Schism, semiosis and the Soka Gakkai

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Schism, Semiosis and the Soka Gakkai

By

Forest Stone

Accepted in Partial Completion
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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Forest Stone

March 25, 2014
Schism, Semiosis and the Soka Gakkai

A Thesis
Presented to
The faculty of
Western Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Forest C. Stone
March, 2014
Abstract

The Soka Gakkai International (SGI) and the Nichiren Shoshu have always had a complex relationship. Formed in 1930 by Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda, the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai was from its inception an independent lay-Buddhist organization. For 60 years, they maintained an uneasy partnership with the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood, a conservative sect of Nichiren Buddhism, who oversaw certain religious and ceremonial functions for the Soka Gakkai. However, there were points of doctrinal interpretation that the two groups never agreed upon and which ultimately made a split between them inevitable.

The ritual practice of gongyo, borrowed from the priesthood, was developed over a span of 600 years on the temple grounds of Taiseki-ji, in the shadow of Mt. Fuji. The format and performance of this ritual was the result of hundreds of years of temple tradition. This practice was handed down to the fledgling SGI in its early years under Toda’s presidency of the organization in the 1940’s.

In 1991 the Nichiren Shoshu excommunicated the SGI and all of its constituent chapters and members internationally. Ten years later, in 2002 the SGI abruptly changed the entire format of gongyo. The present study explores the changes that have occurred in the performance of gongyo since the schism.

The reformating of gongyo and the realignment of the Soka Gakkai’s doctrine are not coincidental nor independent phenomena; in order for the SGI to survive after the schism these changes were necessary, and it is purpose of the present work to substantiate how and why these changes took place. Peircean semiotics forms the basis for analysis of the data presented in this work.

The present study proceeds from a historical overview of the evolution of Buddhism as a world religion, touching upon the ideological developments in a succession of traditions which led to the formulation of the key components of Nichiren Buddhist thought. From this the points of divergence and conflict between the Soka Gakkai and the Nichiren Shoshu are clarified and explored.

To illustrate the degree of their ideological differences, the liturgical manuals which provide the guidelines to the performance of gongyo for SGI members both pre- and post-schism are presented for analysis. The ritual performance of gongyo, its format, ritual paraphernalia, and attendant beliefs are described, unpackaged and presented for semiotic analysis. Finally, field notes of the author’s observations of SGI meetings are provided to give some context for the performance of this ritual activity in a group context.
Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... iv

Chapter 1: Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1
  Schism and Semiosis .................................................................................................................... 1
  Review of the Literature .............................................................................................................. 2
  Outline of the Study .................................................................................................................... 3
  Disclosure of Personal History with the Soka Gakkai ................................................................. 4

Chapter 2: Conceptual and Theoretical Framework ......................................................................... 5
  The Cognition of Religion .......................................................................................................... 5
  Peircean Semiotics ...................................................................................................................... 7
  Semiotic Ideology and Representational Economy ................................................................. 9
  The Materiality of Religion ....................................................................................................... 11
  The Persistence of Semiotic Forms ........................................................................................... 12

Chapter 3: Historical Context ......................................................................................................... 15
  Overview of the Chapter ............................................................................................................ 15
  The First Phase: Early Buddhism (500–0 B.C.E.) ..................................................................... 16
  The Buddha ............................................................................................................................... 17
  The Dharma ............................................................................................................................... 18
  Schism and Reformation within the Early Buddhist Sangha .................................................... 19
  The Second Phase: Mahayana Buddhism (C.E. 0–500) ........................................................... 22
  The Dharma of Mahayana Buddhism ....................................................................................... 23
  The Lotus Sutra ......................................................................................................................... 24
  The Development of Buddhist Iconography ............................................................................ 25
  The Third Phase: Tantrayana Buddhism (C.E. 500–1000) ...................................................... 27
  The Dharma of Tantrayana Buddhism ....................................................................................... 27
  The Tantrayana Buddha ............................................................................................................ 29
  Conclusion .................................................................................................................................. 30

Chapter 4: Buddhism in China ......................................................................................................... 32
  Kumarajiva (approximately C.E. 350–409) ............................................................................... 33
  T’ien-T’ai Chih-I and the Ordering of the Sutras (C.E. 538–597) ............................................... 34
  Life and Times of Chih-I ............................................................................................................ 35
  Contributions and Innovations ................................................................................................. 36
  Three Thousand Realms in a Single Thought-Moment .............................................................. 37
  The Ten Worlds ........................................................................................................................ 38
  The Ten Factors ......................................................................................................................... 39
  The Three Realms of Existence ................................................................................................ 40
  Mappo, the Latter Day of the Law ............................................................................................. 41
  Conclusion .................................................................................................................................. 43
Chapter 5: Buddhism in Japan .................................................................................44
  Tendai and Japanese Buddhism ........................................................................44
  Nichiren (1222–1282) .........................................................................................46
  An Unwelcome Messenger ................................................................................48
  Apocalyptic Prophet .........................................................................................51
  Later Years ........................................................................................................53
  Conclusion .........................................................................................................54
  The Three Treasures of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism ........................................55

Chapter 6: The Soka Gakkai ................................................................................59
  Foundation .......................................................................................................59
  Reformulation ...................................................................................................61
  Expansion Abroad .............................................................................................62
  The Schism, its Roots and Ramifications ..........................................................63
  The Sho-Hondo ................................................................................................64
  The Breaking Point ............................................................................................66
  Aftermath ..........................................................................................................67
  The Three Treasures of the Soka Gakkai ..........................................................68
  The Dai-Gohonzon ............................................................................................70
  The Kaidan .......................................................................................................73
  Conclusion .........................................................................................................74

Chapter 7: Ritual Implements in Soka Gakkai Nichiren Buddhism ..................77
  The Gohonzon ...................................................................................................77
  The Butsudan ...................................................................................................81
  Prayer Beads: Use and Form in Nichiren Ritual Practice ..................................84
  The Crane and the Lotus ..................................................................................87
  Significance and Signification of Ritual Paraphernalia ....................................89

Chapter 8: Gongyo ...............................................................................................92
  A Brief Historical Overview of Gongyo ............................................................92
  The Liturgy of Nichiren Shoshu (1981) ...............................................................95
  The Liturgy of Nichiren Buddhism (2010) .........................................................98
  Analysis of Changes to the Liturgy ..................................................................100
  Analysis of Variances Between the Silent Prayers ...........................................101
  The Liturgy in English Translation ..................................................................103
  Conclusion .......................................................................................................104

Chapter 9: Religious Cognition of the Soka Gakkai .........................................106
  Semiosis and Signification of the Gohonzon .....................................................106
  The Ceremony in the Air ..................................................................................109
List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1: The Peircean Sign .......................................................... 7
Figure 2: Soka Gakkai Nichikan Gohonzon Map ......................... 80
Figure 3: Butsudan ................................................................... 82
Figure 4: Prayer Beads .............................................................. 86
Figure 5: Nichiren Shosho Crane ............................................... 88
Figure 6: Soka Gakkai Lotus ..................................................... 88
Figure 7: Soka Gakkai Flag ....................................................... 88
Figure 8: Pages from the Hoben and Juryo Chapters of the Liturgy ........................................................................ 142

Table 1: Taxonomy of Peircean Signs .......................................... 8
Chapter 1: Introduction

The main question under consideration in this work is how signs and signification can be manipulated by a religious organization seeking to establish and assert its identity and autonomy in the midst of reformation and schism. The history of the Soka Gakkai International (SGI) provides us with a contemporary example of this dynamic in play, and forms the main subject of the present study.

The SGI is a Japanese lay-Buddhist organization that was founded in 1930 under the auspices of the Nichiren Shoshu, a sect of Nichiren Buddhism that has its roots in 13th century feudal Japan. The SGI and the Nichiren Shoshu formally split in 1991, prompting a doctrinal shift in the SGI's core principles and practices. This shift has in turn had an impact on how these concepts are enacted symbolically within the SGI through the ritual performance of gongyo, the twice-daily recitation of their liturgy. In this work, a detailed account of the ritual practice and paraphernalia of Soka Gakkai Nichiren Buddhism is presented, particularly in regards to the changes in its format and performance since 1991. Comparative semiotic analysis of these changes serves to illustrate how the SGI has asserted its independence as an organization through the modification of its core signs and their signification.

Schism and Semiosis

The conflict between the Soka Gakkai and the Nichiren Shoshu has its roots in points of doctrinal interpretation. A reading of the events leading up to the schism reveals an ideological divide between the SGI and the priesthood, primarily over the growing autonomy of the Soka Gakkai, particularly under the leadership of the third and current SGI president, Daisaku Ikeda (Metraux 1992). This simmering ideological conflict ultimately became a struggle over the locus of authority and control within the faith, with the priesthood deferring to the person of the High Priest, and the SGI deferring to the writings of Nichiren Daishonin, the 13th century founder of Nichiren Buddhism.

When the Nichiren Shoshu excommunicated the Soka Gakkai and its constituent international chapters in 1991, it was intended to be a death-blow to the organization (Soka Gakkai International-USA, “Behind the SGI’s Decision to Issue the Gohonzon”). Since 1991, the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood has retained possession of the Dai-Gohonzon, the most sacred relic of the faith, and has refused to transcribe or
bestow new Gohonzon on SGI members. The fact that the SGI successfully weathered this split is a subject that deserves study. The SGI survived the schism due to two essential factors: a robust and effective organizational structure, and the conscious realignment and manipulation of semiotic signs and their signification. It is not the purpose of this study to present an analysis of the SGI’s leadership and organizational structure. Instead this work focuses on the deeper underlying semiotic processes which have served to insulate the SGI from the Nichiren Shoshu. The SGI has survived the schism by compensating for the symbolic loss of the Dai-Gohonzon through reordering its key religious signs within their representational economy. In the process of doing so, the Soka Gakkai has emerged from the schism as a unique form of Nichiren Buddhism in its own right.

**Review of the Literature**

There are few thorough and up-to-date descriptions of gongyo, the core ritual practice of the SGI. Perhaps the most detailed accounts of gongyo and chanting prior to 1991, are James W. White’s *The Sōkagakkai and mass society* (1970), Jane Hurst’s *Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism and the Soka Gakkai in America: The Ethos of a New Religious Movement* (1992), and David A. Snow’s *Shakubuku: A Study of the Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist Movement in America, 1960-1975* (1993). All three of these draw their descriptions from interviews and participant observation of Soka Gakkai members in Japan and/or the United States prior to the 1991 schism. Hurst’s work, which was updated and republished in 1992, gives a brief account of the schism and subsequent reform within the SGI. There are some more recent works which detail the practice of gongyo since the schism, most notably Richard Seager’s *Buddhist Chanting in Soka Gakkai International* (2001) and Constance Lynn Geekie’s, *Soka Gakkai: Engaged Buddhism in North America* (2008), which also provides a detailed description of the material objects attending gongyo. Most accounts of the Soka Gakkai (Seager 2006, 2001; Coleman 2002; Dawson 2001; Machacek 2001; Prebish 1999; Hammond and Machacek 1999a, 1999b; Queen and King 1996; Wilson and Dobbelaere 1994) focus on its organizational structure and membership base, and/or its proselytization efforts. Throughout the literature on the Soka Gakkai, there has been no attempt at a comparative semiotic analysis of the changes which have been made to this practice before and after the schism. The present research
applies Peircean semiotic theory to a study of changes in the format and symbols of gongyo since the 1991 schism, which is a new contribution to the scholarship of the Soka Gakkai.

**Outline of the Study**

The following chapter details the conceptual and theoretical framework of the present study. The main subject of this chapter is showing how Peircean semiotics can be applied alongside anthropological approaches to the study of religion in order to analyze the practice of gongyo and the significance of the changes made to this practice in the years since 1991.

The theoretical chapter is followed by three chapters detailing the history and development of Buddhism. In the third chapter, a historical overview of Buddhism is given, which outlines key developments in the first 1000 years of Buddhist history and semiology. The fourth and fifth chapters treat with the development of Buddhism in China and Japan, respectively, as they relate to the advent of Nichiren Daishonin later in the 13th century. The sixth chapter covers the life and career of Nichiren Daishonin and the beginnings of Nichiren Buddhism, which provides a basis for study of the Soka Gakkai. The sixth chapter deals with the history of the Soka Gakkai, its origins in pre-war Japan, its expansion under the leadership of Ikea, and the rift between the Gakkai and the priesthood in 1991. This historical overview is meant to outline the origins of Nichiren’s ideals, and to give context to the warring ideologies of the Soka Gakkai and the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood. Much of the material covered in these chapters is referred back to in the subsequent analytical chapters.

The seventh, eighth and ninth chapters constitute the descriptive and analytical sections of the present study. The seventh chapter deals with the construction, use and significance of the ritual implements which attend gongyo. Descriptive analysis of religious paraphernalia, ritual practice, and the material forms through which these are expressed are provided in this chapter. The eighth chapter goes into a description and comparative analysis of gongyo, pre- and post-schism. In this chapter, the specific beliefs and practices of the Soka Gakkai will be dealt with. This is followed in the ninth chapter by semiotic analysis of the data presented throughout the study to describe some of the semiotic ideology of the Soka Gakkai, and a description of the material forms this takes within the practice of Soka Gakkai Buddhism.
Disclosure of Personal History with the Soka Gakkai

It should be stated here that the author of this study was raised in a Soka Gakkai Buddhist household, chanting Daimoku and attending SGI meetings. Throughout my life I have gone through periods of varying involvement in the SGI. Although at the time of this writing I am not an active member of the Soka Gakkai, the SGI has had a profound influence on my worldview. My familiarity with Soka Gakkai ritual practice, and close contact with SGI members, puts me in a position to write about the significance of the changes in gongyo which have been largely unnoticed by outside observers.

Despite these subjectivities, I have striven to remain objective throughout this study, especially regarding the issues ongoing between the SGI and the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood. Regardless of their respective arguments, from a semiological and/or historical point of view, the rift between the Soka Gakkai and the Nichiren Shoshu is simply part of a much larger picture: a recurrent pattern of development, reform and schism within religious traditions which results from the fluidity of signs and the processes of semiosis.
Chapter 2: Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

This study is a presentation and analysis of the ritual practice of Soka Gakkai Nichiren Buddhism in the United States. Particularly the subject under study is the performance of gongyo, the primary ritual activity of SGI Buddhists, and the changes made in the format and performance of this activity since the schism with the Nichiren Shoshu in 1991. Secondary to this is a description of the construction and use of ritual paraphernalia in the performance of gongyo. To make sense of this there are two subjects that require definition and explanation: religion itself, and the means by which meaning can be conveyed and changed in religious ritual through processes of semiosis.

The Cognition of Religion

Emile Durkheim in his Elementarv Forms of the Religious Life (1947) defined religion as: “a unified set of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden,— beliefs and practices which unite [into] one single moral community, all those who adhere to them (Durkheim 1947:46)” Durkheim formulated his definition of religion to take into account non-western religious traditions, such as Buddhism, which are nominally independent from belief in supernatural agents. Durkheim posited beliefs of the sacred in lieu of the supernatural, and practices related to these as the basis of all religion. By “practices” Durkheim was referring to religious ritual:

Religious phenomena are naturally arranged in two fundamental categories: beliefs and rites. The first are states of opinion, and consist in representations; the second are determined modes of action. Between these two classes of facts there is all the difference which separates thought from action. (Durkheim 1947:36)

Durkheim’s theory of religion reveals a thought/action dichotomy, which is itself an artifact of Western ideology passed down through an intellectual genealogy stretching back at least to Platonic Idealism (Keane 2003). For example, Durkheim’s theory is mute on the point of whether or not an individual can engage in rites without maintaining any of the beliefs which are supposed to inform those actions. Nonetheless, his observations on “cult practices” which surround things “sacred and profane” and the subsequent “interdiction of contact” which surrounds these are of use to the present study.
Durkheim (1947) gives ritual a secondary place to doctrine. He argued that as beliefs define or represent the sacred, rites can only be characterized by the representations of the sacred that are their object. This is not so far from the Peircean view of the matter as it is presented by Daniel (1981) or Keane (2003, 2008); the main difference being that in the semiotic analysis of religious ritual, the materiality of the practice is given precedence over supposed “beliefs”; we can often learn more from the discursive practices of a people than from what they are purported to believe.

Rather than a definition of religion per se, Geertz offers a definition of “religious cognition” which focuses on the importance of symbols in constructing a convincing and totalizing world-view:

…a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. (Geertz 1966:42)

This definition of religion is important as it hinges upon the power of symbols to structure the world we live in, removing belief from the equation and instead focusing on the symbolic and material forms of religious activity. That belief should not be considered a vital component of religion may come as a surprise to some, but it must be remembered that here Geertz is formulating a definition of religion that applies beyond the bounds of the Abrahamic “religions of the book” (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), embracing those cultures and traditions who make no distinction between thought and action, religious beliefs and ritual. It should also be considered to what extent belief may be absent entirely from religious practice or to what extent it is uniformly distributed throughout any religious community.

Because it is of such central importance, Geertz’s use of the term “symbol” in his definition of religion requires further explication. What are the bounds and limits of symbol and signification, and how do symbols have such a profound effect on our cognition? To answer this we can turn to semiotic theory, specifically the theory of semiotics developed by Charles Sanders Peirce.

The term “symbol” as it is used by Geertz and its use in Peircean semiotic theory are slightly at odds; in the first case, Geertz uses the term in its conventional sense, as an object which stands in for or symbolizes something else. Peirce on the other hand uses the term “symbol” to refer to a very specific type of “sign”, one that is by nature abstract and bears no necessary relation to its object. The Peircean sign will
be discussed further in the next chapter, but in brief it describes any representation of an object that is perceived to bear meaning. By substituting Geertz’s “symbol” with the Peircean “sign”, semiotic theory can be applied to Geertz’s definition of religion (Daniel 1984).

**Peircean Semiotics**

The semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) is based on the theory that cognition is based on signs and is necessarily interpretive (Hoopes 1991). Peirce formulated a tripartite structure to signs and the act of signification, involving a *representamen*, an *object*, and an *interpretant* (Figure 1).

![Figure 1: The Peircean Sign](image)

These three aspects of the sign form an irreducible triad, linking the observer to the object through the act of cognition and signification facilitated by the object’s representamen. Anything that is interpreted as bearing meaning is effectively a sign, even if such meaning is never intended. For example, the ancient art of *augury* interpreted the flight of birds as messages from the gods. It is safe to assume that birds themselves never intend for their flight to be interpreted as such, but it does not matter; so long as meaning is ascribed to something it becomes a sign in the Peircean sense. The birds (as the *representamen*) in this case are seen by the augurer to bear some divine message (the sign’s *object*), the content and meaning of which (the *interpretant*) is decoded by the diviner in a series of further signs (potentially *ad infinitum*). The whole of the above constitutes a Peircean sign.

Peirce developed a taxonomy of basic sign types that was based on the dynamic relationships inherent between the representamen, object and interpretant on three different levels of signification; Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness.
Table 1: Taxonomy of Peircean Signs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First</th>
<th>Qualisign</th>
<th>Relationship of Sign to Object</th>
<th>Relationship of Sign to Interpretant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>Sinsign</td>
<td>Icon</td>
<td>Rheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>Legisign</td>
<td>Symbol</td>
<td>Argument</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While Peirce estimated the total range of possible combinations of sign characteristics was well into the tens of thousands (Hoopes 1991), he was cognizant that such an exhaustive taxonomy would be functionally useless, and was content with distilling his theory of signs to ten basic types. Of these the present study makes particular use of three Peircean sign types: Icon, Index and Symbol.

The Icon is a mode of signification wherein the representamen imitates or resembles some aspect of its object. An icon does not have to possess a particularly striking resemblance to its object in order to be effective. Anyone who has ever received a portrait of themselves drawn by a kindergartner can understand what this means; all that an icon requires is some aspect of its object reflected in the signifier. Mimicry or impersonation are also iconic representations. A person’s habitual gestures, speech patterns and tone of voice can all become iconic representations of that person, immediately intelligible to those who are familiar with them.

An Index is a mode of signification wherein there is some inherent relationship between the representamen and its object. An earthquake, a weathervane, the call of a bird, or footprints in wet sand are all examples of indexical signifiers. Where there is smoke there is fire; indexical signs are so basic to our perceptions and are registered on such an unconscious level that we are seldom aware of the act of cognition involved in perceiving them.

The Symbol in the Peircean sense of the term is the most abstract of these three types of signifiers. Symbols have no inherent relationship with or resemblance to their object so the significance of symbols must be learned. All language is inherently symbolic as well as the lettering conventions we use to record language.
These three sign types are not discreet. Signs often present themselves as hybrids incorporating two or more of these forms simultaneously. For example, the Gohonzon which can be found enshrined in the home of every SGI member is as much an indexical sign of a person’s faith Nichiren Buddhism as it is an iconic and symbolic representation of the Buddha nature they are working to develop within themselves through their practice.

**Semiotic Ideology and Representational Economy**

While the idea of “religion” as something possessed by people that can be traded, abandoned, picked up, or left behind at the doors of the church is common in post-modern, secular Western societies, it presupposes that religious belief and secular life are discreet and can be separated from the act of cognition or perception. However, even this attitude towards religion betrays a certain ideology, one that is shared by both the religious believer and the agnostic alike. This underlying ideology common to the Western mindset is just one aspect of what Webb Keane calls the *semiotic ideology* of modernism (Keane 2006). Keane’s work has focused on the subjects of semiotics and language, anthropology of religion, gift exchange, materiality and material culture. Perhaps his most well-known work, *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter* (2006), was based on his fieldwork in Indonesia, and is an insightful example of the application of semiotic theory to questions in anthropology of religion. One of the concepts developed by Keane which is of particular use to the present study is semiotic ideology:

> By *semiotic ideology* I mean basic assumptions about what signs are and how they function in the world. It determines, for instance, what people will consider the role that intentions play in signification to be, what kinds of possible agent exist to which acts of signification might be imputed, whether signs are arbitrary or necessarily linked to their objects and so forth. (Keane 2003:419)

In the Peircean sense, signification and semiosis are the very basis of human cognition, communication and perception (Hoopes 1991). However, this is not a random process; signification is necessarily bound by context and convention, without which meaningful communication would be impossible. Furthermore, signs are not static or immutable objects; rather they are subject to all the forces of causality as any other

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1 The signification of the Gohonzon is explored much further in Chapter 9, Semiosis and Signification of the Gohonzon.
material object (Keane 2003). As a result, semiosis is constrained within necessarily incomplete boundaries of conventional meaning. Within any given context, the shifting meaning of signs is effected through the semiotic ideology of the people exchanging these signs.

Furthermore, there exists an interdependence between ideas and their associated practices such that these effect each other both logically and causally within what Keane refers to as a representational economy:

By *representational economy*, I mean to draw attention to the dynamic interconnections among different modes of signification at play within a particular historical and social formation….Such assumptions, for instance, will determine how one distinguishes between subjects and objects, which implications for what will or will not count as a possible agent- and thus, for what is a good candidate for being an indexical sign or intentional communication…we might then essay an account of the ‘semiotic ideologies’ that interpret and rationalize this representational economy. (Keane 2003)

Within a representational economy, different kinds of practices and institutions co-exist which at first glance may have little in common. Nonetheless, these “practices and associated ideologies exist in dynamic relations with one another such that the changes in one domain can have consequences for the other (Keane 2006:18).”

To use an example from the present study, the changes in the ritual practice of the SGI follow from a realignment of their doctrine and ideology, itself stemming from the loss of two sacred objects following the schism in 1991. These objects, the Dai-Gohonzon and the Sho-Hondo, were themselves the provisional/material manifestations of two core ideological concepts in Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism. The destruction of the Sho-Hondo in 1999 triggered a realignment of the SGI’s concept of Kaidan, while the loss of the Dai-Gohonzon, kept in the possession of the priesthood, has effectively ended pilgrimage to the head temple for SGI members. The result is a tangible change in the ritual and devotional practice of SGI Buddhism.

All of the above has been negotiated and effected through an ongoing discussion in SGI publications treating with key issues in the schism, often referred to broadly as the “priesthood issue”. This

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2 The Dai-Gohonzon is a large calligraphic/iconographic scroll attributed to Nichiren Daishonin, and believed to be the first Gohonzon he inscribed. The Sho-Hondo was a massive 6000-seat prayer hall funded and built by the Soka Gakkai in 1972 specifically to house the Dai-Gohonzon. These are described in further detail in Chapter 5, “The Three Treasures of Nichiren Buddhism”, and Chapter 6, “The “Dai-Gohonzon” and “The Kaidan”.
ongoing discussion is the means through which the semiotic ideology of the SGI has transformed itself in the process of negotiating these material changes. As Keane points out, “different kinds of practices and institutions affect one another within a representational economy, but it is the logic of a *semiotic ideology* that helps bring the effects into alignment (2006:20).” The loss of the Dai-Gohonzon and the destruction of the Sho-Hondo have essentially removed these material objects from the representational economy of SGI Buddhism. This has necessitated a realignment of their place in connection to the personal Gohonzons in each members’ home, and their signification within the ritual practice of gongyo. In effect, the SGI has been in an ongoing process of semiotic realignment following the schism, which has continued to the present day, and which has had a tangible effect upon these material forms of religious practice in SGI Buddhism.

**The Materiality of Religion**

The materiality of religious practice is of some importance to the study of this schism, as it presents tangible examples of representational economy and semiotic ideology at work through the medium of material objects and practices. The implements and objects utilized in the performance of gongyo as well as the observable ritual behavior involved in this are the main examples of the materiality of religious practice studied in this work. By coupling the study of discursive practice with ritual practice and ritual paraphernalia within the SGI, I hope to substantiate the relationship these things have with the schism in 1991.

The idea of semiotic ideology is meant to capture these practices involving words and things within the same frame. By viewing words and things together within one frame, we can see how they interact within a single representative economy such that changes in some domains can have consequences in others. (2007:20)

This study pays close attention to the form and use of ritual objects and ritual performance to draw attention to the effects this schism has had upon all aspects of practice within the SGI.
The Persistence of Semiotic Forms

As the ideologies of the people producing and utilizing objects change, so too do the objects themselves transform, in the process of which they inform and influence the behavior of those who interact with these objects. On the other hand, material forms also possess the potential for continuity across time, influencing the behavior of those they come into contact with:

We must consider the ways in which material things work independently of, or in contradiction to, their discursive surround. Otherwise we risk treating humans as if their capacity to endow the world with meaning had no limits, and, I would add, as if the world could hold no further surprises for them. (Keane 2006:18)

The physical world and the objects within it are not a blank slate, nor are people immune to the influence of objects. Human behavior is influenced by the material world, especially where it contradicts our ideologies and expectations.

As Peirce would have it, cognition itself is an endless series of semiotic processes (Hoopes 1991). In order to be intelligibly expressed, ideas must be given semiotic form: words, sounds, images, and physical gestures are some examples of this. However, once generated, semiotic forms immediately begin to accrue new meaning and ancillary significance that was perhaps never originally intended by their creators (Keane 2003, 2008). Since material objects persist through time and across contexts, they are amenable to elaboration and permeable to the absorption of new meaning, potentially obscuring their original object and intended signification. As a result, the interpretation of a sign is ultimately personal, heterogeneous, and unevenly distributed within any given society.

Keane expands upon the ramifications of this dynamic of accretion as it relates to the elaboration of rites, reform movements and schism within a religious tradition. Almost as soon as a ritual is formulated, the semiotic forms (signs) that constitute the rite will begin to accrue meaning and ancillary significance:

An important element of the history of scriptural religions is the various struggles between correct dogma and practical deviations, purification and accretion. A recurrent theme in these struggles concerns the tension between abstract or immaterial entities and semiotic form… (Keane 2008:123)

Thus, over time, two groups engaging in the same symbolic ritual activity may develop heterogeneous interpretations (interpretants) of what the ritual activity itself (representamen) is supposed to symbolize or represent (its object). Within these respective groups there will furthermore be an uneven distribution of
any orthodox system of belief and knowledge/discourse, setting in motion the wheels of heterodox
interpretation, conflict, reform and schism. Over time, any and all of a sign’s components (representamen,
object and interpretant) are subject to change, accretion and attempts at purification.

Part of the reason for this tendency of ritual to change over time is what Keane refers to as
“bundling”, accretion, and the polyvalent nature of signs (Keane 2003:414). As a representamen is reified
in a material form it presents additional qualities and features. For example, in order for a qualisign such as
“blueness” to exist in some tangible form it must be manifest in something blue, such as blue jeans, or
blueberries. This object will have other qualities aside from its blueness that may be valued more than this
particular qualisign, and the value of these other qualities will shift across time and context. Furthermore,
due to the abstract nature of the qualisign, a quality such as blueness can potentially be present in a wide
array of objects, or brought forth through processes of transformation:

Abstracting qualisigns from objects offers a way of bringing discrete moments
of experience into an overarching value system on the basis of habits and
intuitions rather than rules and cognitions (Keane 2003:415).

This will come back into play in the discussion of “sacredness” within things profane, as a quality which is
inherent in all mater, but which requires processing for its reification. This consideration of qualisigns is
here used to bridge the gap between the theories of Durkheim, Geertz and Keane on religion.

In the case of religious practices, there are numerous material forms of religious signification
which are subject to bundling and accretion over time. Ritualized speech, ritual paraphernalia, religious
structures, scriptures, and organizational institutions are just some of the more conspicuous examples. The
specific qualities of these things may rise and fall in relative importance and utility to the religious
community, or invite elaboration by their very nature:

To revelation is added commentary. Liturgies produce architectures; both require
officers. Oral testimony comes to be inscribed; written texts can be kissed, enshrouded,
born about the neck as a talisman, rendered into ashes to be swallowed, inscribed as
unreadable but gorgeous calligraphy, appreciated for their literary beauty. Offerings
expect altars, altars support images, images enter art markets, art objects develop auras.
Rituals provoke anti-ritualist purifiers. Purified religions develop heterodox
rites…(Keane 2008:124)

Over time, these material forms begin to obstruct or intercede in the practice of religion and its object or
intention, creating tension between correct dogma and practical deviation. Over the course of seven-
hundred years of semiotic accretion, the artifacts left behind by Nichiren became the focal point in the schism between the Nichiren Shoshu and the Soka Gakkai. Understanding how semiosis is involved in the process of religious schism is the main subject of the present study.
Chapter 3: Historical Context

Nichiren Buddhism generally, and the Soka Gakkai International specifically, are known for their exclusivist truth-claims and contentious relationships with contemporary forms of Japanese Buddhism (Stone 1994). While Nichiren Buddhism derives its legitimacy and inspiration from the teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha (specifically from the Lotus Sutra), and draws liberally from a select body of Buddhist exegetical discourse, there is nothing ecumenical about Nichiren Buddhism and by extension the SGI. The exclusivist stance of the Soka Gakkai runs counter to popular American conceptions of Buddhism and the trend of its development in Western societies (Prebish 1999, Seager 1999). This exclusivist ethos in contemporary Nichiren Buddhism is the product of Nichiren Daishonin’s personal understanding of the relationship between the individual, the Dharma and the world at large (Stone 1994). This in turn cannot be properly understood without an examination of the philosophical foundations of this belief, which leads us down a line of inquiry into the development of the core principles of Buddhism which influenced Nichiren Daishonin and his contemporaries in 13th century Japan.

Such a discussion has to walk a fine line between excessive attention to detail on the one hand (which would risk hijacking the purpose of the present work), and over-simplification on the other. In recounting the history of Buddhism, the author has chosen to focus upon only the key points which made the emergence of Nichiren and his doctrine possible. Naturally, this requires a very selective sampling of the total history Buddhism. This is not to discount the related histories of other sects and regions, nor is it to suggest that Nichiren Buddhism is the final, perfected, or inevitable form of the movement began by Sakyamuni so long ago. Rather, the material presented in this chapter suggests that Nichiren Buddhism, and by extension the SGI, is but one more example of a cycle of growth, elaboration, schism and reformation that has marked Buddhism throughout its historical trajectory across time.

Overview of the Chapter

Buddhism originated in India in approximately the 5th century B.C.E. with the teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha, born Siddhartha Gautama. Buddhism within India went through three major phases of development over the course of approximately 1500 years. Considering the range of Buddhist sects which
are extant in the world at present and those which are known to have existed, we can speak of three major branches of Buddhist thought: Early Buddhism\(^3\), Mahayana Buddhism and Tantrayana Buddhism (Conze 1980; Thurman 1980; Tsukamoto 1985; Collins 2000). The discussion of the development of Buddhism through these three phases is important because it provides some background for understanding their differing characters and practices, and why elements of these can be observed in the Buddhism of Nichiren and the Soka Gakkai.

**The First Phase: Early Buddhism (500–0 B.C.E.)**

There is little sound historical evidence from which to draw a detailed picture of Sakyamuni’s life (Conze 1980). What does exist is fragmentary, conflicting, and composed hundreds of years after the Buddha’s death. The primary sources of written information about the Buddha’s life are the *Buddhacarita*, the *Lalitavistara Sutra*, the *Mahavastu*, and the *Nidanakatha* (Fowler 2005). The earliest of these, the *Buddhacarita*, was written by Ashvagosha in the second century, approximately seven-hundred years after the Buddha’s death. Much of what is contained in these four biographies is purely allegorical or symbolic, and often at odds with the other surviving biographies. Regardless, the basic outlines of his life are generally accepted by scholars, although the details of exactly where and when he taught are up for debate. The only reliable dates are those which reference the life and times of the Buddha to the reign of King Ashoka\(^4\) (304–232 B.C.E.), from which it is known that the Buddha was alive and teaching sometime between 563 and 483 B.C.E.

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\(^3\) A distinction is often made between the so-called “Hinayana” (Lesser Vehicle) and Mahayana (Greater Vehicle) Buddhism, similar to the distinction made between Catholicism and Protestantism. The comparison is a false one however, since Mahayana Buddhism has never been a distinct sect, a unified movement, or a formal school of Buddhism. Rather, it refers generally to a wide range of Buddhist sects which accepted the legitimacy of the Mahayana sutras which began to appear sometime between the first century B.C.E. through the fourth century. These sects grew out of a few of the eighteen to twenty Early Buddhist schools. Conversely, there are no schools of Buddhism which self-identify as “Hinayana”, a clearly slanderous term, applied by Mahayanists to the schools of Buddhism that did not accept the Mahayana sutras. Thus, throughout this study the term “Early Buddhism” is used instead to refer to schools of Buddhism which predate the composition of the Mahayana scriptures. This includes the Theravada School of Buddhism, which is descended from one of these Early Buddhist schools, the Sthaviravada sect specifically.

\(^4\) Emperor of the Maurya dynasty and ruler of nearly the entire Indian sub-continent from circa. 269-232 B.C.E. Regarded as one of India’s greatest emperors, he was a staunch supporter of the early Buddhist
It is important to note that although Buddhism came to China bearing the banner of Indian civilization (Tsukamoto 1985), it was never the mainstream religion of India. Buddhism was a reform movement that ran counter to Brahmanic religious practice in the fifth century B.C.E. (Ling 1966). Nor was Buddhism the only upstart reform movement of its time; Sakyamuni and Mahavira, neither of whom were descended from the priestly Brahmin ruling class, both independently founded their own religious movements, Buddhism and Jainism respectively. Both of these movements attacked the ideology and traditions of Brahmanism and represented a real shift in power in the Magadha region of India as the Kshatriya and Vaisya castes rose to dominate the military and economic activity of the region. Following the close relationship between religion and power, as the old state was overturned, new ideologies arose to legitimize the redistribution of power (Ling 1973). This is not to reduce the advent of the Buddha to purely economic and political factors, but it gives some perspective on the overt and subtle forces at work in Sakyamuni’s time.

The Buddha

According to tradition and the scant historical evidence left to us, Siddhartha Gautama was born in the area of Kapilavastu province, close to the border between modern day Nepal and India, in a village some 25 kilometers east of Lumbini. Kapilavastu was the home of the Sakya clan, a warrior clan of the Kshatriya caste.

Though the religious traditions of his time were well established, Siddhartha did not go in search of enlightenment among the Brahmins. Rather he became a wandering ascetic, one of many in the time and place where Siddhartha lived. In the area around what is now modern-day Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh, about 17km northeast of Varanasi, he fell in with a group of five other extreme ascetics with whom he practiced for the next six years. There Siddhartha’s search for enlightenment lead him through the extremes of self-negation, to the very brink of death, before he struck upon the “Middle Way”.

sangha. Ashoka had pillars and stupas erected throughout India to mark out the important sites of the Buddha’s early ministry which provide important material for dating the lifetime of Śākyamuni.
The traditional account of Sakyamuni’s enlightenment culminates in his confrontation by the god Mara, the personification of illusion and suffering, and dispelling Mara and his demonic host of demons and sensual visions. In the aftermath of this assault of doubts and temptations, the young ascetic arose from his meditation a fully-enlightened being.

**The Dharma**

Following his enlightenment, the Buddha returned to Sarnath where he gave his first sermon (*sutra*), and founded the *sangha*, the Buddhist order, to which he laid down the various rules (*vinaya*) by which they would live, practice and propagate the teachings (*Dharma*). This first sermon is known as the *Dharmacakra Pravartana Sutra* (“Setting in Motion/Turning the Wheel of Dharma”). In this sutra the Buddha taught the foundation of his teachings: the Middle Way, the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path.

The Buddha continued to teach for the next forty years of his life, right up until the day of his death in Kusinara (present-day Kushinagar, India) at the age of 80. Throughout this time, the Buddha traveled on foot continuously, delivering varied sermons and spreading his teachings throughout northeastern India. Following his death, the First Buddhist Council was convened to consolidate Sakyamuni’s teachings (Conze 1970, 1980; Tsukamoto 1985).

The path to enlightenment posited in this early phase of Buddhism is through the careful study and analysis of the mind and the teachings of the Buddha (Conze 1970). This gives Early Buddhist schools a very scholarly and psycho-analytic character. The mind is a subject for careful observation, the passions and illusions identified and systematically negated, until all of one’s ties to the phenomenal world are transcended and *nirvana* is achieved. Nirvana is here posited as extinction, leaving the cycle of life, death and rebirth permanently (Conze 1970). This is the goal of the *arhat*, a “perfected one”, one who has attained nirvana through their own efforts and wisdom (*prattyekabuddha*, “self-awakened one”), or as a disciple and student of the Buddha’s teachings (*a sravaka*, “voice-hearer”). Buddhahood, the fully enlightened state, was thought to take an interminable length of time, countless lifespans to achieve.
In the first four centuries after the Buddha’s death, his teachings were kept orally. It wasn’t until the Fourth Buddhist Council(s), in approximately 100 B.C.E. (Sri Lanka) and C.E. 100 (Kashmir), that the Buddha’s teachings were finally committed to writing in Pali and Sanskrit respectively (Conze 1970). The documentation for these events can be found in the vinaya of the Theravadin and Sarvastivadin Tripitaka.

The Buddhist canon is often referred to by its Pali name (“Tipitaka”) or Sanskrit name (“Tripitaka”), which literally translates as “three (tri) baskets (pitaka)”. The canon is divided into three categories: sutra (the Buddha’s discourses), vinaya (the rules and regulations of the monastic order), and abhidharma (metaphysical/esoteric teachings and commentaries). Actually, the name itself is misleading as by the time the Tripitaka was committed to writing there were schools with four or more pitaka. Even at this early phase, processes of semiotic accumulation were at work, dividing and subdividing the Buddhist order even as it expanded throughout India.

**Schism and Reformation within the Early Buddhist Sangha**

What results is a distinct split of the Buddhist order into two literary branches: those which followed the Pali canon, and those which followed the Sanskrit canon. The oldest surviving school following the Pali canon is the Theravadin (School of the Elders) sect. While none of the Early Buddhist schools following the Sanskrit canon survive today, the numerous sects of Mahayana (Great Vehicle) Buddhism all trace their lineage and history back to the Sanskrit Tripitaka, most of which has been preserved in translation in Chinese and Tibetan (Conze 1970).

The sangha underwent sectarian division due to internal conflict over modifications to the vinaya, the body of rules under which the monastic community conducted itself (Tsukamoto 1985). These rules, laid down in Sakyamuni’s time and local, could not be adopted universally throughout India if the monastic community was expected to survive and successfully propagate the Dharma throughout the land (Tsukamoto 1985; Conze 1980, 1970). The vinaya were gradually modified, and these modifications resulted in conflict between and within monastic communities. These conflicts spawned movements of reform and purification, which resulted in schism and the formation of new sects.
A succession of Buddhist Councils were convened to review the Buddha’s teachings and preserve orthodoxy in the monastic order. The most important of these in consideration to the present argument is the Second Buddhist Council. The accounts of this can be found in the vinaya of various schools (Tsukamoto 1985; Conze 1980, 1970).

The Second Buddhist Council was convened 100 years after the death of the Buddha, approximately 400 B.C.E., in Vaiśālī. The council was gathered by a monk named Yasa who, while traveling through Vaiśālī, noticed the local monks there (the Vajjiputtakas) engaging in a number of practices which were violations of the monastic code, primary amongst these was the acceptance of money as alms (Conze 1970). When confronted, the Vajjiputtakas defended these practices, prompting Yasa to call a council to debate the matter. The result of this council was the rejection of the Vajjiputtakas’ additions to the vinaya, and the first schism within the Buddhist sangha. The majority (which came to be known as the Mahasamghika) refuted the changes that were attempted to be made in the vinaya by the Vajjiputtakas, who later became the Sthaviravāda sect, from which the still-extant Theravada School is descended (Conze 1970).

In spite of the efforts at reform in the successive Buddhist councils, over the next 300 years the sangha continued to split and subdivide. By the time of the Fourth Buddhist Council in 250 B.C.E., the sangha had divided into 18–20 distinct schools (nikaya). These were locked in a state of perpetual opposition and narrowly focused upon refuting the doctrines of other schools (Tsukamoto 1985; Conze 1980, 1970). This led to an increasing obsession with exegetical analysis and debate of the sutras and abhidharma.

The development of Mahayana Buddhism may well have been a reaction to the increasing intellectualization of Buddhism, an attempt to refocus its attention on the pursuit of emancipation (Tsukamoto 1985; Conze 1980, 1970). As these digressions into abstract arguments over abhidharma became increasingly distracting from the pursuit of emancipation, tensions developed within the religious community. This is in accord with the tension Keane describes between creeds (considered here as the

5 The surviving records of the Theravāda, Sarvāstivāda, Mūlasarvāstivāda, Mahāsanghika, Dharmaguptaka, and Mahīśāsaka schools.
vinaya, a dogmatic, material form of signification) and “immaterial entities” (in this case the pursuit of enlightenment):

An important element of the history of scriptural religions is the various struggles between correct dogma and practical deviations, purification and accretion. A recurrent theme in these struggles concerns the tension between abstract or immaterial entities and semiotic form, the indescribable god of the mystic or negative theologian and the physicality of the amulet, universal ethical norms and particular bodily habits, high doctrine and ritual sounds and smells. (Keane 2008:123)

Here Keane is writing about religious phenomena generally, not about any particular tradition under study, but the tension he describes in this statement can be observed in the case of early Buddhism. The pursuit of emancipation or Buddhahood (an “immaterial entity”) in the early Sangha had been eclipsed by the expansion of abhidharmic texts (semiotic form), which created tensions within the religious community. This connects to Keane’s statements concerning the inevitability of schism and semiosis within religious bodies:

To the extent that semiotic form is an unavoidable component of any cultural phenomena, including those held to lie beyond representation, and involves an irreducibly public dimension, then reformist purifications cannot fully and permanently establish themselves. (Keane 2008:124)

As semiotic forms persist across time and context, they are open to elaboration, and reinterpretation. Reformist purification movements result in change, perhaps in their intended direction, but over time this process of accretion and elaboration reasserts itself, leading again to tension between “correct” dogma and practical deviation, prompting further cycles of conflict and schism:

If religions continually produce material entities, those entities can never be reduced only to the status of evidence for something else, such as beliefs or other cognitive phenomena. As material things, they are enmeshed in causality, registered in and induced by their forms. As forms, they persist across contexts and beyond any particular intentions and projects. To these objects, people may respond in new ways. To the extent that those responses become materialized in altered or new semiotic forms, those responses build on and are additive to responses of other people in other contexts. These materializations bear the marks of their temporality. (Keane 2008:124)

The vinaya and the sutras were the semiotic forms in which these processes of deviation, purification and accretion were underway. Being physical (at first oral) scriptures, material things, they were subject over time to practical deviations (such as additions to the vinaya) in order to accord with the new contexts in
which the Dharma had spread. Monastics attempting to preserve the spirit of their movement (an immaterial entity) in a changing environment likely made practical modifications to the monastic charter, a dogmatic scripture. This lead to conflict over points of correct practice/dogma (such as the rejection of the Vajjiputtakas’ innovations) in the successive Buddhist councils (purification movements within the sangha). In spite of these efforts, over time the sangha underwent repeated divisions. These sects became increasingly entrenched behind their own exegetic arguments, ultimately prompting a movement of reform.

Within early Buddhism, this movement to reform and purify the sangha was effected through the generation of new material forms. The Sutra Pitaka is traditionally divided into five sections or collections. In the Pali canon, still in use within the Theravada tradition, these are called nikaya, while in the Sanskrit canon they go under the term agama. The agamas of the Sanskrit canon roughly correspond to the nikaya of the Pali canon; almost all of the sutras contained in the later can be found in the Sanskrit agamas, and in the same divisions (Conze 1980, 1970). However, there are substantially more sutras contained in the Sanskrit canon, which emphasize the attainment of Buddhahood through the Bodhisattvavayana, the “Bodhisattva vehicle”. The Bodhisattvavayana praises the practice of compassion and denigrates the single-minded pursuit of enlightenment for oneself alone. These sutras would later be classified as Mahayana (Greater Vehicle) sutras, and placed in a class of their own to differentiate them from the earlier sutras 6 (Conze 1980, 1970).

The Second Phase: Mahayana Buddhism (C.E. 0–500)

The next phase in the development of Buddhist thought, which grew out of the ideological deadlock of the Early Buddhist schools, was the Mahayana. In some ways the Mahayana philosophy was a radical departure from the earlier forms of Buddhism; in others it was an attempt at returning to the original spirit of the movement, the pursuit of enlightenment for the sake of all humanity. The Prajnaparamita sutras of the Mahasamghika School are the foundations of Mahayana thought (Conze, 1970, 1980, 6 The term “Agama sutra(s)” is sometimes used to differentiate these earlier teachings preserved in the Sanskrit canon from the later Mahayana sutras, a convention adopted for the present study. 7 “Perfection (paramita) of wisdom (prajna)”, first written circa 100 B.C.E. and preserved in Pakrit, a Buddhist hybrid of Pali and Sanskrit.)
Tsukamoto, 1985). These sutras systematically refute the abhidharma, and are a radical reworking of Buddhist ideas on the nature of phenomenal existence (Tsukamoto 1985; Conze 1970; Hurvitz 1963). Several original versions of this sutra survive in Sanskrit, Pakrit\(^8\) and in Chinese translation from Sanskrit.

In this early phase of Mahayana philosophy, the figure of Sakyamuni begins a process of redefinition, from the limited figure of a single enlightened individual into just one of countless provisional expressions of ultimate reality, the Dharmakāya (Conze 1980). This opens up the possibility for multiple buddhas throughout time and space, an idea that is expressed in staggering proportion in the later Lotus Sutra, a middle-Mahayana work that forms the core of many Buddhist traditions. The Soka Gakkai considers Nichiren the “True Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law”, and the earliest roots of this idea stretch back to the Prajnaparamita sutras of the Mahasamghika School.

More Mahayana sutras continued to be added to the Sanskrit canon over the next 300 years (Conze, 1970, 1980, Tsukamoto, 1985). There is evidence to suggest that many of these new sutras were composed in the north of India, where they were inspired by a synthetic exchange of art and ideology with the Greco-Bactrian culture emerging there (Brancaccio, 2006; Tsukamoto, 1985; Conze, 1980, 1970). The first clearly Mahayana schools of Buddhism were the Madhyamaka sect founded by Nāgārjuna sometime in the second century C.E., and the Yogacara sect founded by Asanga and Vasubandhu sometime in the fourth century (Conze, 1970, 1980, Tsukamoto, 1985).

**The Dharma of Mahayana Buddhism**

The Mahayana sutras are a body of texts intended for Bodhisattvas, and so they emphasize the Bodhisattvayana as the means to personal and universal salvation. They denigrate the paths of sravaka and prattyekabuddha, casting the followers of the Early Buddhist sutras as self-centered and of limited faculties (Conze, 1970, 1980, Tsukamoto, 1985). The Bodhisattva seeks the cultivation of faith and compassion (bodhicita/karuna) in the pursuit of enlightenment, placing these qualities above wisdom (prajna) and meditation (dhyana). Originally the Bodhisattvayana sutras were intended for advanced students of

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8 A number of vernacular Indo-Aryan languages spoken in India from the third century B.C.E up until the middle ages.
monastic discipline, those who were ready to take the Bodhisattva Vow and swear to devote themselves to the enlightenment of all beings, life after life (Tsukamoto 1985; Conze 1970). The Bodhisattva Vow is an additional set of proscriptions and obligations which supersedes the rules laid out in the vinaya and is binding for all the successive lifetimes of those who swear by it.

**The Lotus Sutra**

The Lotus Sutra is one of the most important sutras in Mahayana Buddhism, revered by numerous traditions and an object of intense veneration to some (Watson 1993; Kato 1975). There is no way to determine the exact date of its composition, but copies of it were already being translated into Chinese as early as C.E. 255 (Watson 1993; Kato 1975; Hurvitz 1963). A retranslation of this work into Chinese composed in C.E. 406 by Kumarajiva is the version most widely read throughout East Asia (Watson 1993; Kato 1975; Wright 1971; Hurvitz 1963).

The scope of this sutra is vast: its cast is epic, including uncountable millions of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas from throughout time and space. Its setting is transcendental, the earth itself transformed into a vast tower of immeasurable proportions hung with precious stones, and the heavens filled with the innumerable golden bodies of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Its message is both apocalyptic and hopeful, prophesying the spread of the true Dharma in the dark age of humanity. Core concepts of Buddhist thought are restated or contradicted and new ideas are put forth, such as the concept of “skill in means”, the lifespan of the Buddha, and most importantly the path to enlightenment in the age of decline. This sutra combines the three vehicles of Bodhisattva, Pratyekabuddha and Śrāvaka into the “One Vehicle” (Ekayāna) of faith in the Lotus Sutra. Faith in this sutra, the propagation and protection of its teachings and its adherents, is presented as the ultimate means of attaining enlightenment. This sutra is also the first to contain a reference to the enlightenment of a woman, the Dragon King’s Daughter, who upon taking faith in the Lotus Sutra transforms herself into the body of a fully-awakened Buddha.

The exclusivism of the Ekayana doctrine presented in the Lotus is derived from the concept of “skill in means”. Earlier teachings prior to the Lotus Sutra are explained away as “provisional”, merely a means of readying the masses for the ultimate truths revealed in the Lotus. This subsumes the Three
Vehicles of Mahayana Buddhism within the One Vehicle of faith in the Lotus Sutra. If the teachings of the Lotus Sutra are taken in good faith, then the truth claims of all sutras prior to the Lotus are rendered provisional, trumped by the higher truths revealed in the Lotus.

The apocalyptic prophesies of this sutra also tinges Lotus Buddhism with a distinctly millenarian flavor. The teachings of the Lotus must be propagated in the age of decline by the “Bodhisattvas of the Earth” who will expound, protect and propagate this sutra throughout the world. By way of example, the Soka Gakkai likens its members to the countless millions of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth prophesied in the Lotus Sutra to appear in the evil age of mappo, the age of Dharma-decline. An oft-quoted passage by Nichiren states, “If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin:385).” The SGI’s efforts at propagation are all aimed towards the spread of this Buddhism throughout the world, the realization of the prophetic vision of the Lotus Sutra.

The Development of Buddhist Iconography

The Mahayana sutras produced in Northern India between the first century B.C.E. and first century C.E. synthesized the spirit and teachings of the earlier sutras. Simultaneously, they incorporated new ideas, such as the production and veneration of Buddha-images (Brancaccio 2006; Conze 1970, 1980; Tsukamoto 1985). Mahasamghika Buddhism was flourishing in the Greco-Bactrian area of northwest India at this time, and with it Mahayana philosophy (Brancaccio 2006; Liu 1988).

One of the unique adaptations of Mahayana Buddhism that resulted from the fusion of these two cultural streams was the fashioning of iconic images of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas. The veneration of these carved, cast or painted images became a regular and accepted practice for both lay and ordained Buddhists alike. This iconographic movement within Mahayana Buddhism is a syncretic product of the Greco-Buddhist culture that originated in Gandhāra (modern day Kandahar) and which radiated outward from this center throughout the Buddhist world (Brancaccio 2006; Liu 1988; Tsukamoto 1985; Conze 1980). Anthropomorphic Buddha-images eventually found currency in the representational economy of Early Buddhist schools, as evidenced by the proliferation of Buddha-images in the Theravada tradition (Brancaccio 2006). This development represents a major shift in the semiotic ideology and representational
economy of Indian Buddhism, which has had an indelible influence on the religion as a whole up to the present day.

Before the first century, anthropomorphic images of the Buddha simply did not exist; the Buddha was depicted in the form of a lion or lotus throne, the Wheel of the Law (Dharmachakra), or other purely symbolic representations (Brancaccio 2006, Tsukamoto 1985). The anthropomorphic Buddha-images that began to be made at this time in Gandhāra were fashioned in imitation of the Greek style of devotional religious statues, with flowing robes and natural proportions. As was the tradition of the time to deify kings, casting them in the trappings of gods, as the citizenry converted to Buddhism, the Greco-Bactrian kings began to be depicted in the guise of the Buddha and his attendant bodhisattvas (Brancaccio 2006). The quality and sophistication of Gandhāran Buddha-images also suggests a highly developed tradition of Buddhist iconography, specialized craftsmen and economies surrounding the production of these images. These early devotional statues became the early model for Buddhist iconography throughout Asia (Brancaccio 2006; Liu 1988; Tsukamoto 1985; Conze 1980).

Prior to the first century, the centers of Buddhist worship and ritual were based around stupa, reliquary structures housing the physical remains of the Buddha (Brancaccio 2006). Once anthropomorphic depictions of the Buddha began to be produced in the Gandhāra region of Afghanistan, these were placed side by side with stupas, and then eventually inside of stupas (Brancaccio 2006), eventually displacing the worship of reliquaries. This helps to date the authorship of the Mahayana scriptures, as these contain references to the worship or veneration of Buddha-images, a practice that could not have existed prior to the manufacture of the images themselves in the first century (Brancaccio 2006; Liu 1988; Tsukamoto 1985; Conze 1980).

This marks an important shift in the semiotic ideology of Northern Indian Buddhism, as indexical reliquaries were gradually supplanted by iconic Buddha images. This movement from the physicality of indexical signs to the abstraction of iconic images parallels the ideological ascension of the Buddha from an earthly, physical being to an abstract, metaphysical presence.

The development of this anthropomorphic iconography was thus both significant and timely in the development of Mahayana Buddhism (Tsukamoto 1985). The construction of stupas was no longer limited
to the availability and distribution of the Buddha’s remains: the presence and sacredness of the Buddha could now be manufactured of wood or stone, or painted on the walls of a stupa. Mahayana Buddhism had become highly-portable and ready for export beyond the confines of India. The fact that this development coincided with the time and place where India came into contact with the Silk Road assured the rapid spread of Mahayana Buddhism across Central Asia, directly to the capital of China (Liu 1988, Tsukamoto 1985).

**The Third Phase: Tantrayana Buddhism (C.E. 500–1000)**

The third and last great innovative development of Indian Buddhism is known as Tantrayana or Tantric Buddhism. The origins of Tantric Buddhism date from the fourth century, when new deities, physio-mental disciplines and arcane practices utilized for protection and divination begin filtering into the various Mahayana traditions (Conze 1980, 1970). The reasons for these innovations are unclear, but Conze (1980, 1970) suggests that these were a reaction to the beginning of Buddhism’s decline in India, an attempt on the part of practitioners to harness supernatural powers for their own defense, while aiding them in the pursuit of enlightenment. By the eighth century, these various practices were systematized in the form of Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism, where they were preserved even after the decline of Indian Buddhism (Tsukamoto 1985, Conze 1980, 1970). Tantric rituals found their way into China, where they were readily absorbed and heavily influenced the development of Buddhism in China and later Japan.

The development of Tantrayana began in the northwest and south of India. Particularly in the northwest, it was shaped by influences from Persia, Central Asia, and China (Conze 1980, 1970). Tantrayana absorbed native deities from tribal areas within India itself, and was also permeable to the absorption of native deities in areas where it spread, such as can be seen in the surviving Tibetan (Vajrayana) traditions of Tantric Buddhism.

**The Dharma of Tantrayana Buddhism**

The three most easily observed components of Tantric Buddhism are *mudra* (symbolic hand-signs and gestures), *mantra* (prolonged chanting of mystical phrases) and *mandala* (iconic geometric illustrations).
utilized for meditation). Tantric practice is holistic, teaching the devotee to utilize the mind, the voice and the body together in the pursuit of enlightenment (Sasso 1990, Conze 1980, 1970).

These three basic components of tantric practice can be observed in varying degree in virtually every sect of Mahayana Buddhism extant today. However, this does not mean that all surviving forms of Mahayana Buddhism are tantric. The distinction between Tantric and Mahayana Buddhism concerns their doctrinal origins in either the Madhyamaka or Yogacara sects, and hence the character and objectives of their meditative disciplines and ritual practices (Saso 1990). Sects derived from the Madhyamaka School are what may be termed Mahāyānist, and display a regard for and dependence upon exoteric liturgy. On the other hand, the tantric schools derived from the Yogacara are esoteric, ecumenical, and show markedly less dependence on a fixed canon of sacred writings.

The monks of the Yogacara (aka “Consciousness-Only”) School of late Mahayana Buddhism had turned themselves over entirely to meditation. They systematized a pantheon of beings and objects that existed on a purely mental level and were independent of any observers for their continued existence (Conze 1980, 1970). These were transcendent beings, personifications of mystical buddhas and bodhisattvas, imbued with god-like powers. All of these were seen as manifestations of the Dharmakaya, the Body of the Law, the transcendent Buddha in its ultimate form.

The Tantras after which this movement is named are a body of specialized teachings for select initiates under the tutelage of a guru. These are esoteric teachings, meditative disciplines, passed down in a lineage from master to disciple, inaccessible to the uninitiated. Because these teachings are transmitted orally, they had a tendency to become divided into numerous ritual schools (Saso 1990, Conze 1980). The Tantras include a host of pre-Buddhist Vedic rituals, deities and meditative disciplines (Saso 1990, Conze 1980), and in this regard are a crossing point between the parallel development of Buddhism and the matrix of Brahmanic religion. A fine example of this is the Goma fire rite, which can be observed in practice by Brahmins in India, as well as by Buddhist monks in Taiwan, Korea and Japan (Saso 1990).

Tantric philosophy emphasized the attainment of enlightenment immediately, in this very life, spontaneously. Supernatural powers attained through meditative discipline were a by-product of this practice as the adept developed into a full-fledged Bodhisattva. The whole corpus of Bodhisattvayāna
sutras might signal the beginning of this tendency in Mahayana Buddhism which gave rise to the Tantras. Indeed, the Tantrayana tradition absorbed all of the Mahayana canon, as well as the abhidharma of the earlier schools, but it did not remain bound to any specific selection of texts (Conze 1980). Instead the Tantrayana borrowed from these as necessary to support the development of its own distinct doctrine. For example, the Sahajayāna School stressed meditation and yogic discipline over all else, and rejected a fixed canon of exoteric doctrine (Conze 1980). This same sect may have been the progenitor of the Ch’an (Zen) style of meditation later popularized throughout China. This ambivalence towards the sutras is one of the primary features which sets the various sects derived from the Tantrayana branch apart from earlier Mahayana Buddhism.

The development of the Tantras and yogic discipline imbue Tantrayana Buddhism with a distinctly physical character. What is known today as hathayoga was originally a method of mediation developed during this time (Conze 1980). It was designed to strengthen the body and bring all of its various functions into a state of quiescence so that the mind would be free of distraction in the pursuit of enlightenment.

**The Tantrayana Buddha**

The tantric teachings are not ascribed specifically to Sakyamuni Buddha. In Northern Indian Buddhism at this point in time, the idea of Buddhahood as an overarching monism, the concept of Dharmakāya, had developed to allow for the possibility of countless buddhas throughout time, their teachings reaching human beings through transcendent meditation. In this regard, tantric metaphysics were a logical development of the tendency which had begun in the Madhyamaka and Yogacara schools of Mahayana to de-emphasize the role of Sakyamuni Buddha, and to expand the scope of Buddha-nature (Tsukamoto, 1985; Conze, 1980, 1970). By this time in Northern Indian Buddhism, the Buddha came to be regarded as a universal force, or the stuff of creation. This transcendent Buddha manifests itself provisionally in the form of the buddhas of the Ten Directions and various mythical buddhas of past ages, buddhas from distant world-systems, or buddhas from the future. Sakyamuni himself came to be regarded in this age as a provisional manifestation of the overarching transcendent Buddha (Conze 1980, 1970). This
expansion of the Buddha, from a historical figure to a transcendent force radiating provisional manifestations, can be readily perceived in the sacred texts of Tibetan Vajrayana. The Bodhisattva concept similarly underwent an elevation in this period, and soon the laity developed cults dedicated to all manner of mystical bodhisattvas, some of them showing markedly foreign, and particularly Iranian influences (Conze 1980, 1970).

**Conclusion**

The tantric tradition of Buddhism grew out of the late Mahayana schools, particularly the Yogacara School. By the sixth and seventh century, this form of Buddhism was well established in China. Tantric practices, such as mantras, mudras and mandalas, found their way into the other established sects of Buddhism in China, and were carried over into Japan in the form of Shingon and Tendai Buddhism.

Considering all of the material from this chapter, over the course of 1,500 years Buddhism developed into three distinct branches over three successive periods, each of which left behind its own canon of works attributed to the Buddha Sakyamuni. These represent three very different Buddhism: the psychological, pedagogical Early Buddhism (as represented today by the Theravādin tradition and the Pali canon); the evangelical, faith and scripture-based Mahayana Buddhism (finding its fullest expression in the Madhyamaka School and the Lotus Sutra); and finally the mystical, esoteric Tantric Buddhism (best represented by the Vajrayana traditions of Tibetan Buddhism). Turning the argument back to the subject of semiosis, we can observe all of these processes underway in the evolution of Buddhist iconography as it developed across its three branches.

In the imagery of the Early Buddhist schools, the Buddha was depicted in a symbolic form, as an empty lion-throne or lotus blossom (Brancaccio 2006). The conspicuous absence of the Buddha signifies his non-being, extinction, and passage to Nirvana.⁹

The anthropomorphic images of the Buddha that we are familiar with today were an invention of early Mahayana as it developed in the Gandhara/Greco-Bactrian region of northwestern India and

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⁹ The development of anthropomorphic Buddha-images in northwestern India was eventually accepted in iconographic practices of Early Buddhist schools, leading to the proliferation of Buddha-images within the Theravada tradition which can be observed at present (Brancaccio 2006).
Afghanistan (Brancaccio 2006). Buddhism in this stage is marked by its emphasis on compassion and faith. The iconic images of the Buddha Sakyamuni and his attendant bodhisattvas become a kind of divine pantheon, elevating the Buddha to a semi-divine and eternal status.

Finally there is the elaborate imagery of Tantric Buddhism. At this time the monastic tradition was supplemented by the growth of yogic cults, which gave rise to numerous independent tanic lodges, rites and arcane disciplines. In the iconography of Tantric Buddhism, the locus of agency is further diffused; now countless buddhas share the stage with images of deities, demons and mystical bodhisattvas.

Each of these branches was radically different from the others, with completely different definitions of the Three Treasures and different canons of accepted sutras, vinaya and abhidharma. All three of these, in some form or other, found their way into China.

This process of expansion, adaptation and schism has repeated itself again and again in the course of Buddhism’s historical development as a world religion. The schism between the Soka Gakkai and the Nichiren Shoshu in 1991, approximately 2,500 years after the founding of the original sangha, is one more iteration of that process. As the religion grew and expanded into new contexts, the material forms of Buddhism (its texts, relics, tools and rites) were reinterpreted and elaborated to the point where new sects with distinct and unique interpretations of the Three Jewels asserted themselves and set the stage for further cycles of expansion and transformation.

The fusion of Mahayana philosophy and tantric discipline that can be observed in numerous forms of Japanese Buddhism (Tendai, Shingon, and Nichiren Buddhism particularly) is a product of the syncretic and ecumenical nature of Chinese Buddhism, itself a product of recontextualization and translation (Tsukamoto 1985; Conze 1980; Hurvitz 1963). It is to this subject that we now turn in the next chapter.
Chapter 4: Buddhism in China

Buddhism spread to China, not as a single unified creed or system of thought, but in a confused mass of disordered sutras, Early Buddhist, Mahayana, and Tantrayana, with little or no distinction drawn between them (Tsukamoto 1985; Hurvitz 1963). The confusion and contradiction of these disordered doctrines prompted the early Chinese Buddhist scholars to make attempts at ordering the sequence of the Buddha’s teachings into a logical progression of ideas.

The main tenets of Buddhism were preserved in its transmission to China (Tsukamoto 1985). The Buddha Sakyamuni was still regarded as the founder of a body of teachings that would lead its faithful practitioners to the same state of enlightenment (Tsukamoto 1985). The scriptures translated from Sanskrit and Pali to Chinese were all equally regarded as the authentic word of the Buddha, despite the often dubious nature of their origin and translation. Much was lost, changed, or altered in this process of translating Pali and Sanskrit sutras into classical Chinese (Tsukamoto 1985). Nevertheless, the authenticity and accuracy of the translated sutras was taken for granted by Chinese scholars, and by extension all of the East Asian societies which drew from the Chinese literary tradition (Tsukamoto 1985).

Buddhism did not spread into a religious void when it came East; China had its own native religious traditions which pushed back against the spread of Buddhism into China and which influenced the reception and interpretation of these foreign teachings. Both Confucian and Taoist ideas had to be either refuted or somehow incorporated into the Chinese Buddhist community if it hoped to survive in this new environment. This led to a give-and-take process of confrontation and compromise as the new religious movement took root in China (Tsukamoto 1985; Wright 1971).

In regards to the history of Buddhism generally, and Nichiren Buddhism specifically, the two most important figures in the development and transmission of Buddhism from India to China were Kumarajiva and Chih-I, one of them a captive missionary from Central Asia, bearing with him a strict sectarian interpretation of the teachings of the Buddha, the other a native Chinese scholar convinced that Truth could not contradict itself. These two figures would prove pivotal in the development of a holistic Chinese Buddhism and thus the form in which it found its way to Japan.
Kumarajiva (approximately C.E. 350–409)

Born into the royal family of the Central Asian kingdom of Kucha¹⁰, Kumarajiva began his life as a Sarvāstivādin Buddhist, formally ordained as a monk. Although ordained in a sect descended from the Sthaviravāda tradition, he was fascinated by the Prajnaparamita scriptures; classical Mahayana texts. The fires of war brought him from India to China; in 382, he was brought from Kucha to Ku-tsang as a war captive. The general who had captured him, Lu Kuang, upon hearing of the death of his king, Fu Chien, set up his own short-lived state known as the Latter Ch’in. Kumarajiva was kept as a courtier in Lu Kuang’s service and we can presume it was during this period that he attained a detailed knowledge of scholarly Chinese. The collapse of the Latter Ch’in state due to internal strife between successors after only nineteen years brought Kumarajiva to the capital Ch’ang-an in C.E. 401. He would spend the next eight years of his life translating over three-hundred works of classical Buddhist texts, both Agama and Mahayana sutras, until his sudden death in C.E. 409 (Wright 1971; Hurvitz 1963).

Kumarajiva is important in the history of Chinese Buddhism for several reasons. Firstly, he was a translator of great skill, well-versed in Chinese and able to accurately translate subtle ideas from the Sanskrit canon (Wright 1971; Hurvitz 1963). Several of his key works were re-translations, especially his re-translation of the Lotus Sutra, which helped free Chinese Buddhism from the interpolations of Taoist philosophy that were causing so much confusion amongst the scholars of his time (Tsukamoto 1985; Wright 1971; Hurvitz 1963). Primary among these was the concept of Void (Śūnyatā), which was for centuries assumed to be identical with the Taoist idea of an underlying transcendental reality behind all form (Lai 2003; Wright 1971; Hurvitz 1963), but is in fact the opposite: an expression of the composite and co-dependent nature of all phenomena. Secondly, he was an adherent of Madhyamaka philosophy (the school of early Mahayana Buddhism founded by Nāgārjuna), an ardent admirer of the Mahayana scriptures, and a dogged upholder of the Lotus Sutra specifically.

Kumarajiva, in keeping with the Madhyamaka teachings, dismissed the earlier Abhidharma completely. From this point, the Mahayana lineage extending from Kumarajiva broke away from a huge corpus of previously accepted material, a whole third of the Tripitaka (Tsukamoto 1985; Hurvitz 1963).

¹⁰ Modern day Aksu Prefecture, Xinjian, China.
When Ch’ang-an was sacked by Ho-Lien Po-Po in 418, Kumarajiva’s disciples fled the capital and disseminated his translations and the Madhyamaka vinaya throughout China.

Kumarajiva was not an original thinker, but he was an accurate transmitter of Madhyamaka philosophy and an invaluable translator of Mahayana texts into Chinese (Wright 1971; Hurvitz 1963). Kumarajiva’s sphere of influence was limited to Northern China within his lifetime, but war forced his disciples to carry his teachings far and wide, especially to the south of China where they found fertile soil. Kumarajiva, through his successors, managed to accurately transmit Madhyamaka philosophy and the ideals of Mahayana Buddhism to his Chinese disciples.

**T’ien-T’ai Chih-I and the Ordering of the Sutras (C.E. 538–597)**

Chih-i is an extremely important figure in the development of Chinese Buddhism, the foundation of Japanese Buddhism, and is also considered the indirect progenitor of the Nichiren sect specifically (Hurvitz 1963). His influence on Nichiren Buddhism via Tendai Buddhism, and the influence of the Tendai Buddhist establishment in Japan, cannot be overstated. The doctrines he developed shaped the interpretation of Buddhism in China and abroad, and formed the foundation for the concept of original enlightenment in Japanese Buddhism (Stone 1999).

The sacking of Ch’ang-an split China in half both politically and spiritually (Tsukamoto 1985; Conze 1980; Wright 1971; Hurvitz 1963). To the north and south, Chinese Buddhism bifurcated along two lines; in the north it developed along lines of scripture, contemplation and faith, while in the south Buddhism became increasingly concerned with polemics and was closely associated with the ruling elite. Chih-i’s most important contribution to Chinese Buddhism was balancing these two tendencies, the contemplative (*dhyanas*) and the intellectual (*prajnas*), and bringing them all into order under the authority of a close reading and analysis of the sutras (Ziporyn 2000; Swanson 1986; Wright 1971; Hurvitz 1963). Chih-I was himself a practitioner of Ch’an meditation, but coupled this with a systematic study of

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11 The progenitor of Zen, the practice of Ch’an meditation is traditionally ascribed to Bodhidharma, an Indian yogi and ascetic who came to China sometime in the fifth century C.E. Ch’an philosophy is esoteric in nature and is generally reckoned by scholars to be a branch of the YOGACĀRA sect of Mahayana Buddhism.
exoteric doctrine, balancing wisdom (*dhyana*) with meditation (*prajna*) in accordance with the Prajnaparamita teachings of the Madhyamaka School (Saso 1990, Hurvitz 1963).

Chih-i’s original commentaries on the Lotus Sutra were a significant original contribution to the development of Chinese Buddhism (Ziporyn 2000; Saso 1990; Swanson 1986; Hurvitz 1963). Chih-i was attempting to reconstruct the early Madhyamaka, but the school he founded was unique in its doctrine and practices (Swanson 1986; Hurvitz 1963). T’ien-T’ai Buddhism, like other forms of Mahayana Buddhism in sixth century China, was a synthesis of multiple influences, combining Mahayana exegesis with Tantric meditation, under the overarching authority of the Lotus Sutra.¹²

**Life and Times of Chih-I**

Chih-i was born in what is now Hunan province, China, in C.E. 597. His parents were both killed in one of the many civil conflicts that gripped China throughout his lifetime. In C.E. 555 at the age of seventeen he took monastic orders and in C.E. 560 moved to Honan province to study under Hui-ssu on mount Ta-su until the latter relocated to Nan-Yueh in C.E. 567 (Hurvitz 1963).

Hui-ssu (C.E. 515–576) was a prominent Mahayanist teacher of uncertain origins and a votary of the Lotus Sutra (Hurvitz 1963). Hui-ssu presented a radical interpretation of the Lotus Sutra and in his master work the *An lo hsing I* he posits a path to instantaneous enlightenment, a direct path to Buddhahood for all those willing to undertake the necessary exertions. His reading of the Lotus implied the equality of all men (and women) with buddhas, that they are one and the same and are to be equally honored by anyone aspiring to follow the path of a bodhisattva. It is important to note here that to Hui-ssu maintaining a strict adherence to monastic discipline throughout this study was paramount; this was not a discipline for

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¹² This is exemplary of most contemporary Mahayana sects of Buddhism today; while all represent a continuation of Mahayana traditions, most contemporary sects of Mahayana Buddhism show Tantric traits and practices. For example, in the Tendai sect of Buddhism (the Japanese iteration of T’ien-T’ai Buddhism from which Nichiren Buddhism is derived) a clear distinction is made between the devotional practices of the laity (kengyo) and the Tantric practices of the monks (mikkyo), and lay people are free to choose which one they wish to pursue and practice (Saso 1990). The most basic Tantric practice, that of chanting (mantra), is widespread throughout the Buddhist world and can be observed in some form or another in the Vajrayāna tradition, the various strains of Pure Land Buddhism, Tendai, Shingon, Soto Zen and Nichiren Buddhism to name just a few outstanding examples.
laity householders who would find the acetic requirements demanded of them impossible to follow (Hurvitz 1963). Nonetheless, his work further established the idea that the worlds of Samsara and Nirvana are one and the same, separated only by our distorted perceptions, a concept that opens the path to enlightenment for all beings, whether laity or monks.

When Chih-I and his followers relocated to Ching-Ling (near present day Nanking) in C.E. 567 he carried his master’s teachings with him. The eight years he lived in the capital were spent lecturing on the Lotus Sutra (Hurvitz 1963). It was during this time that he developed the basic premises of his later work. It is recorded that on at least one occasion, he delivered a lecture on just the title of the Lotus Sutra to a gathering of prominent courtiers, merchants, clerics and scholars (Hurvitz 1963). His exposition on the Lotus Sutra, The Great Concentration and Insight, is probably his most celebrated work and the basis of later schools of Buddhism that regarded the Lotus as the highest of the Mahayana sutras.

Contributions and Innovations

By Chih-I’s time, Buddhism had already been present in China for approximately 400 years. All of the major works had been translated into Chinese and were widely available (Hurvitz 1963; Tsukamoto 1985; Wright 1971). However, due to the fact that these writings were the product of a thousand years of sectarian division and diversion, when viewed as a whole, the sutras were a jumble of conflicting ideas.

Organizing the vast corpus of the Buddhist sutras was one of the greatest problems that Chinese and later East Asian Buddhist scholars had to deal with. Chih-I applied himself diligently to this problem, and in his master work The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra, he developed a schema for the classification of the Buddha’s teachings known as the “Five Periods” (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Ziporyn 2000; Wright 1971; Hurvitz 1963):

- (1) The Flower Garland period, the first teaching expounded by Sakyamuni directly after his enlightenment; these teachings are regarded as second only to the teachings in the Lotus and Nirvana periods, but were beyond the capacity of his disciples to fully comprehend. Chih-I believed this period lasted only 21 days.

- (2) The Agama period, where the Buddha attempted to develop the capacity of his disciples with the provisional “Agama” teachings of the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path and the Twelve-linked Chain of Causation. This period is exemplified by the Deer Park Sutra by which this period is also known. According to Chih-I this period lasted for 12 years.
• (3) **The Correct and Equal period**, where the Buddha expounded the early Mahayana teachings and refuted the provisional teachings of the Agama period. By Chih-I's analysis this period lasted between eight to sixteen years.

• (4) **The Wisdom period** where the Wisdom sutras were expounded, such as the *Prajñaparamita* associated with Nāgārjuna and the Madhyamaka School of early Mahayana Buddhism. Chih-I believed this period extended for either 14 or 22 years.

• (5) **The Lotus and Nirvana period** where Sakyamuni taught these last two and most important sutras, which composed the final eight years of Sakyamuni’s life. The Nirvana sutra was delivered as Sakyamuni lay on his deathbed and was primarily a summation of the material contained in the Lotus Sutra.

Chih-I’s *Five Periods* doctrine was of immense use to the Chinese Buddhist scholars of the fifth century and later ages who took it as the definitive order of the Buddha's teachings (Ziporyn 2000; Wright 1985; Hurvitz 1963). This is of great importance to sectarian debate, as it delineates the progression of the Buddha's teachings. Chih-I’s doctrine of the Five Periods argues that the Buddha ordered the delivery of his teachings as they lead up to the ultimate truths expounded in the Lotus Sutra. Dengyo and Nichiren would later use this doctrine of the Five Periods as their main defense against the teachings of other sects, stating the supremacy of the Lotus Sutra as the sole teaching suitable for the “Latter Day of the Law” (see below).

**Three Thousand Realms in a Single Thought-Moment**

Perhaps the most complex and original idea presented by Chih-I (Ziporyn 2000), the doctrine of *Three Thousand Realms in a Single Thought-Moment* (Jpn. ichinen-sanzen) is the culmination of Chih-I’s thought and work, and is also a fundamental concept in Soka Gakkai Nichiren Buddhism today. This concept was originally presented in his *Great Concentration and Insight* and founded on the basis of the Expedient Means chapter of the Lotus Sutra (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Ziporyn 2000). It combines the *Ten Worlds*, the *Ten Factors* and the *Three Realms of Existence* into an overarching theory of enlightened potential as it exists in all beings. A thorough analysis and description of the philosophical implications of this theory would take up many more pages than can be devoted to it here. However the

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13 For a more thorough treatment of this doctrine and an analysis of its philosophical merits I would direct the reader to Brooke Ziporyn’s (2000) work on the subject.
basic outlines of this will receive some treatment as it is of primary importance in Nichiren Buddhists and the foundation of much of their metaphysical theory and devotional practice.

The Ten Worlds

Originally conceived as a taxonomy of discrete categories of beings, the Ten Worlds was an adaptation of the pre-Buddhist Indian concept of loka. Originally there were six loka: the world of Hell (Naraka/Avici), the world of Starving Ghosts (Preta), the world of Animality (Tiryagyoni), the world of Bellicose Demons (Asura), the world of Humanity (Manusya), and finally the world of the Gods (Deva). These together are known collectively as the Six Paths, the Six Realms, or the Six Paths of Rebirth. Onto these were grafted the worlds of the Voice Hearer (Srāvaka), the world of the Self-Awakened One (Prātyekabuddha), the world of the Bodhisattva, and the world of the Buddha. These four are together known as the Four Noble Paths.

The Ten Worlds were originally understood as metaphysical locations, overlapping planes of existence, with their own particular inhabitants (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002). Under Chih-I’s analysis, this idea was essentially broadened into a matrix of physio-mental states which interpenetrate the individual, their society and the physical environment. According to Chih-I’s theory, the Lotus Sutra presents the idea of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds; that is to say that each of the Ten Worlds contains all ten within it (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Ziporyn 2000). Chih-I reinterpreted the Ten Worlds as potential life-states, inherent in each individual. Regardless of which life state one is born into, all beings possess the spiritual capacity to inhabit any of the Ten Worlds, making the potential for Buddhahood in a single lifetime attainable and universal. Thus, in formulating the concept of ichinen-

14 Here a higher or transcendent strata of beings are installed above the deities of the native religion, but incorporated back into the Buddhist worldview. This is in no way dissimilar to how the Asura, who represent the deities native to the Dravidian peoples of Northern India, were themselves displaced by the Vedic deities of the Indo-European peoples who settled there. Again, the native deities are preserved in new mythological tales but take on a subjunctive role under the deities of the conquering settlers. The old gods cease to be the object of worship or veneration as their cults are displaced by those of the new syncretic culture. Examples of this same pattern of displacement and absorption can be seen in the mythologies of many regions and cultures throughout history (Campbell 1949).

The same would ultimately happen to Buddhism itself as it fell into decline in India from the tenth-13th centuries CE, until today we find the Buddha incorporated back into the matrix of northern Indian Hinduism, where he is now regarded as the ninth incarnation of Vishnu.
sanzen, the first step in reaching the three thousand realms was in multiplying the Ten Worlds by ten to reflect their mutual possession.

**The Ten Factors**

Also variously translated as the “Ten Suchnesses” or “Ten Thusnesses”, these are first seen in the opening pages of the Expedient Means chapter of Kumarajiva's translation of the Lotus Sutra. The passage reads:

> The true aspect of all phenomena can only be understood and shared between Buddhas. This reality consists of the appearance, nature, entity, power, influence, internal cause, relation, latent effect, manifest effect and their consistency from beginning to end. (The Lotus Sutra 1993:24)

These “Ten Factors” are held to be a pattern of existence common to all phenomena. Each of these is worthy of lengthy analysis and exposition, but it is sufficient to say that unlike the Ten Worlds which discusses the differing conditions of life-states, the Ten Factors describe determinate aspects of all phenomenon generally and extend into the Ten Worlds (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Ziporyn 2000). Thus Chih-I multiplied the Ten Worlds (already multiplied by 10 to equal 100) by the Ten Factors to reach a subtotal of 1000 realms.

It is also in these Ten Factors that a theoretical basis is established for replacing the Three Vehicles (Śrāvakayāna, Pratyekayāna, and Bodhisattvayāna) with the One Vehicle (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Ziporyn, 2000). In fact, this is one of the most radical statements contained within the Lotus Sutra. Its implications are quite far-reaching, as it implies that the Three Vehicles are simply a means of leading people to the one Buddha Vehicle of the Lotus Sutra. Essentially, this amounts to declaring that all other iterations of Buddhism posited upon other sutras are merely provisional and will not lead one to enlightenment, but are merely preparatory for the truths espoused in this sutra (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Ziporyn 2000).
The Three Realms of Existence

The realm of the five components, the realm of living beings, and the realm of the environment are collectively known as the Three Realms of Existence (Jpn. san-seken). The five components are form, perception, conception, volition, and consciousness (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002). Together these five components form an analysis of how an individual responds to its surroundings. For example, a person inhabiting the life-state of Animality would perceive and react to a given object in a very different manner than someone in the state of Humanity.

The realm of living beings indicates an individual life-form composed temporarily of the five components and which experiences the Ten Worlds. This realm refers as well to the community or collective body which surrounds each individual (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002). Thus, a whole society can collectively be seen manifesting or experiencing any of the Ten Worlds just as an individual person does. We need only to read a newspaper to see examples of this principle at work: scenes of civil war and ethnic conflict are a daily reminder of how the life-conditions of individual people contribute to the state of society as a whole.

The realm of the environment refers to the place or land in which living beings live and carry out their lives. Since the environment is affected by living beings and they in turn are shaped and affected by their environment, the land is also subject to the play of the Ten Worlds and it will manifest whatever state predominates in the lives of its inhabitants (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002). Thus the state of the environment is a reflection of the state of the people, and vice versa. According to this idea, the land itself will respond to the life-condition of its inhabitants. If viewed from this perspective, a bountiful harvest season or a plague of locusts, fair weather or devastating floods, earthquakes, tsunamis, and wildfires are all expressions of the life-condition of the environment.

These three realms can be viewed separately but are actually part of an integrated whole, each of the realms interpenetrating the others. Chih-I multiplied the 1000 worlds by a factor of three to reflect the play of the Ten Worlds through the Three Realms to finally reach the doctrine of Three Thousand Realms in a Single Moment of Life.
The utility and ramifications of this doctrine are profound. If the state of the land is a reflection of the predominant state of the people within it, then floods, drought, earthquakes, plague and pestilence can all be laid at the feet of the people. War, famine and natural disasters are a cause of great suffering, but are also simultaneously the manifest effect of the life-state of the people. If the spiritual practices of the people lead them towards enlightenment, then the life-condition of society as a whole will improve; if the life-condition of society improves, the life-state of the environment will be similarly elevated. In the sixth century when Buddhism was first transmitted to Japan via Korea, it was lauded as an instrument for the protection of the nation from war, famine and natural disaster (Stevens 1988). The idea that Buddhism had a prophylactic utility on a national level had significant coinage. Nichiren would later write copiously on this same subject. Having fully absorbed the philosophy of Chih-I, he was deeply concerned for the safety and well-being of the nation, especially as it regarded the spiritual activity of the people:

Those persons who happen to live in a country where there are slanderers of the Law will all—everyone in the entire country—be condemned to the great citadel of the hell of incessant suffering...When the three calamities pile up month after month and the seven disasters appear day after day, then hunger and thirst will prevail and the country will be changed into a realm of hungry spirits. When plague and disease sweep over the land, the country will become a realm of hell. When warfare breaks out, it will be transformed into a realm of Asuras. And when parents, brothers, and sisters, ignoring the fact that they are kin, begin taking each other for a husband or wife, the country will become a realm of animals. Under such circumstances, one does not have to wait until death to fall into the three evil paths. While one is still alive, the country in which one lives will be changed into these four evil realms. (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin:1018)

**Mappo, the Latter Day of the Law**

The concept of *mođa* (Jpn. *mappo*), the idea of successive stages of corruption of the Dharma, is a persistent underlying belief in East Asian Buddhism. The time period of every Buddha is supposedly divisible into three periods of successive degeneration: one in which the Dharma is pure, both visibly and in spirit; one in which it is pure in letter, but degenerate in spirit; and one in which it is corrupt in both letter and in spirit (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Marra 1988). This latter state is the age of mappo, and according to the reckoning of Japanese Buddhists during Nichiren’s time it was believed to have begun in C.E. 1052 (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002).

The day after the Buddha’s passing begins the thousand-year period known as the Former Day of the Law, when those who uphold the precepts are many while those who break
them are few. The day after the end of the Former Day of the Law marks the beginning of the thousand-year period known as the Middle Day of the Law, when those who break the precepts are many while those without precepts are few. And the day after the ending of the Middle Day of the Law begins the ten-thousand-year period known as the Latter Day of the Law, when those who break the precepts are few while those without precepts are many.

...whether in the Former, the Middle, or the Latter Day of the Law, one should never in any of these three periods give alms to those who slander the Lotus Sutra, whether they keep the precepts, break the precepts, or do not receive them at all. If alms are given to those who slander the Lotus Sutra, then the land will invariably be visited by the three calamities and seven disasters, and the persons who give such alms will surely fall into the great citadel of the hell of incessant suffering. (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin:49–50)

It is believed that the period of mappo extends for 10,000 years, and as the Dharma degenerates it will be an age of increasing instability marked by civil strife, death, suffering and natural disasters (Marra 1988). As the capacity of the people to correctly follow the Dharma degenerates, their life-condition undergoes a similar degeneration; this in turn causes the degeneration of the whole State and the environment they depend upon for survival.

A concomitant belief is that of the teachings of the three periods, an idea that classifies Sakyamuni’s teachings into three categories according to their content and the order in which they were believed to have been preached. The first period relates to the Agama sutras of the early sangha. The second period covers the Prajnaparamita sutras of early Mahayana Buddhism. The third period corresponds to the Flower Garland, Profound Secrets and Lotus Sutras, which are compositions dating from the middle and late Mahayana period (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Marra 1988).

According to this belief, the historical Buddha Sakyamuni preached all of the above mentioned sutras within his lifetime but in the three periods after his death, as the world goes into successive states of moral decline, the efficacy of his teachings would similarly deteriorate. In the first 1000 years after his death, the Agama sutras would be sufficient to lead people to enlightenment, but as this age waned they would cease to be effective. In the second period of 1000 years the Prajnaparamita sutras would lead people to enlightenment until finally these ceased to be efficacious. Finally, in the third period, only the Flower Garland, Profound Secrets and Lotus Sutras would be suitable for the age of mappo. This concept was not only current in fifth century China, but it carried over with the spread of Buddhism into Japan.
the 13th century, Nichiren would later take this doctrine as a fundamental tenet of his emancipatory philosophy:

There is no doubt that our present age corresponds to the fifth five-hundred-year period described in the Great Collection Sutra, when “the pure Law will become obscured and lost.” But after the pure Law is obscured and lost, the great pure Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the heart and core of the Lotus Sutra, will surely spread and be widely declared throughout the land of Jambudvipa. (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin:541)

Conclusion

What is interesting about the idea of mappo from an historical perspective is that, in a very basic sense, the idea of the degeneration of the Dharma was correct: although the Prajnaparamita and later Mahayana sutras were composed hundreds of years after Sakyamuni’s death, they are representative of successive phases in the development of Buddhist thought and emancipatory theory. These sutras were written precisely because the former teachings had lost their relevance (Conze 1980). Northern Indian Buddhism underwent its transition through Mahayana and later Tantrayana in response to the needs and trends of the times. Again, this can be seen as an example of how an idea, once given semiotic form, becomes nominally independent and is subject to change across time and context. The Dharma, the Buddha and the Sangha, as objects of semiosis, have been represented and interpreted in a wide range of forms according to their relevance to the place and time. All of this has been negotiated through the semiotic ideologies of its adherents in the representational economy of Buddhism in each particular time and place where this belief system has taken root.

By Nichiren's age (C.E. 1222–1282), The Latter Day of the Law was already well under way and the famines, natural disasters, warfare and civil strife that marred the Kamakura period were perceived as indexical signs of this. Nichiren believed his personal mission as a religious reformer was to aid the nation of Japan by leading its people back to what he interpreted as the correct teaching for the age in which they lived, the Lotus Sutra.
Chapter 5: Buddhism in Japan

Buddhism was introduced to Japan via Korea either in C.E. 552 or 538, when the king of the Korean kingdom of Paikche presented the Japanese emperor with an image of the Buddha (Stevens 1988; Eliot 1969). Buddhism was accepted and supported by the imperial court as a practice that would ensure the peace and prosperity of the nation, and as a means of displaying the sophistication and culture of Japan to her continental neighbors (Stevens 1988; Eliot 1969). By this time Buddhism had already been in existence for over a thousand years. It had spread throughout Central and Southeast Asia into China and Korea, and transformed into a myriad of sects. The various strains of Buddhism that found their way into Japan were quite different from the early sangha founded by Sakyamuni, yet they were still ostensibly concerned with the same essential question: how to eradicate suffering and attain enlightenment in this life.

As mentioned above, Buddhism was introduced to Japan through a gift exchanged between kings. This was not at all uncommon historically (Collins 2000; Saso 1990; Stevens 1988); the monastic community has always depended upon wealthy patrons for its financial support and powerful supporters for its protection. In fact, Buddhism in its early phases in Japan was a possession of the State, supported by government funding, to display the sophistication of the Japanese imperial court and safeguard the peace and prosperity of the land through prayer (Stevens 1988; Eliot 1969); the emancipatory aspects of Buddhism were initially of secondary importance to its courtly patrons. In seventh century Japan, the government was still controlled by the imperial household. The Japanese feudal military dictatorship known as the bakufu (shogunate) had not yet asserted itself. By the 13th century in Nichiren’s time, the shogunate had usurped control of all secular affairs and become the de facto government of Japan. Not much attention was paid to the religious practices of the lower classes, who were taught to simply support the monastic community as best they were able with gifts of food, money or cloth: enlightenment was still the preserve of the monks and the well to do (Conze 1980).

Tendai and Japanese Buddhism

After its initial introduction in the sixth century, Japanese Buddhism grew slowly into six well-established sects centered in the capital city of Nara. The six recognized schools of the Nara period (C.E.
710–784) were the Jojitsu, Sanron, Hosso, Kusha, Kegon and Ritsu sects. These were mostly confined to serving the needs of the aristocracy and scholarly pursuit (Stevens 1988; Earhart 1982). However, the growing corruption and interference of these sects in the imperial court eventually became intolerable. As a case in point, the eighth century monk Dōkyō of the Hossō sect, who had managed to ingratiate himself with the retired Empress Kōken, nearly succeeded in having himself installed as emperor. This debacle prompted the Emperor Konin (C.E. 709–782) to institute a series of reforms to curb the influence of the Nara schools and refocus their activity on religious pursuits (Stevens 1988). His successor Emperor Kammu (C.E. 737–806) went even further, eventually deciding it was easier to move the capital elsewhere to escape the meddling of the Nara priests. Heian-kyo (modern day Kyoto) was established as the new imperial capital, in the very shadow of Mt. Hiei.

Enryaku-ji monastery was founded on Mt. Hiei by Saicho (aka, Dengyo Daishi) in C.E. 788. From its inception, Tendai was an eclectic school, accepting of Zen (Ch’an) meditation, Amidism, Shingon and esoteric ritual, all united and illuminated by T’ien-T’ai’s commentaries on the Lotus Sutra (Saso 1990; Stevens 1988; Earhart 1982). When the imperial capital was moved to Kyoto in 794, practically next door to Enryaku-ji, the fledgling monastery received the official sanction of the imperial court. Saicho was sent along with an imperial delegation to mainland China in C.E. 804 specifically so that he could study under and receive dharma-transmission from the T’ien-T’ai School (Saso 1990; Stevens 1988). Under the patronage of Emperor Kammu, Enryaku-ji monastery was granted an independent ordination platform in 806. From this point onwards, the Tendai sect became increasingly influential and involved in secular politics.

Although Tendai Buddhism was a direct transmission of the tradition begun by Chih-I, it absorbed a host of esoteric Tantric Buddhist practices under its third patriarch Jikaku (C.E. 794–864). Like Saicho before him, in C.E. 838 Jikaku also traveled to the mainland to study at Mt. T’ien-T’ai. However, due to the upheavals of the Great Anti-Buddhist Persecution (C.E. 842–846) perpetrated under the rule of Emperor Wuzong of Tang, Jikaku was unable to complete his journey to Mt. T’ien-T’ai and was deported back to Japan in C.E. 847. Jikaku spent his nine years in China studying in Wu-t’ai and Ch’ang-an, which were centers of esoteric Buddhist learning (Saso 1990; Stevens 1988). Jikaku returned to Japan with a
thorough knowledge of Tantric ritual and meditation, as well as the *nembutsu* practice of chanting the name of Amida Buddha\(^\text{15}\), which he popularized at court and taught on Mt. Hiei.

The Tendai institution had a profound influence on the history and development of Japanese Buddhism (Saso 1990; Stevens 1988; Swanson 1986). All of the reformation sects of the Kamakura period (12–13\(^\text{th}\) century) were founded by priests who had broken away from Tendai (Saso 1990; Stevens 1988).

The Soto-Zen tradition founded by Dogen, the Rinzai-Zen lineage founded by Eisai, the Pure Land teachings of Honen, the Jodo Shinsu sect founded by Shinran, and finally Nichiren, had all studied at Enryaku-ji (Saso 1990; Stevens 1988).

By Nichiren’s time, the Tantra and nembutsu had actually eclipsed the Lotus Sutra, both in the Tendai institution as well as in the popular imagination. Temples and statues of Sakyamuni were being converted to the worship of Amida Buddha, and the upper echelons of the Tendai hierarchy had become an exclusive club for the secular elite (Jo 1978). Zen, Ritsu (Precepts), Shingon and Jodo Shinshu (True Word School) were all thoroughly established schools with their own loci of support among commoners and within the government. By the time of Nichiren’s advent, the Nembutsu was thoroughly entrenched in the religious landscape of Japan. His opposition to this practice was both controversial and vehement:

> But I, Nichiren, one man alone, declare that the recitation of the name of Amida Buddha is an action that leads to rebirth in the hell of incessant suffering, that the Zen school is the invention of the heavenly devil, that the True Word school is an evil doctrine that will destroy the country, and that the Precepts school and the observers of the precepts are traitors to the nation. (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin:1016)

**Nichiren (1222–1282)**

Nichiren was born in the remote fishing village of Kominato, on the Pacific coast of the Chiba peninsula, sometime around C.E. 1222. His childhood name was Zennichi-maru, the son of his father Mikuni no Taifu and mother Umegiku-nyo (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002). All of the major religious reformers of the Kamakura era (Dogen, Eisai, Honen, and Shinran) came from wealthy and politically-connected families, except Nichiren. He records that he was the son of an “outcast” fisherman, a member of the lowest caste (Jo 1978). His lowly origins and ability to communicate complicated

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\(^{15}\) The Nembutsu, namu-amida-butsu (“praise to Amida Buddha”) is a mantra recited by Japanese Pure Land Buddhists.
philosophical ideas in simple terms to simple people are factors of his ministry that have always attracted followers.

He first entered the religious life when he was 11 years old at Kiyozumidera, under the tutelage of the priest Dozen, a Tendai initiate and nembutsu practitioner (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Jo 1978). Nichiren was there given an education, instructed in the basics of Tendai doctrine, Pure Land teachings and esoteric practice (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Stone 2001; Jo 1978). At the age of 15 he was ordained by Dozen and given the religious name Zeshobo Rencho. A year later he set off to Kamakura, the political center of Japan at that time. There he studied the basics of Jodo Shinshu and Zen, two sects which would later become his bitter rivals. He quickly discarded the nembutsu practice of his teacher Dozen as he delved deeper into philosophical studies (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Stone 2001; Jo 1978).

From Kamakura he moved onto Mt. Hiei to the northeast of Kyoto, the home of Tendai Buddhism. There Nichiren was disappointed to discover that the upper levels of the priesthood were completely controlled by the aristocracy; only those with secular status were admitted to the inner circles of the most famous teachers (Jo 1978). Nichiren was left to himself to ponder the meaning of the sutras and draw his own conclusions.

Eventually he hit upon the Lotus Sutra as the guiding light through the many contradictions of the Buddhist canon, just as Kumarajiva, Chih-I and Dengyo Daishi had before him. Seizing upon key passages of the Lotus Sutra, he formulated the Daimoku, “namu-myoho-ренге-kyö”, and chanted this mantra to the rising sun (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Stone 2001; Jo 1978). He believed that the Daimoku was the ultimate distillation of all of T’ien-T’ai doctrine, that it had been known to the Buddha, Nāgārjuna, Kumarajiva, Chih-I and even Dengyo, but it had been kept secret, hidden between the lines of the Lotus Sutra, until the proper time for its dissemination in the Latter Day of the Law. It had fallen upon him, a simple priest without precepts, of humble origins, to share the Daimoku with the world. It was at this
point that he took the name Nichiren\textsuperscript{16}, and in C.E. 1253 began his life as a religious reformer with a mission to save the nation from the damning effects of its erroneous views.

\textbf{An Unwelcome Messenger}

He began preaching in earnest, immediately running afoul of Pure Land Buddhists in his home province. His conflict with the priests and laity of other sects was due to his uncompromising stance and complete faith in the veracity of the Lotus Sutra (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Stone 2001, 1994; Jo 1978). He saw himself not as the founder of a new sect but as a reformer attempting to lead the nation back to the original Tendai teachings, which had always placed the Lotus Sutra above all else. He sincerely believed that the calamities facing Japan in his time were symptoms of a great spiritual sickness caused by the malpractice of Buddhism, and that these problems would only magnify if the cause of this sickness was not pulled out by the roots (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin:1260).

His first major work, the \textit{Rissho ankoku ron} (\textit{On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land}), is a clear summation of his ideas on this subject. This essay was written in 1260 as an explication of his theory regarding the malpractice of Buddhism and the disastrous effects this has upon the State. It was written to Hōjō Tokiyori, the former regent (\textit{shikken}) of the shogun and head of the Hōjō clan, who remained even after his retirement the de-facto ruler of the bakufu government. The letter itself is written in the form of a dialectic, a format that Nichiren often employed to instruct readers. In particular the Pure Land sect is repeatedly singled out as the cause of the nation’s misfortune:

\begin{quote}

Nevertheless, this work by the Sage Honen, \textit{Nembutsu Chosen above All}, does in fact exist. And it lumps together all the various Buddhas, sutras, bodhisattvas, and deities, and says that one should “discard, close, ignore, and abandon” them. The meaning of the text is perfectly clear. And as a result of this, the sages have departed from the nation, the benevolent deities have left their dwelling places, hunger and thirst fill the world, and disease and pestilence spread widely. (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin:23)
\end{quote}

Much of this work is concerned with the subject of arming lay followers “with swords and staves” to protect monks who uphold the Lotus Sutra. In this essay Nichiren quotes liberally from the Lotus Sutra and this quotation is instructive on that point.

\textsuperscript{16} The literal translation of his name is Sun (nichi) Lotus (ren), preserving the first character of his religious name, Rencho.
That is why I now give permission for monks who observe the precepts to associate with and keep company with white-robed laymen who bear swords and staves. Even though they carry swords and staves, I would call them men who observe the precepts. But although they may carry swords and staves, they should never use them to take life. (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin:21)

Nichiren gives several quotations from the Benevolent Kings Wisdom sutra, as translated by Kumarajiva in the early fifth century. Here the Buddha is relating a jataka story, a tale from one of his past lives, concerning his previous incarnation as a king and the punishments he meted out to criminals. The quotation below is concerned with the execution of living beings, placing this in a gradation of evil according to the class of being destroyed. The gist of it suggests that killing icchantikas is not only the least offensive of these, but it may even be justified or result in the accretion of merit:

Good men, at that time I cherished the great vehicle teachings in my heart. When I heard the Brahmans slandering these correct and equal sutras, I put them to death on the spot. Good men, as a result of that action, I never thereafter fell into hell... Good men, if someone were to kill an icchantika, that killing would not fall into any of the three categories just mentioned. Good men, the various Brahmans that I have said were put to death—all of them were in fact icchantikas. (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin:19–20)

However, this is simply part of Nichiren’s dialectic style; he stops short of directly calling for the death of non-believers. He later goes on to clarify that if “heretical” priests were simply denied alms, the problem should go away without need for or recourse to violence. Nonetheless, in his later writings Nichiren did on numerous occasions go just as far or even beyond calling for the death of priests who slander the Lotus Sutra and their followers:

…it is stated that, if a person acts as an enemy of the Lotus Sutra, then to put such a person to death is to perform an act of outstanding merit. (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin:1019)

In addition to the problems he laid at the feet of Amidists, Nichiren predicted worse things would befall the nation if these “heretical” priests were not immediately censored:

...of the seven types of disasters described in the Medicine Master Sutra, five have already occurred. Only two have yet to appear, the calamity of invasion from foreign lands and the calamity of revolt within one’s own domain. And of the three calamities mentioned in the Great Collection Sutra, two have already made their appearance. Only one remains, the disaster of warfare. (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin:24)

17 A person who cherishes only secular values and does not believe in Buddhism nor aspire for enlightenment. It can also mean one who slanders the correct teaching of the Buddha and does not repent or rectify their error. In this sense it refers to those who profess belief for selfish ends and personal gain (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002).
His letter was met with silence by Tokiyori. However, a month after writing this essay, a mob of Nembutsu followers, angry over Nichiren’s call for the suppression of their sect, attacked his hut, apparently with deadly intention (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Jo 1978). Somehow Nichiren was able to escape and find refuge in the province of Shimosa with a follower, Toki Tanetsugu. In the spring of C.E. 1261 he returned to Kamakura to continue teaching but was almost immediately exiled to the Izu peninsula. This would not be the only time that Nichiren would face banishment for his uncompromising and rather inflammatory ideals.

Nichiren spent two years in exile, the experience of which only seemed to deepen his faith and resolve. He was released in C.E. 1263 and returned to his home province of Kominato to visit his parents. He was also hoping to convert his old teacher Dozen (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Jo 1978). He succeeded in converting a number of junior priests at Kiyozumidera, but Dozen was firm in his faith and would not abandon the nembutsu. His stay in Kominato swelled the ranks of his followers but in C.E. 1264 he and a group of followers were ambushed on the road to Matsugahara, causing him to flee the province (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Jo 1978).

Nichiren spent the next several years teaching in the nearby provinces of Awa, Kazusa and Shimosa (Jo 1978). During this time he began to teach his growing body of followers to chant the Daimoku as a replacement for the nembutsu practice of chanting praise to Amida Buddha. He believed that chanting the Daimoku was the most suitable practice for people living in the degenerate age of mappo, and that they would accrue far greater fortune from this than through the study of complicated philosophical doctrine (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Jo 1978).

It is interesting that Nichiren was not opposed to the basic practice of reciting mantras, a decidedly tantric practice. For Nichiren it seems that the methods were not as important as the meaning behind them. The Daimoku praises the Lotus Sutra, whereas the nembutsu gives praise to Amida Buddha; chanting itself was not the problem, giving praise to what he saw as an incorrect object of veneration was what troubled him. In semiotic terms, it was not the material form of the nembutsu that he was opposed to, but the object of its signification. It must also be admitted that chanting is a very accessible religious discipline. Chanting
does not require years of lengthy practice to master; all that it requires is the ability to memorize and repeat a short incantation. For common people who did not have the time or perhaps even the capacity for meditation or study, Nichiren must have understood the efficacy of chanting. The popularity of the nembutsu across all strata of society in Japan at that time was an ample testament to this. The Daimoku of Nichiren was appealed to the faith of ordinary people and acted as a counter against or replacement for the nembutsu.

**Apocalyptic Prophet**

Further events magnified the number of both Nichiren’s followers and his enemies. In C.E. 1268, shortly after Nichiren had returned to Kamakura, the first of two letters from Kublai Khan threatening invasion reached the bakufu government and a tremor ran through all of Japan. Nichiren's prophesy of foreign invasion was being fulfilled, and subsequently the number of his followers swelled (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Jo 1978). Nichiren penned a postscript to the *Rissho ankoku ron*, and reissued his warning to the government, unabashedly calling for the immediate execution of heretical priests:

> All the Nembutsu and Zen temples, such as Kencho-ji, Jufuku-ji, Gokuraku-ji, Daibutsuden, Choraku-ji, should be burned to the ground, and their priests taken to Yui Beach [in Kamakura] to have their head cut off. If this is not done, then Japan is certain to be destroyed! (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin:579)

In C.E. 1271 the region was devastated by drought. Though the Shingon-Ritsu priests had under government orders been praying for rain, none was forthcoming. Nichiren challenged Ninsho, head of the Shingon-Ritsu, to produce rain within one month. If rain fell, Nichiren would become a follower of Ninsho; if no rain came, then Ninsho and his priests were to become Nichiren's followers (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Jo 1978). No rain came and Nichiren gained a powerful enemy, but again his reputation as a prophet grew.

Later that year he was formally accused of leading his followers to arm themselves and destroy images of Amida and Kannon, among other things. This and later incidents in conjunction with his own
writings on the subject clearly suggest that Nichiren was indeed advocating direct action on the part of his followers (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Jo 1978).

It was at this point that he began exhorting his followers to practice shakubuku (“break and subdue”), conversion through direct confrontation and refutation of “erroneous views”:

When the country is full of evil people without wisdom, then shōju\(^{18}\) is the primary method to be applied, as described in the “Peaceful Practices” chapter [of the Lotus Sutra]. But at a time when there are many people of perverse views who slander the Law, then shakubuku should come first, as described in the “Never Disparaging” chapter [of the sutra]. (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin:285)

Unfortunately, with the specter of war looming overhead, the bakufu government had ordered the suppression of any unruly elements and they found Nichiren's actions clearly seditious. He was taken into custody and exiled to Sado Island on September 12, 1272 (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Jo 1978). Many of his followers were imprisoned or exiled, and faced with such consequences many more renounced their faith.

Shortly after Nichiren's exile to Sado Island, a violent rift within the powerful Hōjō clan resulted in a bloody civil conflict, seemingly fulfilling his prophesy of internal rebellion and internecine strife. Shortly thereafter, his imprisoned followers were released and pardoned. Nichiren saw this as both divine punishment against the government and a sign that his warnings were starting to be taken seriously (Jo 1979). His followers in Kamakura resumed their evangelical efforts and preaching in earnest and won many influential converts.

Nichiren was released from exile and returned to Kamakura in C.E. 1274, unbowed and unbroken by his years on Sado Island. In fact, during his time there Nichiren gained an influential convert from the ruling clan, Hōjō Tokimori, who sent Nichiren a pair of swords as a sign of his faith (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Jo 1978). In Kamakura, Nichiren was finally given audience with Taira Yoritsuna, the head of the retainers to the Shogun and chief of the Hōjō clan. Yoritsuna was unable to accommodate Nichiren's demand for the censure of the Zen, Pure Land and Shingon sects, and Nichiren was unable to compromise his ideals (Stone 1994). Rather than turn his movement over in cooperation with

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\(^{18}\)Teaching according to the capacity of listeners in order to gradually lead them to Buddhism without need for directly refuting their ideas, the opposite of shakubuku.
his rivals and enemies to support the war effort, Nichiren chose instead to retreat to Mt. Minobu (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Jo 1978).

Five months after his retreat to Minobu, the Mongol fleet arrived on the shores of Japan. A typhoon wiped out the majority of their fleet, but the invasion served to fulfill Nichiren’s prophesy and lent weight to his warnings of divine punishment. He predicted further invasions; after the second Mongol invasion in 1281 which again was thwarted by a timely storm (*kamikaze*, literally, “divine wind”) Nichiren again warned that the Mongol threat was not over. He likened Japan before the Mongols to a fish on a chopping block, and asked if Japan had really won against them, why it was that no one had taken Kublai Khan’s head (Jo 1979).

**Later Years**

The last years of his life were spent on Mt. Minobu teaching his disciples and writing letters to his many followers. Nichiren was a prolific writer and he wrote often to his followers to give them guidance and encouragement, especially in regards to maintaining their faith in the face of opposition from feudal lords and family members. Hundreds of his letters have survived in their original form and many hundreds more survive as preserved copies. After his death in C.E. 1281, his six senior disciples- Nissho, Nichiro, Nikko, Niko, Nitcho, and Nichiji- dispersed throughout Japan to found their own temples and spread their masters’ teachings (Jo 1979). An agreement was struck between them to share the position of head priest, serving terms of service in rotation at the Minobu monastery (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002).

A year after Nichiren’s funeral, Niko returned to Minobu to oversee the community of monks and laity there. During Niko’s term as head priest however, the steward of the area and one of Nichiren’s followers, Hakiri Sanenaga, purportedly commissioned a statue of Sakyamuni Buddha, made pilgrimages to Shinto shrines, and made financial contributions for erecting a tower of the Pure Land (Jodo) School. Nikko repeatedly warned Niko that allowing such acts without opposition contradicted Nichiren’s teachings, but to no avail (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002). Nikko eventually split with Niko and the other five disciples, citing acts of heresy that he could neither condone nor control. This was the first schism within the Nichiren School (Stone 1994).
Nikko established a temple (the *Dai-bo* or “Grand Lodging”) on a tract of land donated by a wealthy lay believer in the shadow of Mt. Fuji (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002). This eventually grew into the grand temple complex of Taiseki-ji, and came to be known as the Fuji School of Nichiren Buddhism (Stone 1994). The Nichiren Shoshu maintains that their founder Nikko was the legitimate heir of Nichiren's lineage. To substantiate their claims, they cite their possession of the Dai Gohonzon inscribed by Nichiren, some of the ashes and relics of the Daishonin, and two letters (not in the original but “true copies”) dated nine days prior to and on the day of Nichiren's death, designating Nikko as his successor (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002). It is also worth noting that, of the various schools of Nichiren Buddhism which grew up around his surviving disciples, the Nichiren Shoshu has a reputation for being the most isolated, conservative and uncompromising in their ideals, characteristics which were later inherited by the Soka Gakkai (Stone 1994).

**Conclusion**

Nichiren’s most notable contribution to the development of Japanese Buddhist thought is his identification of religious practice as something trans-personal, of national interest (Stone 1994, 2003; Eliot 1969). This is an extension of Chih-I’s doctrine of the Three-thousand Realms in a Single Moment of Life (ichinen-sazzen) taken to its logical (if extreme) conclusion. Nichiren is also notable for establishing the first and perhaps only purely Japanese sect of Buddhism; unlike his contemporaries, Nichiren never traveled to mainland China to transmit the teachings in vogue there to Japan.

Another distinctive aspect of Nichiren’s doctrine is that his literal interpretation of the Lotus Sutra imbued his faith with an assertiveness and exclusivity that borderers on intolerance. This was not peculiar only to Nichiren; a precedent for such exclusivity can be seen in Honen’s Pure Land teachings, and even within the Tendai School (Stone 1994, 1999). What is unique to the exclusivist stance of Nichiren Buddhism is how it integrates propagation and confrontation with competing ideologies directly and explicitly into its doctrine of correct practice (Stone 1994). The Buddhism of Nichiren is politically

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19 The legitimacy of these letters is contested by the other Nichiren sects; accusations of forgery and falsification of Nichiren’s letters were a common component of the schisms that splintered Nichiren’s reform movement (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Stone 1994; Jo 1978).
engaged, perceiving a direct relationship between the religious practice of the people and the state of the nation (Stone 1994, 2003). Nichiren wanted to establish his sect as the national religion of Japan to the exclusion of all others; in this he sincerely felt that he was acting in the best interests of the nation as a whole.

Nichiren's vision went even beyond the shores of Japan however, and he perceived the Daimoku, giving praise to the Lotus Sutra, as the key to the enlightenment of all humanity. In spite of the predominant view of the world's decline in mappo, the “age of perversion”, he posited a world-redeeming faith in the Lotus Sutra that emphasized the active responsibility of each individual to contribute to the betterment of their world. Nearly 650 years after his death, this ethos of vigorous evangelism coupled with uncompromising faith was rediscovered and found modern expression in the Soka Gakkai.

The Three Treasures of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism

The Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin, like all other forms of Buddhism before or since, interpreted the Three Treasures in a manner unique to itself. Each of the nine branches of Nichiren Buddhism defines these Three Treasures and the Three Great Secret Laws (see below) slightly differently. Of these nine sects, only the Nichiren Shoshu is of direct interest to the present study, as they are the sect to which the Soka Gakkai was allied for the first 60 years of the Gakkai’s history, up until their schism and excommunication in 1991.

Within the Nichiren Shoshu we can see a peculiar development in the definition of the Buddha. In most sects of Buddhism, the Object of this sign has always been Sakyamuni. In Nichiren Shoshu however, Nichiren himself is identified as the True Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law. This is in keeping with the idea of there being a Buddha for each age of the Dharma: according to this idea, Sakyamuni was the Buddha of the Former Age; T’ien-T’ai Chih-I was the Buddha of the Middle period; and in the age of mappo, Nichiren appeared to propagate “True Buddhism” throughout the world. The Buddha Sakyamuni is

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20 It should be noted here that the Nichiren Shoshu is unique in this interpretation of Nichiren as the True Buddha; the other Nichiren sects maintain Śākyamuni as the Buddha of the Three Treasures, and present Nichiren as a manifestation of Bodhisattva Medicine King, who is depicted leading the Bodhisattvas of the Earth in the Lotus Sutra.
still revered, but of the various teachings ascribed to him, only the Lotus Sutra is regarded as appropriate for the degenerate age of mappo.

The Dharma is considered to be the Lotus Sutra, specifically the second and sixteenth chapters. In Nichiren Shoshu ritual practice, only the prose section of the second chapter and the prose and verse sections of the sixteenth are recited daily.\(^{21}\) The reasons for this are outlined in Nichiren's own writings:

I have written out the prose section of the “Expedient Means” chapter for you. You should recite it together with the verse portion of the “Lifespan” chapter, which I sent you earlier. (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin:486)

Everything has its essential point, and the heart of the Lotus Sutra is its title, or the daimoku, of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Truly, if you chant this in the morning and evening, you are correctly reading the entire Lotus Sutra. (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin:923)

Nichiren’s Gosho essentially take the place of the Dharma, containing as they do Nichiren’s interpretations of the sutras. Based upon his analysis of these, Nichiren posited the existence of “Three Great Secret Laws” (sandaihiho). These are considered “secret” because they are not explicitly stated in the sutras or in the writings of subsequent masters such as Nāgārjuna, Vasubhandu, Kumarajiva, Chih-I, or Saicho, but were in his estimation, tacitly implied. For example, The Treatise on the Lotus Sutra, attributed to Vasubhandu, contains a passage in praise of the “three treasures” of the Lotus Sutra that Nichiren may have interpreted as indicating the Three Great Secret Laws. Also, the characters which represent the phrase “namu-myoho-renge-kyo” can be found in several places in The Method of Repentance through the Lotus Meditation, a Chinese text usually attributed either to T’ien-T’ai or to his teacher Hui-ssu (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin:75). Furthermore, Chih-I wrote extensive commentaries and gave lectures on the significance of the title of the Lotus Sutra\(^ {22}\) (Hurvitz 1963): Daimoku literally means “title”, and is the recitation of the title of the Lotus Sutra (Jpn myōhō-renge-kyō) with the addition of the word namu, from the Sanskrit namas, meaning “devotion”.

The Three Great Secret Laws of Nichiren Buddhism are: (1) the object of veneration of the essential teaching (the Dai-Gohonzon, a mandala of Chinese and Sanskrit characters inscribed on wood); (2) the invocation of the essential teaching (chanting the Daimoku, namu-myōhō-renge-kyō); and (3) the

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\(^{21}\) The “Expedient Means” and “Life Span” Chapters of the Lotus Sutra.
\(^{22}\) Sankrit, Saddharma-pun-darika-sutra; Chinese, Miao-fa-lien-hua-ching.
Kaidan, the ordination platform, the sanctuary of the essential teaching (kokuritsu no kaidan), where the object of veneration of the true teaching (the Dai-Gohonzon) will be enshrined. The Kaidan is where priests would take their vows to uphold the precepts and chant to the Dai-Gohonzon. The Three Treasures and Three Great Secret Laws are the primary signs around which Nichiren Buddhism is built, and over which the Nichiren Shoshu and the Soka Gakkai contend.

The Kaidan was never established in Nichiren's lifetime. The Kaidan was originally intended to be built under government orders after the entire nation of Japan had been converted to the practice of Nichiren Buddhism (Stone 2003). This act of conversion, which would begin in Japan and eventually extend throughout the entire world, is termed kosen-rufu, which literally means to declare and spread widely (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002). In the meantime, the Dai-Gohonzon was enshrined at Taiseki-ji until such time as the whole nation of Japan would be converted and the Kaidan could be established.

Finally, the sangha as it is understood by the Nichiren Shoshu is the clergy, presided over by the high priest. According to the Nichiren Shoshu, all religious authority was vested in Nichiren's disciple Nikko and extends through the lineage of the high priests of Taiseki-ji. The presiding high priest effectively stands in as Nichiren's representative. All matters of faith and doctrinal interpretation are under the purview of the high priest (Metraux 1992). This creates a clear delineation between the priests, who are charged with protecting an orthodox interpretation of the Three Treasures, and the laity who require the guidance of priests for their own spiritual practice.

To put the above into semiotic terms, the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood see themselves as the symbolic, and indexical representamen of the Sangha. They are symbolic in that their connection to the Sangha is supported primarily through argument, based on the assumed legitimacy of letters by Nichiren entrusting the leadership of his movement to Nikko. In the same sense, the high priest serves as an iconic/symbolic representamen of the Buddha vis-a-vis his indexical relationship to Nichiren. Their role as a body is to regulate and oversee the semiotic processes surrounding Nichiren’s Dharma, primarily the Three Treasures and the Three Great Secret Laws.
The Soka Gakkai later challenged the role and legitimacy of the priesthood as the sole interpreters of Nichiren’s doctrine. The disagreements between these two groups over the fine points of the Three Treasures and the Three Great Secret Laws were such an existential threat to the Nichiren Shoshu that a schism became inevitable. Ultimately, the priesthood felt it necessary to cut off the SGI before they were themselves consumed by the very organization they had helped to form. The next chapter deals with the history of the Soka Gakkai, the schism, and the resulting rearrangement of the Three Treasures and the Three Great Secret Laws within the SGI’s representational economy.
Chapter 6: The Soka Gakkai

The Soka Gakkai is a Japanese Nichiren Buddhist lay organization formerly associated with the Nichiren Shoshu. Its three founding presidents, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Josei Toda and Daisaku Ikeda have each lead the organization through distinct periods of growth and development up to the present day. Up until November, 1991, the Soka Gakkai was officially sanctioned by the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood at Taiseki-ji; following the rift in their relationship, the SGI (Soka Gakkai International) has continued its activities and expansion world-wide, independently of the priesthood. In this section the careers of the SGI's three founding presidents will be summarized and in so doing its historical development as an organization can be briefly detailed.

Foundation

The Soka Gakkai was founded on November 18, 1930 by Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944) and his student Josei Toda (1900–1958) (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Bethel 1973). Makiguchi encountered the Lotus Sutra and converted to Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism at the age of fifty-seven in 1928, just a few years before Japan invaded Manchuria and the outbreak of the Second World War. The Nichiren Shoshu at this time was not a sect of any great power or influence within Japan (Stone 1994); up until the early 1900's the Nichiren Shoshu had no more than about forty temples under its jurisdiction (Nakano et. al. 1992).

Makiguchi was a teacher and educational reformer who wrote about “value-creating education”. The Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Value Creating Educational Society) which he and Toda founded was based on the principles of value-creation pedagogy espoused by Makiguchi. His inspiration for this was found in the Lotus Sutra and the writings of Nichiren Daishonin. Briefly stated, Makiguchi’s theory of value-creation was based on the belief that the traditional Kantian triad of “Goodness, Beauty and Truth” should be amended to “Goodness, Beauty and Benefit”. Makiguchi believed that not all that is true is of use or benefit

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23 The reason why Makiguchi should have chosen the Nichiren Shoshu and not one of its competing sectarian rivals such as the Nichiren Shu is a question open for debate. One has to question what the form and future of the Soka Gakkai would have been had Makiguchi aligned himself with a different sect of Nichiren Buddhism.
to mankind and society (Bethel 1973), and he wanted to reform the educational system to create holistic people. Toda, who was also an educator and followed Makiguchi's example of joining the Nichiren Shoshu, published Makiguchi's writings. Their first publication, *The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy*, printed on November 18, 1930 marks the foundation of the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai. It was also under this name that the future works of the society would be published by Toda (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002).

Originally the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai was primarily a group of educators concerned with implementing Makiguchi's proposed reforms to the national school curriculum. They met informally up until 1937, when their inaugural ceremony was held in Tokyo with sixty members attending. By their second general meeting in 1940, the membership of the Gakkai had grown to three or four hundred (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002). At this time, the content of their meetings had come to focus more on the practice and benefits of Nichiren Buddhism and the Gakkai was taking on a more religious character. Recruitment was stepped up substantially at this point as the membership of the Gakkai swelled to some three thousand in the early 1940's (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002).

In 1941, the Peace Preservation Law of 1925 was completely rewritten, expanding its scope to include religious organizations under the watchful eyes of the Special Higher Police (*Tokubetsu Koto Keisatsu*), a police force established by the military government in 1911 to investigate and control dissident political groups within Japan (Mitchell 1976). An earlier edict had been issued by the government commanding all religious groups and denominations to support the war effort by encouraging their laity to purchase Shinto talismans to the Sun Goddess Tensho Daijin and install these in their homes (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Metraux 1992; Murata 1969). Furthermore, all places of worship were to set an example by enshrining these amulets in their temples. This was seen by Makiguchi as anathema to the teachings of Nichiren and so in 1943 he was arrested and detained by police for a week under suspicion of thought crime (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Bethel 1973). The leaders of the Soka Gakkai, Makiguchi and Toda in particular, were later called to Taiseki-ji, where they were pressured by the priesthood to submit to government demands. Makiguchi and Toda spoke out angrily in opposition citing that doing so would be a violation of Nichiren's teachings (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Metraux 1992; Bethel 1973; Murata 1969). This resulted in their excommunication and expulsion from the
temple grounds. This event was the first major point of conflict between the Soka Gakkai and the Nichiren Shoshu in their history of contentious cooperation and conflict. The twenty-one leaders of the Soka Gakkai, including Makiguchi and Toda, were imprisoned in July 1943 under charge of violation of the Peace Preservation Law of 1925 and *lese majeste* against the emperor (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Stone 1994; Bethel 1973; Murata 1969). Makiguchi, already seventy-three years old and of failing health at the time of his arrest, did not survive and died in prison on November 18, 1944.

**Reformulation**

Josei Toda spent his time in prison immersed in study of the Lotus Sutra, chanting Daimoku and meditation. During this time, he reports having a revelation as to the true meaning of the Buddha, which he relates as being equivalent with Life itself (Strand, “Buddha as Life”; Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002). Furthermore, he came to identify himself with the events described in the Lotus Sutra, particularly with the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, and resolved himself to widely propagate the sutra's teachings by reconstructing the organization he founded with Makiguchi. He was released on parole on July 3, 1945, just one month before the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In the bloody aftermath of WWII, Japan was a fertile ground for the spread of Nichiren's message. During his imprisonment, the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai had dissolved; most of the members had renounced their association with the organization after the leadership was arrested. Toda renamed the organization *Soka Gakkai*, dropping the “Kyoiku” (Education) from the name to reflect its shift from a society of educators to one that embraced all sectors of society. In 1951, he was elected the society's second president and announced his determination to expand the membership from 3,000 to 750,000 households, which was exceeded in just 6 years (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Stone 1994). With the massive influx of donations from new members, Toda had a new Grand Lecture Hall built and donated to Taiseki-ji. The new hall was commemorated on March 16, 1958 at a gathering of six thousand young members, to whom he entrusted the propagation of Nichiren's teachings (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002; Murata 1969). Josei Toda died just two weeks later on April 2, 1958.
Expansion Abroad

Daisaku Ikeda was named the successor of Josei Toda and second president of the Soka Gakkai on May 3, 1960. In January 1975, Ikeda presided over the First International Buddhist League World Peace Conference in Guam. This organization was later renamed the Soka Gakkai International (SGI) and Ikeda was elected its first president. Under Ikeda’s leadership, the Soka Gakkai has undergone its greatest period of growth, expanding from the 750,000 household base established in Toda’s time, into an international organization that claims more than 12 million members in upwards of 183 countries and territories worldwide. The SGI was also embroiled in a string of conflicts with the Nichiren Shoshu, arguably beginning in 1977 (Metraux 1980), which ultimately led to the excommunication of the Soka Gakkai and its affiliated international chapters in November, 1991 (Metraux 1992). Ikeda officially held the position of president of the Soka Gakkai until April 24, 1979 when he suddenly and unexpectedly resigned under pressure from Taiseki-ji (Metraux 1980). Following his resignation, he was given the title of “Honorary President” and in this capacity he has continued his role as the spiritual leader of the organization up to the present day.

The Soka Gakkai first arrived in America in the 1950’s with the Japanese wives of American servicemen (some of whom were successfully converted by their wives) who had relocated with their husbands to the United States (Hammond and Machacek 1999a; Prebish 1999). In October 1960, shortly after his inauguration as president of the Soka Gakkai, Ikeda traveled to North and South America in order to meet with and encourage members living abroad. At this time, the Soka Gakkai established itself in the United States under the name of “Nichiren Shoshu America” or NSA. Initially meetings were conducted in Japanese and primarily attended by Japanese-American members, but by 1963 the proportion of non-Japanese members had grown large enough that meetings began to be held in English (Hammond and Machacek 1999a). It was in this manner that the Soka Gakkai gained its initial foothold in the U.S.

In 1963, the Soka Gakkai, rebranded in America as the NSA, opened the doors of its new headquarters in Los Angeles (Prebish 1999). The NSA was essentially an international branch of the Soka Gakkai and took its cues from the leadership in Japan. The NSA in this era was headed by Vice President George Williams (originally Masayasu Sadanaga), who moved to the U.S. in 1957 and was appointed by Ikeda to lead the organization in the United States (Hammond and Machacek 1999a).
The NSA’s organizational structure and coordinated recruitment drives allowed it to spread rapidly across the United States, reaching a peak of 7,500 new members per month in 1969 (Prebish 1999). The organization’s ethos of self-empowerment, its social dynamism, and the appeal of its assertive truth claims to the disenfranchised, are some of factors of its early success (Hurst 1992). Nichiren Shoshu temples were founded to serve the needs of the growing lay-community. However, recruitment far outstripped the rate at which temples could be built, further contributing to the growing autonomy of the SGI generally and the NSA specifically. By 1991, there were only six Nichiren Shoshu temples in the U.S., all of which were retained by the priesthood after the schism.

The Schism, its Roots and Ramifications

As mentioned earlier, in 1979 Daisaku Ikeda was forced to quit the position of president of the Soka Gakkai under pressure from Taiseki-ji. At the time of Ikeda's resignation, the Soka Gakkai had grown from 750,000 households in 1958 to nearly 8 million in Japan alone (Metraux 1980). Furthermore, under the banner of the SGI, founded in 1975, the organization had spread internationally and was growing rapidly in the U.S. and Brazil. There can be little doubt that the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood benefited greatly by this sudden increase in membership, and the financial donations that came with it (Metraux 1992, 1980). The Soka Gakkai contributed to the purchase and donation of land and temples for the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood, including the construction of the Daikyakuden (Grand Reception Hall) in 1964, and the Sho-Hondo, the main hall of Taiseki-ji built to house the Dai-Gohonzon, in 1972.

However, the priesthood was unable to keep pace with the explosive growth of the Soka Gakkai. Even in the early 1940's, Toda was predicting that the Gakkai would strain the capacity of the priesthood to meet the needs of a rapidly growing membership:

The priesthood’s leadership methods and ways of conducting religious affairs in the past will probably be insufficient to bring the True Law to the ordinary people of today and tomorrow. Furthermore, the clergy is too limited in number to provide leadership for large numbers of believers. To compensate for these weaknesses, a large lay organization is essential. (Ikeda 1977:42)

As the organization grew, meeting halls called kaikan were established throughout Japan and abroad to meet members’ needs for group activities and religious services. These kaikan functioned
independently of the priesthood and were a serious challenge to their authority over and control of the Soka Gakkai membership in Japan and internationally (Metraux 1980). As the Gakkai began to curb the amount of money channeled to the priesthood in order to establish more of these kaikans, the construction of new temples was slowed; this caused considerable anxiety among the junior priests whose future livelihood depended on the expansion of the Nichiren-Shoshu temple network (Metraux 1992).

The Sho-Hondo

One of the Three Great Secret Treasures of Nichiren Buddhism is the Kaidan, the ordination platform. The construction of the Sho-Hondo, a massive 6,000-seat meeting hall built to house the Dai-Gohonzon on the grounds of Taiseki-ji, challenged traditional interpretations of the Kaidan and kosen-rufu. Completed in 1972 and funded almost entirely with money donated by Soka Gakkai members, at the time totaling 35.5 billion yen, the Sho-Hondo was the symbol of the SGI’s success and growing autonomy (Metraux 1980; Soka Gakkai International-USA, "A Time of Destruction: Sho-Hondo Awaits Its Fate.").

One of Ikeda's boldest challenges to orthodoxy was redefining the Kaidan and kosen-rufu and as it applied to Japan. The priesthood had traditionally defined kosen-rufu as the conversion of every Japanese citizen; the kokuritsu no-kaidan (state-built hall of worship) could not be established until the conversion of the Japanese people to “True Buddhism” (the practice of Nichiren Shoshu doctrine and the abandonment of competing ideologies) had been completed. Ikeda redefined kosen-rufu from the conversion of the whole population, to the conversion of one-third of the population, referencing the principle of Shae no san-oku (one-third of Shavasti), an idea attributed to Nāgārjuna (Murata 1969). The rationale behind this was that if one-third of the population practiced True Buddhism, and another third supported the Soka Gakkai through their political wing, the Komeito (Clean Government) party, then the goal of kosen-rufu in Japan could be considered effectively achieved, providing justification for the construction of the Kaidan (Murata 1969).

This revision on Ikeda's part is an interesting case of moderation or softening of ideals in a tradition that has historically been associated with uncompromising idealism. It is a concession that allows for other competing ideologies to co-exist with Nichiren Buddhism on the same soil. Ikeda also changed the traditional expression of the Kaidan to honmon no-kaidan (Kaidan of the True Teaching) in the early
years of his presidency of the Soka Gakkai. Ikeda argued that there was no doctrinal base for the use of the exact wording *kokuritsu no-kaidan* in the Gosho (Murata 1969). The change in terminology was political and helped to alleviate a growing fear that the Soka Gakkai was attempting to establish Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism as the state religion through the influence of the Komeito party (Murata 1969). Given the challenges posed to Nichiren’s exclusive truth claims by modern, pluralistic sensibilities (Stone 2003, 1994), Ikeda’s redefinition of kosen-rufu made this goal realistically attainable. At the same time, there were conservative elements within the Nichiren Shoshu who perceived these changes as acts of heresy (Metraux 1992, 1980), so these doctrinal revisions were not universally popular among the faithful.

In the eyes of the Soka Gakkai, their phenomenal successes in the political arena, and in winning millions of converts in the 1960’s, signaled that the time for the construction of the Kaidan had arrived. Upon its completion in 1972, the Sho-Hondo became the center point of Taiseki-ji and was used to house the Dai-Gohonzon for over twenty years. The completion of the Sho-Hondo had enormous symbolic significance for the Soka Gakkai; it signaled the realization of Nichiren’s dream, the coming of his kingdom on earth. Members in Japan and abroad were greatly encouraged to join organized pilgrimages (*tozan*) to Taiseki-Ji to visit the Sho-Hondo and chant before the Dai-Gohonzon. It was about this time that some within the Nichiren Shoshu began to speak of “Ikeda-ism”, that elements within the Soka Gakkai had come to deify their leader (Metraux 1980). In fact, Ikeda had already eclipsed the high priest in the hearts and minds of the Soka Gakkai, a fact that posed an existential threat to the high priest’s status as the spiritual leader of Nichiren Buddhism. The *Shoshinkai* (Correct Faith Association), an organization of ultra-conservative priests and lay believers within the Nichiren-Shoshu, was formed specifically as a foil against the Soka Gakkai’s reforms (Metraux 1992, 1980). The 200 priests and associated lay believers of the Shoshinkai were excommunicated in 1980 by 67th high priest Nikken Abe, specifically for their refusal to desist from holding a rally against the Soka Gakkai. This same Nikken Abe was the same high priest who would order the excommunication of the Soka Gakkai eleven years later in 1991.
The Breaking Point

Seven years after the completion of the Sho-Hondo, under pressure from the priesthood, Ikeda suddenly resigned from his position as president of the Soka Gakkai. If this move by the priesthood was designed to break Ikeda's hold on the organization, it was unsuccessful. After his resignation, Ikeda retained the title of “Honorary President” and in this role continued openly to lead the Soka Gakkai in both spiritual and worldly affairs.

The final break in relations between the priesthood and the Gakkai began in December 1990, and reached its climax on the eighth of November 1991 with a formal letter from Taiseki-ji ordering the disbanding of the Soka Gakkai (Metraux 1992). The crisis began when audio tapes of a leaders meeting found their way into the hands of the Nichiren Shoshu administration. In these tapes Daisaku Ikeda was alleged to have made insulting comments regarding the priesthood and their place in the Soka Gakkai's movement. This resulted in an exchange of letters between Taiseki-ji demanding explanation, and Soka Gakkai president Akiya requesting dialogue on the matter. On December 27, 1990, the Nichiren Shoshu council announced their decision to relieve Ikeda and other Soka Gakkai leaders of their posts and further threatened to take action against any Gakkai members who criticized the Nichiren Shoshu head priest (Metraux 1992). Finally on November 8, 1991, Taiseki-ji formally excommunicated the Soka Gakkai and its affiliated international chapters. Both sides have continued a war of words to this day, spreading allegations of corruption and heresy against each other.

The rift between the Nichiren Shoshu and the Soka Gakkai appears on the surface as a struggle for control over a massive and rapidly expanding organization. The priesthood saw the Soka Gakkai as a subsidiary organization working on their own behalf to spread Nichiren's message as it is preserved in the Nichiren Shoshu tradition. This may in fact have been the nature of the arrangement between the priesthood and the Soka Gakkai under the presidency of Makiguchi. However, at least since the presidency of Josei Toda, the Soka Gakkai has seen itself as an autonomous movement with its own spiritual mandate handed down to them by Nichiren. The forcible separation of the SGI from the priesthood in 1991 has only heightened their sense of independence:
In light of the Daishonin's teachings, the words of the successive high priests and, most of all, the actual proof seen today in the global spread of the Daishonin's Buddhism, the Soka Gakkai has never been merely a group of lay believers belonging to Nichiren Shoshu, but a Buddhist order directly connected to the Daishonin. (Soka Gakkai International-USA, "Answers to Commonly Asked Questions About the New Nichikan Gohonzon.")

Underlying the conflict between the high priests and the charismatic Ikeda, there has always been a deeper ideological rift between the two groups over which neither could compromise. Ultimately their differences find expression in their respective definitions of the Three Treasures, particularly in their definitions of the sangha and the Three Great Secret Laws.

The Sho-Hondo, the symbol of the Soka Gakkai's triumph, was demolished on the grounds that it was “structurally unsound” in 1998. Comments made by the High Priest Nikken Abe make it clear that the underlying reason for the Sho-Hondo's destruction was a desire to remove any traces of the Soka Gakkai from Taiseki-ji (Soka Gakkai International-USA, "Destruction of the Grand Main Temple."). The Sho-Hondo, to the priesthood, had become a monument to the Soka Gakkai and a representation of ideas that were seen by them as heretical. Destroying the Sho-Hondo and replacing it with the Hoando, a temple-structure built along more traditional lines, was symbolic of the priesthood’s rejection of the Soka Gakkai’s influence on temple traditions and a return to conservative orthodoxy.

Aftermath

Currently, more than twenty years after their break with the Nichiren Shoshu, the SGI claims a membership of 12 million adherents in 192 countries and territories (Soka Gakkai International, "History of SGI"). The growth of the SGI has clearly leveled-out somewhat since the explosive growth it experienced in the 1970's and 1980's, but it has nonetheless continued to grow in spite of its split with the priesthood. In America, what began in the 1960’s as a predominantly Japanese immigrant-Buddhist lay organization has grown to become the most ethnically-diverse form of Buddhism in the U.S. (Hammond and Machacek
1999a; Prebish 1999; Hurst 1992). At present the SGI-USA claims a membership of approximately 352,000 throughout the United States and Canada.\(^{24}\)

After the schism with the priesthood, the Nichiren Shoshu of America (NSA) changed its name to SGI-USA, aligning the American organization closely with the newly-independent SGI. The temples and land-holdings donated to the Nichiren Shoshu in the United States remained in the hands of the priesthood and remain so today.\(^{25}\) The SGI-USA maintains a national headquarters in Santa Monica, California. There was some initial loss of membership as those who were loyal to the priesthood sided with the Nichiren Shoshu, particularly in areas surrounding Nichiren Shoshu temples, but for the most part the Soka Gakkai membership in the U.S. has not been particularly affected by the schism (Prebish 1999; Hurst 1998). In SGI-USA communities, the functions of ordination and officiating at weddings and funerals formerly conducted by priests were taken over by Soka Gakkai leaders (Seager 2001).

**The Three Treasures of the Soka Gakkai**

The ultimate source of the conflict between the Soka Gakkai and the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood is their differing views on the Three Great Secret Treasures. As regards the Buddha, the Soka Gakkai has not altered their interpretation of this from that of the priests; the historical Buddha who preached the Lotus Sutra is Sakyamuni, but Nichiren Daishonin has remained the True Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law. In this regard, the SGI and the Nichiren Shoshu remain semiotically in accord with each other. It is their differing interpretants of the Dharma, the Sangha and the Three Great Secret Treasures which set the Nichiren Shoshu and the Soka Gakkai apart.

The definition of the Dharma is where the rub between the Gakkai and Taiseki-ji begins. On a literary basis, the Dharma of the Soka Gakkai is no different than it was under Taiseki-ji; the first and second chapters of the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren's Gosho and Makiguchi’s writings on value-creation pedagogy

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24 Hammond and Machacek in their 1999a study of the SGI-USA found that the organization was basing its membership statistics on the total number of Gohonzon issued, not taking into account the member’s current status or degree of activity in the organization. They determined a more accurate indicator of current membership could be arrived at through an analysis of subscription rates to the SGI-USA’s periodical publications.

25 The Nichiren Shoshu maintain a total of six U.S. temples in the cities of Kaneohe (HI), Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Flushing (NY), and Washington D.C.
form the whole of their canon. However, their respective exegetical interpretations of key points of the Gosho are substantially different. Under Ikeda, the ideal of the Kaidan underwent substantial revision (Stone 2003), as did the concurrent ideal of kosen-rufu, which was moderated substantially. Since the split with the Nichiren Shoshu, some of these ideas have undergone even further revision (Low 2010; Stone 2003).

This leads us to the next major point of disagreement, which is the definition of the Sangha. To the Soka Gakkai, priests and laity are equal in their capacity for enlightenment. Though equal, both groups were meant to perform different functions for the sake of propagating Nichiren Buddhism:

The Japanese word so, which is narrowly translated as priest, actually means sangha, which can be defined as the harmonious order of believers who correctly transmit and spread the three treasures. If we examine the origins of the word so or Sangha, we find it is correctly interpreted as the gathering of people who, regardless of their position as clergy or laity, practice Buddhism in accord with the Law by transmitting and spreading it to all people. (Soka Gakkai International, "Part III: 3. The Doctrine of the Three Treasures")

Neither is superior to the other in essence, and ideally they both should have complimented and supported the other in their respective roles. The Soka Gakkai was formed independently of the Nichiren Shoshu, founded by Makiguchi and inspired by Toda's original enlightenment, with its own modern, democratic/populist interpretation of the Gosho. In the Soka Gakkai's view, the interpretations of Nichiren's writings espoused by the priesthood are not superior to those of Makiguchi, Toda and Ikeda; where the two differed the Gakkai would go their own way, citing Nichiren’s Gosho as the ultimate source of doctrinal authority. The priesthood was useful to the Gakkai for performing certain ritual services, such as officiating weddings, funerals and most importantly consecrating and distributing Gohonzon. Beyond this limited sphere of activity however, the priesthood was never intended to have any authority over the Soka Gakkai or its members:

Simply put, the successive high priests traditionally have been entrusted with the role of reproducing and issuing the Gohonzon for believers so that they can assist in the accomplishment of the Daishonin’s mandate– kosen-rufu. Their transcription of the Gohonzon in no way indicates that they possess any special spiritual state that the rest of us do not. It is simply a part of their managerial responsibility as high priest to support

26 It could also be argued that the writings of Ikeda, particularly The Human Revolution (2004), has also been absorbed into the SGI’s canon.
believers and advance kosen-rufu. (Soka Gakkai International-USA, "A Historical Perspective on the Transcription of the Gohonzon.")

In the Gakkai’s view of the matter, any individual with sincere faith in the Gohonzon can awaken their inherent Buddha-nature and experience the state of enlightenment without need for any external facilitator. This puts priests and laity on equal footing (Metraux 1992), which negates the religious authority of the priesthood and upends traditional notions of the sangha. However, this reinterpretation of the relationship between priests and lay-people within the sangha, particularly in light of the schism, poses unique challenges for the Soka Gakkai in regards to the Gohonzon.

The Dai-Gohonzon

Since their split in 1991, another reinterpretation of the Three Great Secret Laws has pulled the Soka Gakkai even farther away from the Nichiren Shoshu. The Dai-Gohonzon as the “True Object of Worship” has been redefined and broadened substantially. A side by side reading of their respective statements on the Dai-Gohonzon reveals how and why they now differ on this essential point of doctrine:

...the power of any Gohonzon, including the Dai-Gohonzon, can be tapped only through the power of faith. In other words, we should be clear that it is wrong to think that the Dai-Gohonzon alone has some kind of unique mystic power that no other Gohonzon [has]. The Dai-Gohonzon and our own Gohonzon are equal. (Morino 1999)

While it is still considered a legitimate artifact penned by the hand of Nichiren Daishonin, within the SGI the Dai-Gohonzon is no longer seen as the source of every Gohonzon's power. Rather, the Dai-Gohonzon has been reinterpreted as an expression of the innate Buddha-nature which resides within all individuals, in that sense no different from any other Gohonzon. The Nichikan Gohonzon issued by the Soka Gakkai are thus assured to have efficacy and legitimacy as objects of veneration.

The Nichiren Shoshu liken the Dai-Gohonzon to the trunk of a great tree; all of the temple Gohonzon and personal Gohonzon in the possession of lay believers are extensions of the Dai-Gohonzon, the branches and leaves of the tree (Myosenji Temple Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism, "The Significance of Tozan."). According to this belief, the Dai-Gohonzon inscribed by Nichiren is what lends power to the Gohonzon in each member’s home. The personal Gohonzon possessed by laypeople are empowered by their connection to the Dai-Gohonzon as its indexical/symbolic representamens. Furthermore, any
Gohonzon which has not been consecrated through conferral by an ordained Nichiren priest is considered by them to be counterfeit; only a Gohonzon that has been directly transmitted to a lay believer from a priest in contact with the Dai-Gohonzon, and who is in good standing with the High Priest has any real power (Nichiren Shoshu Temple, "Issuing counterfeit objects of worship, Discussion of the doctrines and purposes"). Furthermore, should the lay believer lack faith in the person of the High Priest, their practice even to a legitimate Gohonzon will be fruitless, perhaps even dangerous:

We say, “No benefits can be derived from a counterfeit object of worship” because from the outset the object of worship does not transmit the lifeblood of the Dai-Gohonzon and it is not endowed with the power of the Buddha and the power of the Law. …Even if one possesses a traditional Gohonzon, if the person worshipping it slanders a High Priest of the conferral of the lifeblood of the Law, the Four Powers (the power of the Buddha, the power of the Law, the power of faith and the power of practice) will not unite together, and there will be no benefits. This applies all the more to members of the Gakkai, which has become a slanderous group that has gone so far as to make a counterfeit object of worship. For them, there will definitely be no benefits. Instead, the karma derived from misconduct will accumulate in direct proportion to the extent that one worships it. Moreover, all the benefits derived from faith up to that point would be extinguished. This is something to be feared. (Nichiren Shoshu Temple, ‘Does “No benefits can be derived from a counterfeit object of worship” mean that benefits can be derived from a traditional Gohonzon worshipped by a Gakkai member?’)

According to the above statement, through their control of the Dai-Gohonzon, the priesthood maintains control over the practice and efficacy of chanting Daimoku to all Gohonzon, as well as the supply of legitimate Gohonzon and the ordination of new members. In the statement above, there are several semiotic relationships which are being stressed: the symbolic/indexical relationship between the Dai-Gohonzon and Nichiren; the iconic/indexical relationship between Nichiren and the High Priest; and the symbolic/indexical/iconic relationship between all Gohonzon and the Dai-Gohonzon.

Following the split in 1991, there was a period of time wherein the Soka Gakkai was unable to confer the Gohonzon to new members. The Nichiren Shoshu refused to continue to supply the Gakkai with Gohonzon after the schism, which posed considerable problems for the SGI. New members were unable to receive Gohonzon, which stymied the growth of the organization. Ironically, many Gakkai members found themselves chanting daily to Gohonzon inscribed by the very high priest (Nikken Abe) who had excommunicated them.
In September of 1993, the priests of Joen-ji temple in Tochigi prefecture broke away from Taiseki-ji and presented a proposal to the SGI, offering their aid in reproducing new Gohonzon. They brought with them a Gohonzon inscribed in 1720 by the 26th high priest Nichikan to use as the basis for reproductions (Soka Gakkai International-USA, "Behind the SGI’s Decision To Issue the Gohonzon."). The Soka Gakkai has continued to issue these Nichikan Gohonzon to new members since that time. An unspecified number of members have also exchanged Gohonzon transcribed by Nikken for new Nichikan Gohonzon (Soka Gakkai International-USA, “Why are Members Exchanging their Nikken-transcribed Gohonzon for one Transcribed by Nichikan? What is the Difference Between These Gohonzon?”). Comparing the statement below issued by the SGI-USA in 1993 to the statement given above by the Nichiren Shoshu Temple, certain points of convergence and divergence in their respective notions regarding the Gohonzon become evident:

Nikken's behavior runs completely counter to the intent and compassion of Nichiren Daishonin. Instead, Nikken has been a driving force behind attempts to destroy the SGI's kosen-rufu movement for people's happiness. In terms of his state of life, Nikken has become the least qualified person to act on behalf of Nichiren Daishonin in transcribing the Gohonzon.

It is quite natural, then, that many members, in reaction to Nikken's conduct, have chosen to exchange the Gohonzon he transcribed for one transcribed by the twenty-sixth high priest, Nichikan, who struggled to restore the Daishonin's spirit and intent within the priesthood during the eighteenth century after it had been compromised by previous high priests.

On one level, we can state that any properly transcribed Gohonzon embodies the life of Nichiren Daishonin, and Nikken's transcription of the Gohonzon is technically correct. Yet knowing now that Nikken's intent and behavior are at complete odds with the profound compassion of the Daishonin himself, many have opted to receive the Gohonzon transcribed by Nichikan. This way they can chant to the Gohonzon without being reminded of Nikken's misdeeds. (Soka Gakkai International-USA, “Why are Members Exchanging their Nikken-transcribed Gohonzon?”)

First among these is the indexical relationship between a Gohonzon and the High Priest who transcribes it. Via this indexical relationship, some aspect of the transcriber remains present in or about a Gohonzon. We may extend this relationship to Nichiren and the Dai-Gohonzon; in this regard being in the presence of this artifact brings one into the presence of Nichiren himself, hence the semiotic significance of this relic to both groups. Transversely, being in the presence of a Nikken Gohonzon brings forth some aspect of Nikken via this same indexicality, which SGI members find uncomfortable. Both the SGI and the Nichiren Shoshu agree on this semiological point.

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Secondly, there is some indexical relationship between the person of the High Priest and Nichiren Daishonin. That a Gohonzon must have been transcribed by a legitimate high priest is not questioned; this is still considered essential, and it explains why the SGI was unable to reproduce its own Gohonzons prior to 1993. The Nichikan Gohonzon is considered appropriate by the SGI because of the reputation that Nichikan enjoys of having been a redeemer and reformer of the Nichiren Shoshu. From the SGI’s perspective then, what is important is that there should be a close alignment in spirit between the transcribing High Priest and Nichiren. From the Nichiren Shoshu’s perspective however, it appears that such a consideration is not appropriate for laypeople; questioning the High Priest is tantamount to heresy, will result in a loss of merit and an impotent practice. Here the indexical connection between the High Priest and Nichiren is considered absolute and essential, whereas in the SGI it is provisional and open to scrutiny. The Nichiren Shoshu would have the person of the High Priest represent Nichiren in the flesh, whereas the SGI would first compare that person to the example of Nichiren in the Gosho.

The Kaidan

Just as the significance of the Dai-Gohonzon has been downplayed in regards to its connection with the personal Gohonzon in each member’s home, the idea of the Kaidan has also undergone significant redefinition since the schism (Jo 2010; Stone 2003).

The destruction of the Sho-Hondo in 1999 was a symbolic blow to the Gakkai; their efforts to establish the High Sanctuary of True Buddhism had been for naught. As a result of this setback, the idea of the Kaidan as a physical structure and location vital to the Gakkai movement had to undergo redefinition:

Because embracing this object of devotion called the Gohonzon is the only precept in Nichiren's teaching, the place where it is enshrined corresponds to the place where one vows to observe the Buddhist precepts—the ordination platform, or sanctuary, of the essential teaching. (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002:564)

The Kaidan as it is now defined and understood within the SGI, exists in every member’s home where their Gohonzon is kept and their Buddhist practice is maintained (Jo 2010). The doctrinal support for this expansion of the Kaidan concept can be found in the following passage from the Gosho:

Although I live in such a forsaken place, deep in this mortal flesh I preserve the ultimate secret Law inherited from Sakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, at Eagle Peak. My
heart is where all Buddhas enter nirvana; my tongue, where they turn the wheel of the
Law; my throat, where they are born into this world; and my mouth, where they attain
enlightenment. Because this mountain is where this wondrous votary of the Lotus Sutra
dwells, how can it be any less sacred than the pure land of Eagle Peak? (The Writings of
Nichiren Daishonin:1097)

Every member who accepts the Gohonzon as the True Object of Worship and chants the Daimoku
essentially embodies the Kaidan; sitting before their Gohonzon and chanting nam-myoho-renge-kyo, they
join the Buddha on Eagle Peak in the company of the countless Bodhisattvas of the Earth. The area around
each Gohonzon thus becomes a sacred space because it is effectively the place where, twice a day, the
enlightenment of a Buddha is realized. This remapping of the Kaidan renders the head temple complex
redundant (Jo 2010) by diffusing the locus of sanctity from a single physical location, to a diffuse,
metaphysical potentiality.

Pilgrimage to the head temple at Taiseki-ji was once considered the honor and obligation of every
Soka Gakkai member. The SGI brought millions of members to the gates of Taiseki-ji, and with them came
millions of yen in the form of obligatory donations to the head temple in order to see the Dai-Gohonzon.

Since the split, tozan (pilgrimage) to Taiseki-ji has been discouraged within the SGI and is now looked
upon as aiding and abetting the priesthood, an act that will generate negative karma (Morino 1999).

Conclusion

The Nichiren Shoshu and the Soka Gakkai both draw from the Gosho of Nichiren to find a
foundation for their beliefs, yet they have each developed irreconcilable interpretations of Nichiren’s core
ideas. The question then of who is qualified to interpret the Gosho is the core of the problem. The schism
between the Soka Gakkai and the Nichiren Shoshu is, from a semiotic perspective, a story of radical
reorganization of signs and signification within their representational economy.

In order to defend their movement and assert their authority against the Nichiren Shoshu
priesthood, the SGI has had to reorder and redefine two of the Three Treasures, core signs within their
representational economy. The SGI has redefined the role and power of the Dai-Gohonzon in order to
bypass the choke-hold which the Nichiren Shoshu maintain upon this sacred object and lend legitimacy to
The Gohonzo distributed by the SGI to their own members. Furthermore, with the destruction of the Sho-Hondo, the Kaidan has had to undergo similar expansion and redefinition.

The Dai-Gohonzon has been the main focus this ideological battle between the Taiseki-ji priesthood and the Soka Gakkai. Both sides of this conflict have focused on differing semiotic relationships surrounding the Dai-Gohonzon to support their differing truth claims and to discredit their opposition. The relationship of the SGI Nichikan Gohonzo to the Dai-Gohonzon has had to negotiate a path through these complex sign-relations in order to establish and maintain their legitimacy in the eyes of the faithful, in the face of fierce opposition from the priesthood. This concept is explored further in the next chapter.

The second important object of signification in the center of this conflict has been the Kaidan. The destruction of the Sho-Hondo has resulted in a reinterpretation and expansion of the Kaidan, another of the Three Great Secret Laws of Nichiren Buddhism. Again putting this into semiotic terms, the Kaidan (in its token form as the Sho-Hondo) has had to undergo a transformative reinterpretation and revaluation within the SGI’s representational economy. In its physical representamen as the Sho-Hondo, the Kaidan was subject to all of the forces of causality as any physical object. As a structure, the Sho-Hondo was symbolic of the SGI’s triumph, and its demolition became a symbolic act of violence against the SGI itself. However, even as the Sho-Hondo was demolished, the Kaidan which (as one of the primary signs within the representational economy of SGI Nichiren Buddhism) could not be so easily destroyed. The Kaidan has been transformed from a single, centralized structure on the Taiseki-ji temple grounds, to a metaphysical presence which manifests wherever people sincerely chant the Daimoku, a radical transformation of this concept.

These reinterpretations of core signs within the representational economy of Nichiren Buddhism have been effected through doctrinal interpretation of Nichiren’s writings. The priesthood contend that lay believers are not sanctioned to make such interpretations, bringing the argument back to a conflict over legitimacy and authority between exoteric and esoteric traditions of interpretation.

These and other points of doctrine over which the Soka Gakkai and Nichiren Shoshu contend (the definition of sangha and the legitimacy of the SGI’s own doctrinal interpretations), have found symbolic expression in changes to the format and performance of gongyo, the primary religious ritual of Soka
Gakkai members. In the next several chapters, the specifics of Soka Gakkai Nichiren Buddhist ritual practice will be detailed and analyzed to substantiate exactly how the practice of gongyo has changed since the schism.
Chapter 7: Ritual Implements in Soka Gakkai Nichiren Buddhism

In this chapter, the ritual paraphernalia of Nichiren of Soka Gakkai Buddhists will be described in detail. I begin with a review of the material culture of Nichiren Buddhism, specifically focusing on how it can be observed in the context of typical SGI members' homes. The material presented here was drawn from the present author's experience and study of the construction and use of Nichiren Buddhist ritual paraphernalia. For the purpose of comparison, I occasionally draw from recollections of the ritual paraphernalia of Tibetan Buddhism. This was the subject of field research conducted in Bodh Gaya, Darjeeling and Dharamsala in northern India, between the years 2000-2001. I have also had some experience with Chinese temple Buddhism in the areas of Shanghai and Nanjing, during the summer of 2005. These observations provide a context for comparison between the objects and practices common to SGI members and those that are common to Mahayana and Tantrayana Buddhists generally.

The Gohonzon

The most important and distinct object in the practice of SGI Nichiren Buddhism is the Gohonzon. The original inscription of the first Gohonzon in the Nichiren Buddhist tradition is ascribed to Nichiren Daishonin. While the surviving references made to this are fragmentary and often vague, the actual word “Gohonzon” can be found in many of Nichiren's letters to his followers. The following are some commonly cited examples:

The Gohonzon is found in faith alone. As the sutra states, “Only with faith can one enter Buddhahood.” (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin: 213)

Believe in the Gohonzon, the supreme object of devotion in all of Jambudvipa. (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin: 386)

I, Nichiren, have inscribed my life in sumi ink, so believe in the Gohonzon with your whole heart...Muster your faith and pray to this Gohonzon. (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin: 412)

I have offered prayers to the Gohonzon of Myoho-rengge-kyo. Though this mandala has but five or seven characters, it is the teacher of all Buddhas throughout the three existences and the seal that guarantees the enlightenment of all women. (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin:414)
The Gohonzon is regarded as the “True Object of Worship” by Nichiren Buddhists. It is the focal point of the entire practice of chanting Daimoku, and is itself the physical representation of Nichiren's ideals. The Gohonzon is many things: a sacred object, a ritual implement, a calligraphic text and a symbolic/iconographic mandala.

Physically, a Gohonzon is a paper scroll which is covered almost entirely in Chinese and Siddham Sanskrit characters written in a highly stylized calligraphic script. Inscribed vertically down the center of this scroll are five characters depicting the Daimoku, “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo”. This is flanked on either side by inscriptions bearing the names of the various deities and notable bodhisattvas attending the Buddha. At the bottom of the scroll, the signature and seal of the author can be found.

As a mandala, the Gohonzon departs from traditional models. Rather than utilizing iconic images, the Gohonzon is a calligraphic text which utilizes blocks of inscriptions to form the components of a composite iconographic image. These blocks of text invoke the names of the various Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and heavenly beings depicted in a scene from the Lotus Sutra known as the “Ceremony in the Air”. In this scene, the Buddha Sakyamuni is seated next to the Buddha Many Jewels (Taho Buddha), in the Treasure Tower (a mystical jeweled stupa that rises out of the earth as Sakyamuni instructs the assembly). Surrounding these two seated Buddhas are numerous deities and countless bodhisattvas recorded to have been in attendance when Sakyamuni taught the Lotus Sutra. This scene is the symbolic representation of the core teachings of the Lotus Sutra and thus the core of Nichiren's doctrine, represented physically by the Gohonzon. The Gohonzon is the “True Object of Worship” to Nichiren Buddhists.

All Gohonzon are based on the example of the Dai-Gohonzon, which is ascribed to Nichiren Daishonin. Each high priest of the Nichiren Shoshu lineage has inscribed Gohonzon for conferral to the laity. These all vary somewhat in appearance according to which high priest inscribed them, but in terms of format, they are all derived from the Dai-Gohonzon. Since 1991, all of the Gohonzon issued to new Soka Gakkai members have been prints of the Gohonzon inscribed by Nichikan, the 26th high priest of the

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27 Gohonzon have been written by each successive high priest of the Nichiren Shoshu since Nichiren's death, as well as by high priests of the Nichiren Shu and other Nichiren sects.
Nichiren Shoshu. For descriptive purposes, the Nichikan Gohonzon will here be used as an example of the physical properties of Gohonzon generally.

The Nichikan Gohonzon measures approximately 20 centimeters across and 39 centimeters in length. The printed section is bordered in a blue-green brocaded paper. The bottom of the Gohonzon is wrapped around a black-lacquered dowel measuring roughly 23 centimeters across and 1.5 centimeters in diameter. The Nichikan Gohonzon is hung vertically from a purple cord attached to the center of its upper edge. Several larger classes of Gohonzon are also produced for meeting halls and temples, but the dimensions provided above are typical of the type found in most members’ homes. Gohonzon are housed within a wooden cabinet called a butsudan (literally “Buddha altar”), which is described further below.

Out of respect for the beliefs of Soka Gakkai members I do not present a copy of the Gohonzon for study here. However, Figure 2 presents a diagram of the Nichikan Gohonzon, reproduced from the August 29, 1997, World Tribune (Buddhastate.com, "The Nichikan SGI Gohonzon Map."). This diagram gives a detailed explanation of the Nichikan Gohonzon’s component parts and a good sense of its appearance.

28 Chapter 9: “Religious Cognition”, and “The Interdiction of Contact”. 
Figure 2: Soka Gakkai Nichikan Gohonzon Map
**The Butsudan**

Butsudans are a common component of Japanese Buddhism generally. They serve as a type of family altar and are found in the homes of religious laypeople. Different sects enshrine sacred objects or images specific to their tradition within these altars.

The butsudans built and used in America by SGI converts have taken many forms and could be a subject of study in their own right, but for the most part they are based on the traditional model. In terms of their construction and appearance, they can run the gamut from simple boxes of unfinished wood or even cardboard, to baroque constructs of gleaming black-lacquer and gold plating.

Traditional Nichiren butsudans are rectangular in shape, and rectangular or hexagonal in cross-section, preserving the same ratio of length to width found in the Gohonzon. They are typically made of wood painted in black or brown lacquer and often decorated with gold fittings. Most butsudans have two sections: an upper section that houses the Gohonzon and a much broader lower section that serves as a table on which to present offerings (Figure 3 below). The upper section generally has two sets of doors or shutters to protect the Gohonzon enshrined within it: one outer pair of doors, usually equipped with handles and a lock, and a smaller inner set behind which hangs the Gohonzon. This inner housing is often lined with brocaded or golden paper and lit with an electric light installed discreetly within the butsudan. In the lower assembly, most butsudans are fitted with one or two drawers to store various paraphernalia such as incense, candles, prayer books, *juzu* beads and/or perhaps a copy of the Gosho or the *Daily Guidance of President Ikeda*. 
The offerings kept on this lower assembly are: a light source, usually in the form of two candles; a small container of water; incense burnt on a bed of ashes held in a shallow bowl; fruit presented on a plate or shallow bowl; and cut evergreen boughs kept in a pair of watered vessels. During the time I spent in Darjeeling and Dharamsala among Nepalese and Tibetan monks, I observed that the offerings presented on their altars were virtually identical to those found on the butsudans of Soka Gakkai members, some slight variations notwithstanding. For example, on Soka Gakkai altars it is not uncommon to see a large bottle of Japanese beer or sake in addition to the usual offerings of fruit. Conversely, the Tibetans typically give offerings of flowers instead of the evergreen boughs commonly found on Nichiren butsudans. The incense
used in Nichiren Buddhist ritual is typically placed horizontally on top of the ashes as opposed to being stuck vertically into the ashes as is generally observed in other Buddhist sects. One other thing that can also be found on the altars of Soka Gakkai members are little pieces of paper or cardstock printed with SGI campaign slogans or personal goals. Members place these on their butsudans as reminders of their goals or objects of prayer; this is an aspect of chanting as an applied discipline focused on the attainment of tangible results from prayer.

In addition to the above, no butsudan would be complete without a bell. Bells are another commonly employed ritual object in the enactment of Tantric Buddhist ritual and recitation. The kind of bell used in Nichiren Buddhism is a deep black bowl made of brass or bronze and set upon a stuffed cushion of brocaded red or gold cloth, which is raised off the floor by a black lacquered wooden stand. The bell is rung with a matching wooden dowel wrapped in white or black leather.

In addition to the ritual objects described above, most of the older, more established SGI members will also hang a framed portrait picture on their wall of President Ikeda and/or the Soka Gakkai founders Toda and Makiguchi. Books of Mr. Ikeda's poetry, Daily Guidance, and commentaries on the Lotus Sutra are typically stored in the drawers of the lower section of the butsudan or kept on a bookshelf nearby. Most SGI-USA members also keep an English translation of the Gosho of Nichiren for study somewhere near their butsudan.

The ritual objects placed on or around a butsudan are collectively referred to as butsugu. The objects as they have been described above are typical of the traditional type found in or exported from Japan. However, the ritual objects and attendant paraphernalia used by many American SGI members show considerable variation from their Japanese counterparts. For a new member, acquiring appropriate butsugu can be a difficult process, often requiring repeated trips to thrift shops, Asian markets and import stores. Since they live far from Japan where such things can be commonly bought in stores or specialty shops, American SGI Buddhists often have to make do with what they can find. As mentioned above, the form and construction of American butsudans can vary wildly; imported Japanese butsudans are rare and expensive, so most new members are either gifted an older used butsudan from another member or they
make their own. In both cases, the butsudans commonly found in the homes of SGI members show marked departures from the traditional Japanese model.

The selection of material, color and form of one's butsudan, prayer beads and butsugu are another means by which SGI members express personal aesthetics and preferences in their practice. Many members today eschew the use of wax candles and incense in deference to their allergies. It is also common these days to see electric candles employed in lieu of wax tapers, and an empty incense pot placed in the center of the butsudan for purely symbolic purposes.

Prayer Beads: Use and Form in Nichiren Ritual Practice

Prayer beads are universally employed in Mahayana and Tantrayana Buddhist ritual practice. Nichiren Buddhism and the SGI are no exception to this rule, although the manner in which their prayer beads are used and constructed is unique to this particular tradition. In this section, the use and form of Nichiren Buddhist prayer beads will be examined and compared to the trend generally observed in other forms of Mahayana and Tantrayana Buddhism.

The standard form prayer beads take in most Buddhist traditions is a string of 108 beads ending at a somewhat larger central bead, from which hangs a tassel of some kind. The size and material of these beads, and the color and length of the string and tassel, all vary substantially across and within sects the world over, but the general form of prayer beads is fairly uniform. For example, the standard type of Tibetan prayer beads are made of white bone pieces measuring approximately six millimeters in diameter and four millimeters in thickness. These are typically strung with bright red cord. A set of such beads is approximately 35 centimeters in length.

Prayer beads are primarily used for counting prayers. For each recitation of a mantra or prayer, one bead is passed between the thumb and forefinger. This process of reciting and counting prayers is repeated all the way around the string, 108 times back, to the central point. Successive cycles of prayer may be carried on continuously throughout the day, calculated roughly by counting the number of times the practitioner passes the larger central bead through their fingers. When not employed for reciting prayers, these beads are usually wrapped around the wrist and as such are a ubiquitous sight in Tibetan Buddhist
communities, carried everywhere by young and old alike. In the Tibetan and other traditions, it is also common for priests and monks to wear much larger strings formed of heavy wooden beads. These are hung from the neck with the central bead placed at the base of the neck, the tassel hanging down the wearer’s back.

Interestingly, the beads (aka. juzu or “juzu beads”) used in Nichiren Buddhism do not conform to the pattern of construction or use general to other forms of Mahayana or Tantrayana Buddhism (Figure 4). The material and length of a set of these beads is roughly approximate to that found in most sects. The beads themselves are usually made of a dark wood (preferably sandalwood), and the body of the string is approximately 30 centimeters in length. Nichiren juzu however, have two tassels and hence two larger beads at each end of the string from which the tassels sprout. Both tassels are subdivided into several “branches”, each set with a specific number of beads and topped with a fluffy ball on the end. The number of these branches is specific; one tassel has three while the other has two, giving the whole set of beads the form of a human body.
Beads of this type are specific to Nichiren Buddhism, although they possess features common to prayer beads in other traditions. It is common in the Tibetan tradition for short strings of smaller beads to be tied at one or more intervals along a set of prayer beads. These are used to count the successive repetitions of the 108-prayer cycle, or to mark one’s progress through a single cycle when interrupted. The “branches” of Nichiren Buddhist juzu likely developed from these ancillary counting strings. The beads upon these branches were at one point used for counting purposes, but today this is not common.

In my experience, most SGI members count time spent chanting in hours and minutes rather than counting individual recitations of the Daimoku. Alternately, they may calculate the number of Daimoku they chant from the amount of time spent chanting. This method of calculation frees up the hands, which would normally have been employed in counting the beads through the fingers. Thus, members’ hands are
free to vigorously rub their beads while they chant to generate white noise, which would have been impossible if the beads were employed as a counting device.29

A member’s choice of beads, their size, material and color, are a personal matter. Some members prefer beads made of semi-precious stone. Others like beads made of translucent or brightly colored plastic, while some others favor simple un-lacquered wood. Regardless, within the SGI the prayer beads all conform to a specific pattern of construction and are used and displayed in a specific manner and context. Among SGI Buddhists, it is uncommon to see beads worn openly on the wrist, as is common among the Tibetans. Usually SGI members do not carry their beads with them unless they are en route to a meeting. On these occasions, the member’s beads are generally kept in their purse or pocket along with a prayer book, wrapped in a decorative square cloth. During gongyo members string these beads through their fingers in a very specific manner: the middle fingers of both hands pass through the ends of the string so that the end beads and tassels hang from the base of their middle fingers, the body of the string pressed between both palms. As the hands are held together before the heart in the form of a lotus blossom during gongyo, it is very common for devotees to vigorously rub their hands together and hence their beads while taking in breath, creating a soft grinding or buzzing sound. This helps one to keep pace with the rest of the assembly and rejoin the chant in rhythm with everyone. Nichiren Buddhist juzu are strung tighter than the bead strings of other traditions, facilitating their use for generating this “white noise” while chanting. When chanting alone, this sound fills the void left while inhaling and maintains the sense of continuity in one’s chant. I know of no other school of Buddhism that utilizes beads in this manner, or beads of similar form.

The Crane and the Lotus

The Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin is conspicuous for its pronounced iconoclasm, so it should come as no surprise to find that there is little in the way of explicit religious iconography or symbolism in either Nichiren Shoshu or Soka Gakkai Buddhism. Traditionally, the priesthood has been symbolized by

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29 The form and use of Nichiren juzu may be an adaptation to ritualized chanting. If priests and laypeople were utilizing incense as a time-keeping device, a practice common in Japan long before the arrival of Buddhism (Bedini 1999), the counting strings would have become redundant. These could have been preserved as tassels and ascribed a new symbolic function. If this was indeed the case, then the bead-rubbing that can be observed in during chanting may be as old as Nichiren Buddhism itself.
the figure of a crane with outstretched wings (Figure 5). This symbol could be found printed on items of paper and cloth, but was perhaps most conspicuously displayed in the form of brass amulets kept enshrined in the butsudan. These amulets were generally given importance of place directly flanking the Gohonzon within the innermost chamber of the butsudan.

Following the schism in 1991, these crane amulets were discarded from the butsudans of SGI members. In short order, the crane was replaced with a geometric lotus flower symbol (Figure 6). Brass amulets made in this form are now commonly enshrined in the butsudans of SGI members in place of the cranes. In all respects, the lotus flower has replaced the crane as the symbol of the SGI. In addition to this symbol, the SGI has created a flag (Figure 7) for itself which can be found with or without the lotus flower symbol embedded within it.
The colors of this flag, going from left to right, are blue, yellow and red. This flag is found present in all SGI meeting halls and can also be found in the form of bumper stickers or miniature flags adorning members’ cars.

The significance of this change is readily apparent. The crane has been a symbol of the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood for seven centuries. Significantly, these crane symbols were installed inside of the butsudan, flanking the Gohonzon and physically interposing between the practitioner and the Gohonzon. Discarding this symbol of the priesthood and replacing it with the lotus is a symbolic act of realignment, turning away from the priesthood and turning back to the original object of Nichiren Buddhism: the Lotus Sutra.

**Significance and Signification of Ritual Paraphernalia**

The Soka Gakkai has inherited a number of items from the Nichiren Shoshu which are involved in the performance of gongyo. What is generally overlooked about these altars and the various objects which adorn them is not their supposed symbolic meaning, but the ways in which these items are involved in the lives of practitioners beyond the practice of gongyo. Presenting offerings to the Gohonzon has a significance that transcends the physical offerings themselves, and which is bound up in the act of producing these offerings and maintaining the altar.

Collectively, the butsugu can be divided into three classes: functional items, symbolic items, and offerings. Some of the butsugu, such as the bell or the prayer beads, have a ritual, auditory or kinetic function: they generate sound and/or punctuate phases in the ritual performance of gongyo. The lotus medallions on the other hand serve no functional purpose, but are purely symbolic. The remaining items however (water, incense, candles, evergreens, and food) have no particular function in the performance of gongyo other than as offerings to the Gohonzon. These categories are not completely discrete; signs are polyvalent, and any of the above items may possess symbolic as well as functional significance. For the sake of simplicity, only their primary or most obvious semiotic aspects are focused upon below.

Offerings, being perishable or consumable, have to be periodically renewed: incense and candles must be regularly purchased; evergreens are sought out and cut; water is emptied and replaced. Some of
these items, such as fruit and water, are often consumed by practitioners after they are used. For example, after large meetings, it is common for food offerings to be shared out to everyone in attendance. The consumption of these offerings necessitates their procurement and replacement, a fact which is so obvious that it is often overlooked.

Furthermore, the bowls, cups and plates containing these consumed items have to be regularly cleaned, as does the rest of the altar. Foregoing these duties creates an air of neglect around one’s altar, which is easily recognizable by the presence of dust, moldy fruit, dead leaves, and salt rings in dry water bowls. This necessitates regular physical contact between the practitioner and their altar, over and above the twice daily recitation of gongyo. A certain amount of time and money are spent in the procurement of the necessary offerings and the maintenance of the butsudan.

As stated above, some of these items are open to substitution; plastic evergreens are not uncommon, nor are electric candles. An empty incense or water bowl may still fulfill a purely symbolic function as an offering to the Gohonzon, so long as it is kept clean and properly maintained. The important thing here is not the offering itself, but the act of offering and the effort this takes on the part of the practitioner. The physical interaction with these objects, the discipline of maintaining the butsudan, and the investment of time and resources this entails, is the actual offering made to the Gohonzon. Collectively, these are an offering of effort and intention, which is valued over the actual substantive reality of incense or fresh evergreens.

This indicates a central point in the semiotic ideology of Soka Gakkai Buddhism: sincere effort and intention are equivalent to concrete action. Whether offering water or an empty bowl, it is the sincerity of the action that is valued rather than the materiality of the offering. A water bowl that is empty but presented with sincerity is superior to an offering of water that has dried up due to neglect. This emphasis on sincerity over materiality has parallels to Sumbanese Calvinists as observed by Keane:

Sincerity in this context means that material objects should be taken to stand apart from the people who own and transact them. When used, for instance in marriage exchange or ceremonies, objects ought only to express immaterial meanings and not serve as tokens of economic value or media of magical power…The separation of words from things is reinforced by a nascent ideology of referential speech that encourages the treatment of verbal performances as texts. (Keane 2006:20)
What these offerings are meant to express is a sincere gratitude for the presence of the Gohonzon in one’s home. The sacrificial offering here has become ‘merely symbolic’ and dematerialized. This emphasis on sincerity is supported by discursive practices and paralleled in liturgical speech practices within the SGI, which are detailed further in chapter 9.

Another aspect of Nichiren Buddhist ritual paraphernalia which bears scrutiny is the persistence of these objects across time and context. There is some aspect of these items which, in spite of their seemingly arbitrary nature, has been remarkably resilient to the vicissitudes of time and circumstance:

We must consider the ways in which material things work independently of, or in contradiction to, their discursive surround. Otherwise we risk treating humans as if their capacity to endow the world with meaning had no limits, and, I would add, as if the world could hold no further surprises for them. (Keane 2006:18)

For example, the functional ritual items and offerings under study in this chapter have a history which predates the advent of Nichiren Buddhism. This same suite of ritual objects exist concurrently with few alterations in the Buddhist traditions of Tibet. Assuming that this is not a coincidence or circumstance, this example shows how material things have worked independently on the development of Buddhism across time and context. This even applies to purely symbolic items which have no functional value in the performance of ritual. In spite of the schism in 1991, the crane medallions that flanked the Gohonzon were not entirely discarded. Instead, only the crane was cast aside and replaced with a lotus. These decorative/symbolic objects have persisted despite their “discursive surround”. This is just one example of how Buddhist ritual practice is somehow bound by material things, which work independently of the doctrinal revaluations and innovations that have been ongoing within Buddhism throughout its history.
Chapter 8: Gongyo

Nichiren Buddhism in the context of the Soka Gakkai is a religion that requires a discipline of rigorous practice. The term used for the performance of this ritual practice is gongyo, which roughly translates as “assiduous practice” (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism 2002). While many aspects of ritual performance within the Soka Gakkai have changed significantly since 1991, “doing gongyo” has remained a significant and demanding aspect of practice within the SGI, requiring and fostering self-discipline and dedication in its members.

Gongyo consists of three components: the recitation of the liturgy, chanting Daimoku, and observation of the silent prayers. While chanting may be performed at any time and in any place, gongyo is typically performed twice a day, seated in front of a Gohonzon. This ritual activity is carefully scripted, beginning, ending and punctuated by sansho and chanting Daimoku. The actual performance of gongyo and the changes that have been made to this practice are the main focus of this study. To substantiate the changes to the performance of gongyo since 1991, two liturgical manuals dating from 1981 and 2010 are reproduced and presented in this chapter for diachronic comparison and analysis of their respective instructions for the performance of gongyo and the wording of the silent prayers.

A Brief Historical Overview of Gongyo

The ritual performance of gongyo originated within the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood, centered at the temple complex of Taiseki-ji, shortly after Nichiren's death in 1282 C.E. (Saito 1992). The practice of gongyo, while more rigidly structured and complex than chanting Daimoku, is in actuality only a supporting activity to chanting:

Chanting daimoku, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, is termed the "primary practice" and reading or reciting the "Hoben" and "Juryo" chapters is called the "supplementary practice" or the "supporting practice"…The benefit from carrying out the primary practice is immense. When you also recite portions of the "Hoben" and "Juryo" chapters, it has the supplementary function of increasing and accelerating the beneficial power of the primary practice.(Soka Gakkai International, “Gongyo and Daimoku.”)

An overview of records left behind by successive high priests shows the gradual formalization of the practice over the next 400 years (Morino 2002; Saito 1992). By the fifteenth century, it had evolved into a
pattern of five recitations delivered at intervals throughout the day at specific sites on the temple grounds, each followed by a specific silent prayer and 100 Daimoku (Saito 1992). In the seventeenth century, during the period of the seventeenth high priest Nissei, the performance of all five prayers was consolidated under one roof, in the Miei-do (Main Temple) before the Dai-Gohonzon (Saito 1992). Under the twenty-sixth high priest Nichikan (1665–1726), the pattern of five morning and three evening prayers became the standard (Saito 1992). It was in this form that gongyo was first handed down to the Soka Gakkai in the early 20th century.

The full recitation of the liturgy in the manner employed by the priesthood was found to be far too time-consuming for laypeople with all the concurrent demands of home and work. Toda successfully petitioned the priesthood to design a condensed version of the ritual for the Soka Gakkai members, which we see reflected in the 1981 liturgical manual presented later in this chapter (Saito 1992). Gongyo in this form proceeded with sansho, chanting Daimoku, then five recitations of the liturgy in the morning and three recitations in the evening, each recitation followed by three slow Daimoku (in lieu of the 100 Daimoku performed by priests) and a prescribed silent prayer. The recitation of the liturgy in this iteration could be completed in under one hour by an experienced practitioner (approximately twenty minutes for the shorter evening gongyo) in addition to however much time they choose to devote to chanting on either end of gongyo.

In 2002, ten years after the schism, the practice of gongyo was changed again. The Soka Gakkai instituted this reform independently from the priesthood (Morino 2002). The basic structure of gongyo as it is practiced in the Soka Gakkai currently begins with sansho, then proceeds with a period of chanting Daimoku, followed by the recitation of the liturgy (the second and 16th chapters of the Lotus Sutra). It is worth noting that the 16th chapter in this reformed version of the liturgy has been cropped, preserving the later verse section of the chapter, but discarding the longer prose section. As the liturgy is completed, the rite continues with chanting for an interminable length of time. This is followed by the silent prayers, which are punctuated by and closed with sansho. The recitation in this form, being now significantly shortened, takes no more than five minutes by a practitioner familiar with the liturgy.
In the following sections, the instructions for the format of gongyo and the silent prayers are reproduced from two liturgical manuals dating from 1981 and 2010. The portions of the sutra which are recited during gongyo are pronounced in a form of archaic Japanese. The text is presented in Chinese characters, with a Japanese hiragana superscript, and subtitled with a Romanized pronunciation guide. A sample of what this text looks like in its American iteration can be found in Appendix C, as well as a transcription of the actual liturgy itself in Appendix D.
The Liturgy of Nichiren Shoshu (1981)

HOW TO DO GONGYO

Gongyo consists of a series of prayers. Recite all five prayers in the morning. In the evening, recite the second, third and fifth prayers only.

For convenience, this sutra book is divided into four sections:

A– Excerpt from the Hohen chapter, pp. 1–5
B– Chogyo or prose section of the Juryo chapter, pp. 6–27
C– Jiga-ge or verse section of the Juryo chapter, pp. 27–38

Here is the order of the recitation:

**First Prayer**
Face the Gohonzon and chant Nam-myoho-rengi-kyo three times (Daimoku sansho). Face east, chant Nam-myoho-rengi-kyo three times and recite part A. The portion of part A from Sho-i shoh to Nyō ze honnak kukyō to is always repeated three times. Recite the title of the Juryo chapter (the first two boldface lines of part B), omit the remainder of part B and recite part C. Chant three prolonged Daimoku (hiki-Daimoku, pronounced Nam-myoho-rengi-kyo), chant Nam-myoho-rengi-kyo three times and offer the first silent prayer. (The bell is not rung during the first prayer.)

**Second Prayer**
Face the Gohonzon, sound bell. Recite part A, sound the bell. Recite parts B, C, and chant three prolonged Daimoku. Sound bell, chant Nam-myoho-rengi-kyo three times and offer the second silent prayer. This is the only time the entire sutra book is recited straight through.

**Third Prayer**
Sound bell, recite part A. Sound bell, recite first two lines of part B, omit remainder of B and recite part C. Chant three prolonged Daimoku, sound bell, chant Nam-myoho-rengi-kyo three times and offer the third silent prayer.

**Fourth Prayer**
Sound bell, recite part A. Sound bell, recite first two lines of part B, omit remainder of B and recite part C. Chant three prolonged Daimoku, sound bell, chant Nam-myoho-rengi-kyo three times and offer the fourth silent prayer.

**Fifth Prayer**
Sound bell, recite part A. Sound bell, recite first two lines of part B, omit remainder of B and recite part C. Sound bell and begin chanting Daimoku (Nam-myoho-rengi-kyo). After completing Daimoku, sound bell, chant Nam-myoho-rengi-kyo three times and offer the fifth silent prayer. Sound bell and conclude gongyo by chanting Nam-myoho-rengi-kyo three times.

**Silent Prayers**

**FIRST PRAYER**

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30 These are the “Ten Factors” described in Chapter 4.
Appreciation to the shoten zenjin

I offer gratitude to Boten, Taishaku, Nitten, Gatten, Myojoten and all other shoten zenjin, the universal forces within all life, the guardians of Buddhism who night and day protect those who embrace the Gohonzon.

(Chant Nam-myoho-ренге-kyo three times)

SECOND PRAYER
Appreciation to the Dai-Gohonzon

I solemnly praise the Dai-Gohonzon- the core of the Juryo chapter of the honmon, the Supreme Law hidden in the depths of the Lotus Sutra, the inscrutable essence of the universe, the perfect fusion of kyo and chi, the entity of kuon ganjo, the entity of the buddha of absolute freedom, the eternal manifestation of the ten worlds, the embodiment of ichinen sanzen, the oneness of Person and Law, the Dai-Gohonzon enshrined in the High Sanctuary of true Buddhism. I also give thanks for the immeasurable benefits I have received.

(Chant Nam-myoho-ренге-kyo three times)

THIRD PRAYER
Appreciation to Nichiren Daishonin and the successive high priests

I offer praise and deepest gratitude to Nichiren Daishonin, the True Buddha of hon'in-myō, who possesses the three enlightened attributes and the three virtues of parent, teacher and sovereign. His immense mercy transcends past, present and future and leads all people to enlightenment.

(Chant Nam-myoho-ренге-kyo three times)

I offer praise and deep gratitude to his true disciple, the second high priest, Byakuren Ajari Nikko Shonin, the great leader of the propagation of true Buddhism who received its pure lineage directly from Nichiren Daishonin.

(Chant Nam-myoho-ренге-kyo three times)

I offer praise and deep gratitude to the third high priest, Nidakyō Ajari Nichimoku Shonin, the high priest of Kosen-rufu who dedicated his life to the spread of true Buddhism. Nam-myoho-ренге-kyo, Nam-myoho-ренге-kyo, Nam-myoho-ренге-kyo.

(Here the three Daimoku are offered silently.)

I offer praise and deep gratitude to the fourth high priest, Nichido Shonin, to the fifth high priest, Nichigyo Shonin, and to all the successive high priests who have guarded the purity of Nichiren Shoshu and correctly handed down the Daishonin's teachings until this day.

(Chant Nam-myoho-ренге-kyo three times)

FOURTH PRAYER
For the attainment of Kosen-rufu

I sincerely pray for the earliest possible realization of Kosen-rufu throughout the entire world.

(Chant Nam-myoho-ренге-kyo three times.)
I pray to erase my negative karma created by my own past causes and to fulfill my wishes in this life and in the future (Offer personal prayers here. Chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo three times.)

**FIFTH PRAYER**

Memorial for the deceased

I pray for my deceased relatives and for all who have passed away, especially these individuals—Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

(Offer special memorial prayers while sounding the bell continuously. Then chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo three times.)

Lastly, I pray for the Gohonzon’s impartial benefits to spread throughout the world and bring peace and happiness to all mankind and the entire universe.

(Sound the bell and conclude Gongyo by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo three times.)
The Liturgy of Nichiren Buddhism (2010)

Format

**In the morning:**

Face the Gohonzon, sound the bell, and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo three times (group chants in unison) to begin. Then, out of appreciation for the protective forces, chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo three times again (group chants in unison). Then offer the first silent prayer.

**In the evening:**

Face the Gohonzon, sound the bell and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo three times (group chants in unison). Proceed with the recitation of the sutra as explained on the next page.

Recitation of the Sutra

Recite the “Expedient Means” chapter excerpt (pages 1–5). When completed, sound the bell. Recite the excerpt from the verse section of the “Life Span of the Thus Come One” chapter (pages 6–17). When completed, sound the bell as you begin chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Continue chanting for as long as you wish.

When completed, sound the bell and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo three times. Then offer the second, third and fourth silent prayers, located at the back of the book.

Silent Prayers

**FIRST SILENT PRAYER**

Appreciation for Life’s Protective Forces (*shoten zenjin*)

I offer appreciation for the functions in life and the environment (*shoten zenjin*) that serve to protect us, and pray that these protective powers be further strengthened and enhanced through my practice of the Law.

*Chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo three times. Then proceed with the recitation of the sutra.*

**SECOND SILENT PRAYER**

Appreciation to the Gohonzon

I acknowledge my debt of gratitude and offer profound appreciation to the Dai-Gohonzon of the Three Great Secret Laws, which was bestowed upon the entire world; to Nichiren Daishonin, the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law; and to Nikko Shonin.

I acknowledge my debt of gratitude and offer appreciation for Nichimoku Shonin.

*Chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo three times.*

**THIRD SILENT PRAYER**

For the Attainment of Kosen-rufu

I pray that the great desire for kosen-rufu be fulfilled, and that the Soka Gakkai International develop in this endeavor for countless generations to come.
I acknowledge my debt of gratitude and offer appreciation for the three founding presidents – Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Josei Toda and Daisaku Ikeda—for their eternal examples of selfless dedication to the propagation of the Law.

Chant Nam-myoho-ренge-kyo three times.

FOURTH SILENT PRAYER

Personal Prayers and Prayer for the Deceased

I pray to bring forth Buddhahood from within my life and accomplish my own human revolution, change my destiny and fulfill my wishes in the present and the future.

(Offer additional prayers here.)

I pray for my deceased relatives and for all those who have passed away, particularly for these individuals: (Sound the bell continuously while offering prayers.)

Chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo three times.

I pray for peace throughout the world and happiness of all living beings.

Sound the bell and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo three times to conclude (group chants in unison).
Analysis of Changes to the Liturgy

The first and most obvious difference between the format of gongyo presented in the 1981 and 2010 editions of the liturgy is that the title has been changed. In the 1981 edition, it was “The Liturgy of Nichiren Shoshu”, showing a clear alignment with the priesthood. Conversely, “The Liturgy of Nichiren Buddhism” goes beyond the confines of the Soka Gakkai, claiming the banner of Nichiren Buddhism generally. This is a subtle challenge to other groups and sects which self-identify as Nichiren Buddhist. The Soka Gakkai does not shy away from making assertive truth-claims, and this title change is exemplary of how these claims are made through its discursive practices.

Secondly, the recitation of the liturgy as it is now performed in the SGI is considerably shorter. The repeated recitation of the liturgy in imitation of the priesthood’s five morning and three evening prayers has been discarded, reducing the recitation to one full reading of the prose section of the Hoben chapter and the verse section of the Juryo chapter. The whole of “part B” (the prose section of the Juryo chapter) has been completely removed. Not only has it been shortened, but the liturgy is now only recited once. Members no longer turn to face east for the first prayer, instead remaining seated before their Gohonzon. These changes have reduced the time required to perform gongyo from a minimum of approximately 45 minutes (plus time spent chanting) to a mere five minutes (plus chanting on either end of the recitation).

Ultimately, the doctrinal basis for gongyo resides within the writings of Nichiren. His own references to daily practice were quite vague however, and open to interpretation, which was ongoing for 700 years before the rite was handed down to the fledgling Soka Gakkai of the 1930’s. The form eventually settled upon for the recitation of the liturgy by the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood was closely tied to the erection of various temples and buildings on the grounds of Taiseki-ji. The doctrinal basis for reciting the liturgy at these sites is founded on comments concerning the transmission of the office of high priest from Nikko to Nichimoku, and had no direct connection to Nichiren’s writings on the subject of daily practice (Saito 1992). The Soka Gakkai, in shedding the yoke of the priesthood, has consequently shed 700 years of temple tradition. In keeping with the Gakkai’s stance that they are the disciples of Nichiren and not of the Nichiren Shoshu, that they have inherited the spirit and mandate of Nichiren rediscovered by and
transmitted through Makiguchi, Toda and Ikeda to the Soka Gakkai as a whole, they are now exercising what they feel is their right to redesign the format of gongyo however they see fit.

The stated purpose for these changes was to refocus attention away from ritualized recitation, regarded as a secondary practice, and back upon chanting as the primary practice of Nichiren Buddhism (Morino 2002). From a functional perspective, this change must also have significantly lowered the barrier to entry for new members, thus supporting the SGI’s proselytizing efforts. Learning gongyo in the older form was quite difficult for new members, requiring weeks or months of careful practice and tutoring from senior members. The time commitment for morning gongyo was especially demanding, often consuming an hour or more every day; this was intimidating and difficult for new members. In terms of the format of gongyo, I believe we can accept this explanation at face-value; shortening the recitation of the liturgy affords more time for chanting, which is the primary practice of Nichiren Buddhism. Secondary to this, shortening gongyo makes the practice as a whole more accessible.

**Analysis of Variances Between the Silent Prayers**

The format of gongyo and the prayers reprinted above, when compared side by side, reveal the degree to which ritual practice within the SGI has diverged from that of the Nichiren Shoshu. It further displays the differences that have developed in their respective interpretations of Nichiren’s doctrine. The silent prayers form one instance of what Keane (2008) would term a religious creed. Pronouncing a creed in the material sense is not so much an expression of beliefs so much as it is an act that reinforces certain modes of thought or semiotic ideologies. The fact that these are prayers are “silent” should not diminish their importance in this regard, although being silent their physicality is somewhat diminished or attenuated in comparison to a spoken creed. In the following paragraphs, each of the Silent Prayers will be compared and analyzed to further substantiate the differences that have developed between these two sects.

**First Prayer:** The position of this prayer has been shifted to the beginning of gongyo, a curious change in format. Furthermore, the shoten-zenjin have lost their individual names and personality, becoming natural functions or forces rather than anthropomorphic powers with distinct features.
**Second Prayer:** The title of this prayer has been broadened from a prayer of gratitude for the Dai-Gohonzon specifically to the Gohonzon generally, which shows a marked shift away from the Dai-Gohonzon as the supreme object of worship. This is in keeping with the SGI's current stance regarding the Dai-Gohonzon and their notion of the essential equality between this and the personal Gohonzon of Gakkai members (Morino 1999).

Note the change in their respective descriptions of the Dai-Gohonzon, from “the Dai-Gohonzon enshrined in the High Sanctuary of true Buddhism” to “the Dai-Gohonzon of the Three Great Secret Laws, which was bestowed upon the entire world”. The Dai-Gohonzon has undergone a transition here from being a physical possession of the Nichiren Shoshu specifically to an abstract concept, a universal law that is the collective possession of all humanity. The locus of power is shifted away from Taiseki-ji and dispersed throughout the world to the numerous personal Gohonzon of SGI members. Also absorbed into this prayer is a recognition of gratitude for Nikko Shonin and Nichimoku Shonin, formerly a component of the Third Prayer. Tellingly, the prayers of gratitude to the lineage of high priests ends here.

**Third Prayer:** The acknowledgment of gratitude to the priesthood which was formerly the main component of the Third Prayer has been entirely replaced by prayers for the attainment of kosen-rufu and the growth and longevity of the SGI in pursuit of this goal. Formerly the prayer for kosen-rufu was a component of the fourth prayer.

In the second half of this prayer the three founding presidents Makiguchi, Toda and Ikeda are here presented as a new lineage of spiritual leaders which has eclipsed and replaced the role formerly held by the high priests.

**Fourth Prayer:** The prayer for the expiation of negative karma has been transformed into a prayer to bring forth the state of Buddhahood, what is termed “human revolution”. The underlying attitude of ritual prayer here has shifted from a necessarily negative process of expiating one's negative karma, “original sin”, to a positive search for the original Buddha-nature residing within oneself, a clear shift in ethos.
The prayer for the deceased is now incorporated into the Fourth prayer and remains unchanged from the original; the tradition of ancestor veneration is left intact. Finally, the prayer for the attainment of world peace, again borrowed from the Fifth Prayer, is incorporated into this prayer. The main point of divergence between the 1981 and 2010 versions being that mention of the Gohonzon and its beneficial effects is here removed; the vehicle of world peace and happiness is left unsaid. Furthermore the extension of this effect is limited now to the world and all living beings rather than the entire universe as it was in the 1981 version. Again, this betrays a doctrinal difference between the Soka Gakkai and the Nichiren Shoshu. Recall how Ikeda redefined the goal of kosen-rufu, invoking the principle of Shae no san-oku to create a more realistic and attainable goal of kosen-rufu (Murata 1969). Here again, the ideal of kosen-rufu is being redrafted in a more concise and down-to-earth iteration of the concept.

The Liturgy in English Translation

One major addition to the liturgy in the 2010 version is the inclusion of a translation in English of the Hoben and Juryo chapters of the Lotus Sutra. These translations are taken from the Burton Watson translation of the Lotus Sutra (1993), the version sanctioned by the SGI-USA. The inclusion of this translation in the prayer book is significant, as it is very much in keeping with the SGI’s emphasis on “faith, practice and study”, the three pillars of the SGI’s ethos.

Including the translation of the liturgy shows that a greater emphasis is being put upon study in the SGI today. As I recall the organization in the past, the study of the Lotus Sutra as bare text, without interpretive commentary, was not encouraged. To see it now made readily available to every SGI member, to read and study every time they do gongyo, is in a very positive step towards balancing the scales between faith and study. This may be another manifestation of the SGI’s new-found freedom from the priesthood; it shows that the organization has confidence in the ability of its members to read and absorb the meaning of the liturgy independently. A transcription of this translated text as it is presented in the liturgy can be found in Appendix D.
Conclusion

The ideological differences between the Soka Gakkai and the Nichiren Shoshu are subtly displayed in the differences between the format of gongyo and the wording of the Silent Prayers in the 1981 and 2010 editions of the liturgical manual. In the 1981 edition the influence of the priesthood, overseeing an orthodox expression of traditional ritual and doctrine, can be clearly felt. In the 2010 edition however, the Soka Gakkai has reclaimed and reformed the practice of gongyo, adapting it to better reflect the ethos and needs of the organization and its members. As the SGI’s interpretations of the Three Great Secret Laws (Daimoku, Gohonzon and Kaidan) and the Three Treasures (Dharma, Buddha and Sangha) have undergone redefinition and adjustment to modern times and realities, the ritual performance of gongyo has similarly undergone significant change.

The ritual of gongyo, directly borrowed by the Soka Gakkai from the priesthood, was practiced by Gakkai members for over 60 years in a manner almost identical to that of the priests. However, the underlying meaning ascribed to this symbolic act was informed by the Gakkai’s particular interpretation of the Gosho, not that of the priesthood (evidence of differing semiotic ideologies within the same representational economy). Both groups were performing virtually the same ritual (representamen), but the meaning they ascribed to the act (interpretant) was different in important ways.

For the members of the Soka Gakkai, the act of chanting the Daimoku to the Gohonzon cognitively links the practitioner to their innate Buddha-nature, furthering the process of Human Revolution, the expiation of one’s negative karma and the fulfillment of one’s desires and goals in this life (the object of the rite). To the Nichiren Shoshu the performance of gongyo has always been an exercise of duty to the Daishonin, their particular obligation to Nichiren as his earthly representatives in the current age of the world.

The purpose and function of this practice, as it is generally understood in the Soka Gakkai, is to change one’s karma, generate good fortune, and contribute to world peace (kosen-rufu). The felt effects of this practice are the development of self-discipline, a sense of well-being, self-empowerment and centeredness in one's environment. In the next chapter, the religious cognition of Soka Gakkai Buddhism
will be considered, the summation of the complex web of semiotic relationships between its core signs, material forms and discursive practices.
Chapter 9: Religious Cognition of the Soka Gakkai

In chapter 1, the relationship between an object, its representamen and interpretant was touched upon as forming the basis of Peircean semiotic theory. These three aspects form an irreducible triumvirate as a fully-realized sign. However, a sign in isolation is meaningless on its own and may only be understood in its relation to other signs. Collectively, signs form a web of associations within a given representational economy, which is organized by a society’s semiotic ideology (Keane 2006). The purpose of this study is to look at how objects influence and are influenced by their discursive surround.

In this chapter, the religious cognition of Soka Gakkai Nichiren Buddhists is presented as it relates to the performance of gongyo, the Gohonzon, and the attendant practices which surround these. The simultaneous experience and affirmation of one’s innate Buddha-nature experienced during this performance, and the sacred character of the Gohonzon, generate a host of attendant discursive practices and religious customs (material forms of semiosis) surrounding this ritual object. A detailed analysis of the various layers of semiosis surrounding the Gohonzon is presented, along with some of customs and interdictions which result from these. Finally, the semiotic ideology attendant with these practices is explored in regards to the discursive practices of members who have taken faith in chanting Daimoku to the Gohonzon.

Semiosis and Signification of the Gohonzon

The Gohonzon is a complex sign, enmeshed in layers of symbolic, iconographic and indexical signification. It is a representamen of Nichiren’s highest ideals, the “Mystic Law”, presented as an iconic/symbolic mandala. It is a depiction of the “Ceremony in the Air”, the core of the Lotus Sutra. It is also an indexical representamen of Nichiren himself, and the high priests who have copied the Gohonzon. The Gohonzon exists simultaneously on an ideal level as an abstract concept, on a concrete physical level as the numerous personal Gohonzons in members’ homes, and as the Dai-Gohonzon enshrined at Taiseki-

31 These observations are necessarily limited in scope to the present author’s study, being compiled from surveys, interviews, participatory observation and personal experience of SGI-USA meetings and practices in Washington State (King and Whatcom counties).
Because of its powerful significance as an object in the representational economy of Nichiren Buddhism, the Gohonzon, specifically the Dai-Gohonzon, has been at the center of the conflict between the Nichiren Shoshu and the Soka Gakkai. The following is a summation of the various semiotic relationships which surround and combine within the Gohonzon.

The Dai-Gohonzon is first of all an indexical representamen of Nichiren Daishonin. Having been penned by his own hand, the Dai-Gohonzon acts as a physical link to Nichiren via the indexicality of his brushwork. As a result, possession of the Dai-Gohonzon has been a major point of contention between the SGI and the Nichiren Shoshu. There are numerous other examples of Gohonzon written by Nichiren, but the Dai-Gohonzon is unique in that it was dedicated by him to all of humanity, making it the collective property of all his disciples. In this sense, the Dai-Gohonzon is an indexical, iconic, and symbolic representamen of Nichiren’s highest ideals (kosen-rufu primary among these). If we take Nichiren Buddhist doctrine at face value, the Dai-Gohonzon was penned by Nichiren to aid in the cause of kosen-rufu. Thus, through its physicality, it is an indexical sign of Nichiren’s ideals, being the product of his idealism. The Dai-Gohonzon is iconic in that it is a visual representamen of the Ceremony in the Air, Nichiren’s conception of the ultimate nature of reality. It is a symbolic representamen of this same object in that the Gohonzon is composed of written characters signifying the various gods, bodhisattvas and creatures described in this portion of the Lotus Sutra. Finally, the Dai-Gohonzon is an iconic representamen of Nichiren’s ideal Gohonzon, a token of that type of sign which Nichiren conceived as a representamen of the Ceremony in the Air. All later Gohonzon take the Dai-Gohonzon as their model, but they are all representative on some level of the ideal Gohonzon described in Nichiren’s writings.

All Gohonzons are iconic representamens of the Dai-Gohonzon and the abstract ideal Gohonzon. They display minor variations, such as variations in calligraphic style, personal signatures, and the dedicatory inscriptions along their side, but for the most part they are transcribed so as to accord with the Dai-Gohonzon in almost all particulars. All Gohonzons possess an indexical relationship to the high priest who transcribed them via the indexicality of that priest’s brushwork. The transcribing priest leaves behind a physical impression of himself in the calligraphic characters of the Gohonzon. Via the indexical
relationship between the high priests and Nichiren Daishonin, each Gohonzon also bears an indirect indexical relationship to Nichiren himself.

Gohonzons as mandalas bear an abstract iconic relationship to the Ceremony in the Air. On the Gohonzon, blocks of characters (essentially lists of names) stand in for iconic images of the buddhas, bodhisattvas and structures they are meant to represent. This iconicity of the Gohonzon is intertwined in a symbolic relationship between written characters and the sounds they arbitrarily represent. In this sense, Gohonzons are both iconic and symbolic representamen on two separate planes concurrently.

Taken as a whole, the Gohonzon as an iconic sign is a model of the Ceremony in the Air, a representation of the ultimate nature of reality. The blocks of script in which it is written are arranged in such an order as to signify the various beings and objects that were present in this event as it is described in the Lotus Sutra (Figure 2). The individual characters which make up the structures within the Gohonzon are arbitrary symbols in the classic semiotic sense, bearing no direct resemblance to their object. However, they are regarded as manifestations of the objects they represent. Thus, in this sense the Gohonzon is indexical of the presence of these gods, buddhas and bodhisattvas, and they are physically present in the frame of the Gohonzon every time the butsudan is opened. The various beings symbolized in the Gohonzon are in this sense physically brought into the presence of the devotee:

When we have this mandala with us, it is a rule that all the Buddhas and gods will gather round and watch over us, protecting us like a shadow day and night, just as warriors guard their ruler, as parents love their children, as fish rely on water, as trees and grasses crave rain, and as birds depend on trees. You must trust in it with all your heart. (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin:624)

Without exception, all these Buddhas, bodhisattvas, great sages, and, in general, all the various beings of the two worlds and the eight groups who appear in the “Introduction” chapter of the Lotus Sutra dwell in this Gohonzon. Illuminated by the light of the five characters of the Mystic Law, they display the dignified attributes that they inherently possess. This is the object of devotion. (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin:832)

As these beings have all sworn to uphold and protect the Dharma and the votaries of the Lotus Sutra, chanting to the Gohonzon is not perceived by practitioners as a form of worship so much as a request, one that the universe as a whole is contractually required to uphold.

Finally, the Gohonzon as a depiction of the Ceremony in the Air, is a symbolic representamen of the innate Buddha-nature of all beings. In this regard, Gohonzons bear a symbolic relation to their
possessors, who regard the Gohonzon as a mirror of their own innate Buddha-nature. The symbolic aspects of the Gohonzon are not readily apparent; the association between the scroll, its blocks of script and their object must be learnt. The characters of the script are symbols in the classical sense, possessing an arbitrary relationship to their object. Once learnt however, the symbolic aspect of the Gohonzon as a representamen of the Ceremony in the Air conjures a powerful interpretant as a mirror of the innate Buddha-nature within the observer.

Because of the numerous intertwined layers of signification bound up in the Gohonzon, this object has been the focal point of the conflict between the Soka Gakkai and the Nichiren Shoshu. This complex sign-vehicle is the core of Nichiren Buddhist practice and semiosis. By their refusal to bestow new Gohonzons to Gakki members, the priesthood was threatening to destroy the Soka Gakkai on a semiotic level. The SGI was able to circumvent this blockade with the help of reformist priests, and in 1993 began to print and distribute its own version of the Nichikan Gohonzon directly to its members. This move on the part of the Soka Gakkai required more than a printing press and paper; it required a doctrinal revaluation of the signification and importance of the Gohonzon in their representational economy. The Soka Gakkai survived the schism primarily because of their successful navigation through this process of semiotic revaluation.

The Ceremony in the Air

The Gohonzon, as mentioned above, is on one level an iconic and symbolic representamen of the Ceremony in the Air. This event takes place through the second half of the eleventh (“Treasure Tower”) through the twenty-second (“Entrustment”) chapters of the Lotus Sutra. The scale and breadth of this event is truly epic, involving incalculable numbers of buddhas, bodhisattvas and their attendant retinues. It occurs in a four-dimensional space-time that does not end or begin with the sutra itself. Within the context of Nichiren Buddhism, this event is regarded as the ultimate nature of reality, beyond the purview of our mundane world. For a practitioner familiar with the symbolic and iconic signification of the Gohonzon, this
scene from the sutra can be directly experienced. The following is a summation of the main points of these chapters drawn from both the Watson (1993) and Kato (1975) translations of the sutra.

In the eleventh chapter, a massive tower rises from beneath the earth and is suspended in mid-air. Seated within it is the Buddha Many Treasures, a Buddha from another time and world-system immeasurably far to the East, who has arrived to lend credence to Sakyamuni’s teachings. Sakyamuni then rises into the air after summoning the buddhas of the ten directions and, opening the tower, seats himself next to Many Treasures. At this point, Sakyamuni uses his mystical powers to raise the entire audience of the lecture into the air with him, thus beginning the “Ceremony in the Air”. This chapter ends with an exhortation from Sakyamuni to his followers, urging them to propagate this sutra in the age after his extinction, and stating that the Lotus Sutra is the foremost of his teachings.

In the thirteenth chapter (“Encouraging Devotion”), the countless bodhisattvas already in attendance vow to uphold the sutra, traveling throughout innumerable worlds to propagate its teachings. In the fifteenth chapter (“Emerging from the Earth”), the innumerable bodhisattvas who had gathered to the assembly accompanying the buddhas of the ten directions also swear to uphold and propagate the Lotus Sutra. However, Sakyamuni commands them to leave off, entrusting the Lotus instead to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. At this point the whole world splits open, disgorging these uncountable beings who had previously resided in the void of space beneath the earth. Each of these in turn leads a retinue equal in number to the grains of sand of sixty-thousand Ganges rivers. All of these swear to uphold, guard, and disseminate the Lotus Sutra throughout the worlds of the ten directions.

The sutra reaches its peak in the sixteenth chapter (“Lifespan of the Thus Come One”), where Sakyamuni reveals his original enlightenment in the incalculable past and the expedient means of his appearing to pass into extinction.

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32 Josei Toda’s revelation during his imprisonment was a direct experience of the Ceremony in the Air, brought on by an extended period of chanting and meditation (Strand, “Buddha As Life”).
33 Figure 2: The Treasure Tower is symbolized on by the Daimoku (1) flanked on either side by Śākyamuni (8) and Many Treasures (9).
34 The prose and verse sections of this chapter are recited daily by Nichiren Buddhists as it is the basis of their doctrine of original enlightenment.
In the twenty-first chapter ("Supernatural Powers"), Sakyamuni entrusts the sutra directly to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, led by Bodhisattva Superior Practices. The Buddha charges these Bodhisattvas with the task of preserving and propagating the Lotus Sutra.

Finally, in the twenty-second chapter ("Entrustment"), Sakyamuni confers the honor of upholding the sutra to all of the bodhisattvas present. He then disperses his emanations in the ten-directions from which they came, along with their attendant bodhisattvas and their retinues. Finally the Treasure Tower and Buddha Many Treasures return to their former place, and the Ceremony in the Air is concluded.

This scene as it is briefly described above, has been a common theme in the varied artistic expressions of 13th century Japanese Buddhism (Stone 1999). The Gohonzon of Nichiren is but one further iteration of these, distinct in its manner of presentation but not unique in its own right. Honzon similar to that produced by Nichiren, which substitute symbols for iconographic images, were already a fixture of Japanese Buddhism by Nichiren’s time (Stone 1999).

The Gohonzon was designed by Nichiren to act as a symbolic representamen of the Ceremony in the Air, as described in his letter to Nichinyo, The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin:831-833). As Nichiren describes in this letter, when a person takes faith in the Gohonzon, chanting the Daimoku, they may “enter” the scene depicted on this scroll:

This Gohonzon also is found only in the two characters for faith. This is what the sutra means when it states that one can “gain entrance through faith alone.” Since Nichiren’s disciples and lay supporters believe solely in the Lotus Sutra…they can enter the treasure tower of the Gohonzon. (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin: 832)

While performing gongyo, a person cognitively fuses with the Gohonzon on two levels: first through their voice, chanting the Daimoku and the reciting the Hoben and Juryo chapters of the Lotus Sutra, thus vocalizing the text which is depicted on the Gohonzon. Secondly, the practitioner fixes their gaze upon the scroll, especially while chanting, activating the iconic function of the Gohonzon. The Daimoku as it is printed on the Gohonzon, is the symbolic and iconographic representamen of the Treasure Tower. Within

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35 Figure 2: Superior Practices (9) is located on the Gohonzon next to Many Treasures. In this regard he symbolizes the countless Bodhisattvas of the Earth in attendance.

36 Nichiren in his writings equates himself often to this Bodhisattva and his own followers to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth led by Superior practices.
the Treasure Tower, Sakyamuni and Taho Buddha are depicted sitting together, instructing the assembly. As one chants, they cognitively and symbolically “enter” and inhabit the Gohonzon, vocalizing the words of the Buddha and their inherent Buddha-nature, just as Sakyamuni symbolically does in the sutra.

The cognitive fusion with the Gohonzon described above is a complex semiotic experience, which is dependent upon an understanding of the symbolic and iconographic aspects of signification bound up in the Gohonzon. It is likely that the distribution of this knowledge is unevenly distributed within the Soka Gakkai, as it would be in any religious community, and hence the experience of the Gohonzon on this level is unlikely to be universal. The revelation had by Toda during his imprisonment was of this nature and served as the inspiration for the reformation of the Soka Gakkai in post-war Japan (Strand, “Buddha as Life”). In my interviews with Soka Gakkai members, experiences similar to that described above are not altogether uncommon.

**Faith and Agency**

It is stressed in SGI literature that a complete understanding of the Gohonzon and gongyo are not necessary components for the practice of chanting to be efficacious. Instead, faith is presented as the key to practice:

I imagine some of you may wonder how reciting sutra passages you cannot understand could bring about any benefit. Let me reassure you that definitely there is benefit from carrying out this practice...Just as a baby is nourished and grows naturally of its own by drinking milk, if you earnestly chant the Mystic Law with faith in the Gohonzon, your life definitely will come to shine with immeasurable good fortune and benefit. (Ikeda, Soka Gakkai International, “Gongyo and Daimoku.”)

The above quote from the Soka Gakkai International website, attributed to SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, makes reference to a passage from the Writings of Nichiren Daishonin:

A baby does not know the difference between water and fire, and cannot distinguish medicine from poison. But when he sucks milk, his life is nourished and sustained. Although one may not be versed [in various sutras]... In the case of the Lotus Sutra, even though people may not have faith in it, so long as they do not slander it, then once
They have heard it, they will attain Buddhahood, strange as it may seem. (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin: 513)

These two statements are slightly contradictory; on the subject of faith, Ikeda presents this as the key ingredient for experiencing benefit from one’s practice. On the other hand, Nichiren presents faith here as secondary to the power of the sutra itself. In both cases however, there is a common underlying semiotic ideology which is unchanged. Daimoku, the “Mystic Law” of the Lotus Sutra, is ascribed powerful agency. Furthermore, understanding of the symbolic forms this object takes (its representamens as the Daimoku or the Gohonzon) is considered secondary; the agency of the object itself is here believed to be great enough to compensate for the speaker’s lack of understanding, or even lack of faith.

The Interdiction of Contact

The Gohonzon is regarded as a sacred object by Soka Gakkai members. Subsequently, the proscriptions for the proper handling of the Gohonzon are quite stringent. While on the surface this may appear to accord with Durkheim’s (1947) theory of religion, as it hinges upon a distinction between things “sacred” and “profane”, I propose that in fact these “interdictions of contact” surrounding the Gohonzon are founded upon a differing principle altogether: the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds. The description of customs and interdictions surrounding the Gohonzon which are offered in this section are derived from my observations of Soka Gakkai-USA meetings and members in their own homes.

There are first of all a number of proscriptions against the improper handling of the Gohonzon. Opening and closing the altar, and moving the Gohonzon are periods of ritual tension where the Gohonzon is at its most vulnerable. This creates an opportunity for the unintentional profanation of the Gohonzon, damaging or staining the scroll, thus necessitating proscriptive practices to protect the object on these occasions. When a Gohonzon must be handled, contact with its printed face is never permitted, and only the dowels it hangs from are ever touched. Great care is taken while removing the scroll from the butsudan, in the storage of the scroll during transport, and in re-enshrining the Gohonzon in its new location. Members continuously chant the Daimoku as they perform these actions. Whenever one approaches a

37 For a discussion of this concept, refer back to Chapter 4, The Ten Worlds.
Gohonzon, such as when opening the altar, a piece of paper or a stick of incense is held between the lips. This is done so as to prevent any unintended saliva from profaning the scroll while breathing and chanting Daimoku in close proximity to the Gohonzon. I have observed in larger formal meetings that some members even wear gloves or hold a piece of cloth in their hands when opening or closing the altar. However, in my experience of meetings, this practice is not observed in members’ personal homes.

Furthermore, unlicensed copying or reproduction of the Gohonzon is strictly taboo. The object is held in such high regard that even reproducing an image of the Gohonzon in a book is forbidden, or rather considered slanderous. This interdiction was originally a component of the Nichiren Shoshu’s monopolistic hold on the legitimate reproduction and distribution of Gohonzons, but it has persisted within the Soka Gakkai since their schism, suggesting that this interdiction has deeper ideological roots. This taboo is actually derived from an ideology of equivalence between things and their various representamens, symbolic, iconic and/or indexical. The Gohonzon, as a representamen of the sacred (Buddha-nature), both external and inherent within each individual, must be handled with great care. It is believed that any harm done to a Gohonzon is compounded and returned upon the damaging agent via this same equivalence; the Buddha-nature inherent in all phenomena connects the two. Any copy of a Gohonzon is, through this ideology of equivalence, indexically connected to the transcendent, or abstracted ideal Gohonzon, and is in that sense functionally equivalent to a ‘legitimate’ Gohonzon. This interdiction against copying the Gohonzon stems from a concern for the damage that might carelessly or unknowingly be done to it, and the concurrent negative karma that would be incurred by both the agent who profaned it and the person who caused it to be printed.

The “interdiction of contact”, the most basic and underlying of taboos, can be plainly seen in the examples above. These conform very neatly with Durkheim's description of a “negative cult”, that is to say, a series of interdictions designed to separate the sacred from the profane (Durkheim 1947). There is one fundamental difference however: in Nichiren Buddhist ideology, inspired by T’ien-T’ai’s dynamic holism, the sacred and the profane are held to be mutually inclusive of each other. Durkheim conceived this dichotomy of the mutual exclusivity of the sacred and the profane as forming the root of all religious sentiment. While it may in fact be a valid component of the Abrahamic religious traditions, this dichotomy
is not reproduced in the semiotic ideology of Nichiren Buddhism. Rather, in keeping with the T’ien-T’ai philosophy of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds, *ichinen-sanzen* (Three-Thousand Realms in a Single Thought-Moment), the “sacred” (Buddha-nature) is believed to reside within all phenomena, including the “profane” (the six lower worlds of devas, humans, Asuras, animals, hungry spirits and hell). This character may be obscured or dormant in people, but is nonetheless considered present in every moment of existence, inherent in all things as they are (Ziporyn 2000).  

Where Buddha-nature is physically manifest, it becomes an object of veneration. Paper, ink and wooden dowels are merely base matter, but in the Gohonzon their inherent Buddha-nature becomes manifest. The interdiction of contact with the Gohonzon reinforces this semiotic ideology of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds, mirrored within oneself and one’s relation to the Gohonzon. This principle of mutual possession resurfaces in numerous other material forms in Nichiren Buddhism. It also clearly marks out the Gohonzon as the central object of ritual significance and “sacredness” in Nichiren Buddhism. 

Belief is not a necessary component for the performance of ritual or for the observance of custom or taboo, although religions do produce material forms which are reproduced by their adherents (Keane 2008). The practice of limiting contact with the Gohonzon produces concurrent material forms, which are relatively autonomous. As these have endured the passage of time, they have acquired unintended features. For example, as a physical object the Gohonzon is vulnerable to all manner of physical harm, and the interdiction of contact necessitates its protection. This has resulted in the acquisition of the butsudan as an attendant object closely associated with the Gohonzon and the performance of gongyo. The butsudan as a physical altar invites offerings, and the ritualized presentation and consumption of those offerings, all of which takes place within a demarcated space. This space and the objects within it have come to be associated with the Gohonzon itself through this dynamic of accretion, and as such they have taken on some of its sacred character.

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38 In consideration of the fact that the majority of SGI-USA members are converts, generally raised in one or another monotheistic tradition (Hammond and Machacek 1999a), some trace of this sacred/profane dichotomy may be expected to persist in spite of their conversion. Such a consideration would be a legitimate subject of further inquiry into the SGI-USA’s conversion practices and religious conversion studies in general, but is not within the scope of the present work.
Creating Sacred Space

Twice a day, Soka Gakkai members sit before their butsudan and chant Daimoku to the Gohonzon, bringing forth their innate Buddha-nature. This area where a person brings forth their enlightened potential in effect becomes the Kaidan, the third of Nichiren’s Three Great Secret Laws. The positive aspects of the Gohonzon radiate outward from this sacred object of worship, thereby in effect sacrilizing the area surrounding one’s butsudan. The offerings of food and water presented to the Gohonzon are similarly sanctified. The area surrounding ones butsudan becomes charged with a sacred character of a lesser degree, and with that follows the interdiction of contact; it becomes a ritually purified space that must be protected from karmic pollution.

Generally, the “Gohonzon room” is a place in every member’s home where additional rules of conduct apply. The exact customs vary from home to home, but for example, shoes are never worn in this area, and rough play, foul speech and violent behavior are generally forbidden. These proscriptions against certain behaviors in the presence of the Gohonzon again conform to Durkheim’s theory of the negative interdictions which surround sacred objects.

The presentation of offerings to the Gohonzon upon the butsudan and the consumption of these after their consecration is another example of Durkheim’s (1947) theory. This constitutes the “positive cult” beliefs surrounding the Gohonzon, being an example of sacrifice, consecration and ritual feast. Even the water that is offered daily is regarded as having curative effects, acquired from its time in proximity to the Gohonzon.

Finally, there are some minor customs surrounding the orientation and maintenance of the butsudan within the space demarcated for prayer. First of all, placing the butsudan in the corner of a room is considered “bad luck” or “bad karma”. Essentially, the butsudan is the home of the Gohonzon, and as such it must be accorded a measure of respect. Thus, the butsudan, and by extension the Gohonzon, is given pride of place in whatever room it is installed. It is also regularly cleaned and dusted, with much care taken to assure that no dust comes in contact with the Gohonzon inside.

39 For a discussion of these concepts, refer back to Chapter 5, “The Three Treasures of Nichiren Shoshu”, and Chapter 6, “The Kaidan”.

116
Human Revolution

Chanting Daimoku, the sacred mantra Nam-myoho-ренge-kyо, is the most basic and fundamental aspect of Nichiren Buddhism. Every recitation of the Daimoku, in terms of the positive karma it generates, is considered to be the equivalent of reciting the entire Lotus Sutra:

Everything has its essential point, and the heart of the Lotus Sutra is its title, or the daimoku, of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Truly, if you chant this in the morning and evening, you are correctly reading the entire Lotus Sutra. (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin:923)

Within the SGI, chanting is presented as an empowering act focused on tangible results, what is commonly referred to as “actual proof”. Members are encouraged to test the efficacy of chanting for specific tangible goals as a means of proving to themselves and to others that chanting is an effective means of attaining goals and achieving a state of stability and happiness, which is termed “human revolution”.

Chanting is perceived as a means of generating good fortune or benefit, both spiritual (kudoku) and material (genze riyaku) (Murata 1969). In the Soka Gakkai, members commonly set goals for their practice; that is to say, they chant for specific things they want to see manifest in their lives, such as a new car, a new job, or an improvement in their relationships with others:

It's natural for prayers to center on your own desires and dreams. [...] By chanting very naturally, without affectation or reservation, for what you seek most of all, you'll gradually come to develop a higher and more expansive life-condition. Of course, it's perfectly fine as well to chant with the resolve to become a bigger-hearted person or for the welfare of your friends and for kosen-rufu- the happiness and flourishing of all humankind. (Ikeda 2010)

Chanting is believed to effect change through one’s karma, via the simple principle of cause-and-effect. As one visualizes the changes they wish to see while chanting, they are creating a cause for that effect to materialize in their life. This manifests itself in the form of conspicuous material effects (improvements in one's health, job, relationships, livelihood, etc.) and subtly in terms of one's “life condition” and “good fortune” (general attitude toward life and accidental success/luck):

There are two kinds of benefit that derive from faith in the Gohonzon: conspicuous and inconspicuous. Conspicuous benefit is the obvious, visible benefit of being clearly protected or quickly able to surmount a particular problem when it arises--be it an illness or a conflict in our personal relationships. Inconspicuous benefit, on the other hand, is less tangible. It is good fortune accumulated slowly but steadily, like the growth of a tree
or the rising of the tide, which results in the forging of a rich and expansive state of life. We might not discern any change from day to day, but as the years pass, it will be clear that over time we've become happy, that we've grown as individuals. This is inconspicuous benefit. (Soka Gakkai International, “On Practice.”)

At every meeting, members give personal testimony to the efficacy of chanting in the pursuit of health, prosperity and indomitable happiness. The cognitive effect of this discourse about the efficacy of chanting is that all positive events in life come to be perceived as benefits secured through prayer in the case of conscious goals, or the result of the “good fortune” one has accrued through their practice in the case of unintended/serendipitous benefit. This metonymic ideology extends to all aspects of the practitioner’s life.

On the other hand, negative events are interpreted as the manifest effects of one's negative karma, generated either in this life or in past incarnations. However, challenges and obstacles are not to be avoided, nor are they to be perceived as cause for sorrow or remorse. Just as Nichiren faced immense challenges in the process of asserting his beliefs and establishing his ministry, negative life events are welcomed as a sign that one is expiating their negative karma, a direct result of correct practice, which is chanting and propagating the Daimoku. The challenges that one faces in life become something to “chant about” and overcome, and are thus seen as opportunities for success and spiritual growth. Indeed they are a sign that one is practicing correctly. In a letter to two of his followers, Nichiren Daishonin wrote:

If you propagate it, devils will arise without fail. If they did not, there would be no way of knowing that this is the true teaching. One passage from the same volume reads: “As practice progresses and understanding grows, the three obstacles and four devils emerge in confusing form, vying with one another to interfere…One should neither be influenced nor frightened by them. If one falls under their influence, one will be prevented from practicing the correct teaching.” This statement not only applies to me but also is a guide for my followers. Reverently make this teaching your own, and transmit it as an axiom of faith for future generations. (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin:501)

Here, obstacles and adversity are reinterpreted as proof that one is practicing correctly. The environment itself is presented as possessing the agency to thwart and misdirect the faithful as a direct consequence of their correct practice. These discursive practices serve to reinforce a semiotic ideology of equivalence between objects and their representamen. Thoughts, words and actions are all thought to generate karma, good or bad, and this karma can be directed at concrete goals or expiated through chanting. 

118
The Soka Gakkai has named this process of bringing out one’s karma, “Human Revolution”. This is the ultimate goal of the practice: enlightenment has been redefined here as a state of unshakable confidence and faith in the efficacy of chanting Daimoku in the face of all adversity. The effects of this human revolution are understood to expand outward throughout society and the world, contributing to world peace and prosperity. There is no ceremony to confirm when or if one has become “enlightened”, because the Buddha-nature is held to be universal and inherent in all beings, just as they are. One has simply to realize their originally-enlightened state, which is awakened through chanting the Daimoku to the “True Object of Worship”, the Gohonzon. This is why Soka Gakkai members refer to what they do as “practice”: twice a day, they bring forth their inherent Buddha-nature through the practice of gongyo and ideally learn to inhabit this perceived enlightened state perpetually.

A semiotic ideology of equivalence between objects and their representamen can be observed in the Daimoku on two levels. First, in terms of generating positive karma, reciting the Daimoku is perceived to be equivalent to chanting the entire Lotus Sutra. Reciting the Lotus Sutra, containing as it does all the wisdom of the Buddha’s earlier sutras, is further perceived to be equivalent to reciting all of the Buddha’s teachings. Thus, every recitation of Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo is functionally equivalent to reciting the entire corpus of the Buddha’s sermons. This is supported doctrinally by passages from the Gosho, and the discursive practices surrounding the Daimoku. Secondly, when one is chanting the Daimoku with a specific goal in mind, the visualization of the goal or desired state is understood as being equivalent to taking concrete action to achieve that goal via a karmic connection between the object of desire and the iconic visualization of the object.

Conclusion

A consistent theme running throughout each chapter of this study has been the connection of the subject material to a specific semiotic ideology. In Soka Gakkai Buddhism, there is a consistent tendency to equate things (as objects) with their various representative forms (the object’s representamen), iconic, indexical or symbolic. This ideology has had an important influence on the material forms of this religion, especially as it finds expression in gongyo, the ritual practice of Soka Gakkai Nichiren Buddhism.
The ritual practice of gongyo, the material objects utilized in this rite, and the ideology of the SGI are not separate phenomena, but are rather interconnected objects tied together by a semiotic ideology within the representational economy of Nichiren Buddhism. As the SGI’s interpretations of the Three Great Secret Laws (Daimoku, Gohonzon and Kaidan) and the Three Treasures (Dharma, Buddha and Sangha) have undergone redefinition and adjustment to modern times and realities, the ritual performance of gongyo has similarly undergone significant change. This change is the result of a reordering of objects within their representational economy, organized by the semiotic ideology of the Soka Gakkai, in the process of successfully navigating the rift in their relationship with the Nichiren Shoshu.

The underlying perception (interpretant) within the Soka Gakkai of what the ritual signifies, its object, has remained largely unchanged in spite of the outward changes in the performance of the rite. In the act of chanting the Daimoku and reciting the sutra, the practitioner invokes their innate Buddha-nature. This act sanctifies the area around the practitioner in the vicinity of the Gohonzon, which effectively becomes the Kaidan, the High Sanctuary of True Buddhism. In this, a semiotic ideology of equivalence between an object and its various expressions through signs can be observed on numerous levels.

The interdiction of contact with the Gohonzon is the material expression of a semiotic ideology that perceives the sacred (Buddha-nature) inherent in all mundane form (the lower six worlds), the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds. The sacred character of the Gohonzon becomes manifestly apparent through the complex layers of its signification, which requires that it be protected from pollution. This in turn generates a host of proscriptions against improper handling and storage of the object and the concomitant ideas of how it is to be properly handled and stored. The Gohonzon’s sacred character charges the area and objects around it through contact and association, bringing out their enlightened potential. The material implements and ritual activities which surround the Gohonzon are the means through which Gakkai members interact with “sacredness” (Buddha-nature) as it is embodied or reflected in the Gohonzon, thus bringing forth or recognizing this same quality in themselves through their practice.
Chapter 10: Summary and Conclusion

This study has primarily dealt with two things: the schism that occurred between the SGI and the priesthood in 1991, and the subsequent changes in the ritual practice and paraphernalia of gongyo within the context of the post-schism SGI. In the twenty years since their excommunication from the Nichiren Shoshu, the Soka Gakkai has realigned its interpretation of several key points of doctrine. These changes have found expression in a modification of its basic ritual practices on all levels; symbolic, indexical and iconic. In this we can see an example of a representational economy at work; as the core symbolic relics of the faith (namely the Dai-Gohonzon and the Kaidan) were variously withheld or destroyed, the practices and ideology of the SGI have undergone a drastic realignment. Even the material objects utilized in the performance of gongyo had to be modified in order to realign these with ideological changes within the SGI. From a broader historical perspective, this schism between the SGI and the Nichiren Shoshu is just one recent iteration of an ongoing cycle of growth, development, schism and reformation which constitutes the entire history of Buddhism. This cycle has been driven by semiotic processes at work on the material forms continuously generated by religious traditions.

This process of semiotic realignment has been orchestrated through the semiotic ideology of the SGI. Redefining their core symbols (the Three Treasures, the Dai-Gohonzon, and the Kaidan) and repositioning themselves in relation to these was necessary for ensuring the survival of the organization. Subsequently, we can observe a shift in the discourse surrounding these objects, a transformation of iconic signs, and changes in the format of ritual practice (gongyo) within the SGI.

Gongyo has been dramatically shortened, simplified, and in the case of the silent prayers, dramatically reworded to better reflect the SGI's ideological realignment. With the conservative influence of the priesthood removed, the SGI has grown into its own as an independent sub-sect of Nichiren Buddhism with its own canon of literature, exegetical discourse, unique symbolism, ritual practice and organizational structure which have helped to differentiate and insulate it from the Nichiren Shoshu.

The Soka Gakkai can be situated historically as one of the more recent iterations in a long line of sects inspired by the Lotus Sutra. From Makiguchi and Toda, to Nichiren and Dengyo Daishi, and ultimately back to T’ien-T’ai Chih-I and Kumarajiva, the Soka Gakkai are the inheritors of more than 1,500
years of thought and commentary on the Lotus Sutra. The spirit of absolutism and assertive idealism this text seems to inspire in its adherents can be plainly seen in the Soka Gakkai today. Nichiren’s faith in the Lotus Sutra and the emancipatory efficacy of the Daimoku fueled an exclusivist ideology and iconoclasm which he encouraged in his followers. The members of the SGI today see themselves as Nichiren’s true disciples, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, the votaries of the Lotus Sutra foretold to appear in the Latter Day of the Law, sworn to disseminate “True Buddhism” throughout the world.

The schism and excommunication of the SGI in 1991 was a calculated move on the part of the priesthood of Taiseki-Ji to reign-in the Soka Gakkai. The decision to withhold the Gohonzon and not issue these to Gakkai members was intended to destroy the Soka Gakkai as a mass-movement internationally. This embargo struck at the semiotic heart of the organization. The SGI was eventually able to circumvent the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood’s monopoly on the production and distribution of the Gohonzon, but this still left the members in a position of offering prayers for the longevity of a lineage of priests who had already excommunicated them. The SGI had to reform their ritual practice in order to fully sever their ties to the Nichiren Shoshu. In this sense, the changes made to gongyo were absolutely necessary in order for the SGI to reestablish some sense of stability within the representational economy of its signs. This process began with rewording the silent prayers and ended ten years later with the attenuation and reformattting of gongyo.

The core principles of this Buddhism had to undergo a process of redrafting, in several cases calling for the expansion of sacred objects into abstracted forms. First the Dai-Gohonzon and then the Kaidan were redefined in terms of their central importance to the Soka Gakkai’s doctrine of Human Revolution. The priesthood as a symbol of Nichiren’s authority was discarded from the practice of SGI members, just as were the brass crane medallions formerly enshrined in members’ butsudans. But while some of the outward expressions of the practice were mutable, other material forms were maintained and persisted despite their discursive surround. The practice of gongyo was altered and the cranes of the Nichiren Shoshu have been replaced by the lotus of the SGI, but the maintenance, function and use of ritual paraphernalia has remained practically unchanged. Within the representational economy of the SGI, these
expansions, substitutions and attenuations were necessary steps for ensuring the viability of the organization after the schism.

The SGI was hamstrung by the lack of new Gohonzon for three years before being joined by the reformist priests of Joen-ji temple. With the aid of these priests, new Gohonzon are now being regularly printed and conferred to new members, allowing the SGI to grow again. In this sense the SGI has never fully shaken their dependence on the priesthood for the manufacture of an item without which the organization cannot function. Because of the sacred character attributed to the Gohonzon, the SGI would not endeavor to produce these on their own; in this they betray a semiotic ideology which still discerns a measure of sacredness to the priesthood and which preserves the interdiction of contact between the laity and the Gohonzon.

The above serves as an example of both the persistence and mutability of semiotic forms and the manner in which these will shift and change within a given representational economy in the wake of religious schism. Regardless of the attendant beliefs ascribed to religious rite, the material effects of religious ritual in regards to forging group identity and unity are clearly of great value to a religious organization and will not be easily abandoned. In this sense, many of the semiotic forms of religious ideology were preserved by the SGI in the reformation of their ritual practice. On the other hand, this reformation serves as an example of how easily core concepts within a religious sect can be re-envisioned and promulgated throughout a large and dispersed population of members.

Implications for Further Research

The SGI has survived in spite of their excommunication due to two factors: their dedicated and highly organized leadership structure and the effective reformation of their core ideological signs. This first factor should receive further attention, particularly the decision-making process involved in the reformation of the SGI’s ritual practice and the redrafting of their symbolic, indexical and iconic signs. The process behind the design, planning, and implementation of these changes and innovations deserves further attention, as well as the readiness with which these were accepted by the membership internationally.
The study of religious reform movements could also be aided by further research into the semiotic processes that accompany schism and reformation. Focusing attention on the material forms of opposing semiotic ideologies within a representational economy in the process of schism could yield interesting data on the processes at work behind allegations of heresy and apostasy between religious bodies.

As mentioned in the conclusion of the previous chapter, another area that could bear further study is the recurrence of the semiotic ideology of equivalence and the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds throughout Nichiren Buddhist thought. Such a study would highlight the semiotic forms and processes of icon, index and symbol in the representational economy of Nichiren Buddhist practice within the context of the SGI or elsewhere.
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Appendix A: Field Notes of a SGI District Meeting

Date: October 17, 2012

Location: Bellingham Buddhist Center (BBC)

Event: District Meeting

The Bellingham Buddhist Center (BBC) is located in a small business center, on the north end of town, across the street from the local community college. A bright yellow blue and red banner with the letters SGI emblazoned upon it is painted on the window and the sign “Bellingham Buddhist Center” taped to the window.

Tonight's meeting is a study meeting for Electric District (ED) and a district general meeting for NW District (ND)

6:40 pm—I arrive to find the building locked and empty. One of my hosts, who is trusted with the maintenance of the facilities, unlocks the door, turns on the lights, and deactivates the security alarm. Further preparations are made for the other members who will arrive soon; a desk is located at the entry wherein a log book with a checklist for opening and closing the center is located.

Someone has come previously to the center and adorned the main meeting hall with festive Halloween themed decorations. Stretched cotton cobwebs and plastic spiders have been strung across the ceiling, and even the butsdan has food offerings of mini-pumpkins.

My host goes about the room preparing the Center for the meeting. The first thing she does is open the butsdan. Taking a small strip of white paper, she places this between her lips and slowly, reverently, opens the butsdan, all the while quietly chanting the Daimoku. We sit and my host proceeds to chant while we wait for more members to arrive.

6:50—Three more arrivals have come to the center. There is sporadic chatting, greetings and a hum of chanting.
There are now eight people in attendance; the majority are chanting in unison, harmonizing their voices. The chanting is proceeding at a rate of approximately 35–40 daimoku per minute (dpm). A couple of participants are trying to socialize or encourage me to chant with them; I retreat to the kitchen where I can drink tea and continue to my observations unmolested.

The chanting has ceased; the man leading gongyo rings the bell three times and everyone chants in unison three times; gongyo has begun.

The recitation of gongyo seems to proceed at a faster clip than the chanting did; within about five minutes gongyo is over and the group switches back to chanting Daimoku; there is no bell rung to transition between the two.

The pace of the chanting holds steady at about 40 dpm. There is one member sitting at the desk, not chanting, and he answers the phone whenever it rings. Another member enters the Center at this time, engages in a brief conversation with the gajokai on duty, takes a seat and begins chanting.

The meeting participants are moving freely about the Center now, coming and going into the kitchen, bookstore or bathroom as needed; most are still chanting in unison. During gongyo all were seated for the duration of the recitation.

One male participant moves to the back of the room, chants three times, bows to the Gohonzon, and then goes through the five silent prayers. He then greets me, talks briefly to a friend, and leaves the Center.

The bell is sounded three times and the group slowly chants in unison; the silent prayers have now begun. The leader slowly chants three times, pauses, and then chants three more times, pauses, and then chants three more times. The other members, heads bowed and hands pressed together, remain silent, either

It is customary at larger meetings for a number of young men to patrol or guard the assembly; I have been told that this tradition dates back to the early years of Nichiren’s ministry, when violent clashes between Nichiren’s followers and Nembutsu adherents were common. At present, the duties of gajokai are mostly confined to directing traffic and greeting members at the door, as well as keeping an eye on any suspicious activity that may occur around the vicinity of the meeting hall.
scanning their prayer books or directing their gaze at the floor throughout the silent prayers. This pattern of
doing sansho is repeated for each silent prayer one, two, or three times. In the fifth prayer, the bell is
sounded continuously while the participants give prayers to the deceased; in this case the leader of gongyo
rings the bell a total of six times at irregular intervals over a span of approximately 25 seconds.

Sansho is again repeated by the leader, the bell is rung three more times and the whole group does
sansho together. This last sansho is quite a bit louder, longer, and more harmonious than those preceding it
during gongyo; it is the closing act of the rite.

Afterward, everyone says thank you, folds up their prayer beads, pockets their gongyo books, and
starts to chat and mingle. Gongyo is now over.

The members of ED remove themselves to the kitchen where they can hold their meeting around
some large plastic folding tables and drink tea (drinks other than water are not permitted in the main hall of
the Center). Of the two members of NWD, one leaves and the other joins the ED study meeting.

7:40—The meeting begins with name-sharing, snacks and tea. Everyone is chatting, and a couple of
sporadic attempts are made to bring the study session into order. One female member begins reading an
extract of the study material over the hubbub of the crowd, which quiets everyone quickly; the material is a
Gosho passage about the doctrine of itai-doshin, “many in body one in mind”, which is read from a
periodical published by the SGI, Living Buddhism magazine.

As soon as she has finished the reading, she shares her understanding or interpretation of this
material with the group. She is an older member who has been practicing since the early 1970's and has
gone over this passage numerous times, but admits that it has always troubled her; she then shares her
experience of having gained insight into the meaning of this passage and how it can be applied to daily life
and maintaining the unity of the local SGI community. Next a male member reads the official interpretation
appended to the text.

7:50—There is no apparent leadership organizing or running the proceedings of this meeting; it is informal
and non-hierarchical, although the more experienced members do seem to take the lead in reading and
sharing their experiences or interpretations of the text, but they also encourage the younger members to do the same. Meeting participants then take turns reading paragraphs of the text, with older members helping the younger with difficult vocabulary and pronunciation of Japanese terms. The material is read paragraph by paragraph in this manner. Afterwards the members provide their own interpretations of the text as they care to.

7:55—One male member exhorts the others to unite in propagating this Buddhism, to attain a goal of bringing in 60 new members this month. The power of Daimoku is now discussed, specifically the power of united Daimoku when all the members within the community unite in prayer for a specific end. It is explained as increasing the efficacy of the prayer exponentially.

8:00—Another male member tells a story about President Ikeda's early efforts to propagate this Buddhism in Japan. Kosen-rufu is then defined as the worldwide propagation of Nichiren Buddhism.

A female member somewhat counters the evangelical stance taken by the first two male members on the subject of propagation, bringing the subject of itai-doshin back into the conversation and relating it to the relationship between mentor and disciple. One male member then defends his interpretation of propagation and explains that he chants for people to be brought into his environment in order to propagate this Buddhism. According to him, the act of propagation generates tremendous good fortune and allows us to achieve our goals; his statement is met with general approval by the crowd.

8:10—Along the subject of propagation, a discussion of geisha cards and where to procure them springs up for a few minutes. At this point about six of the eleven participants in the room have contributed experiences or opinions about the material being discussed.

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41 The act of introducing someone to Buddhism. Not to be confused with shakubuku, which concerns the confrontation and refutation of erroneous ideas. Gakkai members often keep business cards for the purpose of succinctly introducing Buddhism to strangers. Typically these cards contain a transcription and explanation of the Daimoku.
After being asked by the older members, one younger male member then gives a description of his experience of starting up a student Buddhist group at the local university campus.

8:20—The elder male member then proceeds to talk about the importance of shakubuku again, this time proceeding to describe it from a multi-generational viewpoint. As an active member for over 40 years, he has found that he has on several occasions proselytized to multiple generations of members of the same families, and he sees this as the continuation of karma across generations.

8:30—The discussion has wound up; according to their schedule the meeting ends at 8:30, so the members present clean up the cups and teabags, straighten out the kitchen, return the seats taken from the meeting hall to their original locations and slowly filter out of the building.

I take this opportunity to recruit five members for my study. A few linger for a while, chatting amiably with each other before leaving; the last to leave is the gajokai on duty who proceeds to work through his closing checklist to put the Center in order, turn out the lights and lock the doors.
Appendix B: Field Notes of a World Peace Prayer Meeting

Date: November fourth, 2012

Location: Bellingham Buddhist Center (BBC)

Event: World Peace Prayer Meeting—these meetings are held once a month and are open to any and all members in the area.

9:40pm—At this time there are about 13 people in attendance. The butsudan had already been opened, offerings of fruit (pears, bananas), pumpkins, flowers, water and evergreens all set out on the lower tier. At the time, although there were plenty of people present, no one was chanting; this was due to the fact that two young men, perhaps in their early 20's, were standing to the right of the butsudan practicing a duet they would play later with violin and steel drum...as unlikely a combination as any I have ever seen. I recognized the tune they were rehearsing as “Forever Sensei”, an old Gakkai tune still current in the SGI. It is a militaristic march, a song of devotion to the path of mentor and disciple. Not much had changed in 25 years after all.

The meeting is set to begin at 10am, so people continue to filter into the center. As they enter there are greetings, introductions, chatting and general socializing. The people assigned to work the front desk, bookstore, and donation desks are already at their posts, seeing to their duties, occasionally bustling about the Center but generally behind the scenes.

9:50—A young man in his early 20's takes a seat in front of the butsudan and rings the bell three times to signal the beginning of gongyo. As one, everyone in the room does sansho, reciting the daimoku three times, palms pressed together before their mouths or hearts, bowing slightly at the waist. The young man leading begins to chant at a steady clip into the microphone placed before him and the whole room follows, matching his speed and harmonizing with his tone. I time the chanting and it comes out to a steady 42 daimoku per minute (dpm).
After about 5 minutes, the leadership changes and another young man takes his place. Chanting continues, but the new leader is far louder and increases the rate of the chanting. After timing him I found he was chanting at a rate of approximately 50 dpm, a brisk pace.

Most of the participants at this time are seated and chanting; gongyo proper will begin soon and during this time no one will talk or move from their seats, and it seems everyone is cognizant of this and settling in for gongyo. By this time there are about 35 members present; 15 women and 20 men, and about five young children in the activity room, all girls. While the rest of the congregation chants an older female member attends the children to keep an eye on the kids and keep them from disturbing gongyo.

10:10—The bell is rung three times and everyone takes the cue to wind down their last daimoku; then simultaneously they do sansho again, chanting slowly three times. Now the leader does sansho while the rest remain silent, their heads bowed, giving thanks and praise to the Shoten-Zenjin, the functions in life and the environment protecting the votaries of the Lotus Sutra.

The leader then rings the bell three more times and begins Gongyo, “Myo ho ren ge kyo. Hoben-pon. Dai ni...,” and the whole room begins the recitation as one. The pace the leader sets is brisk; in one minute approximately 65 mora/characters are recited, which means that part A (the second chapter) is completed within two minutes. At the conclusion of this recitation the bell is rung three times and the leader begins with the introduction to the sixteenth chapter, “Myo ho ren ge kyo. Nyorai ju-ryo-hon. Dai ju-roku...,” and again the congregation begins the recitation of this section simultaneously, perfectly in rhythm and harmony with the leader and each other. This second section is completed almost as quickly, and within three minutes the group has finished the last syllables of this chapter. The leader immediately begins chanting and sounding the bell, the group follows shortly, matching his pace which is again at about 50 dpm.

10:20—After just five minutes of chanting, the leader rings the bell three times and begins to lead the group through the other four silent prayers. Throughout these prayers the only person doing sansho is the leader; the rest are sitting with bowed heads and hands held before them like lotus blossoms decorated with strings
of beads. They either scan the prayers in their books or stare with half-closed eyes at the floor while the leader does sansho, pauses, repeats, pauses, again and again like this for each prayer.

While the other members are praying silently, I cannot help thinking about how much gongyo has changed since I was young; a thirty-minute kosen-rufu gongyo was unheard of when I was a child. Virtually every aspect of the ritual has been attenuated, cut down, shortened and simplified.

The bell rings out repeatedly as we enter the Fifth prayer, the prayer for the dead. As I have aged the number of people I honor during this prayer has grown year by year. The prayer itself has taken on a new poignancy that it never used to have when I was younger and had never experienced of the finality of death. I sit silently, head bowed, and remember the names and faces of all those people I knew who have gone into the ground.

The leader does sansho one more time and rings the bell; there is an audible intake of breath as everyone in the room prepares to do sansho for the final time. The silence is broken as the whole congregation breaks out simultaneously in the first chord of sansho, made all the more dramatic by their complete silence over the last minutes of prayer. This last sansho is long and loud, and each syllable is drawn out to such an extent that we have to take in more breath for each daimoku.

Everyone has a unique rhythm and draws out these syllables to different lengths when they chant or do sansho, so this can be tricky. Sometimes the group will dictate to the leader, sometimes the leader can control the group. Leading gongyo feels like nothing so much as riding a wave; you have the sense of a great mass moving behind you, a welling force that you can somewhat direct and then let loose, but is really not under your control at all. It will respond to certain prompts, but it cannot be directed with any great degree of accuracy. It is during sansho at the end of gongyo that this can be particularly felt. Our leader keeps an even pace and the air is left ringing with the last syllable of the daimoku, “kyo”. Everyone mutters “thank you” as we pack away our prayer books and beads, concluding gongyo.

10:25—A young woman acting as MC for the meeting takes the microphone and welcomes everyone, thanking the young man, Joseph, for leading gongyo. Her announcements are greeted with clapping; as a rule the crowd always claps following every announcement from the MC and to welcome every speaker
who takes the floor. Volunteers are then solicited to read passages from the daily guidance of Pres. Ikeda and the Gosho of Nichiren. After 3 people have read, our MC declares that there will now be a Gohonzon conferral ceremony, and the parties involved make their way to the front of the room.

The ceremony is brief and prescriptive, without much in the way of ritual. The conferee and his sponsor, an older man, stand at the front of the room, just to the right of the butsudan. The older gentleman is holding the Gohonzon, wrapped in its protective sleeve of white paper. The conferee holds out his hands before his chest, a blue fukusa draped over them to receive the Gohonzon. The sponsor begins by introducing the conferee to the group; the young man is a fortune baby and grew up in a Nichiren Buddhist household but is now receiving his own Gohonzon.42 After introducing the conferee to the crowd, the sponsor reads aloud from a card explaining the significance of the Gohonzon and the day on which it is received. The material on the card is mostly quotations from the Gosho encouraging the new member to endure in his practice, and a short message from President Ikeda on victory and defeat. The sponsor then, carefully holding the Gohonzon with both hands, places it in the waiting hands of the new member. Both of them bow slightly and the conferee turns back the face the applause of the crowd. With that the conferral ceremony is ended, and both parties make their way back to their seats.

10:30—An experience is now being given to by a young man, a Brazilian fortune baby, about how this practice helped him in his life. The crowd listens attentively as the speaker reads aloud, holding the microphone with one hand, his notes with the other. The experience he gives is about his struggles trying to learn English and get an education in Ireland and America. At its conclusion the room erupts in great cheers, clapping and whistles, some members even stand to give their ovations.

Next the microphone is given to the older woman who had been watching the children in the adjacent room. She has a young girl in tow, maybe 7 years old, and together they give an account of a recent learning review that had been conducted to instruct the children in the tenets of this Buddhism.

42 For new members, receiving the Gohonzon marks the official beginning of their lives as Nichiren Buddhists. For those raised in the practice, receiving the Gohonzon marks a passage to adulthood and independence. The young man in question is in his early 20’s, most likely a university student who has recently begun living on his own; now that he has started to live outside the family home he will have to take up the responsibility of maintaining his own butsudan and his own Buddhist practice.
10:40—Now a video is screened of a meeting that took place with Pres. Ikeda in Japan at the SGI general headquarters. The video is given a short introduction by an older gentleman, who had earlier been setting up the AV equipment to the left of the butsdan; he warns us that the film is 30 minutes long. The lights are dimmed and the crowd turns slightly to the left to watch the video which is being shown on a big screen TV and also projected onto the wall. The video itself is an official release from the SGI; these meetings are all in Japanese but the video has been subtitled in English.

The first segment is a series of experiences given by young members, first a female pianist from Fukushima whose home was destroyed in the 2011 tsunami, then a young man who was introduced to the practice recently. This is followed by an older man in his 60's describing in brief the various projects underway in the SGI. The near completion of a new general headquarters building is specifically emphasized and he then goes on to expound how in every district the youth division should strive to “build fortresses of faith”; this is not to be taken literally, but such militaristic language is fairly common in SGI rhetoric and is purely metaphorical.

The second segment is recording of another meeting with SGI Pres. Ikeda. Mr. Ikeda begins by greeting an elderly woman on stage and then welcoming the foreign members who are present at the meeting, representing some 250 countries. The gist of his speech is encouraging members to propagate this Buddhism far and wide; he makes reference to passages in the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren's Gosho to explain that the members of the SGI are the true votaries of the Lotus Sutra, the “Bodhisattvas of the earth”, and their lives and efforts will be supported by the protective deities, innumerable Buddhas and even Nichiren himself.

The last segment of the meeting is rather candid; Ikeda proceeds to call out some young men in the first row, asking them questions about where they are from and what they are studying. The young men are so nervous they cannot properly respond and Ikeda has some fun with them, making jokes at their expense—much laughter ensues. Ikeda concludes the meeting by calling out and honoring the various members from distant areas of Japan and the foreign members in attendance.
Looking around, I notice that the children attending the meeting today are starting to get restless; it reminds me of being a kid at these meetings myself, running around and causing trouble.

A young man in a white shirt and red tie reads a quotation from Makiguchi which is interesting; it is an account of how inspired Makiguchi was by his discovery of Nichiren Buddhism. Makiguchi was 60 years old when he encountered this Buddhism but it inspired him to found the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai, the forerunner of the SGI, which was intended as an educational reform society/movement. The young man then goes on to describe how the SGI is a world-wide community, how you can travel and meet with members all over the world. Even if you cannot speak the same language, you can still sit down and chant or do gongyo with other members you meet.

Now the two young men who had been practicing earlier take up their instruments at the front of the room and play their song. Members are standing and singing, reading the lyrics off white slips of paper we found on our seats when we arrived earlier. The performance is well-received and there is much clapping and applause.

Final announcements are made of upcoming events by the MC, and then a young man takes the seat in front of the butsudan to lead us in sansho. He rings the bell three times and everyone takes up the paean, much as we did at the conclusion of gongyo, each syllable drawn out long and loud. With that done, the meeting is now officially concluded.

People begin to disperse, rising from their seats to mill about and chat, put on jackets, make introductions or say goodbye to friends. Some members remain to straighten out the center. The flowers and fruit are removed from the altar, the lights are put out and the butsudan is closed.

Approximately 20 members are still milling about, a knot of young men are playing with the steel drum. People are going in and out of the Center, drinking tea in the kitchen, chatting with each other.
11:45—About 10 members are left including those assigned to stay and close up the Center. I take leave of the Center at this point.
Appendix C: Pages from the Hoben and Juryo Chapters of the Liturgy (2010)

Figure 8: Pages from the Hoben and Juryo Chapters of the Liturgy
Appendix D: Excerpts from the Lotus Sutra

Chapter 2: Expedient Means

At that time the world-honored one calmly arose from his Samadhi and addressed Shariputra, saying: “The wisdom of the buddhas is infinitely profound and immeasurable. The door to this wisdom is difficult to understand and difficult to enter. Not one of the voice-hearers or pratyekabuddhas is able to comprehend it.

“What is the reason for this? The buddhas have personally attended a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million, a countless number of buddhas and have fully carried out an immeasurable number of buddhas’ ways and doctrines. They have exerted themselves bravely and vigorously, and their names are universally known. They have realized the Law that is profound and never known before, and preach it in accordance with what is appropriate, yet their intentions are difficult to understand.

“Shariputra, ever since I attained Buddhahood I have through various causes and various similes widely expounded my teachings and have used countless expedient means to guide living beings and cause them to renounce their attachments. Why is this? Because the thus come ones are fully possessed of both expedient means and the paramita of wisdom.

“Shariputra, the wisdom of the thus come ones is expansive and profound. They have immeasurable [compassion], unlimited [eloquence], power, fearlessness, concentration, emancipation and samadhis, and have deeply entered the boundless and awakened to the Law never before attained.

“Shariputra, the thus come ones know how to make various distinctions and to expound the teachings skillfully. Their words are soft and gentle and can delight the hearts of the assembly.

“Shariputra, to sum it up: the buddhas have fully realized the Law that is limitless, boundless, never attained before.

“But stop, Shariputra, I will say no more. Why? Because what the buddhas have achieved is the rarest and most difficult-to-understand Law. The true aspect of all phenomena can only be understood and shared between buddhas. This reality consists of the appearance, nature, entity, power, influence, internal cause, relation, latent effect, manifest effect, and their consistency from beginning to end”

(The Lotus Sutra and Its Opening and Closing Sutras, pp. 56–57)

Chapter 16: The Life Span of the Thus Come One

Since I attained Buddhahood
the number of kalpas that have passed
is an immeasurable hundreds, thousands, then thousands,
millions, trillions, asamkhyas.
Constantly I have preached the Law, teaching, converting
countless millions of living beings,
causing them to enter the buddha way,
all this for immeasurable kalpas.
In order to save living beings,
as an expedient means I appear to enter nirvana
but in truth I do not pass into extinction.
I am always here, preaching the Law.
I am always here,
but through my transcendental powers
I make it so that living beings in their befuddlement
do not see me even when close by.
When the multitude sees that I have passed into extinction,
far and wide they offer alms to my relics.
All harbor thoughts of yearning
and in their minds thirst to gaze at me.
When living beings have become truly faithful, honest and upright, gentle in intent, single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha, not hesitating even if it costs them their lives, then I and the assembly of monks appear together on Holy Eagle Peak. At that time I tell the living beings that I am always here, never entering extinction, but that because of the power of expedient means at times I appear to be extinct, at other times not, and that if there are living beings in other lands who are reverent and sincere in their wish to believe, then among them too I will preach the unsurpassed Law. But you have not heard of this, so you suppose that I enter extinction. When I look at living beings I see them drowned in a sea of suffering; therefore I do not show myself, causing them to thirst for me. Then when their minds are filled with yearning, at last I appear and preach the Law for them. Such are my transcendental powers. For asamkhya kalpas constantly I have dwelled on Holy Eagle Peak and in various other places. When living beings witness the end of a kalpa and all is consumed in a great fire, this, my land, remains safe and tranquil, constantly filled with heavenly and human beings. The halls and pavilions in the gardens and groves are adorned with various kinds of gems. Jeweled trees abound in flowers and fruit where living beings enjoy themselves at ease. The gods strike heavenly drums, constantly making many kinds of music. Mandarava blossoms rain down, scattering over the Buddha and the great assembly. My pure land is not destroyed, yet the multitude sees it as consumed in fire, with anxiety, fear and other sufferings filling it everywhere. These living beings with their various offenses, through causes arising from their evil actions, spend asamkhya kalpas without hearing the name of the three treasures. But those who practice meritorious ways, who are gentle, peaceful, honest, and upright, all of them will see me here in person, preaching the Law. At times for this multitude I describe the Buddha’s life span as immeasurable, and to those who see the Buddha only after a long time
I explain how difficult it is to meet a buddha.
Such is the power of my wisdom
that its sagacious beams shine without measure.
This life span of countless kalpas
I gained as the result of lengthy practice.
You who are possessed of wisdom,
entertain no doubts on this point!
Cast them off, end them forever,
for the Buddha’s words are true, not false.
He is like a skilled physician
who uses an expedient means to cure his deranged sons.
Though in fact alive, he gives out word he is dead,
yet no one can say he speaks falsely.
I am the father of this world,
saving those who suffer and are afflicted.
Because of the befuddlement of ordinary people,
though I live, I give out word I have entered extinction.
For if they see me constantly,
arrogance and selfishness arise in their minds.
Abandoning restraint, they give themselves up to the five desires
and fall into the evil paths of existence.
Always I am aware of which living beings
practice the way, and which do not,
and in response to their needs for salvation
I preach various doctrines for them.
At all times I think to myself:
How can I cause living beings
to gain entry into the unsurpassed way
and quickly acquire the body of a buddha?

(The Lotus Sutra and Its Opening and Closing Sutras:270–73)
Glossary of Buddhist Terms

**abhidharma:** “Doctrinal treatise and commentary. One of the three divisions of the Buddhist canon, the other two being sutras and vinaya (The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism, 2002).”

**agama:** Traditional divisions of the sutra pitaka (see Tripitaka) prior to the development of the Mahayana sutras. Over time the term “agama” has come to be used as a term for those teachings which predate the development of Mahayana.

**Amida:** “The Buddha of the Pure Land of Perfect Bliss in the west. Amida is the Japanese transliteration of the first half of both Amitayus and Amitabha, names referring to the same Buddha that appear in Sanskrit texts and are rendered in Chinese as the Buddha Infinite Life (or the Buddha of Infinite Life) and the Buddha Infinite Light (or the Buddha of Infinite Light) respectively (The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism, 2002).”

**Bodhidharma:** An Indian yogi and ascetic who came to China sometime in the fifth century. Considered the progenitor of the Ch’an (Zen) tradition.

**Buddha:** “One enlightened to the eternal and ultimate truth that is the reality of all things, and who leads others to attain the same enlightenment. Buddha was originally a common word meaning awakened one or enlightened one, referring to those who attained any kind of religious awakening. In Buddhism, it refers to one who has become awakened to the ultimate truth of all things and phenomena. In this context, the term Buddha at first was applied exclusively to Shakyamuni. Later, however, with the development of Buddha as an ideal, numerous Buddhas appeared in Mahayana scriptures (The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism, 2002).”

**butsudan:** A wooden altar used to house a Gohonzon or other religious item.

**Dai-Gohonzon:** “The object of devotion that Nichiren inscribed at Minobu, Japan, on the twelfth day of the tenth month in 1279, and which he referred to as the purpose of his advent. "Dai-Gohonzon” literally means the great object of devotion (The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism, 2002).”

**Daimoku:** "(1) The title of a sutra, in particular the title of the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law (Chn Miao-lo-lien-hua-ching; Jpn Myoho-renge-kyo). The title of a sutra represents the essence of the sutra. Miao-lo (711-782) says in The Annotations on "The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra," "When for the sake of brevity one mentions only the daimoku, or title, the entire sutra is by implication included therein." (2) The invocation of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo in Nichiren's teachings. One of his Three Great Secret Laws (The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism, 2002).”

**Dengyo Daishi (767–822):** “Also known as Saicho. The founder of the Tendai School in Japan (The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism, 2002).” Dengyo is credited with transmitting the doctrine and practice of T’ien-T’ai Buddhism from China to Japan.

**Dharma:** “A term fundamental to Buddhism, dharma derives from the root dhri, which means to preserve, maintain, keep, or uphold. It has a wide variety of meanings, including law, truth, doctrine, the Buddha's teaching, decree, observance, conduct, duty, virtue, morality, religion, justice, nature, quality, character, characteristic, essence, elements of existence, or phenomena (The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism, 2002).”

**Dharmakāya:** (Jpn hosshin) “Also, body of the Law. The dharmakāya means Law, and kaya, body. One of the three bodies—the Dharmakaya body, the reward body, and the manifested body. The Dharmakaya body means the essence of Buddhahood, the ultimate truth or Law, and the true nature of the Buddha's life. It also means a Buddha per se, whose body is the Law itself. A Buddha of this kind is referred to as the Buddha of the Dharmakaya or the Buddha in his body of the Law (The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism, 2002).”

**Eight-Fold Path:** “Also, noble eightfold path or eightfold holy path. An early teaching of Buddhism setting forth the principles for attaining emancipation. They are (1) right views, or correct views of the Buddha's teaching; (2) right thinking, which includes right thought, right intent, and right aspiration; (3) right speech, or avoidance of falsehood, slander, abuse, and idle talk; (4) right action, or abstaining from all wrong deeds such as taking life and stealing; (5) right way of life, or living while purifying one's thoughts, words, and deeds; (6) right endeavor, to overcome evil in one's own life and make an uninterrupted progress in pursuing the way of truth; (7) right mindfulness, which means always aspiring for the truth and keeping its pursuit in mind; and (8) right meditation. In the
doctrine of the four noble truths, the truth of the path to the cessation of suffering is regarded as the discipline of the eightfold path (The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism, 2002).

**Four Noble Truths:** “A fundamental doctrine of Buddhism clarifying the cause of suffering and the way of emancipation. The four noble truths are the truth of suffering, the truth of the origin of suffering, the truth of the cessation of suffering, and the truth of the path to the cessation of suffering (The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism, 2002).”

**geishu:** The act of introducing someone to Buddhism. Often conflated with shakubuku, which concerns the confrontation and refutation of erroneous ideas, but is also colloquially used in the same context. Gakkai members often keep business cards for the purpose of succinctly introducing Buddhism to strangers. Typically these cards contain a transcription and explanation of the Daimoku.

**Gohonzon:** The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism (2002) defines this as “the object of devotion. The word go is an honorific prefix, and honzon means object of fundamental respect or devotion.” Physically, it is a scroll made of paper and brocade-cloth inscribed with Chinese and Sanskrit characters drawn in sumi ink, and hung vertically in a protective shrine by Nichiren Buddhists.

**Gongyo:** “Literally, to "exert [oneself in] practice." Generally speaking, gongyo refers to the practice of reciting Buddhist sutras in front of an object of devotion [Gohonzon]. The content and method of gongyo differ according to the school of Buddhism. In Nichiren's (1222-1282) teaching, gongyo means to chant the daimoku of Nam-myoho-RENGE-kyo and recite portions of the "Expedient Means" (second) chapter and the "Life Span" (sixteenth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra with faith in the object of devotion called the Gohonzon. (The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism, 2002).”

**icchantika:** “A person of incorrigible disbelief. Icchantika means one who is filled with desires or cravings. Originally icchantika meant a hedonist or one who cherishes only secular values. In Buddhism, the term came to mean those who neither believe in Buddhism nor aspire for enlightenment and therefore have no prospect of attaining Buddhahood (The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism, 2002).”

**ichinen-sanzen:** “Also, the principle of a single moment of life comprising three thousand realms. "A single moment of life" (ichinen) is also translated as one mind, one thought, or one thought-moment (The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism, 2002).”

**Kaidan:** “Also, sanctuary. A place where the ceremony for conferring Buddhist precepts is conducted. Originally the ceremony for conferring precepts was held at a particular site or location designated as sacred (The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism, 2002).” One of the Three Great Secret Treasures of Nichiren Buddhism, Nichiren prophesied that the Kaidan would be built by the Shogunal government in the aftermath of Japan’s state-wide conversion to Nichiren Buddhism (Stone 2003).

**Kōsen-rufu:** Wide propagation, or wide proclamation and propagation. A term from the Lotus Sutra that literally means to declare and spread widely.

**Mahayana:** “Great Vehicle”. One of the three major divisions of Buddhism between Early Buddhism and Tantrayana. Mahayana emphasizes compassion and altruism as the means to attaining enlightenment for the sake of all beings.

**Mandala:** “An object of devotion on which Buddhas and bodhisattvas are depicted or on which a doctrine is expressed. Many Buddhist schools regard a mandala specific to their respective schools as the embodiment of enlightenment or truth. It was rendered in Chinese as "perfectly endowed" or "cluster of blessings." (The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism, 2002).”

**Mantra:** The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism (2002) defines this as, “a formula consisting of secret words or syllables said to embody mysterious powers.” A verbal formula consisting of sacred words or syllables chanted for extended duration. Originally a Vedic Indian practice, mantras became a component of Tantric Buddhism and through this have found wide-spread use and acceptance in many schools of Buddhism throughout the world.

**Mappo:** The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism (2002) defines this time as, “the age of the Decadent Law, age of the Final Law, or latter age. The last of the three periods—the Former Day of the Law, the Middle Day of the Law, and the Latter Day of the Law—following Shakyamuni Buddha’s death, when his teachings are said to fall into confusion and lose the power to lead people to enlightenment.

**Middle Way:** “The way or path that transcends polar extremes. The Middle Way also indicates the true nature of all things, which cannot be defined by the absolutes of existence or nonexistence. It
mudra: “Signs and gestures made with hands and fingers that symbolize the enlightenment and vows of Buddhhas and bodhisattvas (The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism, 2002).”

Nāgārjuna: “A Mahayana scholar of southern India, thought to have lived between the years 150 and 250 (The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism, 2002). Credited with the foundation of the Madhyamika School of Buddhism and the organization the theoretical foundations of Mahayana thought (Conze 1980, 1970).”

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo: “The ultimate Law or truth of the universe, according to Nichiren's teaching. Nichiren first taught the invocation of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to a small group of people at Seicho-ji temple in his native province of Awa, Japan, on the twenty-eighth day of the fourth month in 1253. It literally means devotion to Myoho-renge-kyo. Myoho-renge-kyo is the Japanese title of the Lotus Sutra, which Nichiren regards as the sutra's essence, and appending nam (a phonetic change of namu) to that phrase indicates devotion to the title and essence of the Lotus Sutra. Nichiren identifies it with the universal Law or principle implicit in the meaning of the sutra's text (The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism, 2002).”


Nichiren Daishonin (1222–1282): The founder of the Buddhism which inspired the formation of the SGI. The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism (2002) describes Nichiren as, “The founder of the Buddhist tradition, that is based on the Lotus Sutra and urges chanting the phrase Nam-myoho-renge-kyo as a daily practice. Nichiren revealed that Nam-myoho-renge-kyo (Myoho-renge-kyo being the title of the Lotus Sutra) represents the essence of the Lotus's teaching. He embodied it in a mandala called the Gohonzon and taught that chanting that phrase with faith in the Gohonzon is the practice that enables people in the present age, the Latter Day of the Law, to attain Buddhahood.” The name Nichiren means “sun lotus” and Daishonin is an honorific title meaning “great sage”.

Prajnaparamita: “Perfection (paramita) of wisdom (prajna),” first written circa 100 B.C.E. and preserved in Pāli, a Buddhist hybrid of Pali and Sanskrit.

Pakrit: A number of vernacular Indo-Aryan languages spoken in India from the third century B.C.E up until the middle ages

Sakyamuni: Also “Shakyamuni”, the historical founder of Buddhism circa 500 B.C.E. Born to a wealthy clan in the area of Lumbini, present-day Nepal, he spent his life teaching in the area of Kushinagar, present-day Uttar Pradesh, India.

Sangha: Also, samgha. The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism (2002) defines this as, “the Buddhist Order, or the community of Buddhist believers. One of the three treasures of Buddhism, the other two being the Buddha and his teachings.” Sangha has traditionally referred exclusively to the monastic community. In the Soka Gakkai, the concept of Sangha includes the laity.

The Seven Disasters: The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism (2002) defines these as “Disasters said to be caused by slander of the correct Buddhist teaching. In the Benevolent Kings Sutra, they are (1) extraordinary changes of the sun and moon, (2) extraordinary changes of the stars and planets, (3) fires, (4) unseasonable floods, (5) storms, (6) drought, and (7) war, including enemy attacks from without and rebellion from within. The Medicine Master Sutra defines the seven disasters as (1) pestilence, (2) foreign invasion, (3) internal strife, (4) extraordinary changes in the heavens, (5) solar and lunar eclipses, (6) unseasonable storms, and (7) drought. The seven disasters are often cited together with the three calamities in Nichiren's works as "the three calamities and seven disasters." The "Perceiver of the World's Sounds" (twenty-fifth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra also lists seven disasters from which people can be saved by the power of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds: (1) fire, (2) flood, (3) rakshasa demons, (4) attack by swords and staves, (5) attack by yaksha and other demons, (6) imprisonment, and (7) attack by bandits.”

shakubuku: Literally meaning “to break and subdue” (Stone 1994). Defined in the Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism (2002) as a method of expounding Buddhism, the aim of which is to suppress others' illusions and to subdue their attachment to error or evil. This refers to the Buddhist method of leading people, particularly its opponents, to the correct Buddhist teaching by refuting their
erroneous views and eliminating their attachment to opinions they have formed…The term shakubuku is used in contrast with shoju, which means to lead others to the correct teaching gradually, according to their capacity and without directly refuting their religious misconceptions.’

This term is also used colloquially by SGI members to refer to the act of introducing others to the practice of chanting Daimoku.

Sho-Hondo: A great meeting hall built primarily with donations from Soka Gakkai members on the grounds of Taiseki-ji in 1972. Associated closely with the Kaidan, the Sho-Hondo was demolished by order of Nichiren-Shoshu high priest Nikken Abe of Taiseki-ji in 1998.

shoju: Presented in contrast to shakubuku as “a method of propagating the Buddha’s teachings gradually, according to the capacity of others to understand and without directly refuting their misconceptions” (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism, 2002).

shoten zenjin: gods and benevolent deities sworn to protect the Buddha’s teachings and its practitioners. They function to protect the people and the land and bring good fortune to both (Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism, 2002).

sutra: Any one of a number of the sermons or teachings ascribed to the Buddha.

Tantrayana: The third and final great innovative phase of Indian Buddhism, approximately between the sixth and tenth centuries.

Tendai: The Japanese iteration of the Chinese T’ien-T’ai School, founded in the late ninth century by Dengyo.

T’ien-T’ai: A major school of Chinese Buddhism founded by Chih-I sometime in the sixth century on Mt. T’ien-T’ai in Chekiang Province, from which the school derives its name (Hurvitz 1963).

Three Realms of Existence: The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism (2002) defines these as, “The realm of the five components, the realm of living beings, and the realm of the environment…The concept of three realms of existence views life from three different standpoints and explains the existence of individual lives in the real world. The five components, a living being as their temporary combination, and that being’s environment all manifest the same one of the Ten Worlds at any given point in time.”

Three Treasures: The Dharma (The teachings or Law of Buddhism), the Buddha (Sakyamuni, or the principle of enlightenment), and the Sangha (the Buddhist Order).

Three Great Secret Laws: The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism (2002) defines these as “the object of devotion of the essential teaching, the daimoku of the essential teaching, and the sanctuary of the essential teaching. Here, "essential teaching” refers to the teaching of Nam-myoho-reng-kyo and not to the essential teaching, or the latter fourteen chapters, of the Lotus Sutra.” They are called “secret” because they were never explicitly revealed in the sutras; rather Nichiren believed they were implicit in the teachings of the Lotus and its opening and closing sutras and kept secret until the age of mappo when they were intended to be revealed.

Tripitaka: “Three baskets”. The three divisions of the Buddhist canon: the sutas (the Buddha’s doctrinal teachings), vinaya (rules of monastic discipline) and abhidharma (commentaries on the sutas and vinaya).

Twelve-linked Chain of Causation: The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism (2002) defines these as “an early doctrine of Buddhism showing the causal relationship between ignorance and suffering. The Sanskrit word nidana means cause or cause of existence. Shakyamuni is said to have taught the twelve-linked chain of causation in answer to the question of why people have to experience the sufferings of aging and death. Each link in the chain is a cause that leads to the next. The first link in the chain is ignorance (Skt avidya ), which gives rise to (2) action (samskara) (also, volition or karmic action); (3) action causes consciousness (vijñana), or the function to discern; (4) consciousness causes name and form (nama-rupa), or spiritual and material objects of discernment; (5) name and form cause the six sense organs (shad-ayatana); (6) the six sense organs cause contact (sparsha); (7) contact causes sensation (vedana); (8) sensation causes desire (trishna); (9) desire causes attachment (upadana); (10) attachment causes existence (bhava); (11) existence causes birth (jati); and (12) birth causes aging and death (jara-marana).”

Vasubhandu: An Indian Buddhist scholar thought to have lived during the fourth or fifth century. A prolific writer and supporter of the Yogacara School of Mahayana Buddhism.

Yogacara: One of the early schools of Mahayana Buddhism founded in the third century, whose primary discipline was yogic practice and meditation. Widely believed to be the precursor of Tantrayana Buddhism.