

# Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence

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game of history. The movement is wagering that history's ordinary desultory flow can be stopped dead, and through a convulsive religious/revolutionary act the river of destiny raised into a high sparkling-pure stream running under divine power, never again subject to the downward pull of gravity. If the wager fails and normal time again returns, then all is lost and the movement is discredited in most eyes. To keep the wager going, therefore, all the prophet's resources must be continually placed on the table: money, persons, armaments, the energies of sacred wars, even human sacrifice. The ultimate gamble requires the ultimate in commitment. In the end the bet can prevail only if spirit can prove itself truly superior in historical time to the way of all flesh, if grace can be shown greater than gravity in our time and space, for millennialism means this-worldly, not other-worldly, salvation. Therefore, the stakes call for war to make millennialist will triumph even if, by the laws of the flesh, the millennium seems likely to lose on the field of battle; only thus can the power of spirit in this historical moment be tested. The Nazis gambled everything because they could do no other in the light of their original premises about the superiority of their race, their leader, their community, and their spirit; and they lost.

# 12

## *Japanese Lotus Millennialism*

### From Militant Nationalism to Contemporary Peace Movements

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Some of the most compelling millennial visions to emerge in modern Japan have come from the Buddhist tradition of Nichiren (1222–82), which takes the *Lotus Sutra* as its sacred scripture. In this chapter I introduce some examples of Nichiren Buddhist millennial thought during Japan's modern imperial and post-World War II periods. This material suggests two hypotheses: first, millennialist strands in a given tradition are not necessarily violent or pacifistic in themselves but can shift from one orientation to another in response to circumstances; second, millennial thinking need not be confined to individuals or fringe movements isolated from or antagonistic to the larger society but may represent particularly intense expressions of more widely held concerns. Before considering modern Nichiren Buddhist millennial ideas, however, we must briefly refer to their remote beginnings.

#### Medieval Origins in Nichiren's Thought

Buddhists in Japan's medieval period generally believed that the world had entered an era of decline, known as the Final Dharma age (*mappō*), predicted in sutras (Buddhist scriptures) and commentaries and said to have begun two thousand years after the death of the historical Buddha.<sup>1</sup> By that time, many thought, the world had moved so far from

1. Traditional East Asian Buddhist eschatology divides the process of Buddhism's decline into three successive periods following the Buddha's final nirvana: the True Dharma

the Buddha's age, and human delusion had accumulated so greatly, that attaining liberation through traditional paths of study and discipline was all but impossible. Japanese Buddhists calculated that *mappō* had begun in 1052, and over the next two centuries, social and political upheaval and recurrent natural disasters combined to convince many that they were indeed living in the fifth five-hundred-year period following the Buddha's nirvana, which began the dreaded "last age."

Nichiren was originally a monk of the Tendai school, which reveres the *Lotus Sutra*, with its promise of universal Buddhahood, as the Buddha's highest teaching. Like other teachers of his time, Nichiren saw the unique soteriological problems of *mappō* as demanding an exclusive commitment. Abandoning the traditional Buddhist position that values different practices as suitable to people of differing capacities, he taught that now in *mappō*, men and women could realize Buddhahood only by embracing faith in the *Lotus Sutra* and chanting its *daimoku* or title in the formula *Namu-myōhō-renge-kyō*. These seven characters were for Nichiren not merely the name of a text but embodied the seed of Buddhahood and the essence of all Buddhism. In this age, he held, because only the *Lotus* could lead to enlightenment, other teachings were ineffectual. Nichiren therefore urged the necessity of *shakubuku*, an assertive form of proselytizing that explicitly criticized and rejected other Buddhist teachings. This stance incurred hostility and even persecution for himself and his followers, but in his view, meeting such hardships for the sutra's sake proved the validity of one's faith and guaranteed one's eventual Buddhahood.

The *Lotus Sutra* presents itself as the Buddha's ultimate teaching, designated for the "evil age" after his nirvana. Nevertheless, it is not a millennial or apocalyptic text. It was through the lens of Nichiren's teachings that certain modern Buddhists came to read it in a millennialist light. Here let us consider some specific elements in Nichiren's thought that fueled these later millennialist readings.

#### *Risshō ankoku*

The phrase *risshō ankoku*, "establishing the right [teaching] and [thus] bringing peace to the land," derives from the title of Nichiren's

age (*shōbō*), the Semblance Dharma age (*zōbō*), and the Final Dharma age (*mappō*). According to the chronology most commonly accepted in Japan, the True and Semblance Dharma ages last for one thousand years each, and the Final Dharma age, for ten thousand years and more (Nattier 1991, 65–118).

famous memorial *Risshō ankoku ron*, submitted in 1260 to the retired shogunal regent, Hōjō Tokiyori, virtual head of the military government of the day. In this treatise, citing scriptural passages describing the calamities that befall a country where the True Dharma (Law or teaching) is neglected, Nichiren argued that Japan was being ravaged by epidemics and other disasters because its people had abandoned the *Lotus Sutra* in favor of lesser teachings. If the people embraced faith solely in the *Lotus*, Nichiren asserted, then calamities would at once be banished and the country restored to peace. But if "slander of the *Lotus Sutra*" were allowed to continue, then further disasters—civil strife and foreign invasion—would occur without fail. Nichiren's exclusivistic claims and his harsh criticisms of other Buddhist traditions incurred the wrath of the authorities, who exiled him twice. Nevertheless, an attempted coup d'état led by the regent's half-brother Hōjō Tokisuke in 1272 and the Mongol invasion attempts in 1274 and 1281 lent credence to his predictions and won him the name of prophet.

Nichiren's doctrine that faith in the *Lotus Sutra* would make the land peaceful draws on two sources. One is the old tradition of "nation protection" (*chingo kokka*), a belief in the magical power of Buddhism to ensure safety and prosperity in the realm. By Nichiren's time, the *Lotus* had already enjoyed a long history as one of three "nation-protecting sutras," having been transcribed, recited, and expounded for centuries in the belief that the merit of such deeds would ward off calamities and secure the country's peace and stability. A second source for Nichiren's *risshō ankoku* concept lay in Tendai metaphysical thinking about the nonduality of subjective and objective realms and the immanence of the Buddha land in this present world. In Nichiren's reading, the nonduality of self and environment, of this world and the Buddha land, did not stop at subjective, personal insight; wherever the *Lotus Sutra* was embraced, he taught, the phenomenal world would actually be transformed. Thus, the *Risshō ankoku ron* states that when one has faith in the *Lotus*, "the threefold world will all become a Buddha land" and "the ten directions will all become a treasure realm" (Risshō 1988, 1:226).<sup>2</sup>

How exactly did Nichiren envision the Buddha land that faith in the *Lotus* could manifest in this world? Although his extant writings contain little specific description, we can point to one passage, often cited in modern millennialist readings:

2. The "threefold world"—of desire, form, and formlessness—indicates the realm in which unenlightened beings transmigrate.

When all people throughout the land enter the one Buddha vehicle, and the Wonderful Dharma [of the *Lotus*] alone flourishes, because the people all chant *Namu-myōhō-enge-kyō*, the wind will not thrash the branches nor the rain fall hard enough to break clouds. The age will become like the reigns of [the Chinese sage kings] Yao and Shun. In the present life, inauspicious calamities will be banished, and people will obtain the art of longevity. When the principle becomes manifest that both persons and phenomena “neither age nor die,” then each of you, behold! There can be no doubt of the sutra’s promise of “peace and security in the present world.” (*Nyosetsu shūgyō shō* in *Risshō* 1988, 1:733).

This seems to suggest a conviction on Nichiren’s part that faith in the sutra could bring about an age of harmony with nature, just rule, and in some form, a transcending of impermanence. This conviction, that faith in the *Lotus* could outwardly transform the world, represents one of his most important legacies that supports the millennial thinking of modern followers.

#### *The Position of Japan*

Nichiren’s writings reflect considerable ambivalence about his country. On the one hand, he saw Japan as an evil place, full of people who slandered the Dharma by placing other teachings above the *Lotus Sutra*, and who were therefore destined to suffer great miseries such as attack by the Mongols. On the other hand, the Tendai tradition had long postulated a unique karmic connection between Japan and the *Lotus Sutra*. Nichiren carried this further in regarding Japan as the very place where—in his own person, as the Buddha’s messenger—the Great Pure Dharma for the time of *mappō* had first appeared. Thus far, he said, the Buddha-Dharma of India had spread from west to east. But its light was feeble; it could never dispel the darkness of the degenerate Final Dharma age. In the time of *mappō*, the Buddha-Dharma of Japan would rise like the sun, moving from east to west, and illuminate the world (*Kangyō Hachiman shō* in *Risshō* 1988, 2:1850). This image of a new Buddhism emanating from Japan like a resplendent sun was to prove compelling when, six centuries later, Japan began the struggle of defining its place in the modern international community.

Especially in his later years, Nichiren seems to have recognized that the spread of his teachings would take time. His chief concern was not so much the imminent world transformation characteristic of millennial thought as establishing the exclusive validity of the *Lotus Sutra* for the

Final Dharma age. Nevertheless, under the historical circumstances of the modern period, the elements outlined above would inspire full-fledged millennial expectations among some of his later followers.

#### *The Lotus Sutra and Militant Nationalism*

The first fully developed modern millennial visions claiming inspiration in the *Lotus Sutra* and Nichiren’s teachings emerged around the turn of the century and persisted until the end of World War II. With various permutations, these visions identified faith in the *Lotus Sutra* with Japanese nationalistic aspirations and looked forward to a world harmoniously unified under Japanese rule. This imperialist *Lotus* millennialism had its roots in the historical pressures of the Meiji period (1868–1912). First was the acute need for Japan to gain economic and political parity with Western powers if it was not to be exploited by them. Educators, opinionmakers, and spokesmen of the new Meiji government sought to rally citizens to the cause of transforming Japan into a modern industrial country by promoting a strong sense of national identity. Growing nationalistic sentiment in turn placed strain on the Buddhist community. For some time, Shinto and Confucian ideologues had criticized Buddhism as institutionally corrupt, a superstitious relic of the past, a drain on public resources, and a noxious foreign import that had oppressed the indigenous Japanese spirit. The Meiji Restoration also brought an end to the state patronage that Buddhism had enjoyed under the previous Tokugawa regime (1600–1868); the authority of the Buddhist establishment was further undermined by a brief but violent anti-Buddhist movement (ca. 1868–71) and by the institution of state Shinto as a national creed. Buddhism faced the need both to reform internally and prove its relevance to an emerging modern nation (Ketelaar 1990). Throughout the modern imperial period, virtually all Buddhist institutions, of all denominations, supported nationalistic and militaristic aims, sending chaplains abroad to minister to Japanese troops, missionizing in subjugated territories, and promoting patriotism and loyalty to government among their followers. Within Nichiren Buddhist circles, however, Nichiren’s mandate to spread the *Lotus Sutra* and thus realize the Buddha land in this present world was assimilated to imperialist aspirations in a way that inflated the latter to millennialist proportions.<sup>3</sup> A short

3. Of course, for some ultranationalists, the aim of imperialist expansion acquired a millennial character independently of any explicitly religious associations.

chapter cannot detail all the clerics, scholars, and other prominent lay figures who promulgated nationalistic interpretations of Nichiren and the *Lotus Sutra* during this period. I will focus on three individuals in whose writings such interpretations assume a decidedly millennialist character: Tanaka Chigaku, Kita Ikki, and Ishiwara Kanji.<sup>4</sup>

### *Tanaka Chigaku*

Tanaka Chigaku (1861–1939) is known for initiating the ideological movement known as Nichirenshugi (“Nichirenism”)—not the traditional Nichiren Buddhism of temples and priests, but a popular Nichiren doctrine welded to lay Buddhist practice and modern national aspirations.<sup>5</sup> As a youth in training for the Nichiren priesthood, Tanaka was disturbed by the accommodating attitude displayed by sectarian leaders toward other Buddhist denominations. In the time of *mappō*, Nichiren had taught, only the *Lotus Sutra* could protect the country; Tanaka became convinced that it was now time to revive the founder’s strict spirit of *shakubuku* and declare the exclusive truth of the *Lotus*. Abandoning his priestly training in 1879, Tanaka embarked on a lifetime career as a lay evangelist. In 1881 he founded the Rengekai (Lotus Blossom Society) to propagate Nichirenshugi ideals. It was reorganized in 1885 as the Risshō Ankokukai, and again in 1914 as the Kokuchūkai or “Pillar of the Nation Society” (after Nichiren’s words, “I will be the pillar of Japan.”) The Kokuchūkai would in time win the support of ranking government officials, army officers, leading intellectuals, and large numbers of the public. Some of Tanaka’s more famous followers included scholar of religion Anesaki Masaharu (1873–1949), instrumental in introducing Japanese religion to the West; Inoue Nisshō (1886–1967), agrarian reformer and founder of the civilian terrorist organization Ketsumeidan (League of Blood); and Gen. Ishiwara Kanji (1889–1949), of whom more will be said below. Others briefly attracted to Tanaka but who later rejected his nationalistic readings of Nichiren include the lit-

4. Japanese names are given in traditional order, with the surname first.

5. Another key figure in promoting Nichirenshugi was Honda Nisshō (1867–1931), leader of the small Nichiren denomination Kenpon Hokkeshū, who founded a number of lay societies to combat socialism, promote nationalism, and provide “good guidance” for citizens. Honda took the lead in forging ties with government officials, as seen, for example, in his successful negotiations to have Nichiren awarded the posthumous title of “great teacher” by the imperial court in 1922. Tanaka, however, was the movement’s leading propagandist and thus the focus of discussion here.

erary figure Takayama Chōgyū (1871–1902) and the poet Miyazawa Kenji (1896–1933).

In 1901 Tanaka published a tract called *Shūmon no ishin* (Restoration of the [Nichiren] sect), a blueprint for radical sectarian reform. Here was the first Nichirenist millennial vision of modern times, combining shrewd plans for innovative evangelizing with a wildly improbable agenda. *Shūmon no ishin* outlined a detailed fifty-year plan for converting Japan and the world to Nichirenshugi. Tanaka envisioned proselytizing throughout the country: by the roads, in halls and auditoriums, at hot-spring resorts. Lay women would be organized into nursing corps and charitable hospitals established, winning the sect both public respect and converts by its works of practical compassion. The sect would publish a daily newspaper and evangelical materials in colloquial Japanese. Passengers on ships operated by the sect would also be proselytized; eventually, thousands of such vessels would fill the international shipping lanes with the sound of voices preaching the Dharma. Colonies of Nichiren adherents would be established in Hokkaido, Taiwan, and overseas countries as bases for evangelizing abroad. The growing financial capital of the sect, conscientiously invested, would make Nichiren Buddhism a significant economic force and contribute to the nation’s wealth and power. Tanaka worked out detailed projections over ten five-year periods of the number of converts, income, and expenditures required by this colossal undertaking. In twenty to thirty years, he predicted, Nichirenshugi sympathizers would dominate both houses of the Diet. Realizing the fusion of Buddhism and secular law, Nichiren Buddhism would assist the imperial court in its enlightened rule. Other nations, coming to revere Japan’s example of justice and benevolence, would abandon their barbaric quarrels. The righteousness of Nichiren Buddhism being made clear, other religious bodies would announce their own dissolution (Tanaka 1931, 93–134; Lee 1975, 26–27).

It was not, however, in this extravagant, narrowly sectarian form as the worldwide propagation of Nichiren Buddhism per se that Tanaka’s millennialist vision was to exert wide appeal. Rather, its attraction would lie in his increasing identification of this goal with the spread of Japanese empire. The beginnings of this identification are already evident in *Shūmon no ishin*:

Nichiren is the general of the army that will unite the world. Japan is his headquarters. The people of Japan are his troops; the teachers and scholars of Nichiren Buddhism are his officers. The Nichiren

creed is a declaration of war, and *shakubuku* is the plan of attack. . . . The faith of the *Lotus* will prepare those going into battle. Japan truly has a heavenly mandate to unite the world. (Tanaka 1931, 16; trans. from Lee 1975, 26)

From about the time of the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5), the *Lotus Sutra* became increasingly fused in Tanaka's thought with the idea of the Japanese *kokutai*, or national essence, the ideological pillar of Meiji nationalism, said by many nationalist thinkers to have descended in an unbroken line from the Sun Goddess and her divine grandson, Emperor Jinmu, legendary founder of Japan. "The truth of the *Lotus Sutra* and the Japanese national essence form one another, like front and back, and are mutually dependent, like essence and function. Truly, this is the Great Way of nonduality," he declared (Tanaka 1936, 163). Tanaka developed a Japan-centered hermeneutic by which he read the *Lotus Sutra* as a revelation of national destiny. For example, the word "thus" of "Thus have I heard" in the sutra's opening passage he interpreted as the Japanese national essence; the "heavenly drums [that] resound of their own accord" when the Buddha preaches, as Japan's mission of world unification; and the Buddha's supernatural powers, as Japan's military victories against China and Russia (102, 103, 107; Tanabe 1989, 199–206). Tanaka began to invoke the rhetoric of the mythic origins of the Japanese state—also prominent in the discourse of state Shinto—when he spoke of Japan's "heavenly task" of world unification as a mandate inherited from Emperor Jinmu, whom he saw as reincarnated in the Meiji emperor. Though he urged the revival of Nichiren's spirit of *shakubuku*, in making these ideological moves, Tanaka radically departed from Nichiren, who had strictly subordinated to the *Lotus Sutra* both the Japanese deities and the ruler's authority. Tanaka's identification of the *Lotus Sutra* with the Japanese national essence raised the latter to a status of universal significance and in effect equated the spread of Nichiren Buddhism with the extension of Japanese empire. It also served to justify militarism and aggression on the Asian continent (Lee 1975, 28–33; Nakano 1977, 165–72, 189–95; Tokoro 1966, 78–79).

The Kokuchūkai was not a marginal organization. Tanaka has even been credited with showing Buddhists a way to overcome their religion's exclusion from political affairs, following the establishment of state Shinto (Lee 1975, 33–34). The leader of a lay association, he was able to reach the public in a way the traditional Nichiren temple structure could not. As promised in his original vision, the Kokuchūkai published a magazine

and a daily newspaper, providing material about Nichiren Buddhism in the vernacular language and interpreted in terms of immediate national concerns. Although his organization had its economic base largely among the lower middle class, Nichirenshugi ideology attracted politicians, businessmen, military officers, and scholars. The Kokuchūkai represents a case where millennialist thinking was an intensified form of already heightened sensibilities of patriotism, nationalism, and support for military ventures.

#### *Kita Ikki*

Tanaka and the Kokuchūkai endorsed war in a "righteous" cause—extending the sacred Japanese *kokutai* to all peoples. There were also individuals, not necessarily affiliated with religious bodies, for whom imperialist aspirations, inflated to the proportion of millennial visions, inspired and legitimated violence. This was especially evident in the 1930s, a time of economic depression, affecting especially agrarian workers, and of a perceived inability of bureaucrats to deal with problems at home and abroad. This period saw a number of political assassinations and attempted coups d'état led by disaffected military officers and other right-wing elements seeking to remove "corrupt" officials intervening between the emperor and his people and "restore" direct imperial rule. Ultimately unsuccessful, their actions nonetheless had the effect of increasing the political power of the military and of right-wing influence in government. Some of these insurrectionists drew selective inspiration from the new Nichirenist millennialism, such as Tanaka's equation of *shakubuku* with territorial conquest, as well as from Nichiren's own emphasis on readiness to sacrifice one's life if needed for the spread of Dharma (on Nichirenist-inspired terrorism, see Tokoro 1972, 174–88).

An important example is the revolutionary Kita Ikki (1883–1937), who advocated national socialism and strong imperial rule (Tokoro 1966, 189–222; Wilson 1969). Kita's millennial vision first emerged in his *Shina kakumei gaishi* (Unofficial history of the Chinese revolution, 1915–16) (1959a). A sinophile and ardent sympathizer with Chinese nationalism, Kita had gone to China and taken part in the Chinese revolution of 1911. His *Gaishi*, while analyzing the Chinese revolution, also sharply criticized Japan's leaders for their foreign policy of alignment with Western interests. Japan's destiny, in Kita's view, was to lead the rest of Asia in throwing off the yoke of Western imperialism and to spearhead a world socialist revolution.

In making this proposal, Kita clearly saw himself as a second Nichiren, remonstrating with government leaders in an attempt to save the country from disaster. Both the *Gaishi*'s introduction and final chapter—titled “The Mongol Invasion by Britain and Germany,” a reference to European interests in China—speak of the *Gaishi* as the “Taishō ankoku ron”: Just as Nichiren had risked his life to warn the authorities of foreign invasion in the thirteenth century, Kita now sought to protect the nation by warning against the threat posed by Western imperialism in the Taishō era (1912–26) (1959a, 4, 203). By the 1930s variations on the theme of a Japan-led Pan-Asianism had gained wide support; Kita was among the first to connect it with the new *Lotus* millennialism.

Kita's vision also entailed aggressive military conquest culminating in world peace, with Japan presiding over a union of nations. Like Tanaka Chigaku, who may briefly have influenced him, Kita equated Nichiren's teaching of *shakubuku* with the forcible extension of empire. The specifically Nichirenist elements in Kita's vision had less to do with the ideal world that would be achieved under Japanese rule than with the new Nichirenshugi rhetoric of *shakubuku* as legitimating the violence necessary to accomplish it. The Buddha, Kita said, had manifested himself as the Meiji emperor, and “clasping the eight volumes of the *Lotus Sutra* of compassion and *shakubuku*,” waged the Russo-Japanese War. Now China, too, was “clearly thirsting for salvation by *shakubuku*” (161, 154).

Just as the Lord Śākyamuni [Buddha] prophesied of old, the flag bearing the sun, of the nation of the rising sun, is now truly about to illuminate the darkness of the entire world. . . . What do I have to hide? I am a disciple of the *Lotus Sutra*. Nichiren, my elder brother in the teachings, taught the Koran of compassionate *shakubuku*, but the sword has not been drawn.<sup>6</sup> He preached the doctrine of world unification but it has yet to reach China or India. . . . Without the *Lotus Sutra*, China will remain in everlasting darkness; India will in the end be unable to achieve her independence, and Japan too will perish. . . . Drawing the sword of the Dharma, who in the Final Dharma age will vindicate [the prediction of] Śākyamuni? (201, 203, 204)

Similar rhetoric occurs in Kita's later work, *Nihon kaizō hōan taikō* (A plan for the reorganization of Japan, 1923) (1959b), a blueprint for

6. Popular associations of the Koran with holy war had earlier been assimilated to the *Lotus Sutra* by Tanaka in *Shūmon no ishin* (1931, 21).

social, political, and economic reform calling for a purge of corrupt bureaucrats and business cliques and the establishment of direct imperial rule. Industry was to be nationalized, private property restricted, and with the nation's economic base thus secured, Japan could proceed with its destiny to conquer and unite Asia. This work excited the admiration of a cadre of young army officers who envisioned the “restoration” of a stronger Japan under the emperor's direct rule. In 1936, leading some fourteen hundred men, they attempted a coup d'état, assassinating several government officials and seizing the center of Tokyo. (This incident inspired Mishima Yukio's famous short story “Patriotism.”) Along with the insurrectionist leaders, Kita was arrested for complicity and executed the following year.

#### *Ishiwara Kanji*

The potential influence of one individual's violent millennialist vision is yet more vividly illustrated by the example of Ishiwara Kanji (1889–1949). In the early 1930s Ishiwara was operations officer of the Kuantung Army, a Japanese force that had been stationed in Manchuria to protect lands leased from China after the Russo-Japanese War. This military presence was a source of continual friction between Japanese and local interests. With Chinese nationalism and accompanying anti-Japanese sentiment on the rise, voices within the middle echelons of the Japanese military began calling for a more assertive policy in Manchuria. Ishiwara played a leading role in the so-called Manchurian Incident of September 18–19, 1931, an unauthorized attack on the Chinese garrison at Mukden that committed Japan to a policy of military takeover in Manchuria and fed currents of growing nationalism, military buildup, and hostility in foreign relations. Though his action was not sanctioned by civil or military officials in Tokyo, Ishiwara was hailed by many as a hero for his “decisive solution” to the Manchurian problem. Ishiwara's action in this affair seems to have been rooted in his millennialist convictions that united Nichirenshugi ideals with his own views, as a military historian, about the evolutionary role of war in human history.

Then a captain newly graduated from the War College, Ishiwara had joined the Kokuchūkai in 1920. At the time, he was seeking a theoretical grounding for his personal faith in the Japanese *kokutai*, instilled by his military training, that could explain how loyalty to the *kokutai* differed from the ordinary patriotism that inspires heroism in the soldiers of any nation, and also provide a clear moral ground upon which

he, as an officer, could legitimately require the sacrifice of men's lives in battle (Iokibe Feb. 1970, 133–34, n.30; April 1970, 76–77). Ishiwara was convinced by Tanaka's theory, which, by identifying the Japanese *kokutai* with the essence of the *Lotus Sutra*, elevated it to a principle of universal import. In the relatively liberal Taishō era, when an influx of Marxist, pacifist, democratic, and other Western ideologies seemed to threaten the moral supremacy of the Japanese *kokutai* and the prestigious position achieved by the military during the Meiji period, Ishiwara found in Nichirenshugi a justification—indeed, a divine mandate—for his military calling.

Nichiren, as we have seen, had accepted the traditional theory of Buddhist decline occurring over five five-hundred-year periods. This scheme provided Ishiwara with a framework for his views on the “final war,” a concept he had begun developing in the early 1920s and to which he would devote most of his life (Peattie 1975, 53–74). War, for Ishiwara, was a driving force of historical progress, in which the struggles of nations and peoples to impose their ideologies on their neighbors led to higher levels of civilization. By the present time, Ishiwara believed, these competing cultures and ideologies had aligned themselves along two polar axes: the West, led by the United States, which followed the “way of dominance,” and Asia, to be headed by Japan, which followed the “way of righteousness.” The conflict between these two was destined to end in Japanese victory ushering in everlasting peace. Ishiwara drew support for his theory from Nichiren's statement that in the fifth five-hundred-year period following the Buddha's nirvana—that is, at the beginning of the Final Dharma age—“a great war, unprecedented in prior ages, shall break out in the world” (*Senji shō* in Risshō 1988, 2:1008). Nichiren was referring to the Mongol invasion, which he saw as divine punishment for Japan's neglect of the *Lotus*. For Ishiwara, however, Nichiren's “unprecedented great war” signified the final war that would pit the imperialistic West against an East Asia united under Japanese leadership in a conflict of apocalyptic proportions. To prepare for this cataclysm, Japan would need to mobilize the resources of China and Manchuria—an argument Ishiwara used to justify Japanese military aggression on the Asian continent. Through this war to end all wars, “Our powerful enemies will be vanquished, the glorious spirit of the Japanese *kokutai* will come home to the hearts of the peoples of all nations, and the world will enter an era of peace under the guidance of the imperial throne” (Ishiwara 1968, 1:431; trans. from Peattie 1975, 74).

As Ishiwara struggled with the chronology of his eschatological theory, modern Buddhological scholarship confronted him with an unexpected obstacle. Nichiren, like most of his contemporaries, had accepted the traditional Chinese date corresponding to 949 B.C.E. for the Buddha's nirvana and thus believed that he was living in the fifth five-hundred-year period that began the Final Dharma age. Today, however, though the Buddha's dates are by no means agreed upon, scholarship tends to place him much later, in the fifth or sixth century B.C.E. If one were still to assume that the Final Dharma began two thousand years after the Buddha's death, then Nichiren would have lived, not in the Final Dharma age at all, but toward the end of the Semblance Dharma age. To resolve this difficulty, Ishiwara formulated his novel “dual theory of *mappō*” (1986, 56–58). He concluded that the Buddha by his supernatural power had skillfully intended the “first five hundred years of *mappō*” in two senses, and that the messenger of the *Lotus Sutra* was to appear twice. The first time he had come as the monk Nichiren to establish the True Dharma. While Nichiren's age had not in strictly chronological terms coincided with the fifth five-hundred-year period, because the Japanese of that time were convinced that it did, this first advent was absolutely necessary. The second advent of the sutra's messenger, however, would fall within the actual historical period of the fifth five hundred years, when he would appear as a “wise ruler” to realize the Dharma in reality and “unify the world.”<sup>7</sup>

Although not sanctioned by Nichiren orthodoxy, Ishiwara's solution enabled him to fix his timetable for the final war firmly within the 2,500-year framework of traditional Buddhist eschatology. Writing in 1939, Ishiwara calculated that about 2,430 years had passed since the Buddha's nirvana; thus, within the next seventy years—before the first five hundred years of *mappō* would have expired—the final war would break out and world unification be accomplished (1967, 307–8).

Here one man's violent millennialism literally affected nations and was instrumental in setting Japan on a tragic course. Although Ishiwara acted independently, his idiosyncratic vision of a “final war” that would unite all humanity was not all that removed from more widely held imperialistic aspirations.

7. Ishiwara here subverted a passage in which Nichiren predicted a “wise ruler,” meaning, not the ruler of Japan, but an enemy sovereign who would punish Japan for slandering the *Lotus Sutra* (*Kanjin honzon shō* in Risshō 1988, 1:719).



### Summary

During Japan's modern imperial period, intense nationalism, militarism, and war were assimilated to new millennial visions of a world harmoniously united under Japanese rule. Certain elements in the teachings of the medieval Buddhist teacher Nichiren were appropriated to these visions. His discourse about Japan as the place where a new Dharma would arise to illuminate the world was given an imperialist reading; his advocacy of assertive proselytizing or *shakubuku*—which for Nichiren had meant preaching and debate—was adopted as a metaphor for armed force; and his emphasis on giving one's life for the *Lotus* became a celebration of violent death in the imperial cause. Such millennialist appropriations inspired not only extremists committed to political assassination or coups but also broadly legitimated the violence that pitted Japan as a whole against other Asian countries and the West.

### A World Without War

It is little exaggeration to say that ultranationalistic *Lotus* millennialism died in August 1945 in the flames of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But even before these ruined cities had been rebuilt, a new *Lotus* millennialism had risen to take its place. Postwar *Lotus* millennialism envisions a time when, by awakening to the universal Buddha nature, people everywhere will live in harmony and with mutual respect. Different Nichiren- and *Lotus*-related religious groups offer variations on this basic theme, but on one point they all agree: in that future time, there will be no war. Nuclear weapons, in particular, will be abolished.

### The Rejection of Violence

One of the earliest articulations of postwar *Lotus*-inspired millennial hopes for peace can be found, astonishingly enough, in the last writings of General Ishiwara Kanji. Ishiwara, who lived to see Japan's defeat, did not relinquish his "final war" theory easily. For a while he seems to have believed that Japan might yet be able to wage the final war through the efforts of scientists working secretly on yet unimaginably powerful weapons (Peattie 1975, 347–48). In a long memorandum to General MacArthur, he alternatively suggested that he had mistaken the participants in the final conflict, and hinted that such a struggle might still be waged between the United States and the communist bloc (Fujimoto

1964, 309). Purged from public life and in failing health, Ishiwara retired in 1946 with a group of disciples to the village of Nishiyama on the Japan Sea, where he devoted his remaining years to pondering how Japan and the world might be regenerated through Nichiren's teaching. Before his death, he arrived at a new *Lotus*-inspired millennial vision, one that broke utterly with the violence he had previously advocated.

Ishiwara's new vision called for establishment of a modern agrarian society in which the tasks of production would be performed communally by village units of about a dozen families and where men and women would rank equally, a person's work being decided on the basis of ability rather than gender. In a long tract dictated shortly before his death in 1949, Ishiwara interpreted Nichiren's prediction of a time when "the wind will not thrash the branches nor the rain fall hard enough to break clods" in terms of a future society in which science, politics, and religion were perfectly harmonized. Science, "having obtained the Buddha wisdom," would enable control of the weather and eliminate the ravages of storms. Homes, villages, and factories, engineered by the new science, would be pleasantly integrated into a natural environment of forests and streams. For a few hours each day, everyone, even the imperial family, would work wholeheartedly in the fields, factories, or at other tasks. Then, in the ample leisure afforded by rational social management, people would devote themselves to study, art, dance, sport, or other pursuits. An abundance of commodities would eliminate all inequity of distribution. Acute illness would be conquered by science, and chronic disease would vanish with a way of life that had "returned to nature." Advances in flight technology would make the world smaller, "like a single town," and through mixed marriages based on natural affection, "all humanity will gradually become a single race" (Ishiwara 1949, 128–30).

What had not changed in Ishiwara's thinking was the notion of a unique role for Japan:

Our vows and efforts for *risshō ankoku* will surely be achieved in a few decades. The time when, throughout the world, all will embrace the Wonderful Dharma is approaching before our eyes. At this time, we who once tasted the wretchedness of defeat have gained the good fortune of receiving the supreme command to lead the world in establishing a nation without armaments. . . . Cleansing ourselves of the dross, both material and spiritual, of humanity's prior history, we shall create a new Japan as a literal treasure realm, an actualized Buddha land, setting a correct course for human civilization. This will not only

work to atone for the crimes against humanity committed in the Pacific War; it is the one, sole way by which to live. (1949, 126)

The community of Ishiwara's followers remained marginal and did not give rise to a large-scale peace movement. But his vision is significant in that it demonstrates how quickly, and in what ways, wartime *Lotus* millennialism was refigured as the peaceful *Lotus* millennialism of the postwar world. It also illustrates how failure to achieve the millennial goal in one way (i.e., through military conquest) led, not to the abandonment of the goal, but to revised notions of how it should be achieved.

A similar shift to a millennialism of world peace can be seen in the Nichiren Buddhist monastic order Nihonzan (or Nipponzan) Myōhōji Sangha founded in 1918 by Rev. Fujii Nichidatsu (1885–1985). During the war, Fujii and his followers were committed nationalists who supported Japanese expansion on the continent (Tokoro 1966, 226–27). After the war, however, appalled by the atomic devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Fujii came to embrace a doctrine of absolute nonviolence on the Gandhian model. Today, the monks and nuns of this order are engaged peace activists, especially committed to the antinuclear weapons movement. Their courage at demonstrations, even in the face of police brutality, and their refusal to align themselves with any political camp have made Nihonzan Myōhōji leaders respected arbiters within the Japanese peace movement (223–47; Kisara 1997, 51–83).

Fujii discovered a Buddhist model for absolute nonviolence in the *Lotus Sutra* in the person of Bodhisattva Never Despising (Sanskrit, Sadāparibhūta; Japanese, Jōfukyō), who “practiced only obeisance,” bowing in reverence to all he met for their innate Buddha-potential and never yielding to anger, even when scorned or struck.<sup>8</sup> Fujii was harshly critical of the modern state, which he identified primarily with Western civilization, where economic considerations hold preeminence and the authority of laws rests ultimately on force. Instead, he envisioned an ideal future society united by “practicing only obeisance,” free of all violence and killing and based on mutual aid and respect stemming from reverence for the Buddha in everyone. Such a society in his view would embody the “civilization of the East,” whose essence he claimed was embodied in the precept “not to kill others” and in the words *Namu-myōhō-renge-kyō* taught by Nichiren (1980, 25–28).

8. A *bodhisattva* is one on the path to enlightenment who has vowed to strive for the liberation of all beings.

Like Ishiwara, however, Fujii retained a belief in Japan's unique mission in realizing the millennial goal. In his view, the atomic bombings had in one sense demonstrated curses “returning to their originators,” in the sutra's words (1965, 354). But in another sense, they represented a noble sacrifice offered by the Japanese people to demonstrate the tragedy of atomic weapons and thus prevent the extermination of humanity (1980, 119). Japan now had an obligation, not only to uphold the Peace Constitution but also to set an example of absolute nonviolence.

### “Managed Millennialism”

A millennial vision of “world peace” is also central to the two lay Buddhist organizations, Sōka Gakkai and Risshō Kōseikai, the largest of Japan's so-called New Religions and both based on the *Lotus Sutra* and the teachings of Nichiren. Risshō Kōseikai claims six million members; Sōka Gakkai, ten million. Founded before the war, both achieved their greatest growth in the postwar decades. Though the millennialism of these two organizations overlaps that of Japanese new religions in general (Blacker 1971), they may also be seen as participating in a distinctive tradition of *Lotus*-related millennialist thinking. In these associations, members' personal religious practice of reciting the sutra, chanting the *daimoku*, and proselytizing is complemented by organizational activities for peace. Both groups hold NGO (nongovernmental organization) status in the United Nations and have worked on behalf of refugees; Kōseikai has been active in famine relief, while Sōka Gakkai has launched a grassroots education movement on the sufferings engendered by war. Sōka Gakkai also founded a political party, the Komeitō, or Clean Government Party, to implement Buddhist ideals in politics (Métraux 1994, 39–69).

The two groups have different understandings of how the ideal society is to be achieved (Stone 1997). Sōka Gakkai maintains that only the spread of Nichiren's teachings can bring about world peace; in the light of Nichiren's *Risshō ankoku ron*, adherence to other, “false” religions is ultimately blamed for the tragedy of Japan's defeat in World War II. This conviction underlay the organization's aggressive missionizing in the postwar years. Risshō Kōseikai, for its part, takes an ecumenical approach; the “*Lotus Sutra*” is understood as the fundamental truth—God, Allah, or the one vehicle—at the heart of all great religions. Its co-founder and longtime president, Niwano Nikkyō (1906–), was active in promoting worldwide interfaith cooperation for peace. Central to both organizations, however, is a progressive millennialism, pursued, not through

the transformation of existing social structures (as advocated in Ishiwara's postwar millennialism), nor through civil protest (as practiced by Nihonzan Myōhōji), but by personal religious cultivation and by working within the system for social improvement. Both groups hold that war and other social evils have their roots in the greed, anger, and delusion of individuals; therefore, it is individual efforts in self-cultivation and promoting harmony in everyday relations—rather than diplomatic or political efforts—that will fundamentally establish world peace. What is needed, in Sōka Gakkai parlance, is not social revolution but “human revolution,” the positive transformation of character said to come about through Buddhist practice. If this approach tends to discourage social or political activism, on the personal level it empowers tremendously, infusing the individual's smallest acts with deep significance by connecting that person to a cause greater than himself or herself. The doctrines of both Risshō Kōseikai and Sōka Gakkai free their adherents from impotent frustration in the face of nuclear stockpiling and other global problems. One person *can* make a difference. To quote Ikeda Daisaku, president of Sōka Gakkai International:

The individual human revolution will never stop with just that person. It represents a moment that surely encompasses all humanity. . . . As a single drop or water of speck of dust, each of you must win the trust of those around you, acting on the basis of our common humanity, and steadily advance the movement of a new awakening of life. Your own awakening will give rise to the next awakened person, who in turn will be followed by two, three, and ten in succession, becoming a great ocean of nirvana and a great mountain of wondrous enlightenment, just as the Great Saint [Nichiren] teaches. (1977, 170–71)

For the members of these groups, the humblest actions and interactions of daily life, performed conscientiously and with a sense of their greater purpose, all become *bodhisattva* practice and karmic causes linked directly to the realization of world peace. What governments and diplomacy have failed to accomplish, ordinary believers are in fact achieving. It is here, in the heightened sense of personal meaning, the conviction that one has a “mission” to fulfill, that the millennial visions of these movements exert their appeal.

Neither Sōka Gakkai nor Risshō Kōseikai has set specific timetables for the realization of world peace but maintain this goal on a horizon that recedes in pace with organizational advance. After the initial fervor of postwar expansion, they have settled down into what might be termed

a “managed millennialism”: world peace, it is suggested, can be realized soon enough that individual members' efforts will make a difference; this enables the mustering of collective energy to support organizational programs. At the same time, however, the goal is not arriving so soon as to disrupt the fabric of daily life or social responsibilities. In these groups, we find a millennialism that in general works to endorse rather than threaten the status quo, and is fully consonant with broader aspirations for peace and social stability.

Risshō Kōseikai and Sōka Gakkai, too, preserve the idea of Japan's unique mission in realizing the *risshō ankoku* ideal. On the one hand, this is seen as an act of atonement for wartime hostilities against other Asian countries. On the other hand, Japan is said to be uniquely qualified to lead the way to world peace, being the only nation to know firsthand the full horror of atomic warfare and to have a constitution explicitly renouncing war. This theme of Japan's unique role represents a complex element in postwar Nichiren Buddhist millennialism. It may be seen as a refiguring, in a manner consistent with the postwar rejection of violence, of the conviction of Japan's sacred destiny that underlay much earlier imperialist ideology. It may additionally be read as an attempt to come to terms with guilt over Japanese wartime atrocities; as a revisionary coopting of the humiliation of defeat and an externally imposed constitution; and as expressing an ongoing concern about Japan's place in the international community. It also occurs in a number of modern Japanese religious movements unrelated to Nichiren Buddhism and is linked to an ethnocentric element common to much Japanese peace theory (Kisara 1997, 25, 41). Outside Japan, however, it is not emphasized among non-Japanese converts to Sōka Gakkai or Risshō Kōseikai, suggesting that this part of the millennial vision, too, is susceptible to revision.

### Conclusion

Nichiren Buddhist millennialist thinking of the modern period, in both its imperial and postwar incarnations, shares a common structure drawing on elements in Nichiren's teaching, especially the power of faith in the *Lotus Sutra* to bring about an ideal world, and the importance of Japan as the place from which the Buddhism of the Final Dharma age shall spread. However, under different historical circumstances, these elements have been interpreted in radically different ways. The first phase of *Lotus* millennialism initially arose in response to an urgently felt need to “catch up” with the industrialized West and resist the threat of West-

ern domination; later it came to reflect (and to legitimate) the militant imperialism of the times. Its second phase represented a response to the threat of global atomic warfare—a threat at first bound up with the horror, ruin, and dislocation experienced in World War II, and more recently seen also as symbolic of alienation, loss of meaning, and other problems associated with modernity. In his essay in this volume, Ian Reader discusses how the initially progressive, rather optimistic millennialism of Aum Shinrikyō turned catastrophic as the group consistently failed to achieve its projected growth. Postwar *Lotus* millennialism may be seen as an opposite case, in which a failure, brought about by Japan's defeat, to realize a millennial vision through military conquest led to a refiguring of that vision in pacifistic terms. The rapid transformation of *Lotus* millennialism from an ideology of empire to the driving force of a peace movement strongly suggests that violent millennialist energies are not necessarily integral to the millennial vision itself, but, under different circumstances, can be redirected in peaceful and constructive ways.

What also strikes one in considering modern *Lotus* millennialism is how close it lies to mainstream aspirations. Perhaps a romantic advocate of direct imperial rule, such as Kita Ikki, whose ideas were appropriated in the service of a military insurrection, cannot be considered a mainstream figure; nor perhaps can the followers of Nihonzan Myōhōji, who advocate passive resistance and reject nonviolence even in self-defense. But their millennial visions were at the moment of their emergence not so very remote from the hopes of large segments of the population, being intimately connected to widespread desires, respectively, for a strong Japanese empire in the 1930s and for abolition of the atomic threat in the immediate postwar period. This is all the more true in the case of the large Nichiren Buddhist lay movements, such as the Kokuchūkai, Risshō Kōseikai, and Sōka Gakkai. Tanaka gave voice to the patriotic sentiments of many and elevated them to a holy status in his rhetoric of Nichirenshugi; the support his movement won from government bureaucrats and military leaders shows that his vision was useful to official agendas. In the postwar period, Risshō Kōseikai and Sōka Gakkai articulate a widespread revulsion against war and fears about the continuing nuclear threat, offering a path by which the common citizen can contribute to their eradication. Such examples suggest that millennial thinking is by no means limited to the marginal or disenfranchised, but can serve to legitimize the actions of armies and politicians, and also give expression—albeit in intensified form—to aspirations shared by a majority.