main activity.^{[88]:247} Stagnation was often the price for the protected status.^{[58]:306}

19th century: From Tokugawa to Meiji periods

Nichiren Buddhism was deeply influenced by the transition from the Tokugawa (1600–1868) to Meiji (1868–1912) periods in nineteenth-century Japan. The changeover from early modern (*kinsei*) to modern (*kindai*) was marked by the transformation of late-feudal institutions into modern ones as well as the political transition from shogunal to imperial rule and the economic shift from national isolation to integration in the world economy. This entailed creating a centralized state, stitching together some 260 feudal domains ruled by hereditary leaders (*daimyō*), and moving from a caste social system to a meritocracy based on educational achievement. Although commonly perceived as a singular event called the Meiji Restoration, the transition was full of twists and turns that began in the later Tokugawa years and continued decades after the 1867–1868 demise of the shogunate and launch of imperial rule.^{[89]:3–4,14}

By this time Japanese Buddhism was often characterized by syncretism in which local nativistic worship was incorporated into Buddhist practice. For example, Tendai, Shingon, Jodō, and Nichiren temples often had chapels within them dedicated to Inari Shinto worship.^{[90]:266} Within Nichiren Buddhism there was a phenomenon of *Hokke Shintō* (Lotus Shinto), closely influenced by Yoshida Shintō.^{[91][92]}

Anti-Buddhist sentiment had been building throughout the latter part of the Tokugawa period (1603–1868). Scholars such as Tominaga Nakamoto and Hirata Atsutane attacked the theoretical roots of Buddhism. Critics included promoters of Confucianism, nativism, Shinto-inspired Restorationists, and modernizers. Buddhism was critiqued as a needless drain on public resources and also as an insidious foreign influence that had obscured the indigenous Japanese spirit.^[93]

Under attack by two policies of the day, *shinbutsu bunri* (Separation of Shinto Deities and Buddhas) and *haibutsu kishaku* (Eradication of Buddhism), Japanese Buddhism during the Tokugawa-to-Meiji transition proved to be a crisis of survival. The new government promoted policies that reduced the material resources available to Buddhist temples and downgraded their role in the religious, political, and social life of the nation.^{[94]:143,153–156}

The policies of *shinbutsu bunri* were implemented at the local level throughout Japan but were particularly intense in three domains that were the most active in the Restoration: Satsuma, Choshii, and Tosa. In Satsuma, for example, by 1872 all of its 1000+ Buddhist temples had been abolished, their monks laicized, and their landholdings confiscated. Throughout the country thousands of Buddhist temples and, at a minimum, tens of thousands of Buddhist sutras, paintings, statues, temple bells and other ritual objects were destroyed, stolen, lost, or sold during the early years of the restoration.^{[94]:157,160}

Starting in the second decade of the restoration, pushback against these policies came from Western powers interested in providing a safe harbor for Christianity and Buddhist leaders who proposed an alliance of Shinto and Buddhism to resist Christianity. As part of this accommodation, Buddhist priests were forced to promote key teachings of Shinto and provide support for national policies.^{[94]:98}

Nichiren Buddhism, like the other Buddhist schools, struggled between accommodation and confrontation. The Nichiren scholar Udana-in Nichiki (1800–1859) argued for a policy of co-existence with other schools of Buddhism, Confucianism, Nativism, and European religions.^{[87]:246–247} His

disciple Arai Nissatsu (1830–1888) forged an alliance of several Nichiren branches and became the first superintendent of the present Nichiren Shū which was incorporated in 1876. Nissatsu was active in Buddhist intersect cooperation to resist the government's hostile policies, adopted the government's "Great Teaching" policy that was Shinto-derived, and promoted intersectorian understanding. In the process, however, he reinterpreted some of Nichiren's important teachings.^{[87]:248–249} Among those arguing against accommodation were Nichiren scholar and lay believer Ogawa Taidō (1814–1878) and the cleric Honda Nisshō (1867–1931) of the Kempon Hokke denomination.^{[87]:249–250}

After the above events and centuries of splintering based on dogma and institutional histories, the following major Nichiren temple schools, according to Matsunaga, were officially recognized in the Meiji era:

- 1874: Nichiren-shū (formerly *Minobu monryū*). This school's headquarters was at Kuon-ji temple and held the *Itchi* perspective that advocated the equal treatment of all sections of the Lotus Sutra. However, it also included five schools that maintained the *Shoretsu* perspective which emphasized the latter half of the Lotus Sutra: Myōmanji, Happon, Honjōji, Honryūji, and Fuji-ha
- 1876: The *Fuju-fuse-ha* was recognized by the government after years of clandestine operation following episodes of persecution. In 1882 a second *Fuju-fuse* sect was recognized, the *Fuju-Fuse Kōmon-ha*.
- 1891: The five *Shoretsu* schools changed their names

Myōmanji-ha became Kempon Hokke based at Myōmanji, Kyoto
Happon-ha became Honmon Hokkeshū based in Honjōji, Niigata
Honjōji-ha became Hokkeshū based in Honryūji, Kyoto
Honryūji-ha became Honmyō Hokkeshū, also based in Honryūji, Kyoto
Fuji-ha became Honmonshū in Monmonji, Shizuoka

- 1900: The Taisekiji temple of Shizuoka broke off from the Honmonshū and became Nichirensū Fuji-ha. In 1913, this group was renamed Nichiren Shōshū which was popularized by the Soka Gakkai lay organization. Although the latter has a sizeable membership and it is one of the important Japanese new religions (*shinshūkyō*), it is not included in many treatments of Nichiren lineages.^{[58]:180–181}

Development in modern Japanese history

Nichiren Buddhism went through many reforms in the Meiji Period during a time of persecution, Haibutsu kishaku (廃仏毀釈), when the government attempted to eradicate mainstream Japanese Buddhism.^[95] As a part of the Meiji Restoration, the interdependent Danka system between the state and Buddhist temples was dismantled which left the latter without its funding. Buddhist institutions had to align themselves to the new nationalistic agenda or perish.^{[96]:220,226–227[97]:184–185[98]:237–241[99]} Many of these reform efforts were led by lay people.^{[100][68]:209[65]}

The trend toward lay centrality was prominent in Nichiren Buddhism as well, predating the Meiji period.^{[68]:209[85]} Some Nichiren reformers in the Meiji period attempted to inject a nationalistic interpretation of Nichiren's teachings; others called for globalist perspectives. According to Japanese researcher *Yoshiro Tamura*, the term "Nichirenism" applies broadly to the following three categories:

1. The ultranationalistic preoccupation with Nichiren that contributed to Japan's militaristic effort before World War II.

2. Socialist activists and writers during the prewar and postwar eras who promoted a vision of an ideal world society inspired by the Lotus Sutra and according to their own views of Nichiren.
3. Organized religious bodies that were inspired by Nichiren's teachings.^{[30]:424}

As a form of nationalism

Both Nichiren and his followers have been associated with fervent Japanese nationalism specifically identified as Nichirenism between the Meiji period and the conclusion of World War II.^{[101][102]} The nationalistic interpretation of Nichiren's teachings were inspired by lay Buddhist movements like Kokuchūkai and resulted in violent historical events such as the May 15 Incident and the League of Blood Incident.^{[103][104][105]} Among the key proponents of this interpretation are Chigaku Tanaka who founded the Kokuchūkai (English: Nation's Pillar Society). Tanaka was charismatic and through his writings and lectures attracted many followers such as Kanji Ishiwara.^{[30]:427–428} Nisshō Honda advocated the unification Japanese Buddhists to support the imperial state.^{[30]:428[96]:230} Other ultra-nationalist activists who based their ideas on Nichiren were Ikki Kita and Nisshō Inoue.^{[30]:429}

As a form of socialism

Nichirenism also includes several intellectuals and activists who reacted against the prewar ultranationalistic interpretations and argued for an egalitarian and socialist vision of society based on Nichiren's teachings and the Lotus Sutra. These figures ran against the growing tide of Japanese militarism and were subjected to political harassment and persecution.^{[30]:425} A leading figure in this group was Girō Seno who formed the New Buddhist Youth League (*Shinkō Bukkyō Seinen Dōmei*).

Originally influenced by the ideals of Tanaka and Honda, Giro Seno came to reject ultra-nationalism and argued for humanism, socialism, pacifism, and democracy as a new interpretation of Nichiren's beliefs. He was imprisoned for two years under the National Security Act.^[106] The same fate was also endured by Tsunesaburo Makiguchi,^[107] who refused the religious dictum of Shinto display accepted by Nichiren Shoshu for the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai, his lay organization composed of primarily secretaries and teachers until it grew to become Soka Gakkai after World War II.

Within new social and religious movements

Several Nichiren-inspired religious movements arose and appealed primarily to this segment of society with a message of alleviating suffering salvation for many poor urban workers.^{[30]:425} Honmon Butsuryū-shū, an early example of lay-based religious movements of the modern period inspired by Nichiren, was founded several years before the Meiji Restoration. Reiyukai, Rissho Koseikai stemming from Nichiren Shu while Kenshokai and Soka Gakkai, once affiliated with Nichiren Shoshu, are more recent examples of lay-inspired movements drawing from Nichiren's teachings and life.^{[30]:433}

In culture and literature

Nichiren Buddhism has had a major impact on Japan's literary and cultural life. Japanese literary figure Takayama Chogyū and children's author Kenji Miyazawa praised Nichiren's teachings. A prominent researcher, Masaharu Anesaki, was encouraged to study Nichiren which led to the work *Nichiren: The Buddhist Prophet* which introduced Nichiren to the West.^{[30]:430–431} Non-Buddhist Japanese individuals

such as Uchimura Kanzō listed Nichiren as one of five historical figures who best represented Japan, while Tadao Yanaihara described Nichiren as one of the four historical figures he most admired.^{[30]:430–433}

Globalization

While various sects and organizations have had a presence in nations outside Japan for over a century, the ongoing expansion of Nichiren Buddhism overseas started in 1960 when Soka Gakkai president Daisaku Ikeda initiated his group's worldwide propagation efforts growing from a few hundred transplanted Japanese to over 3500 families just by 1962.^[108]

Nichiren Buddhism is now practiced in many countries outside of Japan. In the United States Prebish coined the typology of "two Buddhisms" to delineate the divide between forms of Buddhism that appealed either primarily to people of the Asian diaspora or to Euro-American converts.^{[109][110][111][112]} Nattier, on the other hand, proposes a three-way typology. "Import" or "elite" Buddhism refers to a class of people who have the time and means to seek Buddhist teachers to appropriate certain Buddhist techniques such as meditation. "Export or evangelical" Buddhism refers to groups that actively proselytize for new members in their local organizations. "Baggage" or "ethnic" Buddhism refers to diaspora Buddhists, usually of a single ethnic group, who have relocated more for social and economic advancement than for evangelical purposes.^{[113]:16} Another taxonomy divides Western Buddhist groups into three different categories: evangelical, church-like, and meditational.^[114]

Nichiren Shu has been classified into the church-like category.^{[114]:5} One of several Japanese Buddhist schools that followed in the wake of Japanese military conquest and colonization, Nichiren Shu opened a temple in Pusan, Korea in 1881. Its fortunes rose and diminished with the political tides but eventually failed.^[115] It also established missions in Sakhalin, Manchuria, and Taiwan.^[116] A Nichiren Shu mission was established in Hawaii in 1900. By 1920 it established temples at Pahala, Honolulu, Wailuku and Maui.^[117] In 1955 it officially started a mission in Brazil.^{[118]:283} In 1991 it established the Nichiren Buddhist International Center in 1991 and in 2002 built a center in Hayward, California, to help overseas missions.^[116] However, Nichiren Shu does not widely propagate in the West.^[119]

Some have characterized the Soka Gakkai as evangelical^{[114]:5} but others claim that it broke out of the "Two Buddhisms" paradigm. It is quite multi-ethnic and it has taken hold among native populations in locations including Korea, Malaysia, Brazil, Europe, parts of Africa, India, and North America.^[120] The growth of the Soka Gakkai was sparked by repeated missionary trips beginning in the early 1960s by Daisaku Ikeda, its third president.^{[118]:285} In 1975 the Soka Gakkai International was launched in Guam.^{[121]:107–108} In the United States it has attracted a diverse membership including a significant demographic of African Americans.^{[122][123]} Since the 1970s it has created institutions, publications and exhibitions to support its overall theme of "peace, culture, and education."^[124] There is academic research on various national organizations affiliated with this movement:^{[125]:54} the United States,^{[126][127]} the United Kingdom,^[128] Italy,^[129] Canada,^[130] Brazil,^{[131][132]} Scotland,^[133] Southeast Asia,^[134] Germany,^[135] and Thailand.^[136]

The Rissho Kosei Kai focuses on using its teachings to promote a culture of religiosity through inter-religious dialogue. In 1967, it launched the "Faith to All Men Movement" to awaken a globalized religiosity. It has over 2 million members and 300 Dharma centers in 20 countries throughout the world including Frankfurt and Moorslede. It is active in interfaith organizations, including the International

Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) and Religions for Peace (WCRP). It has consultative states with the United Nations and since 1983 issues an annual Peace Prize to individuals or organizations worldwide that work for peace and development and promote interreligious cooperation.^{[137]:23[121]:108}

The Reiyukai conducts more typical missionary activities in the West. It has a membership of between five hundred and one thousand members in Europe, concentrated in Italy, Spain, England and France. The approximately 1,500 members of the Nihonzan Myohoji have built peace pagodas, conducted parades beating the drum while chanting the daimoku, and encouraged themselves and others to create world peace.^[137]

Nichiren Shoshu has six temples in the United States led by Japanese priests and supported by lay Asians and non-Asians.^[138] There is one temple in Brazil and the residing priest serves as a "circuit rider" to attend to other locations.^[139]

Lists of major schools and organizations

The following lists are based on English-language Wikipedia articles and the Japanese Wikipedia article on Nichiren Buddhism.

Clerical Nichiren Buddhist schools and their head temples

In alphabetical order (Japanese characters preceded by "ja:" link to articles in the Japanese Wikipedia).

Romanized English	Japanese
<u>Fuju-fuse Nichiren Kōmon Shū</u>	不受不施日蓮講門宗 本山本覺寺
Hokke Nichiren Shū	法華日蓮宗 総本山 ja:宝龍寺
Hokkeshū, Honmon Ryū	法華宗（本門流）大本山光長寺・鷲山寺・本興寺・本能寺
Hokkeshū, Jinmon Ryū	法華宗（陣門流）総本山本成寺
Hokkeshū, Shinmon Ryū	法華宗（真門流）総本山本隆寺
Hompa Nichiren Shū	本派日蓮宗 総本山宗祖寺
Honke Nichiren Shū (Hyōgo)	本化日蓮宗（兵庫）総本山妙見寺
Honke Nichiren Shū (Kyōto)	ja:本化日蓮宗 （京都）本山石塔寺
<u>Honmon Butsuryū Shū</u>	ja:本門佛立宗 大本山宥清寺
Honmon Hokke Shū: Daihonzan Myōren-ji	本門法華宗 大本山妙蓮寺
Honmon Kyōō Shū	ja:本門経王宗 本山日宏寺
<u>Kempon Hokke Shu: Sōhonzan Myōman-ji</u>	総本山妙満寺
Nichiren Hokke Shū	ja:日蓮法華宗 大本山正福寺
Nichiren Honshū: Honzan Yōbō-ji	ja:日蓮本宗 本山 ja:要法寺
Nichiren Kōmon Shū	日蓮講門宗
<u>Nichiren Shōshū:Sōhonzan Taiseki-ji</u>	日蓮正宗 総本山 大石寺
Nichiren Shū <u>Fuju-fuse-ha</u> : Sozan Myōkaku-ji	日蓮宗不受不施派 祖山妙覺寺
<u>Nichiren Shū: Sozan Minobuzan Kuon-ji</u>	日蓮宗 祖山身延山 ja:久遠寺
Nichirensū Fuju-fuse-ha	日蓮宗不受不施派
Shōbō Hokke Shū	正法法華宗 本山 ja:大教寺

20th-century movements and lay organizations

In alphabetical order (Japanese characters preceded by "ja:" link to articles in the Japanese Wikipedia):

- Bussho Gonenkai Kyōdan, founded in 1950 by Kaichi Sekiguchi and Tomino Sekiguchi
- Fuji Taiseikiji Kenshōkai (also, just *Kenshōkai*) [ja:富士大石寺顕正会](#), founded in 1942 and expelled from Nichiren Shoshu in 1974^[140]
- Hokkekō, lay organization affiliated with Nichiren Shōshū
- Kokuchūkai [ja:国柱会](#) (also 國柱会), a nationalist group founded in 1914 by Tanaka Chigaku
- Myōchikai Kyōdan, founded in 1950 by Miyamoto Mitsu
- Myōdōkai Kyōdan, founded in 1951
- Nipponzan-Myōhōji-Daisanga, founded in 1917 by Nichidatsu Fujii
- Reiyūkai (Spiritual-Friendship-Association), founded in 1920 by Kakutaro Kubo and Kimi Kotani, Reiyūkai considers itself the grandfather of lay-based new religions devoted to the Lotus Sutra and ancestor veneration.
- Risshō Kōsei Kai, founded in 1938 by Nikkyō Niwano and Myōkō Naganuma
- Shōshinkai, founded in 1980.

- Soka Gakkai, founded in Japan in 1930 by Tsunesaburō Makiguchi and Soka Gakkai International founded in 1975 by Daisaku Ikeda.

See also

- Kotodama

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Nichiren

Nichiren (kanji: 日蓮; born as Zen-nichi-marō (善日麿), Dharma name: Rencho - 16 February 1222^{[9][10]} – 13 October 1282) was a Japanese Buddhist priest of the Kamakura period (1185–1333), who developed the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism, a branch school of Mahayana Buddhism.^{[11][12][13]}

Nichiren^{[14]:77[15]:1} declared that the Lotus Sutra alone contains the highest truth of Buddhist teachings suited for the Third Age of Buddhism. He advocated the repeated recitation of its title, *Nam(u)-myōhō-renge-kyō* and held that Shakyamuni Buddha and all other Buddhist deities were extraordinary manifestations of a particular Buddha-nature termed “*Myōhō—Renge*” that is equally accessible to all. He declared that believers of the Sutra must propagate it even under persecution.^{[16][17][18][19][20][21][22]}

Nichiren was a prolific writer and his biography, temperament, and the evolution of his beliefs has been gleaned primarily from his own writings.^{[23]:99[8]:442} After his death, he was bestowed the title *Nichiren Dai-Bosatsu* (error: {{nihongo}}: Japanese or romaji text required (help)) (*Great Bodhisattva Nichiren*) by Emperor Go-Kōgon (1358)^[24] and the title *Risshō Daishi* (error: {{nihongo}}: Japanese or romaji text required (help)) (*Great Teacher of Rectification*) was conferred posthumously in year 1922 by imperial edict.^[25]

Today, Nichiren Buddhism includes traditional temple schools such as Nichiren-shū and Nichiren Shōshū, as well as lay movements such as Soka Gakkai, Risshō Kōsei Kai, Reiyūkai, Kenshōkai, Honmon Butsuryū-shū, Kempon Hokke, and Shōshinkai among many others. Each group has varying views of Nichiren's teachings^[21] with claims and interpretations of Nichiren's identity ranging from the rebirth of bodhisattva Visistacaritra to the primordial or "true" (本仏: *Honbutsu*) Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law.^{[26][27][28][29]}

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- Buddhist education
- Declaration of the Lotus Sutra

Nichiren
日蓮



A 15th century portrait of Nichiren. From Kuon-ji Temple in Mount Minobu, Yamanashi prefecture.

Other names

- Dai-Nichiren (大日蓮)
Great Nichiren)^{[1][2]}
- Nichiren Daishōnin (日蓮大聖人)
Great Sage Nichiren)^{[3][4]}
- Nichiren Shōnin (日蓮聖人)
The Sage Nichiren)^[5]
- Nichiren Dai-Bosatsu (日蓮大菩薩)
Nichiren Great Bodhisattva

Personal

Born	16 February 1222 <div>Chiba Prefecture, Japan</div>
Died	13 October 1282 <div>(aged 60)</div> <div>Ota Ikegami Daibo</div>

First remonstrance to the Kamakura government
Attempt at execution
Second banishment and exile
The Mandala Gohonzon
Return to Kamakura
Retirement to Mount Minobu
Death

Teachings

Contributions based on Tendai or contemporary thought
Immanence
The Latter Day of the Law
Debate and polemics
"Single Practice" Buddhism
Protective forces

Unique teachings
"The Five Principles"
The Four Denunciations
The doctrine of the Three Great Secret Dharmas
Changing karma to mission
The great vow to achieve Kosen-rufu

Nichiren and his followers

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Bibliography

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	Hongyoji (Present-day Tokyo_
Religion	Buddhism
Nationality	Japanese ^[6]
Denomination	Nichiren Buddhism
School	Mahayana Tendai
Lineage	Shakyamuni Buddha Tiantai (Zhiyi) Saichō ^[7]
Education	<i>Kiyozumi-dera</i> Temple (Seichō-ji), Enryaku-ji Temple on Mount Hiei
Other names	<div><ul style="list-style-type: none">Dai-Nichiren (大日蓮) Great Nichiren)^{[1][2]}Nichiren Daishōnin (日蓮大聖人) Great Sage Nichiren)^{[3][4]}Nichiren Shōnin (日蓮聖人) The Sage Nichiren)^[5]Nichiren Dai-Bosatsu (日蓮大菩薩) Nichiren Great Bodhisattva</div>
Senior posting	
Teacher	Dōzenbo of Seichō-ji Temple ^{[8]:442}

Overview

The main narrative of Nichiren's life has been constructed from extant letters and treatises he wrote, counted in one collection as 523 complete writings and 248 fragments. Aside from historical documents stored in the repositories of various Nichiren sects, the first extensive non-religious biographical account of Nichiren did not appear until more than 200 years after his death.^{[30]:ix}

He launched his teachings in 1253, advocating an exclusive return to the Lotus Sutra as based on its original Tendai interpretations. His 1260 treatise *Risshō Ankoku Ron* (error: {{nihongo}}: Japanese or romaji text required ([help](#))) (*On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land*) argued that a nation that embraces the Lotus Sutra will experience peace and prosperity whereas rulers who support inferior religious teachings invite disorder and disaster into their realms.^{[14]:88[31]} In a 1264 essay, he stated that the title of the Lotus Sutra, "*Nam(u)-myōhō-enge-kyō*," encompasses all Buddhist teachings and its recitation leads to enlightenment.^{[16]:328} As a result of his adamant stance, he experienced severe persecution imposed by the Kamakura Shogunate and consequently began to see himself as "bodily reading the Lotus Sutra (*Jpn. Hokke shikidoku*)."^{[8]:252[32]:128–130} In some of his writings during a second exile (1271-1274) he began to identify himself with the key Lotus Sutra characters Sadāparibhūta and Visistacaritra^{[14]:99,100} and saw himself in the role of leading a vast outpouring of Bodhisattvas of the Earth.^[33]

In 1274, after his two predictions of foreign invasion and political strife were seemingly actualized by the first attempted Mongol invasion of Japan along with an unsuccessful coup within the Hōjō clan, Nichiren was pardoned by the Shogunate authorities and his advice was sought but not heeded.^{[4]:9–10} The *Risshō Ankoku Ron* in which he first predicted foreign invasion and civil disorder is now considered by Japanese historians to be a literary classic illustrating the apprehensions of that period.

Several hagiographies about Nichiren and are reflected in various pieces of artwork about incidents in his life.^{[34][35][36][8]:442[37]}

Nichiren remains a controversial figure among scholars who cast him as either a fervent nationalist or a social reformer with a transnational religious vision.^[38] Critical scholars have used words such as intolerant, nationalistic, militaristic, and self-righteous to portray him.^[39] On the other hand, Nichiren has been presented as a revolutionary,^[40] a classic reformer,^{[41]:403} and as a prophet.^{[41][42]:3[43]} Nichiren is often compared to other religious figures who shared similar rebellious and revolutionary drives to reform degeneration in their respective societies or schools.^{[44][45][46][47]}

Birth

According to the lunar Chinese calendar, Nichiren was born on 27th of the first month in 1222, which is 16 February in the Gregorian calendar.^[48]

Nichiren was born in the village of Kominato (today part of the city of Kamogawa), Nagase District, Awa Province (within present-day Chiba Prefecture). Accounts of his lineage vary. Nichiren described himself as "the son of a Sendara (*Skt: chandala*, despised outcast), "a son born of the lowly people living on a rocky strand of the out-of-the-way sea," and "the son of a sea-diver." In contrast, Hōnen, Shinran, Dōgen, and Eisai, the other founders of religious schools who predated Nichiren, were all born in the Kyoto region and came from noble or samurai backgrounds. Although his writings reflect a fierce pride of his lowly birth, followers after his death began to ascribe to him a more noble lineage, perhaps to attract more adherents.^{[49][50]} Some have claimed his father was a rōnin,^[51] a manorial functionary (*shokan*),^{[15]:5} or a political refugee.^{[52][53][30]:4}

Nichiren's father was Mikuni-no-Tayu Shigetada, also known as Nukina Shigetada Jiro (d. 1258) and his mother was Umegiku-nyo (d. 1267). On his birth, his parents named him *Zennichimaro* (善日磨) which has variously been translated into English as "Splendid Sun" and "Virtuous Sun Boy" among others.^[54] The exact site of Nichiren's birth is believed to be currently submerged off the shore from present-day Kominato-zan Tanjō-ji (小湊山 誕生寺) near a temple in Kominato that commemorates his birth.

Buddhist education

Between the years 1233 and 1253 Nichiren engaged in an intensive study of all of the ten schools of Buddhism prevalent in Japan at that time as well as the Chinese classics and secular literature. During these years, he became convinced of the preeminence of the *Lotus Sutra* and in 1253 returned to the temple where he first studied to present his findings.^{[55]:129[8]:443–444[56][42]:17[57][14]:90}

In a 1271 letter Nichiren outlined his rationale for deeply studying Buddhism:

[D]etermined to plant a seed of Buddhahood and attain Buddhahood in this life, just as all other people, I relied on Amida Buddha and chanted the name of this Buddha since childhood. However, I began doubting this practice, making a vow to study all the Buddhist sutras, commentaries on them by disciples, and explanatory notes by others[.]^[58]

At the age of 12 he began his Buddhist study at a temple of the Tendai school, Seichō-ji (清澄寺, also called Kiyosumi-dera).^{[42]:13} He was formally ordained at sixteen years old and took the Buddhist name *Zeshō-bō Renchō* (是生房蓮長), *Renchō* meaning "Lotus Growth." He left Seichō-ji for Kamakura where he studied Pure Land Buddhism, a school that stressed salvation through nianfo (Japanese *nembutsu*) or the invocation of Amitābha (Japanese *Amida*), and then studied Zen which had been growing in popularity in both Kamakura and Kyoto. He next traveled to Mount Hiei, the center of Japanese Tendai Buddhism, where he scrutinized the school's original doctrines and its subsequent incorporation of the theories and practices of Pure Land and Esoteric Buddhism. In the final stage of this twenty-year period he traveled to Mount Kōya, the center of Shingon esoteric Buddhism, and to Nara where he studied its six established schools, especially the Ritsu sect which emphasized strict monastic discipline.^{[59][60]:243–245}

Declaration of the Lotus Sutra

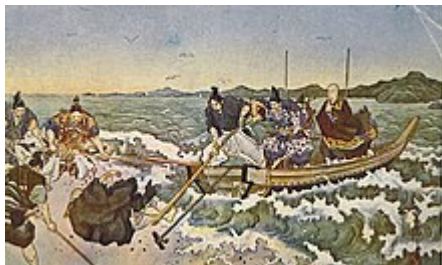
According to one of his letters, Nichiren returned to Seicho-ji Temple on 28 April 1253 to lecture on his twenty years of scholarship.^{[60]:246} What followed was his first public declaration of *Nam(u) Myōhō Renge Kyo*, atop Mount Kiyosumi. This marked the start of his campaign to return Tendai to the exclusive reliance of the Lotus Sutra and his efforts to convert the entire Japanese nation to this belief.^{[43]:233} This declaration also marks the start of his efforts to make profound Buddhist theory practical and actionable so an ordinary person could manifest Buddhahood within his or her own lifetime in the midst of day-to-day realities.^[61]

At the same event, according to his own account and subsequent hagiography, he changed his name to *Nichiren*, an abbreviation of *Nichi* (日 "Sun") and *Ren* (蓮 "Lotus").^{[42]:34} *Nichi* represents both the light of truth and the Sun Goddess symbolizing Japan itself. *Ren* signifies the Lotus Sutra. Nichiren envisioned Japan as the country where the true teaching of Buddhism would be revived and the starting point for its worldwide spread.^[62]

At his lecture, it is construed, Nichiren vehemently attacked Honen, the founder of Pure Land Buddhism, and its practice of chanting the Nembutsu, *Nam(u) Amida Butsu*. It is likely he also denounced the core teachings of Seicho-ji which had incorporated non-exclusive Lotus Sutra teachings and practices. In so doing he earned the animosity of the local steward, Hojo Kagenobu, who attempted to have Nichiren killed. Modern scholarship suggests that events unfolded not in a single day but over a longer period of time and had social, and political dimensions.^{[60]:246–247[30]:6–7}

Nichiren then developed a base of operation in Kamakura and he converted several Tendai priests, directly ordained others, and attracted lay disciples who were drawn mainly from the strata of the lower and middle samurai class. Their households provided Nichiren with economic support and became the core of Nichiren communities in several locations in the Kanto region of Japan.^{[60]:246–247[30]:7–8}

First remonstrance to the Kamakura government



The banishment of Nichiren in 1261. The disciple Nichirō wished to follow but was forbidden to do so. Tourist postcard artwork, circa 1920s.

Nichiren arrived in Kamakura in 1254. Between 1254 and 1260 half of the population had perished due to a tragic succession of calamities that included drought, earthquakes, epidemics, famine, fires, and storms.^{[60]:432#49} Nichiren sought scriptural references to explain the unfolding of natural disasters and then wrote a series of works which, based on the Buddhist theory of the non-duality of the human mind and the environment, attributed the sufferings to the weakened spiritual condition of people which caused the Kami (protective forces or traces of the Buddha) to abandon the nation. The root cause of this, he argued, was the widespread decline of the Dharma due to the mass adoption of the Pure Land teachings.^{[60]:249–250[63]:124–125}

The most renowned of these works, considered his first major treatise, was the *Risshō Ankoku Ron* (立正安国論), "Treatise On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land."^[note 1] Nichiren submitted it to Hōjō Tokiyori, the *de facto* leader of the Kamakura shogunate as a political move to effectuate radical reform. In it he argued the necessity for "the Sovereign to recognize and accept the singly true and correct form of Buddhism (i.e., 立正: *risshō*) as the only way to achieve peace and prosperity for the land and its people and end their suffering (i.e., 安国: *ankoku*)."^{[64][65][66]}

Using a dialectic form well-established in China and Japan, the treatise is a 10-segment fictional dialogue between a Buddhist wise man, presumably Nichiren, and a visitor who together lament the tragedies that have beleaguered the nation. The wise man answers the guest's questions and after a heated exchange gradually leads him to enthusiastically embrace the vision of a country grounded firmly on the ideals of the Lotus Sutra. In this writing Nichiren displays a skill in using analogy, anecdote, and detail to persuasively appeal to an individual's unique psychology, experiences, and level of understanding.^{[67][16]:328[30]:10}

The teacher builds his argument by quoting extensively from a set of Buddhist sutras and commentaries. In his future writings Nichiren continued to draw from the same sutras and commentaries, effectively forming Nichiren's canon of sources out of the Buddhist library which he deemed supportive of the Lotus Sutra including the Konkomyō, Daijuku, Ninno, Yakushi, and Nirvana sutras. They share in common apocalyptic or nation-protecting teachings and prophecies.^{[67]:330–334}

The *Risshō Ankoku Ron* concludes with an urgent appeal to the ruler to cease all financial support for Buddhist schools promoting inferior teachings.^{[67]:334} Otherwise, Nichiren warns, as predicted by the sutras, the continued influence of inferior teachings would invite even more natural disasters as well as the outbreak of civil strife and foreign invasion.^{[16]:328}

Nichiren submitted his treatise on 16 July 1260 but it drew no official response. It did, however, prompt a severe backlash from the Buddhist priests of other schools. Nichiren was challenged to a religious debate with leading Kamakura prelates in which, by his account, they were swiftly dispatched. Their lay

followers, however, attempted to kill him at his dwelling which forced him to flee Kamakura. His critics had influence with key governmental figures and spread slanderous rumors about him. One year after he submitted the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* the authorities had him arrested and exiled to the Izu peninsula.^{[60]:251}

Nichiren's Izu exile lasted two years. In his extant writings from this time period, Nichiren began to strongly draw from chapters 10-22 of the Lotus Sutra, what Tanabe calls its "third realm" (*daisan hōmon*). Nichiren began to emphasize the purpose of human existence as being the practice of the bodhisattva ideal in the real world which entails undertaking struggle and manifesting endurance. He suggested that he is a model of this behavior, a "votary" (*gyōja*) of the Lotus Sutra.^{[68][60]:252[69][70][30]:11–12}

Upon being pardoned in 1263 Nichiren returned to Kamakura. In November 1264 he was ambushed and nearly killed at Komatsubara in Awa Province by a force led by Lord Tōjō Kagenobu. For the next few years he preached in provinces outside of Kamakura but returned in 1268. At this point the Mongols sent envoys to Japan demanding tribute and threatening invasion. Nichiren sent 11 letters to influential leaders reminding them about his predictions in the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*.^{[4]:7–8}

Attempt at execution

The threat and execution of Mongol invasion was the worst crisis in pre-modern Japanese history. In 1269 Mongol envoys again arrived to demand Japanese submission to their hegemony and the bakufu responded by mobilizing military defenses.^{[30]:13}

The role of Buddhism in "nation-protection" (*chingo kokka*) was long established in Japan at this time and the government galvanized prayers from Buddhist schools for this purpose. Nichiren and his followers, however, felt emboldened that the predictions he had made in 1260 of foreign invasion seemingly were being fulfilled and more people joined their movement. Daring a rash response from the bakufu, Nichiren vowed in letters to his followers that he was giving his life to actualize the Lotus Sutra. He accelerated his polemics against the non-Lotus teachings the government had been patronizing at the very time it was attempting to solidify national unity and resolve. In a series of letters to prominent leaders he directly provoked the major prelates of Kamakura temples that the Hojo family patronized, criticized the principles of Zen which was popular among the samurai class, critiqued the esoteric practices of Shingon just as the government was invoking them, and condemned the ideas underlying Risshū as it was enjoying a revival.^{[8]:454–455[60]:257} His actions at that time have been described by modern scholars either as a high form of altruism^[71] or the ravings of a fanatic and madman.^[72]

His claims drew the ire of the influential religious figures of the time and their followers, especially the Shingon priest Ryōkan (良観). In September 1271, after a fiery exchange of letters between the two, Nichiren was arrested by a band of soldiers and tried by Hei no Saemon (平の左衛門, also called 平頼綱 *Taira no Yoritsuna*), the deputy chief of the Hojo clan's Board of Retainers. Nichiren considered this as his second remonstrance to the government.^{[73][60]:257}

According to Nichiren's own account, he was sentenced to exile but was brought to Tatsunokuchi beach in Shichirigahama for execution. At the final moment an astronomical phenomenon, "a brilliant orb as bright as the moon," arced over the execution grounds, terrifying Nichiren's executioners into inaction.^[74] Some scholars have proposed alternative narratives for this story.^{[60]:257, 436 (note 99)}

Regardless of the account, Nichiren's life was spared and he was exiled to Sado Island. The incident has become known as the "Tatsunokuchi Persecution" and was regarded by Nichiren as a death-and-resurrection turning point.^{[60]:257–258, 436 (note 100)[42]:58} In the Nichiren tradition this is called his moment of *Hosshaku kenpon* (発迹顕本), translated as "casting off the transient and revealing the true"^[75] or "outgrowing the provisional and revealing the essential."^[76]

Second banishment and exile

After the failed execution authorities carried out Nichiren's original sentence of exile to Sado Island in the Sea of Japan. Upon arriving, he was dispatched to a small dilapidated temple located in a graveyard. Nichiren was accompanied by a few disciples and in the first winter they endured terrible cold, food deprivation, and threats from local inhabitants.^{[60]:258}



Konpon Temple was built on Sado where Nichiren lived during his exile.

Nichiren scholars describe a clear shift in both tone and message in letters written before his Sado exile and those written during and after.^{[77]:238} Initially, Nichiren's urgent concern was to rally his followers in Kamakura. The tactics of the *bakufu* suppression of the Nichiren community included exile, imprisonment, land confiscation, or ousting from clan membership. Apparently a majority of his disciples abandoned their faith and others questioned why they and Nichiren were facing such adversity in light of the Lotus Sutra's promise of "peace and security in the present life."^{[60]:258–259}

In response he began to identify himself with Sadāparibhūta, a key figure in the Lotus Sutra, who in the 20th chapter invited repeated persecution in his efforts to propagate the sutra. Such hardship, Nichiren argued, fulfilled and validated the Lotus Sutra. He also identified himself with the bodhisattva Visistacaritra to whom Shakyamuni entrusted the future propagation of the Lotus Sutra, seeing himself in the role of leading a vast outpouring of Bodhisattvas of the Earth who pledged to liberate the oppressed.^{[14]:99,100[33][60]:259}

The numerous letters and minor treatises he wrote in Sado include what is considered his two most significant works, the *Kanjin no Honzon Shō* (観心本尊抄: "The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind")^{[64][78]} and the *Kaimoku Shō* (開目抄: "On the Opening of the Eyes").^[79] In the latter he stated that facing adversity should be regarded as a matter of course and that the resolve to carry on with the mission to propagate the sutra was for him more important than guarantees of protection: "Let Heaven forsake me. Let ordeals confront me. I will not begrudge bodily life... . No matter what trials we may encounter, so long as we do not have a mind of doubt, I and my disciples will naturally achieve the Buddha realm." He concluded this work with the vow to be the "pillar of Japan, the eyes of Japan, the great ship of Japan."^{[60]:259[16]:329}

The Mandala Gohonzon

At the end of the 1271-1272 winter Nichiren's conditions had improved. He had attracted a small band of followers in Sado who provided him with support and disciples from the mainland began visiting him and providing supplies. In 1272 there was an attempted coup in Kamakura and Kyoto, seemingly fulfilling the prediction he had made in the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* of rebellion in the domain. At this point Nichiren was transferred to much better accommodations.^{[60]:259[8]:452}

While on Sado island, Nichiren inscribed the first Mandala Gohonzon (error: {{nihongo}}: Japanese or romaji text required (help)). Although there is evidence of a Gohonzon in embryonic form as far back as the days right before his exile, the first in full form is dated to July 8, 1273 and includes the inscription of "Nichiren inscribes this for the first time."^{[60]:437, note 114}

His writings on Sado provide his rationale for a calligraphic mandala depicting the assembly at Eagle Peak which was to be used as an object of devotion or worship. By increasingly associating himself with Visistacaritra he implied a direct link to the original and universal Buddha. He read in the 16th (*Life span*) chapter of the Lotus Sutra a three-fold "secret Dharma" of the *daimoku*, the object of worship (*honzon*), and the ordination platform (*kaidan*). These became the means for people to directly access the Buddha's enlightenment.^{[60]:259–260}

At the bottom of each mandala he wrote: "This is the great mandala never before revealed in Jambudvīpa during the more than 2,200 years since the Buddha's nirvana." He inscribed many Mandala Gohonzon during the rest of his life. More than a hundred Mandala Gohonzon preserved today are attributed to Nichiren's own hand.^{[14]:96}

Return to Kamakura

Nichiren was pardoned on February 14, 1274 and returned to Kamakura one month later on March 26.^{[60]:260} Nichiren wrote that his innocence and the accuracy of his predictions caused the regent Hōjō Tokimune to intercede on his behalf. Scholars have suggested that some of his well-connected followers might have had influence on the government's decision to release him.^{[60]:437, note 115}

On April 8 he was summoned by Hei no Saemon, who inquired about the timing of the next Mongol invasion. Nichiren predicted that it would occur within the year. He used the audience as yet another opportunity to remonstrate with the government. Claiming that reliance on prayers based on esoteric rituals would invite further calamity, he urged the *bakufu* to ground itself exclusively on the Lotus Sutra.^{[60]:261}

Deeply disappointed by the government's refusal to heed his advice, Nichiren left Kamakura one month later, on May 12, determined to become a solitary wayfarer. Five days later, however, on a visit to the residence of Lord Hakii Sanenaga of Mt. Minobu, he learned that followers in nearby regions had held steadfast during his exile. Despite severe weather and deprivation, Nichiren remained in Minobu for the rest of his career.^{[60]:261}

Retirement to Mount Minobu

During his self-imposed exile at Mount Minobu, a location 100 miles west of Kamakura,^{[80][81][82]} Nichiren led a widespread movement of followers in Kanto and Sado mainly through his prolific letter-writing. During the so-called "Atsuhara affair" of 1279 when governmental attacks were aimed at Nichiren's followers rather than himself, Nichiren's letters reveal an assertive and well-informed leader who provided detailed instructions through a sophisticated network of disciples serving as liaisons between Minobu and other affected areas in Japan. He also showed the ability to provide a compelling narrative of events that gave his followers a broad perspective of what was unfolding.^[83]

More than half of the extant letters of Nichiren were written during his years at Minobu. Some consisted of moving letters to followers expressing appreciation for their assistance, counseling on personal matters, and explaining his teachings in more understandable terms.^{[60]:261[84]} Two of his works from

this period, the *Senji Shō* (撰時抄: "The Selection of the Time")^[85] and the *Hōon Shō* (報恩抄: "On Repaying Debts of Gratitude")^[86] constitute, along with his *Risshō Ankoku Ron* (立正安国論: "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land"), *Kaimoku Shō* ("The Opening of the Eyes"), and *Kanjin no Honzon Shō* ("The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind"), what is commonly regarded as his five major writings.

During his years at Minobu Nichiren intensified his attacks on mystical and esoteric practices (mikkyō 密教) that had been incorporated into the Japanese Tendai school. It becomes clear at this point that he understood that he was creating his own form of Lotus Buddhism.^{[87]:362}

Nichiren and his disciples completed the Myō-hōkke-in Kuon-ji Temple (久遠寺) in 1281. In the 19th century this structure burned down to be replaced by a new structure completed in the second half of the Meiji era.^{[88]:117[89]}

While at Minobu Nichiren also inscribed numerous Mandala Gohonzon for bestowal upon specific disciples and lay believers. Nichiren Shoshu believers claim that after the execution of the three Atsuhara farmers he inscribed the Dai Gohonzon on October 12, 1279, a Gohonzon specifically addressed to all humanity. This assertion has been disputed by other schools as historically and textually incorrect.^{[90][14]:189} It is enshrined currently at the *Tahō Fuji Dai-Nichirenge-Zan Taiseki-ji*, informally known as the *Head Temple Taiseki-ji* of the Nichiren Shōshū Order of Buddhism, located at the foot of Mount Fuji in Fujinomiya, Shizuoka. Several of these Mandala Gohonzon are prominently retained by the Nichiren-shū in Yamanashi Prefecture. Others survive today in the repositories of Nichiren Shōshū temples such as Taiseki-ji (大石寺) in Fujinomiya, Shizuoka, which has a particularly large collection of scrolls that is publicly aired once a year.

It is apparent that Nichiren took great care in deciding which of his disciples were eligible to receive a Gohonzon inscribed by him. In the case of a letter written to Lady Niiama he took great care to explain why he would not inscribe a Gohonzon despite a deep personal bond.^{[30]:52–55} Among the Gohonzon he inscribed were several that were quite large in size and perhaps intended for congregational use in chapels maintained by some lay followers.^{[60]:275}

Death

In 1282, after years of privation, Nichiren fell ill. His followers encouraged him to travel to the hot springs for their medicinal benefits. En route, unable to travel further, he stopped at the home of a disciple in Ikegami, outside of present-day Tokyo, and died on 13 October 1282. According to legend, he died in the presence of fellow disciples after having spent several days lecturing from his sickbed on the Lotus Sutra, writing a final letter, and leaving instructions for the future of his movement after his death, namely the designation of the six senior disciples. His funeral and cremation took place the following day.^{[60]:261[42]:133[91]}

His disciples left Ikegami with Nichiren's ashes on October 21, reaching back to Minobu on October 25.

- Nichiren Shu sects claims his tomb is sited, as per his request, at Kuon-ji on Mount Minobu where his ashes remain.^{[60]:321}
- Nichiren Shoshu asserts that Nikko Shonin later confiscated his cremated ashes along with other articles and brought them to Mount Fuji which, they claim, are now enshrined on the left side next to the Dai Gohonzon within the *Hoando* storage house.^[note 2]

Teachings

Nichiren's teachings developed over the course of his career and their evolution can be seen through the study of his writings as well as in the annotations he made in his personal copy of the Lotus Sutra, the so-called *Chū-hokekyō*.^{[93]:363}

Some scholars set a clear demarcation in his teachings at the time he arrived at Sado Island^{[94]:238} whereas others see a threefold division of thought: up to and through the Izu exile, from his return to Kamakura through the Sado Island exile, and during his years at Minobu.^{[93]:252–253}

According to Anesaki, Nichiren, upon his arrival at Minobu, quickly turned his attention to consolidating his teachings toward their perpetuation. The scope of his thinking was outlined in an essay *Hokke Shuyō-shō* [法華取要抄, "Choosing the Heart of the Lotus Sutra"], considered by Nikkō Shōnin as one of Nichiren's ten major writings.^{[95][42]:98}

Anesaki also claims that later during his Minobu years, in lectures he is said to have transmitted to his disciples, Nichiren summarized the key ideas of his teachings in one paragraph: Buddhahood is eternal, all people can and should manifest it in their lives; Nichiren is the personage in the Lotus Sutra whose mission it is to enable people to realize their enlightenment; his followers who share his vow are the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. This requires a spiritual and moral unity among followers based on their inherent Buddhahood; Nichiren established the seeds of this community and his followers to come must extend it globally. Thus the enlightened individual, country, and world are different expressions of the ideal of the Buddha land; and the enlightened heart of the individual plays out its role with the world and cosmos as its stage.^{[42]:98–100} This is Nichiren's vision of *Kosen-rufu*, a time when the teachings of the Lotus Sutra would be widely spread throughout the world.^[96]

Nichiren set a precedent for Buddhist social activism centuries before its emergence in other Buddhist schools. The uniqueness of his teachings was his attempt to move Buddhism from the theoretical to the actualizable. He held adamantly that his teachings would permit a nation to right itself and ultimately lead to world peace.^{[97][77]:251[98][99]:54}

Some of his religious thinking was derived from the Tendai understanding of the Lotus Sutra, syncretic beliefs that were deeply rooted in the culture of his times, and new perspectives that were products of Kamakura Buddhism.^{[99]:vii-ix} Other ideas were completely original and unique to him.

Contributions based on Tendai or contemporary thought

Nichiren was a product of his times and some of his teachings were drawn from existing schools of thought or from emerging ideas in Kamakura Buddhism. Nichiren appropriated and expanded on these ideas.

Immanence

Nichiren stressed the concept of immanence, meaning that the Buddha's pure land is to be found in this present world (*shaba soku jikkōdo*). Related concepts such as attaining enlightenment in one's current form (*sokushin jōbutsu*) and the belief that enlightenment is not attained but is originally existing within all people (*hongaku*) had been introduced by Kūkai and Saichō several centuries earlier.^{[100][101]} These concepts were based on Chih-i's cosmology of the unity and interconnectedness of the universe called Three Thousand Realms in a Single Moment of Life (*ichinen sanzen*).^[102]

Nichiren advanced these concepts by declaring that they were actualizable rather than theoretical. Cause and effect were simultaneous instead of linear. Contemplation of one's mind (*kanjin*) took place within the singular belief in and commitment to the Lotus Sutra. According to Nichiren these phenomena manifest when a person chants the title of the Lotus Sutra (*date*) and shares its validity with others, even at the cost of one's life if need be.^{[60]:68,265–266}

Nichiren constructed a triad relationship between faith, practice, and study. Faith meant embracing his new paradigm of the Lotus Sutra. It was something that needed to be continually deepened. "To accept (*ju*) [faith in the sutra] is easy," he explained to a follower, "to uphold it (*ji*) is difficult. But the realization of Buddhahood lies in upholding [faith]." This could only be manifested by the practice of chanting the *daimoku* as well as teaching others to do the same, and study.^{[60]:270,295[103]:12–13}

Consequently, Nichiren consistently and vehemently objected to the perspective of the Pure Land school that stressed an other-worldly aspiration to some pure land. Behind his assertion is the concept of the nonduality of the subjective realm (the individual) and the objective realm (the land that the individual inhabits) which indicates that when the individual taps buddhahood, his or her present world becomes peaceful and harmonious. For Nichiren the widespread propagation of the Lotus Sutra and consequent world peace ("*kosen-rufu*") was achievable and inevitable and tasked his future followers with a mandate to accomplish it.^{[104][105]:68}

The Latter Day of the Law

The Kamakura period of 13th century Japan was characterized by a sense of foreboding. Nichiren, as well as the others of this time, believed that they had entered the Latter Day of the Law (*Mappō*), the time which Shakyamuni predicted his teachings would lose their efficacy. Indeed, Japan had entered an era of extreme natural disasters, internal strife and political conflict.^[106]

Although Nichiren attributed the turmoils and disasters in society to the widespread practice of what he deemed inferior Buddhist teachings that were under government sponsorship, he was enthusiastically upbeat about the portent of the age. He asserted, in contrast to other Mahayana schools, this was the best possible moment to be alive, the era in which the Lotus Sutra was to spread, and the time in which the Bodhisattvas of the Earth would appear to propagate it. "It is better to be a leper who chants Nam(u)-myōhō-rence-kyō than be a chief abbot of the Tendai school."^{[60]:56,254 [107]}

Debate and polemics

The tradition of conducting open and sustained debate to clarify matters of fundamental Buddhist principles has deep-seated roots in Tibet, China, and Korea.^{[108][109][110]} This tradition was also quite pronounced in Japan.^[111]

In addition to formalized religious debates, the Kamakura period was marked by flourishing and competitive oral religious discourse. Temples began to compete for the patronage of the wealthy and powerful through oratorical sermonizing and temple lecturers (*kōshi*) faced pressure to attract crowds. Sermonizing spread from within the confines of temples to homes and the streets as wandering mendicants (*shidōso*, *hijiri*, or *inja*) preached to both the educated and illiterate in exchange for alms. In order to teach principles of faith preachers incorporated colorful storytelling, music, vaudeville, and drama—which later evolved into Noh.^{[30]:48–49}

A predominant topic of debate in Kamakura Buddhism was the concept of rebuking "slander of the Dharma." The Lotus Sutra itself strongly warns about slander of the Dharma.^{[32]:114–115} Hōnen, in turn, employed harsh polemics instructing people to “discard” (*sha* 捨), “close” (*hei* 閉), “put aside” (*kaku* 闕), and “abandon” (*hō* 抛) the Lotus Sutra and other non-Pure Land teachings. His ideas were vociferously attacked by many including Nichiren.^{[32]:116,120}

Nichiren, however, elevated countering slander of the Dharma into a pillar of Buddhist practice. In fact, far more of his extant writings deal with the clarification of what constitutes the essence of Buddhist teachings than expositions of how to meditate.^{[32]:114,145–146}

At age 32, Nichiren began a career of denouncing other Mahayana Buddhist schools of his time and declaring what he asserted was the correct teaching, the Universal Dharma (*Nam(u)-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō*), and chanting its words as the only path for both personal and social salvation.^{[112][113]} The first target of his polemics was Pure Land Buddhism which had begun to gain ascendancy among the leaders and populace and even had established itself within the Tendai school. Nichiren's detailed rationale is most famously articulated in his *Risshō Ankoku Ron*^[65] (立正安国論): "Treatise On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,"^{[note 1][114][115]} his first major treatise and the first of his three remonstrations with the *bakufu* authorities.

Although his times were harsh and permeated by *bakufu* culture, Nichiren always chose the power of language over bearing arms or resorting to violence. He didn't mince his words and was relentless to pursue dialogue whether in the form of debate, conversations, or correspondence. His spirit of engaging in discourse is captured in his statement, "Whatever obstacles I may encounter, as long as men [persons] of wisdom do not prove my teachings to be false, I will never yield."^{[116]:86–87}

"Single Practice" Buddhism

Hōnen introduced the concept of "single practice" Buddhism. Basing himself on the writings of the Chinese Buddhist Shandao, he advocated the singular practice of Nianfo, the recitation of the Buddha Amida's name. This practice was revolutionary because it was accessible to all and minimized the monopolistic role of the entire monastic establishment.^{[117][118][119]}

Nichiren appropriated the structure of a universally accessible single practice but substituted the Nianfo with the daimoku of *Nam(u)-myōhō-renge-kyō*. This constituted renouncing the principle of aspiring to a Pure Land after death and asserting instead the Lotus perspective of attaining Buddhahood in one's present form in this lifetime.^{[32]:124}

Protective forces

Japan had a long-established system of folk beliefs that existed outside of and parallel to the schools of the Buddhist establishment. Many of these beliefs had an influence on the various religious schools which, in turn, influenced each other, a phenomenon known as syncretism. Among these beliefs were the existence of *kami*, indigenous gods and goddesses or protective forces, that influenced human and natural occurrences in a holistic universe. Some beliefs ascribed *kami* to traces of the Buddha. The belief in *kami* was deeply embedded in the episteme of the time. Human agency through prayers and rituals could summon forth *kami* who would engage in nation-protection (*chingo kokka*).^{[60]:40–42,166[120][121]}

According to some of his accounts, Nichiren undertook his study of Buddhism to largely understand why the *kami* had seemingly abandoned Japan, as witnessed by the decline of the imperial court. Because the court and the people had turned to teachings that had weakened their minds and resolve, he came to conclude, both people of wisdom and the protective forces had abandoned the nation.^{[122][123]}

By extension, he argued, through proper prayer and action his troubled society would transform into an ideal world in which peace and wisdom prevail and "the wind will not thrash the branches nor the rain fall hard enough to break clods."^{[60]:291–292}

Unique teachings

From Nichiren's corpus appear several lines of unique Buddhist thought.

"The Five Principles"

Developed during his Izu exile, the Five Principles (*gogi*) are five criteria through which Buddhist teachings can be evaluated and ranked. They are the quality of the teaching (*kyō*), the innate human capacity (*ki*) of the people, the time (*ji*), the characteristic of the land or country (*koku*), and the sequence of dharma propagation (*kyōhō rufu no zengo*). From these five interrelated perspectives Nichiren declared his interpretation of the Lotus Sutra as the supreme teaching.^{[60]:252–255[124][125]}

The Four Denunciations

Throughout his career Nichiren harshly denounced Buddhist practices other than his own as well as the existing social and political system. The tactic he adopted was *shakubuku*, conversion, in which he shocked his adversaries with his denunciations while attracting followers through his outward display of supreme confidence.^[126] Modern detractors criticize his exclusivist single-truth perspective as intolerant. Apologists argue his arguments should be understood in the context of his samurai society and not through post-modern lenses such as tolerance.^[127]

As his career advanced, Nichiren's vehement polemics against Pure Land teachings came to include sharp criticisms of the Shingon, Zen, and Ritsu schools of Buddhism. Collectively his criticisms have become known as "the Four Denunciations." Later in his career he critiqued the Japanese Tendai school for its appropriation of Shingon elements. Reliance on Shingon rituals, he claimed, was magic and would decay the nation. He held that Zen was devilish in its belief that attaining enlightenment was possible without relying on the Buddha's words; Ritsu was thievery because it hid behind token deeds such as public works. In modern parlance the Four Denunciations rebuked thinking that demoralized and disengaged people by encouraging resignation and escapism.^{[42]:8–11[128][129]}

The doctrine of the Three Great Secret Dharmas

Nichiren deemed the world to be in a degenerative age and believed that people required a simple and effective means to rediscover the core of Buddhism and thereby restore their spirits and times. He described his "Three Great Secret Dharmas" (*Sandai hiho*) as this very means.^{[130]:353}

In a writing entitled *Sandai Hiho Sho*, or the Three Great Secret Dharmas, Nichiren delineated three teachings in the heart of the 16th chapter of the Lotus Sutra which are secret because he claimed he received them as the leader of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth through a silent transmission from

Shakyamuni. They are the invocation (*daimoku*), the object of devotion (*honzon*), and the platform of ordination or place of worship (*kaidan*).^{[131]:266[60]:264[130]:353}

The *daimoku*, the rhythmic chanting of Nam(u)-myōhō-rence-kyō is the means to discover that one's own life, the lives of others, and the environment is the essence of the Buddha of absolute freedom. The chanting is to be done while contemplating the *honzon*. At the age of 51, Nichiren inscribed his own Mandala Gohonzon, the object of veneration or worship in his Buddhism, "never before known," as he described it.^[132] The Gohonzon is a calligraphic representation of the cosmos and chanting *daimoku* to it is Nichiren's method of meditation to experience the truth of Buddhism. He believed this practice was efficacious, simple to perform, and suited to the capacity of the people and the time.^{[130]:354}

Nichiren describes the first two secret Dharmas in numerous other writings but the reference to the platform of ordination appears only in the *Sandai Hiho Sho*, a work whose authenticity has been questioned by some scholars. Nichiren apparently left the fulfillment of this secret Dharma to his successors and its interpretation has been a matter of heated debate. Some state that it refers to the construction of a physical national ordination platform sanctioned by the emperor; others contend that the ordination platform is the community of believers (*sangha*) or, simply, the place where practitioners of the Lotus Sutra live and make collective efforts to realize the ideal of establishing the true Dharma in order to establish peace to the land (*rissho ankoku*). The latter conception entails a robust interplay between religion and secular life and an egalitarian structure in which people are dedicated to perfecting an ideal society.^{[131]:266,268[133]}

According to Nichiren, practicing the Three Secret Dharmas results in the "Three Proofs" which verify their validity. The first proof is "documentary," whether the religion's fundamental texts, here the writings of Nichiren, make a lucid case for the eminence of the religion. "Theoretical proof" is an intellectual standard of whether a religion's teachings reasonably clarify the mysteries of life and death. "Actual proof," deemed the most important by Nichiren, demonstrates the validity of the teaching through the actual improvements achieved by practitioners in their daily lives.^{[134][135][136][137][138]}

Changing karma to mission

Nichiren was deeply aware of the karmic struggles his followers faced in their day-to-day existence and encouraged them that they could "cross the sea of suffering" (*Shiji Shiro-dono gosho*). Through prevailing over these situations, he taught, they would establish a sense of inner freedom, peace of mind, and understanding of the Dharma that persisted independent of the ups and downs of circumstances. He accepted prevailing Buddhist notions about karma that taught that a person's current conditions were a result of thoughts, words, and actions accumulated in the past. He showed little concern, however, for attributing current circumstances to supposed past deeds. Rather, he viewed karma through the lens of the teachings of the Lotus Sutra which could enable all people to become Buddhas, even the ignorant and evil people of the Latter Day of the Law.^{[139]:30–32}

When confronting karmic situations, the act of chanting Nam(u)-myōhō-rence-kyō would open the wisdom of the Buddha, transforming karma into mission and a creative and joy-filled way of life. Beyond the sphere of a single individual's life, the process would awaken a person's concern for the broader society and sense of social responsibility.^{[140]:168}

Nichiren introduced the term "votary of the Lotus Sutra" (*Hokekyō no gyōja*) to describe himself. The Lotus Sutra itself speaks of the great trials that will be faced by individuals who base themselves on its teachings and attempt to spread it. Nichiren claims he read the sutra "bodily" (*shikidoku*), voluntarily

inviting the entailing hardships it predicts rather than just reciting or meditating on its words.^{[139]:35–36}

Through challenging these persecutions Nichiren claimed to have discovered his personal mission and felt great joy even when experiencing the harshness of exile. His sufferings became, in his thinking, redemptive opportunities to change his karma and give his life transcendent meaning.^{[139]:37}

In enduring severe persecutions Nichiren claimed that the negative karma he had accumulated from the past could be eradicated quickly in his current life. He was an active agent in this process, not a victim. He even expressed appreciation to his tormentors for giving him the opportunity to serve as an envoy of the Buddha.^{[141]:34,36}

In letters to some of his followers Nichiren extended the concept of meeting persecution for the sake of propagating the Dharma to experiencing tribulations in life such as problems with family discord or illness. He encouraged these followers to take ownership for such life events and view them as opportunities to repay karmic debts and mitigate them in shorter periods of time than would otherwise be the case.^{[141]:37}

Nichiren reached a state of conviction that offered a new perspective on karma. He expressed that his resolve to carry out his mission was paramount in importance and that the Lotus Sutra's promise of a peaceful and secure existence meant finding joy and validation in the process of overcoming karma. According to Stone, in confronting karma Nichiren "demonstrated an attitude that wastes little energy in railing against it but unflinchingly embraces it, interpreting it in whatever way appears meaningful at the moment so as to use that suffering for one's own development and to offer it on behalf of others."^{[141]:39}

The great vow to achieve Kosen-rufu

Nichiren's teachings are replete with vows he makes for himself and asks his followers to share as well. Some are personal in nature such as frequent admonitions for people to transform their inner lives. "You must quickly reform the tenets you hold in your heart," he stated in his treatise *Rissho Ankoku Ron*. He urged his followers to attain "treasures of the heart" and to reflect on their behavior as human beings.^{[116]:76,79–80,86,89} These vows are "this-worldly" rather than theoretical and are matched with an easily accessible practice.^[142]

Nichiren also made a "great vow" of a political dimension. He and his followers to come would create the conditions that lead to a just nation and world which the Lotus Sutra describes as *Kosen-rufu*. In earlier Japanese Buddhism the concept of "nation" was equated with Tennō (天皇), or imperial rule and "peace of the land" was associated with the stability of the regime. Nichiren's teachings, however, fully embraced a newly emerging viewpoint in medieval Japan that "nation" referred to the land and the people. Nichiren was unique among his contemporaries in charging the actual government in power, in this case the *bakufu* rather than the throne, with the peace of the land as well as the thriving of the Dharma. In his teachings based on the Lotus Sutra, all human beings are equal, whether the nation's sovereign or an unknown commoner. Enlightenment is not restricted to an individual's inner life but is actualized by efforts toward the transformation of the land and the realization of an ideal society.^{[143]:313–320}

This entails an urgent mandate. Nichiren links the great vow of personages in the Lotus Sutra to raise all people to the consciousness of the Buddha, to his own single-minded struggles to teach the Law despite the great persecutions he encountered, to his injunction to future disciples to create the Buddha land in the *saha* world over the course of the myriad years to follow.^{[42]:66–69[143]:320–321}

Nichiren and his followers

Nichiren was a charismatic leader who attracted many followers during both his missionary trips and his exiles. Most of these followers were warriors and feudal lords. He maintained to his women followers that they were equally able to attain enlightenment. He set a high standard of leadership and, in his writings, shared his rationale and strategies with them, openly urging them to share his conviction and struggles.^{[144][16]:328–329}

He left the fulfillment of the *kaidan*, the third of his Three Secret Dharmas, to his disciples. His many extant letters demonstrate the scope and breadth of his relationship with them and his expectations for them. They recognized and trusted his charismatic leadership and his understanding of Buddhism. Many sought his guidance to overcome personal problems. Many were actively involved with supporting him financially and protecting his community of followers. Several of disciples were praised by him for sharing in his privations and a few lost their lives in these situations. Although over the centuries the movement he established was fraught with divisions, his followers sustained his teachings and example and various times gained considerable influence. Today his followers are found in influential lay movements as well as traditional Nichiren schools.^{[145][146]}

The relationship between Nichiren and his disciples has been called *shitei funi*, the oneness of mentor and disciple. Although the functions of the mentor and disciple may vary, they share the same goals and the same responsibility. Nichiren claimed the precedent for *shitei funi* is a core theme of the Lotus Sutra, especially in chapters 21 and 22 where the Buddha entrusts the future propagation of the sutra to the gathered bodhisattvas.^{[147][148][149]}

After Nichiren's death

After Nichiren's death, his teachings were interpreted in different ways. As a result, Nichiren Buddhism encompasses several major branches and schools, each with its own doctrine and set of interpretations of Nichiren's teachings.^[150]

Writings

Many of Nichiren's writings still exist in his original handwriting, some as complete works and some as fragments. Other documents survive as copies made by his immediate disciples. Nichiren's existing works number over 700 manuscripts in total, including transcriptions of orally delivered lectures, letters of remonstrance and illustrations.^{[151][152][153][154][155]}

Scholars have divided the writings attributed to Nichiren into three categories: those whose authenticity are universally accepted, those generally designated as written by someone else after his death, and a third category in which the veracity of works is still being debated.^{[156][131]}

In addition to treatises written in formal Classical Chinese (*kanbun* 漢文), Nichiren also wrote expository letters to followers in mixed kanji-kana vernacular as well as letters in simplified kana for believers such as children who could not read the more formal styles. Some of Nichiren's *kanbun*



A section of Nichiren's treatise Risshō Ankoku Ron (On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land).

works, especially the *Risshō Ankoku Ron*, are considered exemplary of the *kanbun* style, while many of his letters show unusual empathy and understanding for the downtrodden of his day.^[157]

Selected important writings

Among his *kanbun* treatises, five are generally accepted by Nichiren schools as his major works:^{[158][159][160]}

- *On Establishing the Correct teaching for the Peace of the Land (Risshō Ankoku Ron)* — written between 1258-1260.^[161]
- *The Opening of the Eyes (Kaimoku-shō)* — written in 1272.
- *The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind (Kanjin-no Honzon-shō)* — written in 1273.
- *The Selection of the Time (Senji-shō)* — written in 1275.
- *On Repaying Debts of Gratitude (Hō'on-shō)* — written in 1276.

Nichiren Shōshū adds an additional five writings to comprise a set of ten major writings. Other Nichiren sects dispute these selections as being either of secondary importance or as apocryphal:^[160]

- *On Chanting the Daimoku of the Lotus Sutra (Shō-hokke Daimoku-shō)* — Written in 1260.
- *On Taking the Essence of the Lotus Sutra (Hokke Shūyō-shō)* — written in 1274.
- *On the Four Stages of Faith and the Five Stages of Practice (Shishin Gohon-shō)* — written in 1277.
- *Letter to Shimoyama (Shimoyama Goshō-soku)* — written in 1277.
- *Questions and Answers on the Object of Devotion (Honzon Mondo-shō)* — written in 1278.

Personal letters to followers

Among the collection of his extant writings are numerous letters to his follows in the form of thank you notes, messages of condolence, responses to questions, and spiritual counseling for trying moments in his followers' lives. Collectively these letters demonstrate that Nichiren was a master of providing both comfort and challenge befitting the unique personalities and situations of each individual.^{[23]:102[30]:52}

Many of these letters use tales drawn from Indian, Chinese, and Japanese traditions as well as historical anecdotes and stories from the Buddhist canon. Nichiren incorporated several hundred of these anecdotes and took liberty to freely embellish some of them; a few of the stories he provided do not appear in other collections and could be original.^{[30]:47–50[162]}

Another category of his letters follow the genres of Japanese *zuihitsu*, lyrical and loosely organized essays that combine personal reflection and poetic language, or personal diaries (*nikki*) Nichiren was a master of this genre and these colloquial works reveal his highly personal and charismatic method of proselytization as well as his deep caring for his followers.^{[30]:47–50,52}

Nichiren used his letters as a means to inspire key supporters. About one hundred followers are identified as recipients and several received between 5 and 20 of them. The recipients tended to be of the warrior class and only scattered references appear about his lower status followers, many of whom were illiterate. The series of letters he wrote his followers during the "Atsuhara affair" of 1279 provide a case study of how he used personal written communications to direct a response to the government's actions and to keep his followers steadfast during the ordeal.^{[30]:55n[83]:156n,158}

Writings to women

Against a backdrop of earlier Buddhist teachings that deny the possibility of enlightenment to women or reserve that possibility for life after death, Nichiren is highly sympathetic to women. Based on various passages from the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren asserts that "Other sutras are written for men only. This sutra is for everyone."^{[163][164][165]}

Ninety of his extant letters, nearly a fifth of the total, were addressed to female believers.^[166] Nichiren Shu published separate volumes of those writings.^[167]

In these letters Nichiren plays particular attention to the instantaneous attainment of enlightenment of the Dragon King's daughter in the "Devadatta" (Twelfth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra and displays deep concern for the fears and worries of his female disciples.^{[168][169]}

In many of his letters to female believers he often expressed compliments for their in-depth questions about Buddhism while encouraging them in their efforts to attain enlightenment in this lifetime.

Having the honor to be born in your kingdom, I find my body obeying your Excellency,
but my soul will never.

—Nichiren, *Senji sho*^[170]

Notes

1. Also translated as "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land" (*The Writings of Nichiren*), "Establishment of the Legitimate Teaching for the Protection of the Country" (*Selected Writings of Nichiren*), and others.
2. "please build my grave on Mount Minobu, because that is where is where I spent nine years reciting the Lotus Sutra to my heart's content. My heart lives forever on Mount Minobu"^[92]

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 "Because of his concern for the welfare of the country and exaltation of the truth of the Lotus Sutra as interpreted by Tendai, he appears to be intolerant, denouncing all other sects as false. He is famous for Four Denunciations in which he outlined the errors. Shingon is false because it destroys the nations. For Nichiren it was false magic. The nation would be protected by the Lotus. Historically the Japanese government employed Shingon rites whenever there was a disaster affecting the country. According to him, Zen is a teaching of devils because it held that one could become enlightened apart from scriptures. In Zen truth is beyond words and therefore it rejects the ultimacy of the words of Buddha. Pure Land nembutsu is a false way of salvation. Salvation comes only through the Lotus Sutra, particularly for Nichiren, reciting its title: Namu myoho renge kyo. The Ritsu or Precept sect is wrong because it is a thief. Here Nichiren apparently objected to the funds given this sect for social welfare activity. In any case, none of these prominent sects advocated the centrality of the Lotus Sutra. Eventually he came to include Tendai itself because it was combined with Shingon teachings and rites. For him any compromise on the Lotus made them all false. Nichiren was a good scholar of history and knew the basic tenets of these groups, but he faulted them in their relation to the Lotus. His erudition is embodied in voluminous writings, especially five major texts which set forth the essence of his faith, Also he wrote numerous letters, sharing his ideas and sentiments with followers."
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See also

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External links

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