Background of the Formation of Nichiren’s Theory of
Daimoku-Juji
the ‘Acceptance and Maintenance of the Sūtra-title of the Lotus Sūtra’

WATANABE Hōyō

1. Acceptance and Maintenance of Sutra-title in Hokke Buddhism

It can be said that one of the especial feature of Nichiren's Hokke Buddhism is
that it based on the 'Acceptance and Maintenance of sutra-title of the Lotus Sutra'.
It is needless to say, basing on the results of his studies in Buddhist Studies during
his youth, at the age of 32, Nichiren is said to have declared his faith in the Lotus
Sutra through the “Recitation of the sutra-title of the Lotus Sutra” on April 28 in
the year 5 of Ken-Cho (1253).

In fact, Nichiren's writings after this incident cohere in contents in alignment
with the idea of 'acceptance and maintenance of the title of the Lotus Sutra'
(Daimoku-Juji 題目受持). However, it was April 25 of the year 10 of Bun-Ei (1273), 20
years later of his first recitation of the title of the Lotus Sutra, that he completed the
theoretical explanation of the theory of 'Acceptance and Maintenance' of Daimoku.

If we consider the reasons for it, several factors can be pointed out.

(1) As Nichiren had very eventful days, he had to limit himself to the writing of relatively
short works in his initial years of missionary activity.

(2) Nichiren was living in the social environment, in which a rapid change could take place
especially in religious sphere.

(3) The fact that Nichiren had to encounter with various Honans (法難, religious persecu-
tions) successively, especially after his presentation of Rissho-Ankoku-Ron to Hojo To-
kiyori, the then former regent of the Emperor and the actual leader of Kamakura Sho-
gunate on July 16 of the year 1 of Bun-O (1260). The Shi-Dai-Hōnan (四大法難, Four
Great Religious Persecutions) Nichiren had to undergo are the following: i) the burning
of his hermitage one month later of the presentation, ii) Izu Banishment, iii) Tojo Per-
secution, and iv) Sado Island Banishment, i.e., (Ryū-Kō-Hōnan 龍口法難) of September
12 in the year 8 of Bun-Ei (1271).
However, through the experiences of such Honan (法難), Nichiren could embody Shiki-Doku (色読) of ‘the Future Prediction of the Lotus Sutra’ (法華経の未来記). Regarding Shiki-Doku, Nichiren often mentioned that it was the reading of ‘the Future Prediction of the Lotus Sutra’ through the experience in the process of the life guided by the belief in the Lotus Sutra.

Through such experiences of religious persecutions and difficulties, Nichiren could actualize ‘the Future Prediction of the Lotus Sutra’. He gradually came to connect the idea of relief from such sufferings by the mercy of the Buddha of Eternal Life (久遠本仏) with the establishment of solid faith to ‘Accept and Maintain the Daimoku’. The conceptual theory on the Daimoku-Juji was finally revealed in the Nyorai-Metsugo-Go-Gohyaku-Sai-Shi-Kanjin-Honzon-Shō (如来滅後五五百歳始観心本尊抄).

In this paper, basing on the interpretations in alignment with tradition of Nichiren Buddhist Studies, holding the question in mind if Nichiren really maintained silence on Daimoku-Juji for 20 years or not, we intend to examine as much as possible his writings to find the idea of Daimoku-Juji.


As has been mentioned above, though Nichiren declared the foundation of Nichiren Hokke Sect at the age of 32 in the 5th year of Kencho, he never openly stated the essence and the logic of his teaching. Although the essentials of ‘the Acceptance and Maintenance of the Lotus Sutra’ was revealed in Shugo-Kokka-Ron (守護国家論), which he wrote when he was 38, it was not at all the statement of frank revelation of the essence and logical foundation of Daimoku-Juji.

In Kaimoku-Sho (開目抄), the work he wrote when he was 51, he revealed the theory of ‘Ichi-Nen-San-Zen’, basing on his conviction of being a ‘Prophet of the Lotus Sutra’ which he gained through his personal experience of religious persecutions, and the meaning of the Daimoku. However, for the full explanation of the entire picture of the theory of Daimoku-Juji, we had to wait until the emergence of Nyorai-Metsugo-Go-Gohyaku-Sai-Shi-Kanjin-Honzon-Sho, which was written in April 25 of the year 10 of Bun-Ei (1273), when Nichiren was 52. It was after full 20
Background of the Formation of Nichiren’s Theory of Daimoku-Juji (H. WATANABE) (141) years since his establishment of his new sect.

Among them, here, we intend to deal with the idea of Daimoku. According to the traditional understanding, the essence of Nichiren’s Daimoku-Juji is shown in the section of what is traditionally called ‘Daimoku no Sanjū-san ji Dan’ (‘33 characters on Daimoku Section’, 項目の三十三字段) or ‘Jinen Jō-yo Dan’ (‘Automatically Transferred Section’, 自然譲与段): “Shaku-son no Ingyo Katoku no ni-ho wa Myo-Ho-Ren-Ge-Kyo no Goji ni gusoku suru. Warera kono Go-ji wo Juji sureba, Jinen ni kano Inga no Kudoku wo Yuzuri Atae Tamau.” (Showa Teihon Nichiren Shonin Ibun, 立正大学日蓮華教学研究所編 p.711.)

Summary: Though many sutras were cited, it means that the great cause of Buddha’s religious austerities (Shū-In-No-Gyō-Hō, 修因の行法) and the broad merits the Buddha accumulated (Kan-Ka-No-Toku-Hō, 感果の德法), all of them are equipped in the 5 characters of Myō-Hō-Ren-Ge-Kyō. The word ‘Shū-In-No-Gyō-Hō’ includes all the religious austerities and religious trainings the Bodhisattva underwent during 3,000 kalpas of period since his taking vow of attaining Buddhahood and of leading people in North-East region to salvation. It is shown clearly that the entire religious austerities and trainings the Buddha had undergone are equipped in the 5 Chinese characters of Myō-Hō-Ren-Ge-Kyō. The word ‘Kan-Ka-No-Toku-Hō’ signifies the entire teaching preached by the Eternal Buddha during his 50 billion kalpas of period in the world of ten directions and in the three periods of the past, the present and the future. The entire merits of the Eternal Buddha, which associated with his constantly preached teachings, are equipped in the very 5 characters of Myō-Hō-Ren-Ge-Kyō.

Therefore, if we, common people in Mappō age, accept and maintain the 5 characters of Myō-Hō-Ren-Ge-Kyō, it says, the entire religious austerities the Eternal Buddha underwent and the whole merits arising out of the teachings of the Eternal Buddha will be handed over to us. That is to say, if a lay man accepts and maintains the 5 characters of Myō-Hō-Ren-Ge-Kyō, the religious austerities the

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Buddha with Eternal Life underwent and the entire merits of teachings of the Eternal Buddha will be automatically transferred to him.

Thus, it is emphasized that the religious training the Buddha underwent since the beginning of the universe and the very missionary activities of the Eternal Buddha since the day of his attainment of the Buddhahood are in the 5 characters of **Myō-Hō-Ren-Ge-Kyō**. So if we accept and maintain the 5 characters, it means that all the *Hetu* and *Phala* of the Eternal Buddha will be automatically transferred to the one who accepts and maintains the *Daimoku*.

3. The Appeal of Eternal Buddha Śākyamuni to the Innocent Living Beings in *Mappō* age

Since Heian period, people were tormented by the fear of the arrival of *Mappō*, the Period of Degenerated Law. It seems that the expectation for being wrapped in the mercy of the Buddha in *Mappō* period had been something that are beyond our imagination today. The foundation of those activities for encouraging Pure Land Buddhism by Eikan, Genshin, Honen and etc. appears to rest on such expectations.

Contrary, Nichiren questioned the Pure Land Buddhists' attitude of denying all other Buddhist traditions by bundling them up as *Shō-Do-Mon* (聖道門), and of advocating the idea that the salvation could be attained only through *Jō-Do Mon* (浄土門, Pure Land Gate).

The main points of Nichiren's criticism appear to rest in the following:

1. The fact that Pure Land Buddhist did not pay any attention on *Shi-Do* (此土), this very *Sahā*-World.

2. It is true that various theories exist, if we discuss the matter in detail. Conclusively, we may be able to point out that Nichiren, basing on Tendai idea of *Shaba-Soku-Jakkō* (娑婆即寂光), perfected in taking belief in the *Grdrakūta* Pure Land (靈山浄土) of Eternal Buddha which he believed to exist in this actual world of suffering. The phrase ‘*Shaba-Soku-Jakkō*’ appears to mean the fact that the ‘Serene Light of Pure Land’ should be observed in relation to the reality of this painful *Sahā*-world. Nichiren further believed that the Lotus Sutra should be preached on the *Grdrakūta* for eternity on the basis of the phrases in *Nyorai-Juryō-Hon*. It means that we can continue to receive the help of the Eternal Buddha in the *Grdrakūta* Pure Land.
The end section of Kanjin-Honzon-Shō states the following:

Ten Hare nureba, Chi akiraka nari. (“If the sky is clear, it becomes clear also on the earth.”)

Hokke wo shiru monoha, Sehō wo ebeki ka. (“Those who know the teachings of the Lotus Sutra should attain this worldly knowledge.”)

Ichi-nen-sanzen wo shirazaru mono niha, Hotoke, Dai-jihi wo okoshite, Go-ji no uchi ni kono tama wo tsutsumi, Matsu-dai yō-chi no kubi ni kakesashime tamau. (“To those who do not have the knowledge of Ichi-Nen-Sanzen, the Buddha, working his great mercy, make the innocent person living in Mappo period to wear the necklace of the jewel wrapped in 5 characters of Myō-Hō-REN-Ge-Kyō.”)

Shidai-bosatsu no kono hito wo Shu-go shi tamawan koto, Tai-kō, Shu-kō no Sei-O wo shōbushi, shikō ga Kei-tei ni jibu seshi ni kotonara zaru mono nari. (“The protective attitude of the Four Great Bodhisattvas to the person is as equal as how the ancient Tai-kō and Shū-kō served the King Sei, or how four sages helped the Emperor Kei.”) [Showa Teihon Nichiren Shonin Ibun, p.720.]

Summary: If the sky becomes clear, it becomes blight on the earth. According to this natural law, if we ascertain the understanding of Buddhism, it can be said that for those who do not understand the Buddha’s teaching of Ichi-Nen-Sanzen, the Eternal Buddha, working his great mercy, wraps the teaching of Ichi-Nen-Sanzen in the 5 characters of Myō-Hō-REN-Ge-Kyō, and makes the people ignorant of the Buddha’s teaching wear the necklaces made with the gem.

In the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha with Eternal Life revealed for the first time the existence of Earth Emerging Bodhisattvas whose numbers are equal to those of sands of 60,000 Ganges river, whom the Eternal Buddha had been instructing, and who were unknown even to the immediate disciples of Śākyamuni Buddha. The Buddha ordered the Earth Emerging Bodhisattvas, who are the Hon-Ge-no-Bosatsu (本化の菩薩, Bodhisattvas instructed by the Eternal Buddha), the missionary activities in this Saha World after the demonstration of the demise of the Buddha. Those original disciples were lead by the Four Bodhisattvas: Jō-Gyō-Bosatsu (上行菩薩, Bodhisattva Viśiṣṭa-cārita), Muhen-Gyō-Bosatsu (無辺行菩薩, Bodhisattva Ananta-cārita), Jō-Gyō-Bosatsu (常行菩薩, Bodhisattva Viśuddha-cārita) and Anryū-Gyō-Bosatsu.
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There is no doubt for the Four Great Bodhisattvas to protect the base and inferior people who believe in the significance of the 5 characters of Myo-Ho-Ren-Ge-Kyo in Mappo period. If we read Chinese history, we find the cases of Ancient Chinese philosophers Tai Gong Wang (太公望) and Zhou Gong Dan (周公旦) assisted the young King Cheng Wang (成王), and of the four sages, living in Shang-shan (商山) to avoid war turmoil, who supported the Emperor Hui Di (惠帝). Even if the person is base and inferior in nature, if he believe in the significance of the 5 characters of Myo-Ho-Ren-Ge-Kyo, the disciples of the Eternal Buddha, i.e. the Earth Emerging Bodhisattvas, serve the person as they serve the Eternal Buddha.

The words are so commonly known to the followers of Nichiren Buddhism that they can recite the sentences without mistake as they learned the words by heart. It would be pity for the understanding of Nichiren, if the real importance of the words is not realized. Here we can see how we should respect the Eternal Buddha, who encompasses the past, the present and the future. Moreover, the words also show the entire picture of guidance of the Eternal Buddha and the nature of salvation of inferior people in Mappo.

4. The Spirit of Integration of Buddhist Traditions Behind the idea of Daimoku-Juji

Searching for synthetic understanding of many Buddhist scriptures and for the basis of belief in Buddhism, the Buddhism introduced into China from India inspired for integrative understanding of Buddhist traditions. Asking for a solution to the above-mentioned subject, the Thirteen Sects of China attempted at arriving to the integrative understanding of Buddhist traditions by using the technique of Kyô-Sô-Han-Jaku (教相判釈, systematic arrangement in order of sutras, according to contents).

In the Buddhism spread to the North-East region of Asia, strong faiths in Maitreya Bodhisattva and Amitâbha Buddha were observed, as has been demonstrated by the construction of formidable images and sculptures. The associating faith in Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva was also prevalent. It is generally known that the Vairocana Buddha of Hua-yen Sūtra was installed in Tōdai-ji Temple in Nara in Japan. However, the same Buddha was called differently according to its being
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*Dharma-kāya (法身), Samboga-Kāya (報身) or Nirmana-kāya (応身)* in the light of *Tri-kāya* theory.

In China, it is said that construction of large Buddha images on the basis of Hua-yen Sutra was carried out for integrating many Buddhas appearing in scriptures. Thus, it is significant that both the theoretical *Kyō-Sō-Han-Jaku* and the spirit for systematic unification of Buddhas at that time were moving towards the integration of Buddhism.

In Japan also, it can be said that there existed the system of *Kokubun-ji* and the movement for the establishment of Mahāyāna Vinaya Platform (円頓戒壇) by Saichō. If we observe the situation from such standpoint, it seems to be understandable that Nichiren felt a crisis of Buddhism in Japan, especially facing the rapid development and spread of Pure Land Buddhism, and that he took a vow to restore the Buddhism on the basis of the teaching of the Lotus Sūtra.

*In Nyorai-Metsugo-Go-Gohyaku-Sai-Shi-Kanjin-Honzon-Shō, Nichiren speaks thus:*

*Toute iwaku, kono kyomon no Ken-Shi-Ken-Koku wa Ikan.* (問うて曰く、この経文の遣使還告は如何。“Question. What does the episode of ‘Sending messengers to the house to tell the children who lost clear mind’ (Ken-Shi-Gen-Koku) mean in the Sūtra?”)

*Kotae te iwaku, Shi-E nari. Shi-E ni shi-shu ari.* (答えて曰く、四依なり。四依に四類あり。・・・”Answer. It means Four Refuges. They are 4 types of Four Reliable Masters to whom we can take Refuge. ・・・・）

*Shi ni Hon-mon no Si-E, Ji-yu Sen-kai wa Mappro no hajime ni shugunub subesi. Ima no Ken-shi-Ken-Koku wa Ji-yu nari. Ze-ko-ro-yaku towa Juryo-hon no kanjin taru Myo, Tai, Shu, Yo-u, Kyo no Namu-Myo-Ho-Ren-Ge-Kyo kore nari.* (四に本門の四依 地涌千界は末法の始めに出現すべし。今の遣使還告は、地涌なり。是好良薬とは、壽量品の肝心たる名・体・宗・用・教の南無妙法蓮華経是なり。・・・”The fourth is the Refuge of Hon-mon. Earth emerging one thousand worlds should appear at the beginning of Mappro period. Present *Ken-Shi-Gen-Koku* is Earth emerging one. *Ze-Kō-Rō-Yaku* [The splendid good medicine] signifies the profound teachings of Name, Body, Reality, Working and Teaching, the essence of the Chapter of Eternal Life of the Buddha, of the very Namu-Myo-Hou-Ren-Ge-Kyo.) [Showa Teihon Nichiren Shonin Ibun, pp.716-717.]

General meaning: A question is asked. What does the episode of ‘sending messenger to the house to tell the children who lost clear minds’, appearing in the Chapter of the Eternal Life Duration of the Buddha mean? Answer. In the world

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after the death of the Buddha, four stages of Bodhisattvas would deliver the essence of the Buddha’s instruction. Among the four stages, there will be four types of them. The fourth is the Shi-e (四依, Four Refuges) of Honmon (本門). When the earth trembles, many Great Bodhisattvas reaching to the one thousand worlds emerging from the Earth appear for the rescue of the people of Mappo period. Therefore, the episode of ‘sending messengers to the house to tell the children who lost clear minds’ means the fact that the Earth Emerging Bodhisattvas emerge now in Mappo period. This Splendid good medicine’ is the medicine prescribed for the people of Mappo, meaning the Namu-Myō-Hō-Ren-Ge-Kyō which was preached to be preserved as the essence of the Chapter on the Eternal Life of the Buddha (Chapter 16 of Myō-Hō-Ren-Ge-Kyō).

Thus, Namu-Myō-Hō-Ren-Ge-Kyō is not just the name of the sutra. It has the Body (体), and it also contains all the Hetus and Phalas (因果) of the Buddha. It has the Working (働き) and it has the aspect of the very Teaching (教法) that envelopes them. Thus Namu-Myō-Hō-Ren-Ge-Kyō contains five-fold profound teachings, i.e., Name, Body, Hetus and Phalas, Working and Teaching. This Five-fold profound teaching is called ‘Go-Jū-Gen-Gi (五重玄義).

Furthermore, in order to instruct his disciples the structure of Buddhism, we know that Nichiren often illustrated a chart depicting the structure, like Ichi-Dai-Go-Ji-Kei-Zu (一代五時鶴図) and etc. In one of them, like other Ichi-Dai-Go-Ji-Kei-Zu and Ichi-Dai-Go-ji-Zu, Kegon sutra (華厳経), Agon sutra (阿含経), Hō-tō sutra (方等経), Hannya sutra (般若経) and the Lotus Sutra (法華経) were mentioned, to each of which related commentaries, name of sects basing on them, the name of the founder priests and etc. were mentioned on lower section of the pages. In the section of the Lotus Sutra, we find the names like, Sho-shū-e-hyō-shū (諸宗依憑宗), Buturryū-shū (佛立宗), Ten-dai-shū (天台宗), Hokke-shū (法華宗), Himitu-shū (秘密宗), and Ken-ro-shou-shū (顕露彰宗) being listed side by side. (Showa Teihon Nichiren Shonin Ibun, p. 2337.) In the first Sho-shū-e-hyō-shū (諸宗依憑宗), we may be able to read the spirit of integration of Buddhism which we discussed above.

5. Conclusion

About the idea of Daimoku-Juji, as has been discussed above, the discussions
appear to have been limitedly carried out only within the Nichiren Buddhist circle. For the logical understanding of the concept, we have to wait until the emergence of Kaimoku-Shō and Kanjin-Honzon-shō. However, as Nichiren started reciting the Daimoku from the year 5 of Kenchō, it seems to be certain that the logical basis of the Daimoku-Juji had existed within deep inside of the mind of Nichiren.

In Shugo-Kokka-Ron, Nichiren did not speak of the profound logical argument for the theory of automatically transferring of both Hetus and Phalas of the Eternal Buddha. However, the meanings of ‘Wholeheartedly Accepting’ (Ichinen-Shinju, 一念信受) the Eternal Buddha’s guidance and of ‘Wholeheartedly Believing in’ (zuiki, 随喜) the guidance have been discussed on the basis of the Chapter 17 of Myō-Hō-Ren-Ge-Kyō which assists in explaining the real essence of the Nyorai-Juryō-Hon (如来壽量品), the crux of the Lotus Sūtra.

Though it is clearly demonstrated in Nichiren’s writings of later years, we should not also forget the very fact that Nichiren had long before established the fundamental interpretations on the ‘Acceptance and Maintenance of the Lotus Sutra’ and on chanting of Daimoku (sutra title, 題目), basing on the spirit for the integration of various Buddhist traditions under the Lotus Sūtra.

参照）上田本昌博士喜寿記念論文集『日蓮聖人と法華仏教』(2007年3月) 所収, 拙論「日蓮聖人初期の題目受持勧奨について」

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〈Professor Emeritus, Rissho University〉