

# The Acceptance and Impact of the Lotus Sutra in Japan

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**I**N discussing the acceptance and impact of the Lotus Sutra in Japan, I will focus my discussion on four topics,

1, faith in the Lotus Sutra as one of the sutras for protection of the state in the Asuka and Nara periods,

2, the foundation of the Tendai Lotus sect by Saicho in the Heian period,

3, the foundation of the Nichiren Lotus sect in the Kamakura period,

4, new religious movements in modern times which were founded on the Lotus Sutra. These four topics had an important influence on the spread of faith in Lotus Sutra throughout Japan. Faith in the Lotus Sutra has been adapted successfully to different cultural societies in each age.

## SOME ASPECTS OF FAITH IN THE LOTUS SUTRA IN THE ASUKA AND NARA PERIODS

### *The Introduction of Buddhism and Its Regulation by the State*

In the sixth century a king of Paikche sent an image of Buddha and some volumes of the sutras to Emperor Kinmei in order to recommend the adoption of Buddhism. (According to the *Chronicles of Japan* (『日本書紀』), it was 552. But according to the *History of the Gangyo-ji Temple* (『元興寺縁起』), it was 538. The latter date is now supported by many scholars.) But the function of the emperor was religious as well as political in Japan. The emperor was thought to be a descendant of the Sun Goddess (天照大神) who was the supreme goddess in Japanese mythology. Emperor Kinmei didn't accept Buddhism. When Emperor Yomei, who was the father of Prince Shotoku, wanted to embrace Buddhism to pray for recovery from a disease, his ministers objected strongly and the emperor could not embrace it officially. In 587 the Soga clan which supported Buddhism defeated the Mononobe clan which objected to it. After this the Soga clan became the most powerful clan and erected a full-scale temple, the Hoko-ji Temple (later the Asuka-ji Temple or the

Gangyo-ji Temple). Many powerful clans also began to erect their own temples.

At this time Prince Shotoku was appointed Regent by his aunt, Empress Suiko. It's thought that Prince Shotoku was the real founder of Buddhism in Japan. Before him Buddhism was worshiped as a means of obtaining material benefits, for example, recovery from disease, victory in war, and rain in times of drought. The sutras were recited without understanding as rituals of incantation. But Prince Shotoku had a profound understanding of the moral and philosophy within Buddhism. For example we can see in the second article of the so-called Seventeen Article Constitution that Prince Shotoku regarded Buddhism as the base of morals.

According to the *Chronicles of Japan*, in 606 Prince Shotoku lectured to Empress Suiko on the Lotus Sutra. He also wrote the so-called Commentaries on the Three Sutras (the Vimalakirti Sutra, the Shrimala Sutra, and the Lotus Sutra). (There are some disputes about his lectures and commentaries.) For Prince Shotoku the Lotus Sutra was a teaching of universal salvation and the eternal Buddha who sent innumerable bodhisattvas for the salvation of all sentient beings throughout the ages. Maybe the Prince considered himself one of the bodhisattvas and tried to spread the teaching.

Prince Shotoku promoted the spread of Buddhism and the heads of powerful clans competed with one another in erecting Buddhist temples for their own clans from the beginning of his regency. Empress Suiko, however, didn't erect a temple for the Imperial House. This was because the Soga clan took the initiative in promoting the spread of Buddhism. The Hoko-ji Temple erected by the Soga clan was of the highest ranking in Japan. The abbot of the Hoko-ji Temple administered other temples as the leader of the three treasures.

After the death of Prince Shotoku, Empress Suiko wanted to take control of Buddhism. She appointed administrative priests and ordered them to make a list of priests. But in those days each clan had autonomy and the right to govern their land and people directly. The heads of the clans could make some of their people become priests without restraint and make them dwell in their clan temples to pray for clan's prosperity. Because Empress Suiko didn't have her own temple, she couldn't help appointing the abbot of the Hoko-ji Temple to be High Priest (僧正). It meant that the initiative of the Soga clan in Buddhism was approved by Empress Suiko.

In 639 Emperor Jomei, who was the father of Prince Naka-no-Oe (later Emperor Tenchi), erected Imperial House's temple, the Kudara-ji

Temple (later the Daikan-daiji Temple or the Daian-ji Temple). At this time some priests who had been sent to Sui and T'ang by Prince Shotoku returned after extensive study of Buddhism and the system of state religion in T'ang. Emperor Jomei appointed them to be abbots of the Kudara-ji Temple. Now the Emperor had people who would compete against the Hoko-ji Temple priests and the Soga clan.

In 645 Prince Naka-no-Oe led a coup d'état and defeated the Soga clan. In the same year his new government summoned chief priests and proclaimed that the emperor himself would promote Buddhism instead of the Soga clan. At the same time the emperor appointed 10 priests to be supervisors of the monastic order. It meant that the control of priests was transferred from the abbot of the Hoko-ji Temple to the 10 administrative priests. Because the new government dominated the people directly, the right to let someone become a priest belonged only to the new government or the emperor. In 701 the order of monks and nuns (僧尼令) was expounded to chief priests who were summoned to the Daian-ji Temple. Consequently the control of the monastic order by the state was accomplished legally.

*Belief in the Lotus Sutra as One of the Sutras for Protection of the State*

During the early history of Buddhism the Lotus Sutra was regarded as an important sutra, as we can see in the case of Prince Shotoku. Although Prince Shotoku regarded Buddhism as a base of morals, many Japanese worshiped Buddhism and recited the Lotus Sutra as a means of obtaining material benefits. However after the emperor took control of the monastic order, the Lotus Sutra was revered as one of the three sutras for protection of the state. The other two were the *Benevolent Kings Wisdom Sutra* (『仁王般若經』) and the *Golden Light Sutra* (『金光明經』), later a new translation, the *Sovereign Kings Sutra of Golden Light* (『金光明最勝王經』).

In 660 the ceremony of lecture on the Benevolent Kings Wisdom Sutra (仁王会) began in the court. In the sutra it reads that when a foreign threat appears, if a king makes 100 images of Buddha and invites 100 priests to lecture on the *Benevolent Kings Wisdom Sutra*, then 100 demons or gods will protect the king. At that time T'ang and Silla had defeated Paikche and were threatening Japan, so the ceremony was held in the court to pray for protection of the state. In the *Golden Light Sutra* or the *Sovereign Kings Sutra of Golden Light*, it reads that the Four Deva (Heavenly) Kings (四天王), will protect the king. The Shitenno-ji Temple (the Four Heavenly Kings Temple), which is said to have been erected by Prince Shotoku, represented the faith.

In 671 when Emperor Tenchi was ill in bed, high officials made an oath in front of the emperor and Buddha's image to follow Crown Prince Otomo, Emperor Tenchi's son. In the oath they said that if they broke their vow, they would be punished by the Four Heavenly Kings, which is thought to be the ceremony based on the *Golden Light Sutra*. In 680 the ceremony of lecture on the *Golden Light Sutra* (later the ceremony of lecture on the *Sovereign Kings Sutra of Golden Light*, 最勝会) was delivered in the court and the sutra was regularly recited at official state ceremonies in the court.

The *Golden Light Sutra* and the *Benevolent Kings Wisdom Sutra* had enough teachings to be called "the sutras for protection of the state." But the Lotus Sutra didn't have such teachings. Why was the Lotus Sutra revered as one of the three sutras for protection of the state? Maybe the reason is as follows.

In 733 the Great Council of State issued a notice imposing recitation of the Lotus Sutra or the *Sovereign Kings Sutra* on novices as a qualification for becoming priests. As a result many priests acquired knowledge of the Lotus Sutra. In 741 Emperor Shomu ordered the foundation of provincial monasteries (国分寺) and provincial nunneries (国分尼寺) in each province. The official name of the former was "the Temple for Protection of the State by the *Four Heavenly Kings Sutra of Golden Light* (金光明四天王護国之寺)," and 20 monks were made to dwell there and ordered to recite the *Sovereign Kings Sutra of Golden Light* on fixed dates. The official name of the latter was "the Temple for Expiation of Sins through the Lotus Sutra (法華滅罪之寺)," and 10 nuns were ordered to recite the Lotus Sutra. It's thought that the Lotus Sutra was chosen for the nunneries because the Devadatta chapter of the Lotus Sutra taught clearly that women could attain Buddhahood. In the provincial temples the Lotus Sutra as well as the *Sovereign Kings Sutra* had the function of protection of the state.

High Priest Roben held the ceremony of lecture on the Lotus Sutra (法華会) in the Todai-ji Temple in 749 for the first time and the ceremony was held annually at government expense. Roben included in his ceremony prayers for prosperity of the Imperial House and noble families, security of the state, and a rich harvest, the overall purpose being the protection of the state.

The Lotus Sutra was revered not only to pray for protection of the state, but also for recovery from disease and it was used in the memorial services for deceased parents or ancestors. In 726 Emperor Shomu ordered his men to make copies of the Lotus Sutra to pray for recovery

of his aunt, the Retired Empress Gensho. In 748 when she died, Emperor Shomu ordered 1000 copies of the Lotus Sutra as part of her memorial service. Before this, various sutras, sometimes all sutras, had been copied for memorial services. After this the Lotus Sutra was used predominantly.

In 796 the ceremony of eight lectures on the Lotus Sutra (法華八講), in which lectures were delivered on each of eight fascicles of the Lotus Sutra, was held for the first time in the Iwabuchi-dera Temple in Yamato province. The ceremony of eight lectures on the Lotus Sutra spread rapidly. Soon after in 798 in the Monastery for the One Vehicle and Meditation (一乘止觀院 later the Enryaku-ji Temple) on Mt. Hiei, Saicho, the founder of the Tendai Lotus sect in Japan, performed the ceremony of 10 lectures, in which lectures were given on the Lotus Sutra, the *Immeasurable Meanings Sutra* (『無量義經』, which was the prologue of the Lotus Sutra) and the *Universal Worthy Sutra* (『普賢經』, which was the epilogue of the Lotus Sutra). It was held as a memorial service for the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai.

#### THE FOUNDATION OF TENDAI LOTUS SECT IN JAPAN BY SAICHO

##### *Saicho's Advocacy of the One Vehicle Thought in the Lotus Sutra*

In the ninth century Saicho founded the Tendai Lotus sect in Japan. It was a very important event in the history of faith in the Lotus Sutra in Japan. In China the T'ien-t'ai sect had been founded already by Chih-i in the Sui dynasty. Although the Three Treatises sect (三論宗, which was founded by Chi-tsang in China almost at the same time as the T'ien-t'ai sect) and the Dharma Characteristics sect (法相宗, which was founded by Hsuan-tsang in the T'ang dynasty) had been introduced into Japan in the Nara period, the T'ien-t'ai sect wasn't introduced. When Chien-chen (鑑真) came to Japan, he brought some books of the T'ien-t'ai sect. Although he founded an ordination platform in the Todai-ji Temple and formulated the rites of ordination, which was the main purpose of his visit, he didn't expound the doctrines of the T'ien-t'ai sect.

Soon after Saicho received precepts at the ordination platform in the Todai-ji Temple, he left and entered Mt. Hiei (in 785) near Kyoto to practice an ascetic life. The reason he refused a normal priest life was that he found many degenerate priests in Nara and also many vices within himself. When he entered Mt. Hiei, he wrote *A Prose of Vows* (『願文』), in which he called himself the most foolish, the maddest, the

worst of all. He vowed that until he got pure precepts and reached a stage in which the six sense organs of the body had been freed from any dirty attachment (六根清淨位), he would never do normal priest works. Moreover he hoped not to taste egoistic emancipation from worldly attachments but to attain Buddhahood with all sentient beings.

After this he stayed on Mt. Hiei for 12 years. Saicho recited the Lotus Sutra, the Golden Light Sutra, and the Wisdom Sutra every day without idleness. At first he studied the *Five Kinds of Teachings Classified by the Flower Garland Sect* (『華嚴五教章』) and the *Commentary on the Awakening of Faith in Mahayana* (『大乘起信論義記』) by Fa-tsang of the Flower Garland sect in China. In these books the interpretations by T'ien-t'ai were referred to frequently and appraised highly. Hence Saicho began to study books of the T'ien-t'ai sect, which had been imported by Chien-chen. In 787 Saicho erected the Monastery for the One Vehicle and Meditation. In 798 Saicho performed the ceremony of 10 lectures on the Lotus Sutra, the Immeasurable Sutra, and the Universal Worthy Sutra. In 801 he held a symposium of 10 lectures, where 10 learned priests from Nara were invited to lecture. In 802 in the Takaosan-ji Temple, Hiroyo Wake, an important statesman, invited Saicho and more than 10 learned priests from Nara to study and discuss on the three major books of T'ien-t'ai. They all agreed on the excellence of T'ien-t'ai's teachings, and Saicho was acknowledged as the highest authority on them. Emperor Kammu heard the news of the meeting and endorsed it. The emperor wanted to introduce a new Buddhist sect into his new capital.

In the same year Saicho submitted to the court *A Petition to Dispatch Research Monks to T'ang* (『請入唐請益表』) to study mysterious doctrines of the T'ien-t'ai sect. In his petition Saicho asserted that although the Three Treatises sect and the Dharma Characteristics sect were founded on treatise, only the T'ien-t'ai sect was founded on sutras. He claimed that sutras were more fundamental than treatise. It meant that the T'ien-t'ai sect surpassed all other sects. In 804 Saicho was dispatched to China. There he learned not only the teachings of T'ien-t'ai but also those of bodhisattva precepts, True Word (真言), and Meditation (禪). In 806 the court permitted Saicho to take two priests every year and authorized his school as an independent sect, the Tendai Lotus sect along with six other sects from Nara.

In 817 Saicho began to use the doctrine of the three provisional teachings and the one true teaching in the Lotus Sutra to dispute Tokuichi, who was a learned priest of the Dharma Characteristics sect. This sect asserted that attaining Buddhahood was the result of lengthy

ascetic practices in the three existences and that only a few people were capable of attaining Buddhahood. They insisted it according to the respective doctrines of the five kinds (五性各別) that there were five kinds of capacities in sentient beings, and people of two kinds could not attain Buddhahood and that the capacities were unchangeable in spite of their efforts. Against this assertion, Saicho argued that Buddhahood was a real possibility for all sentient beings according to the doctrine of the one vehicle in the Lotus Sutra. In 821 Saicho wrote the *Outstanding Principles of the Lotus Sutra* (『法華秀句』). In this he asserted that the Lotus Sutra was supreme among sutras because it offered a direct path to attain Buddhahood in one's present form in contrast to other sutras which required lengthy ascetic practices over a span of many kalpas.

*The Erection of a Mahayana Ordination Platform by Saicho*

In 805 when Saicho returned from China, Emperor Kammu was severely ill in bed. Saicho prayed for his recovery by esoteric baptism of True Word, which Saicho introduced anew. When Emperor Kammu recovered a little, Saicho petitioned the court to allow him to take two priests every year for the Tendai sect as the case with six other schools in Nara. Saicho's petition was granted in 806 and the Tendai sect was authorized by the court, one condition being that one student had to study the teachings of T'ien-t'ai (止觀業), the other had to study the teachings of True Word (遮那業).

After Emperor Kammu, Saicho's most powerful supporter, died, a crisis of the Tendai sect began. The novices who belonged to the Tendai sect had to be ordained at the ordination platform in the Todai-ji Temple in Nara. But half of them didn't come back to Mt. Hiei. One reason was that the leaders of six other sects from Nara, especially of the Dharma Characteristics sect, enticed them to convert from the Tendai sect to the six other sects with promises of future promotion. Another reason was Saicho's inferior knowledge of the teachings of True Word. Many of those priests who had to study the teachings of True Word left Saicho to Kukai. Kukai had studied comprehensively the teachings of True Word in China and returned soon after the death of Emperor Kammu. Kukai established good relationship with the leaders from Nara and manifested his idea that the esoteric teachings of True Word were superior to the exoteric teachings of the Lotus Sutra. It was an attack on Saicho's idea that the teachings of True Word were compatible with those of the Lotus Sutra.

During this crisis of the Tendai sect, in order to keep annually permitted priests on Mt. Hiei, Saicho decided to erect a Mahayana ordination

platform on Mt. Hiei, and in 818 Saicho manifested renouncement of Hinayana precepts which he had taken at the ordination platform in the Todai-ji Temple. In the same year Saicho submitted to the court the *Regulations of Annually Permitted Priests of the Tendai Lotus Sect* (『天台法華宗年分學生式』, the *Six Article Regulations*), in which Saicho insisted that the priests of the Tendai sect should vow not to follow Hinayana precepts but to follow Mahayana precepts to become bodhisattva priests and they should stay on Mt. Hiei for 12 years either to study the teachings of T'ien-t'ai and recite the sutras for protection of the state or to study those of True Word and recite the esoteric sutras for protection of the state.

In the same year Saicho submitted again to the court the *Regulations of Annually Permitted Priests of the Tendai Sect for Endorsement to Become Bodhisattva Priests* (『勸獎天台宗年分學生式』, the *Eight Article Regulations*), in which Saicho asked the court to give the graduated priests high ranks of monks and to send two state officials to administer the Tendai sect. The latter meant that the Tendai sect would be administered not by the administrative priests from Nara but by the state officials and hence become completely independent of the six other sects in Nara. The administrative priests from Nara objected to the proposals of Saicho, so the proposals were rejected by the court.

In 819 Saicho submitted again to the court the *Regulations of Annually Permitted Priests of the Tendai Lotus Sect Prohibiting Hinayana Precept and Giving Mahayana Precepts* (『天台法華宗年分度者回小向大式』, the *Four Article Regulations*). In it Saicho insisted that there were three kinds of Buddhist temples, Mahayana temples, Hinayana temples, and mixed temples, and that because the Tendai Lotus sect was a Mahayana sect, the priests of this sect should dwell in Mahayana temples. Saicho identified clear differences between Hinayana precepts and Mahayana precepts. Consequently Saicho asked the court to erect a Mahayana ordination platform on Mt. Hiei. But the administrative priests from Nara strongly objected again. Saicho submitted to the court *A Clarification of the Precepts* (『顯戒論』), in which Saicho refuted many arguments of his opponents in Nara. The administrative priests from Nara found that they were at a disadvantage, so they ignored Saicho's refutation. Permission wasn't given until a week after Saicho's death in 822.

After this the Tendai Lotus sect became dominant and the Enryaku-ji Temple on Mt. Hiei became the center of Buddhism in Japan. Many priests spread faith in the Lotus Sutra throughout Japan. The Tendai Lotus sect had various faiths, for example, True Word, meditation, pre-

cepts and faith in the Lotus Sutra. Later Priests in the Enryaku-ji Temple introduced faith in the Pure Land. They thought that the Lotus Sutra taught both the doctrine of the one vehicle and other various expedient means to attain Buddhahood, hence faith in the Lotus Sutra was compatible with other faiths. In the Heian period the Lotus Sutra had an important influence on various aspects of culture such as literature, music and art.

#### THE FOUNDATION OF THE NICHIREN LOTUS SECT

##### *Nichiren's Unique Interpretations of the Lotus Sutra*

People in the Heian period thought that in 1052 the Latter Day of the Law (末法) began and the world would be worse. In late 11th century the Fujiwara family lost power and retired emperors began to dominate. Consequently conflict intensified between the imperial family and noble families. The dominant class wanted to settle affairs by using military force. After all the power of warriors increased. Initially the Taira family, with a powerful military, took control but was later defeated by the Genji family. In 1192 the Genji family founded the Kamakura shogunate. This left Japan with two governments and a reduction in peace security and stability. With such social conditions the thought of the Latter Day of the Law became popular. At that time Honen, a Nembutsu priest, encouraged people to chant Namu-Amida-butsu. He insisted that in the Latter Day of the Law this invocation was the only way to get to the Pure Land of Amida Buddha (Amitabha) and all other practices became of no use. Although Honen was oppressed by priests of other sects and the government, his advocacy of this invocation spread rapidly.

After the death of Honen, Nichiren began to reform faith in the Lotus Sutra and suit it to the Latter Day of the Law. Nichiren called the Buddha Shakyamuni, T'ien-t'ai, Saicho and himself the four teachers of the three countries, namely India, China and Japan because they maintained orthodox faith and spread faith in the Lotus Sutra.

Nichiren inherited T'ien-t'ai's doctrine of "three thousand realms in a single moment of mind" and he emphasized that the doctrine was central to attaining Buddhahood for all beings. He emphasized especially that the concept of "mutual possession of the Ten Worlds" explained the principle of attaining Buddhahood for all beings. He said that no Mahayana sutras except the Lotus Sutra approved that persons of the two vehicles could attain Buddhahood. Therefore, strictly speaking any

other sutras did not show the concept of “mutual possession of the Ten Worlds.” Nichiren concluded that sentient beings could attain Buddhahood only through the Lotus Sutra.

Nichiren wrote in “The Object of Devotion for observing the Mind.” “Showing profound compassion, for those who can not comprehend the gem of the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of mind, the Buddha wrapped it within the five Chinese characters, (namely 妙法蓮華經, which is a Chinese name of the Lotus Sutra), with which he then adorned the neck of the ignorant people of the Latter Day.” Nichiren argued that “three thousand realms in a single moment of mind” as the seed of Buddhahood was in the Latter day of the Law nothing but Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Nichiren expressed clearly that the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day was Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, that is to say, the Three Great Secret Laws, which were Nichiren’s unique interpretations.

Nichiren compared his Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with T’ien-t’ai’s “three thousand realms in a single moment of mind” and described the former as actual practice, which was based on the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra, and the latter as only theory, based on the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra. So Nichiren concluded that in the Latter Day Nichiren’s interpretations of the Lotus Sutra were superior to T’ien-t’ai’s “three thousand realms in a single moment of mind.”

### *The Three Great Secret Laws as the Central Dogmas of Nichiren*

As mentioned above, Nichiren inherited the ideas of Buddha Shakyamuni, T’ien-t’ai, and Saicho and spread faith in the Lotus Sutra. Nichiren showed that his original way to attain Buddhahood, namely, the Three Great Secret Laws, was well suited to the Latter Day of the Law. The Three Great Secret Laws were the object of devotion of the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra (本門本尊), the invocation, or daimoku of the essential teaching (本門題目), and the ordination platform of the essential teaching (本門戒壇).

The object of devotion of the essential teaching was a mandala inscribed on paper or wood with Chinese and Sanskrit characters representing the Mystic Law as well as the Ten Worlds, including Buddhas. Before Nichiren inscribed mandalas as the objects of devotion, which were rather cheap, the statues and the pictures of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, which were very expensive, had been the objects of devotion. In “The Four Debts of Gratitude,” Nichiren wrote, “The Law is the teacher of all Buddhas. It is because of the Law that the Buddhas are worthy of respect.” Nichiren thought that this Law was superior to Bud-

dha and therefore we should believe in the Law as the object of devotion. Consequently Nichiren inscribed many mandalas in which the Mystic Law, that is to say, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, was inscribed at the center and the names of sentient beings of the Ten Worlds were inscribed around it.

The invocation, or daimoku of the essential teaching was to chant the sacred title of the Lotus Sutra, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Before Nichiren, the ways to practice the Lotus Sutra were, for lay believers, the five kinds of practicing, which were described in the Lotus Sutra such as reciting or copying the Lotus Sutra by hand. For priests it was to concentrate and gain an insight of the mind which was described in T'ien-t'ai's *Great Concentration and Insight* (『摩訶止觀』). These ways of practicing were possible only for those who were rich and educated. Nichiren developed an easy way to practice the Lotus Sutra in order to spread the Lotus Sutra to people of every class.

The ordination platform of the essential teaching was to erect an ordination platform of the essential teaching. Nichiren was influenced by Saicho's movement to erect a Mahayana ordination platform on Mt. Hiei. So he thought that the ordination platform should be erected in the future with permission from the court and shogunate. This would be a milestone of spreading the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra throughout Jambudvipa.

### *Some Features of the Teachings of Nichiren*

According to the doctrine of the one vehicle in the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren showed that every person was endowed with Buddhahood in his mind. In "the Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind," Nichiren wrote, "The Buddha Shakyamuni in our minds is the eternal Buddha since time without beginning, who obtained the three bodies more than numberless major world system dust particle kalpas ago."

As every person had a clean world of Buddhahood and the possibility of attaining Buddhahood in his mind, all people were equal as noble children of the Buddha. Therefore the differences of status and social positions in this world were religiously meaningless. In "The Selection of the Time," Nichiren wrote, "Those concerned about their next life would do better to be common people in the Latter Day of the Law, than be mighty rulers during the two thousand years of the Former and Middle Days of the Law." In "The Letter from Sado," Nichiren wrote, "Nichiren, who in this life was born poor and lowly to a chandala, the lowest class family." In the Kamakura period when the status system was strict, Nichiren's identifying himself as from the lowest class

extended the circle of solidarity which overcame the strict status system. This was a revival of Buddha Shakyamuni's opinion which had refuted the caste system in India.

The thought that every person was endowed with a world of Buddhahood in his mind formulated the thought that life was most precious of all because every sentient being was endowed with a noble world of Buddhahood in its life. In "On Prolonging One's Life Span," Nichiren wrote, "One day of life is more precious than all the treasures of the major world system."

Nichiren thought that salvation meant attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime. Nichiren criticized all other sutras, because these taught that people would only be able to attain Buddhahood after countless kalpas of austere practice and denied that people would be able to attain Buddhahood in this lifetime. Nichiren told the believers of the Jodo sect who thought they would be reborn in the Pure Land (Sukhavati) of Amitabha (Amida Buddha) in the next existence of life, that the Pure Land of Amitabha was only a provisional teaching and that this saha world in which we lived was the only pure land. In "Letter to the Lay Priest Ichinosawa," Nichiren wrote "Amida Buddha dwells in a land that is located a hundred thousand million worlds away and has not the slightest connection with this saha world." Nichiren criticized the teachings of the Jodo sect because they neglected this life and world.

As a step to attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime, Nichiren emphasized a teaching in the Parable of the Medical Herbs chapter of the Lotus Sutra. "Once these living beings have heard the Law, they will enjoy peace and security in their present existence and good circumstances in future existences." To some believers who suffered from diseases or poverty, Nichiren taught lessening their karmic retributions and prayed kindly for them to recover. In "Winter Always Turns to Spring," Nichiren wrote, "Those who believe in the Lotus Sutra are as if in winter, but winter always turns to spring. Never, from ancient times on, has anyone heard or seen of winter turning back to autumn," and encouraged them to do their best with hope.

Although Nichiren admitted happiness in this world, the ultimate happiness was to attain Buddhahood, which could be obtained through endurance of religious persecution, preservation of faith and practicing bodhisattva way. In "Happiness in This World," Nichiren wrote, "There is no true happiness other than upholding faith in the Lotus Sutra. This is what's meant by 'peace and security in their present existence and good circumstances in future existences.' Though worldly troubles may arise, never let them disturb you. No one can avoid problems,

not even sages or worthies.”

*The Significance of “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land (立正安国論)”*

According to a passage of the Life Span of the Thus Come One chapter of the Lotus Sutra, “(From having attained Buddhahood), I (the Buddha) have been constantly in this saha world, preaching the Law, teaching and converting,” Nichiren thought that there was no Pure Land except this saha world. But Nichiren didn’t think this world was exactly like a Pure Land, an ideal world. With the document “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” Nichiren described hardships of people who suffered natural disasters, plague and famine. Nichiren submitted this treatise to the Kamakura shogunate in the hope that the shogunate would alter policy and consequently reduce the suffering of the people. Nichiren thought “the peace and security of the land” not as the peace and security of the court and shogunate but as an ideal world where all people were secure.

Nichiren didn’t regard people as powerless beings who waited for salvation passively. In the treatise, he wrote, “The nation achieves prosperity through the Buddhist Law, and the Law is proven worthy of reverence by the people who embrace it.” It was the people who should spread the correct teaching (the Law) and create a peaceful and secure world. In this respect, the treatise attached importance to people’s autonomy and their active participation in this world based on faith. It appeared that Nichiren insisted social reform not for the government class but for people who suffered.

Nichiren thought that the believers in the Lotus Sutra should try to create an ideal society in this world. They should not be satisfied with religious activities only in a narrow religious sphere. Because the secular laws were the same as the Buddhist Law, expressed by the passage of Expedient Means chapter of the Lotus Sutra, “These phenomena are part of an abiding Law, the characteristics of the world are constantly abiding,” believers should try to realize social justice and to create an ideal world based on faith.

THE VARIOUS NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS FOUNDED ON  
THE LOTUS SUTRA, ESPECIALLY SOKA GAKKAI

*The Foundation of Soka Gakkai by Tsunesaburo Makiguchi*

New Buddhist movements in the Kamakura period, for example, faith

in the Pure Land, meditation, and Nichiren Lotus sect, developed in the medieval period. The Tokugawa shogunate, however, regulated religious movements and made Buddhist temples part of government organization. The government compelled all people to belong to a Buddhist temple and to support their temples. Priests had the authority to be guarantors for their believers. Buddhism became one social system in Japan and all people formally became Buddhists. The government, however, prohibited Buddhist sects to dispute with one another. New religious movements were forbidden.

In the last days of the Tokugawa shogunate, Seifu Nagamatsu founded Honmon Butsuryu ko, this was a pioneering lay person movement based on the Lotus Sutra. In the Meiji era Chigaku Tanaka, a renounced priest, founded Risho Ankoku kai, later Kokuchu kai, which was a nationalistic lay person movement based on the Lotus Sutra. After then many lay person movements based on the Lotus Sutra, for example, Reiyu kai, Risho Kosei kai, Soka Gakkai, developed. These religious bodies emphasized happiness in this world and easy ways to practice, for example, chanting daimoku. Consequently these religious movements were supported by the poor and uneducated, the lower class.

I would like to focus on Soka Gakkai, the largest and most influential of them. Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (the former organization of Soka Gakkai) was founded by Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda in 1930. It was an organization of educational reforms aimed at realizing Makiguchi's original ideas of education, namely ideas of education for creating values. He was a lay believer in one of the Nichiren Lotus sects and he thought the purpose of religion as well as that of education should be to make people happier. Though founded for educational reforms Soka Kyoiku Gakkai had some elements of a religious movement.

In Japan Makiguchi was the first author of systematic human geography, and he supported the theory of social evolution as well as that of biological evolution. He thought religion should be compatible with science. He also had a long career in education, so he thought religion should serve human beings as a source of individual happiness, social responsibility and morals. He researched several religions, for example, Protestantism, meditation, Kokuchu kai. However he didn't find an ideal religion.

Eventually he encountered the teachings of Nichiren and he felt it was his ideal religion. He thought that the teachings of Nichiren were compatible with scientific knowledge. He wrote that the teachings of Nichiren had three types of proof ( proof by documentary evidence, by logical reasoning and by demonstrations of actual facts) which estab-

lished the Buddhist truth. He documented how these types of proof were similar to scientific methods of proof. He distinguished between religions which embraced a personified deity or Buddhas and those which embraced a Law, for example, in the case of the Lotus Sutra, and argued that the latter had an affinity with science. Although the objects, which many other religions devoted, were personified deity or Buddhas, who had absolute powers of salvation, the object, which Nichiren devoted, was the Law for becoming a Buddha. He argued that a Buddha led a life based on the Law and attained Buddhahood, the noblest personality.

Because Makiguchi had a long career as an educator, he thought that religion should promote both individual happiness and social responsibility. He may have thought that Zen Buddhism promoted individual happiness because it taught how to attain individual peace of mind, but it wasn't concerned with social responsibility. Of all Japanese Buddhist sects, Nichiren's took the strongest interest in social issues, and Nichiren's "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land" showed that it was important for religious people to criticize those in power from a viewpoint of their religious faith. Because Makiguchi thought we should choose religion which promoted social responsibility, it was natural that he chose the teachings of Nichiren.

Nichiren attached importance to the Nirvana Sutra's saying that one shouldn't rely on persons but on the Law. Makiguchi also made the saying his motto and interpreted the saying as a democratic principle. He wrote that the teachings of Nichiren regarded the rule of universal law more agreeable than authoritarian government by a monarch.

As mentioned above, Makiguchi accepted Nichiren's teachings in such a way. However he exercised his own interpretations of them. Nichiren's teachings were well suited to Makiguchi's ideals hence Makiguchi's acceptance of them.

In 1940 Makiguchi became president of Soka Kyoiku Gakkai and focused more on religion than education. In 1943 Soka Kyoiku Gakkai opposed the religious policy of the military government in Japan and refused to accept talismans of Ise Shrine (Japanese Emperor's shrine). So Soka Kyoiku Gakkai was oppressed and accused of being guilty under the Maintenance of the Public Order Act and disrespect of majesty. Makiguchi died in prison in 1944 and Toda was not released from prison until a month before Japan was defeated.

#### *The Reconstruction of Soka Gakkai by Josei Toda*

In prison Toda read the Lotus Sutra, and at last he realized that Buddha-

hood was a state of life. He explained his realization in “An essay concerning life (生命論).” In the essay Toda quoted some passages of the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren’s texts and explained life as follows. “Life is eternal; it existed in the past, exists now, and will exist always in the future, and continues in conformity with the Law of cause and effect. Life exists not only in living beings, but also in the whole universe, which contains inanimate beings. In short the whole universe is life itself and is filled with life force.” Toda admitted existence of individual life after this life’s death and he explained that it dissolved into the whole life of the universe. This essay explained T’ien-t’ai’s doctrine of three thousand realms of a single moment of mind by using his original keyword “life.” Toda united the Lotus Sutra, T’ien-t’ai’s doctrine and the teachings of Nichiren by using the term “life” and the essay oriented Soka Gakkai’s interpretations of Buddhism through the keyword “life.”

From Makiguchi Toda inherited some concepts regarding religion, i.e., that religion should provide values in this life and that religion should not be incompatible with science. Toda explained these ideas in “Science and Religion (「科学と宗教」)” and “An Essay on Happiness (「幸福論」),” but there was an originality in these papers. He used theory of life as a framework to interpret Buddhism. In “An Essay on Happiness” Toda explained Buddhism as follows. “Religions have developed to seek truths in human inner world.” Buddhism argued that there was a law of polluting and cleansing life. When each sentient being committed bad and foolish deeds, these deeds polluted its life. The polluted life couldn’t be in harmony with the rhythm of the universe and it lost life force and felt unhappy. There was only one way to cleanse a badly polluted life in the Latter Day of the Law, that is, practices of the Three Great Secret Laws. If a person practiced these Laws, he could cleanse and strengthen his life and feel happy. Because Toda emphasized rewards through belief in Nichiren’s Buddhism, the Soka Gakkai was considered generally as one of the new religious movements whose purpose was to give people this-worldly benefits. But Toda distinguished three different kinds of benefits in “An Essay on Great Benefits.” The first kind of benefit was relief from poverty and diseases. The second kind of benefit was obtaining vigorous life force on which our daily life rested. The third kind was to obtain Buddhahood which meant eternal happiness. Toda explained that a Buddha was a person who continued to give relief to suffering sentient beings with vigorous life force and kind-hearted mercy whenever he was reborn in the cycle of reincarnation.

As missionary works advanced, Toda felt that Soka Gakkai should

establish the ordination platform of the essential teaching, which was one unrealized goal of the Three Great Secret Laws. In order to establish the ordination platform of the essential teaching, Soka Gakkai should propagate objects of devotion on a large scale and make people understand the significance of Nichiren's teachings. After this they would be able to establish the ordination platform of the essential teaching as a national ordination platform. Toda argued in "An Essay on the Harmonious Relation between Politics and Buddhism (「王仏冥合論」)" that, in order to realize policy that social prosperity would be in keeping with individual happiness, Soka Gakkai should commit political activities to establishing a national ordination platform. In Toda's argument "a secular purpose that social prosperity would be in keeping with individual happiness" and "a religious purpose that they should establish a national ordination platform" weren't distinguished. Toda's proposal wasn't examined legally, and later Soka Gakkai was criticized because establishing a national ordination platform was against the principle of separation of church and state in the Japanese Constitution.

In the Kamakura period when Nichiren lived, it was taken for granted that the Imperial court and the Kamakura shogunate protected or oppressed religious groups and there was no thought of separating church and state. It appeared that Nichiren thought that, from the case of Saicho's movement to erect a Mahayana ordination platform, he would want to establish the ordination platform of the essential teaching with permission from the court and shogunate.

But in 1970 under the leadership of Daisaku Ikeda, the third president of Soka Gakkai, it was formally decided that they would establish the ordination platform of the essential teaching not as a national one but as a private one that would be erected through many people's contributions. The principle of separation of state and church was constituted in modern times from the criticism that the state should not oppress freedom of belief and Soka Gakkai was also oppressed by the military government during the war. Ikeda decided against a national ordination platform because Soka Gakkai thought highly in principle of separation of state and church which would secure freedom of belief institutionally. To be better suited to the principle, Soka Gakkai decided to separate members of assemblies from the managing staff of Soka Gakkai. Soka Gakkai entrusted political activities to the Komei Party which had no religious purpose and would restrict itself to support activity. Soka Gakkai now develops cultural, peace and educational activities which are based on the religious movement.

A SUMMARY

To sum up, there were four important events regarding the Lotus Sutra, firstly, faith in the Lotus Sutra as one of the sutras for protection of the state in the Asuka and Nara periods, second, the foundation of the Tendai Lotus sect by Saicho in the Heian period, third, the foundation of the Nichiren Lotus sect in the Kamakura period, and fourth, various new religious movements in modern times which were founded on the Lotus Sutra. Though faith in the Lotus Sutra has disappeared in India and China, these four events had an important influence on the spread of faith in the Lotus Sutra and its continued strength throughout Japan.