



日蓮聖人絵伝

Nichiren Shōnin Eden

THE PICTORIAL LIFE OF SAINT NICHIREN

Painted by Chokusai Uenaka

Annotated by Kyōyū Fujii



THE PICTORIAL LIFE OF SAINT NICHIREN

PREFACE

Since ancient times a genre of art called *emakimono*, in which biographies of individuals and narrative tales were presented in picture and written form, has existed in Japan. This book, following the traditional Japanese method, illustrates the biography of St. Nichiren, founder of the Nichiren-shū (sect) of Buddhism. An explanation of the scenes is also included.

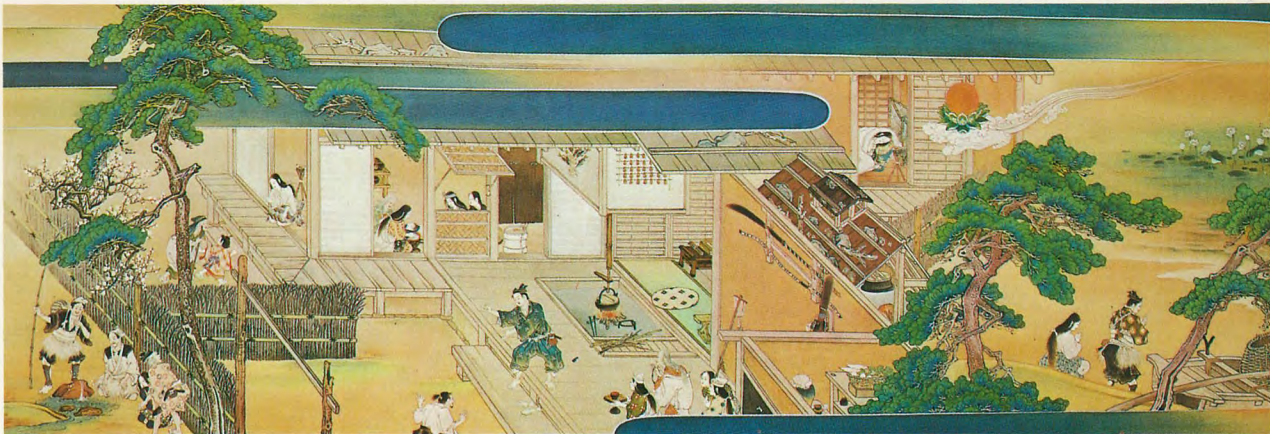
The paintings of St. Nichiren's life were executed by Chokusai Uenaka. Including a descriptive text which I composed, a Japanese edition of this book was published under the title of *Nichiren Shōnin eden* (A Pictorial Biography of St. Nichiren) by the Kuonji Temple of Mt. Minobu. This English edition contains a selection of sixteen paintings from the original with a re-edited digest of the original text.

In order that people all over the world learn about St. Nichiren and his faith, publishing projects have been a business concern of the Nichiren-shū Asian Buddhist Friendship Association.

Uenaka Chokusai, the artist who created the scenes for this publication, is ranked as a great master of the traditional Tosa-e painting school. In completing this pictorial biography of St. Nichiren, he gave great attention to detail. After carefully researching the period, he took care to make sure that the elements of St. Nichiren's era—Kamakura period (1192-1333) customs, mannerisms, clothing and architecture—were illustrated accurately.

In the original Japanese edition, the explanatory text was summarized and edited into an English digest by Junpei Kawasaki. However, in order to make the text more understandable it has been given a standardized style, certain areas have been altered or retranslated, and the whole text has been rechecked for accuracy and readability. This has been accomplished through the cooperation of David A. Hall, a Ph.D. candidate in Buddhist Studies from the University of California, Berkeley. The Publishing of this English edition is being made possible through the assistance of Nichiren-shū.

Kyōyū Fujii, Editor
President, Nichiren-shū Asian Buddhist Friendship Association
Tokyo, July 1986

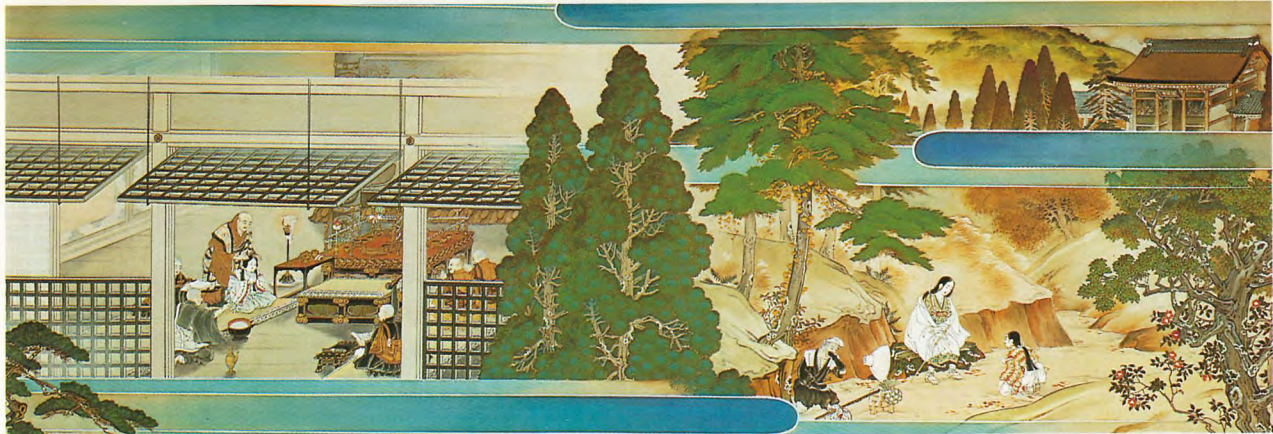


Scene 1 Birth of Zen-nichi-maro

In the small fishing village of Kominato lived Shigetada and Umegiku Nukina. Shigetada was a veteran *bushi* (warrior) turned fisherman. He and his wife were known as humble and religious people in their attitudes concerning life in general. It is said that one night Umegiku had a dream wherein a miniature sun cradled in petals of a lotus blossom descended upon her and entered her womb. . . whereupon awakened, she found herself about to give birth to their fourth child. On the morning of 2/16/1222, their fourth son was born. At that time, although they were out of season, lotus blossoms miraculously bloomed on the beach, adorning his birth. The child was given the name Zennichimaro.

Raised a fisherman's son, Zennichimaro was a healthy boy, but it was his keen mind and constant concern for human matters that impressed his parents and the villagers. There were too many inconsistencies in the social status of people, and the

ignorance among the populace was overwhelming. This led to spiritual questions such as, "Who is the Buddha?" Sakyamuni? Amitabha? Vairocana? Questions led to more questions but with few, if any, satisfying answers. What course was left for one who sought answers to such questions?



Scene 3 Ordination

Yaku-ō-marō studied the fundamentals of Buddhism and Confucianism over a four year period. On 10/8/1237, he was ordained and the priestly name of Zeshō-bō Renchō was conferred upon him. As he changed into a priestly robe, Renchō is said to have intensified his desire for learning of the basics of Buddhism because faith can not be fully grasped made one's own unless the particulars of Buddhism are understood. He thus resolved to study the entire Buddhist canon which was kept in the Mt. Kiyosumi library.

Scene 2 Tears Moisten the Rock

Aware of Zennichimaro's eagerness for knowledge and his particular interest in the humanities, his parents arranged to have him admitted to the monastery on nearby Mt. Kiyosumi. The boy was eleven years old and a temple was one of the few educational institution available at that time. It should be noted that a commoner of that period was not eligible for formal schooling. It is therefore conjectured that Shigetada Nukina's semi-aristocratic warrior background paved the way for acceptance of his son. On 5/12/1233, Zennichimaro ascended Mt. Kiyosumi where he became a disciple of Master Dōzen. At that time the lay novice name of Yaku-ō-marō was conferred upon him.

In the scene above, Yaku-ō-marō's mother, Umegiku, is pictured visiting her son and shedding tears of joy at his maturity.



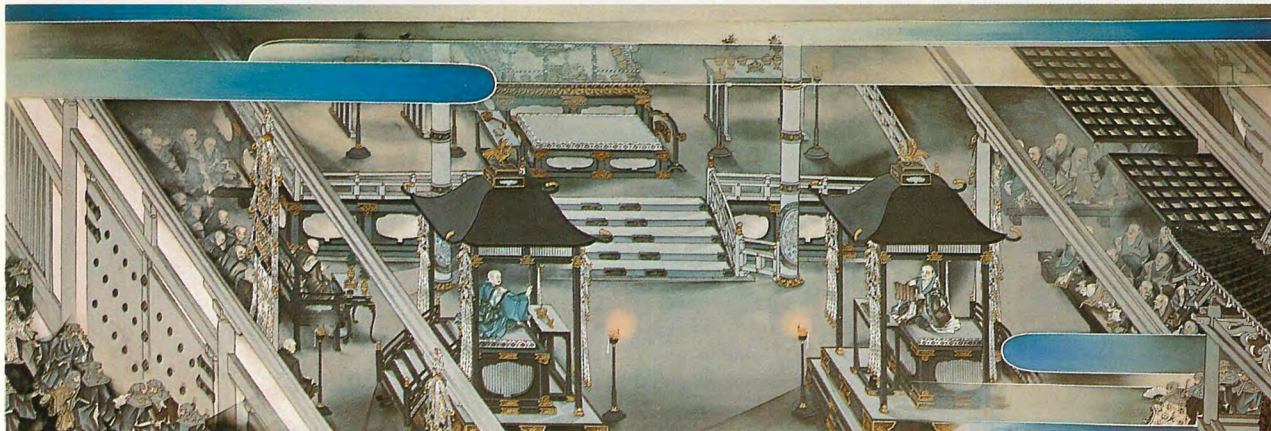
Scene 5 Study Atop Mount Hiei

Mt.Hiei was founded by the monk Saichō (767 -822) and his monastic center had been accorded a royal decree by Emperor Kammu. It is said that there were about three thousand priests including students and staff on Mt. Hiei during Renchō's time. Because of Renchō's speed in mastering difficult Buddhist concepts—in spite of his youth—he was soon put in charge of the Enton-bō, a hall which claims a number of famous alumni.

Scene 4 Meeting with Master Shunpan

In order to further his study of Buddhism, Renchō journeyed to the city of Kamakura, the seat of the *bakufu* (military government of Japan). There, for a period of four years at the Tsurugaoka Hachiman Shrine, he again read the entire Buddhist canon and studied the Jōdo (Pure Land) and Zen (meditation) schools of Buddhism. Subsequently he returned to Mt.Kiyosumi and then journeyed to Mt.Hiei, the center of Buddhist learning in Japan (located just outside the former capital city of Kyoto) in order to continue his studies.

While traveling along the Tokaido, the main road which stretched between Kamakura and Kyoto, Renchō stopped in the small town of Sakamoto. This stopover, just one station before entering Mt.Hiei, was a lucky one for Renchō. In this small town lived Master Shunpan, an eminent scholar from a monastery on Mt.Hiei, and it was at his residence that Renchō spent the night.



Scene 6 Debate

The Tendai Sect on Mt. Hiei was referred to as an academy and debates were quite popular there. The form of the debates was unusual as they were conducted at night in a deliberately darkened hall with only two candles providing light. The limited visibility made it convenient for a loser to exit the back way. A winner's seniority rose simultaneously with his victory in debate. In the center of the hall was a separate platform designated for an imperial observer. Ennin (794-864), the third patriarch of Mt. Hiei, had advocated the superiority of Shingon (esoterism) when dealing with practice, although he acknowledged the teachings of the Lotus Sutra (exoterism) as equal in reasoning. Renchō

denounced esoterism as muddling the original principles set forth by Saichō. He believed that the teachings of the One Vehicle (Lotus Sutra Doctrine) established on Mt. Hiei by Saichō must be restored. No one challenged him. Renchō, having completed his studies, was then ready to visit the other religious centers located in and around Kyoto.



Scene 7 Sunrise at Asahi-ga-mori

Renchō not only mastered the teachings of Buddhism available in the representative temples he visited in Kyoto and Nara, but also thoroughly investigated the tenets of Confucianism and the ancient Japanese religion of Shintō. After completing these studies, he again returned to Mt. Hiei. In 1253, at the age of thirty-two, he returned to Mt. Kiyosumi.

One morning as the sun was about to climb above the Pacific horizon, Renchō stood alone on a high bluff, gazing toward the imminent sunrise. The Asahigamori forest spreading out below him was silent and the sky was completely clear. As the first

streak of golden, morning sun rays broke the horizon, his thundering voice pierced the silence with the words "*Na-mu Myō-hō-ren-ge-kyō*," heralding the new day. It is on this date, 4/28/1253, that Renchō established his new Buddhist sect.



Scene 8 Street-corner Evangelist

Renchō established his own brand of Buddhism based on his praise of the Lotus Sutra with the phrase *Na-mu Myō-hō-ren-ge-kyō*. He soon began evangelizing at Kiyosumi Temple by denouncing the established Buddhist sects—Jōdo, Shingon, and Zen. Because of this, he was given a notice of interdiction and exiled from Mt. Kiyosumi. Returning home, his parents attempted to dissuade him from his evangelism, but after hearing their son's beliefs they became his first converts. At this time, Renchō changed his priestly name to Nichiren (Sun-Lotus) and went to Kamakura where he taught extensively.

In Kamakura, St. Nichiren took to the streets to conduct his preaching. He accomplished this with heretofore unheard of fervour, advocating the Lotus Sutra as being the quintessence of the Buddha's entire mission. He admonished those who continued to be misled by the fragmentary tenets of all sectarian dogma.

Rocks, tiles, sticks, etc. were the usual response from most, but time eventually brought converts. The first was Jōben, a former senior student priest from Mt. Hiei, who then changed his name to Nisshō. Next came Nichirō, followed by such *samurai* adherents as Kingo Shijō, Yoshiharu Shinji, Yoshitaka Kudo, Yoshimune Ebara, Munenaka Ikegami and Tanetsugu Toki.

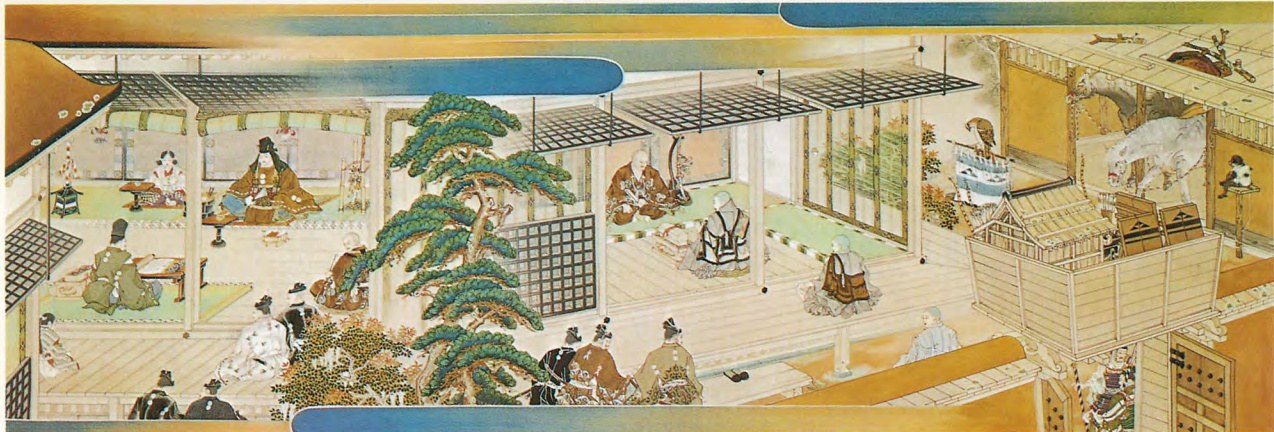


Scene 10 **The Jissō-ji Temple Library**

In the first month of 1258, St. Nichiren went to the Jissōji temple library to review the sutras and make sure his own ideas corresponded with the true teachings of the Buddha.

Scene 9 **Natural Disasters**

Earthquakes, typhoons, famine and epidemics reeked havoc on Japan and, it is said, close to half the population perished in the year 1257. It seemed as if all the good patron gods of Japan had deserted her and the devils had taken control. St. Nichiren decided that this could only be a sign admonishing the country for abandoning the Lotus Doctrine. He decided to recheck his views with the volumes of written works on Buddhism.



Scene 12 Tokiyori Hōjō

In the *Risshō ankoku ron*, St. Nichiren petitioned Tokiyori Hōjō stating:

The root cause of the many calamities of recent years is the neglect of the correct teachings of the Lotus Sutra and the thriving of false religions. In such a situation as this, the sutras predict that there will be disasters, civil war and invasion from foreign countries. We must soon turn to faith in the correct One Vehicle teachings of the Lotus Sutra.

St. Nichiren derived this conclusion from reading the entire Buddhist canon five times.

Tokiyori had relinquished his position in 1256 and became a priest. He had been a good ruler, diligent and frugal.

Scene 11 The Risshō Ankoku Ron

On 7/16/1260, St. Nichiren went to the residence of Mitsunori Yadoya, a high ranking officer of the military government, and submitted his *Risshō ankoku ron* (Treatise on Establishment of Righteousness and Security of the Nation). He asked that it be forwarded to retired Shogunal Regent Tokiyori Hōjō, defacto ruler of the country.

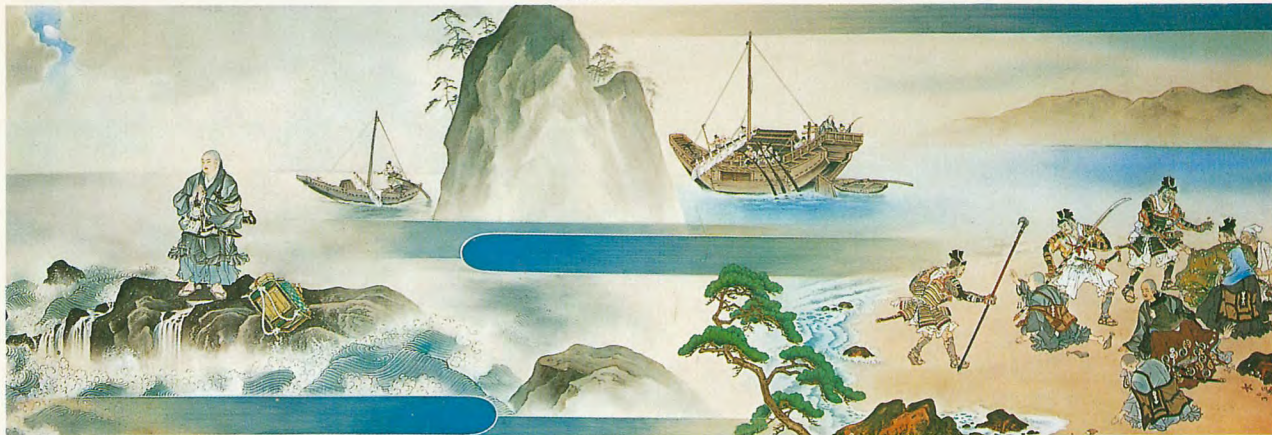


Scene 14 Lecture on the Lotus Sutra

Having lost his home, St. Nichiren went on an evangelical tour of the Wakamiya region (located in modern day Chiba Prefecture). This area was ruled by Tanetsugu Toki and it was on this occasion that the Hokke-dō (Lotus Hall) was built next to his home. The Saint lectured to people in the Hokke-dō for one hundred days. He taught that the Lotus Sutra, as the final enlightenment of the Buddha, and the prayer *Na-mu Myō-hō-ren-ge-kyō*, as the essence of this sutra, are guides indicating the true reality of this world and the path humankind should follow.

Scene 13 Fire Destroys Matsuba-ga-yatsu

A month after the submission of his treatise, a ruthless mob raided St. Nichiren's hermitage at night and burned it down. A legend tells of a white monkey approaching the Saint earlier in the evening and tugging at his sleeve. Curiosity made him follow the monkey up a mountain path. As they neared a cave, a loud commotion came from the direction of his hermitage. Turning, he saw his hermitage engulfed in flames and he was, thus, saved.



Scene 16 The Mana-ita Reef

It was about 4:00 P.M. when St. Nichiren was dropped off on a reef, still some distance from shore. This was the Manaita reef, located just off Itō on the Izu peninsula, on which a person could walk to shore at low tide. Unfortunately for the Saint, it was approaching high tide and most of the reef was completely submerged. Here his life was spared by a fisherman who was on his way home. This was the first of four great persecutions to which St. Nichiren was to be subjected during his lifetime.

Scene 15 Exiled to Itō

Without due process St. Nichiren was arrested and sentenced to banishment. As he was being taken aboard a government boat, Nichirō, his youthful disciple, pleaded to be taken along with his master, but was struck down with an oar by one of the officers. The Saint rose and comforted Nichirō, explaining it had been prophesied in the Lotus Sutra that during the age of *mappō* (the period of decline of the Buddha's teachings) those who propagate the teachings of the Lotus Sutra would be beaten with sticks and driven into exile. The date was 5/12/1261.



Scene 17 The Komatsu-bara Ambush

St. Nichiren was invited to visit Yoshitaka Kudō of Amatsu (located in Chiba Prefecture). It was the evening of 11/11/1264 when he left Hanabusa (where he had met with Master Dōzen) with an entourage of about ten followers. As his party entered a pine grove, they were suddenly attacked by archers followed by a large band of armed led by Kagenobu Tōjō. Tōjō had been infuriated by the first sermon delivered by the Saint. The ambush was savage and the monks were greatly outnumbered. Although Kudō soon arrived on the scene with two retainers, they too were soon overwhelmed. In the meantime Tōjō, with his sword drawn and ready to strike, charged St. Nichiren, but his horse reared

back on its hind legs, startled by the beads of a rosary held straight out in the Saint's hand. Tōjō is said to have fallen, struck his head and been carted off on a stretcher. This attack was the second of the Saint's four great persecutions.

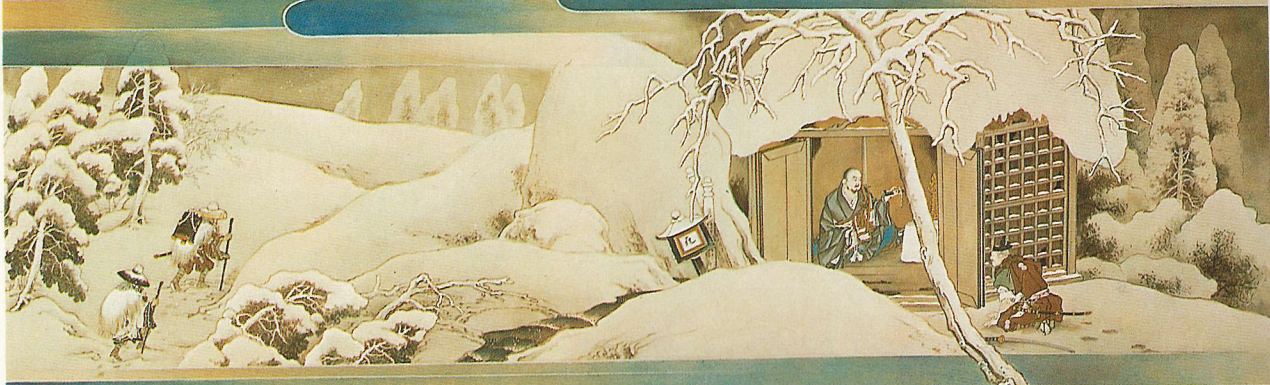


Scene 18 The Tatsu-no-kuchi Plot of Assassination

On 1/18/1268, the first envoys arrived from the Mongol court. They brought with them a demand that Japan become a vassal state of the Mongol Empire. This occasion fulfilled the prophecy made by St. Nichiren in his *Rishō ankoku ron* in which he predicted the disaster of foreign invasion. The Saint proposed that the military government and influential temples immediately give up their trust in erroneous religious sects and place their faith in the correct religious teachings of the Lotus Sutra. As a result of this there was much enmity and animosity directed toward him.

On 9/12/1271, due to a plot by a group of Jōdo Sect followers, St. Nichiren was suddenly arrested and sentenced to execution. He was then taken to Tatsunokuchi (located on Yuigahama beach in Kamakura). This was the third great persecution suffered by the Saint.

As the heavily guarded procession neared the beach, more armed men could be seen silhouetted by a number of bonfires. As an executioner was about to strike the Saint, a blinding bolt of lightning shattered the ominous darkness. It is said that the executioner's sword was struck and broken into three pieces. The guards were seen hugging the sand and running or crawling away, stricken with fear. The plot on his life was foiled and their leader, Hei-no-saemon, was not found until sometime later.



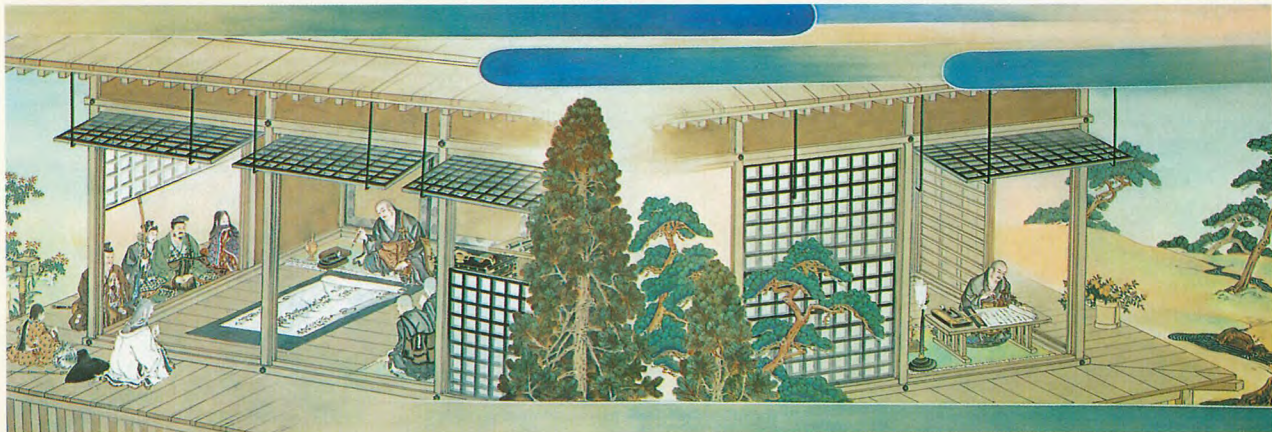
Scene 20 Abutsu-bō Becomes a Convert

Abutsubō, a local *samurai*, learned about St. Nichiren and his critical attack on the Nenbutsu, a practice of the Jōdo Sect to which he belonged. He was enraged and plotted assassination but, being a true *bushi* (warrior), he decided first to allow time for clarification. The answers he received convinced him of the merits in the Lotus Sutra with the encounter resulting in his conversion instead. From then on Abutsubō and his wife discreetly provided the Saint with enough provisions to survive the long winter. Soon others joined and became converts.

Scene 19 The Tsukahara Samadhi Shed

St. Nichiren, having miraculously escaped with his life at Tatsunokuchi, found his death sentence commuted to exile on Sado Island, a place where criminals were disposed of in those days. This was the fourth great persecution suffered by the Saint. The year was 1271 and St. Nichiren was fifty years old.

On 11/1/1271, the Saint was escorted to a small, crumbling shack on Sado Island. The place was called Tsukahara and it was here that the Sado islanders disposed of their dead. He was abandoned there to survive the freezing winter cold with only a straw cape to keep him warm.

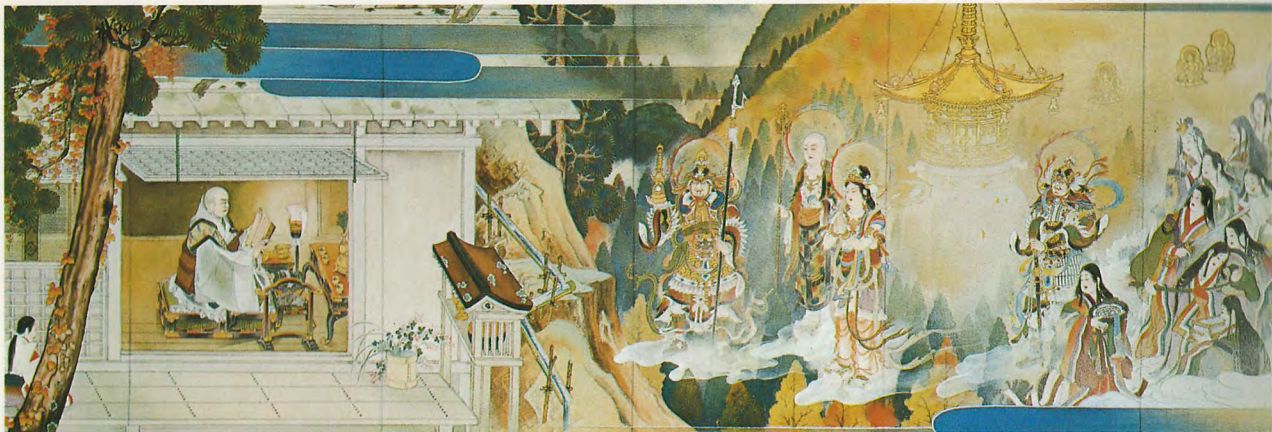


Scene 22 The Mandala Devised

On 7/8/1273, St. Nichiren, brushed the seven sacred characters *Na-mu Myō-hō-ren-ge-kyō* down the center of a piece of silk material measuring about two feet, six inches by five feet, eight inches. This mandala is a symbolic expression, derived from the unified truth of the Lotus Sutra, of the interpenetration of oneself and the entire universe; the unity of microcosm and macrocosm. This mandala is used as a symbol of the Lotus Sutra and an object of worship. Concentration on this mandala and the recitation of the praise of the Lotus Sutra *Na-mu Myō-hō-ren-ge-kyō* are the essential practices of the Buddhist sect founded by St. Nichiren.

Scene 21 The Kanjin Honzon-shō Masterpiece

On 4/25/1273, St. Nichiren wrote what is considered the masterpiece work of his life-long mission, the *Kanjin honzon shō* (Introspection into the Mind's Original Nature). In this text he explained that Sakyamuni Buddha's two types of enlightened virtue — his practice of the *bodhisattva* path and the result of that practice — are inherent in the five-character title *Myō-hō-ren-ge-kyō* 妙法蓮華經 (*Saddharma-puṇḍarīka-sūtra*). Consequently, if one holds to these five characters, he will spontaneously acquire these virtues of the Buddha.

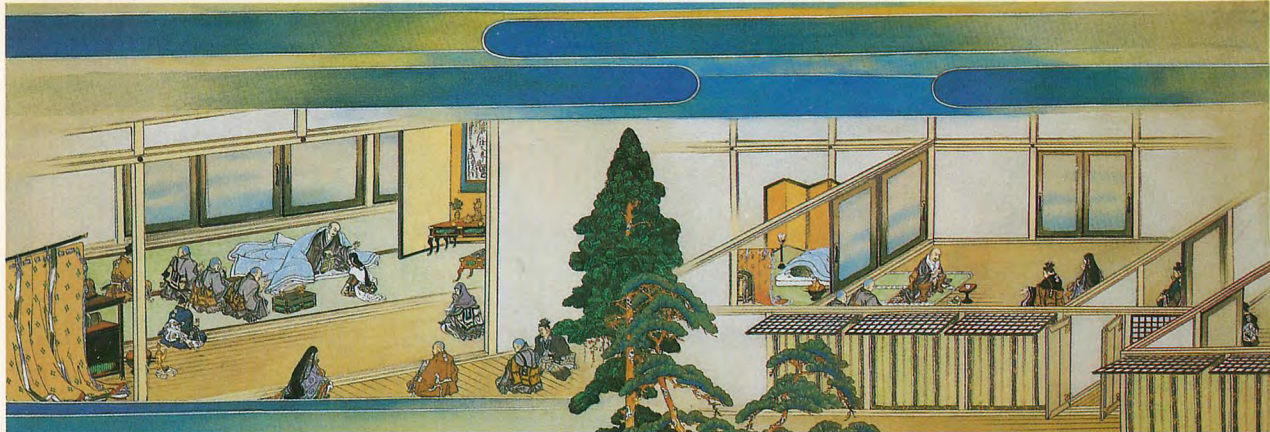


Scene 23 Bound for Mount Minobu

On 3/13/1274, St. Nichiren was pardoned and left Sado Island. Two weeks later he arrived in Kamakura. The Saint proceeded to the offices of the military government and admonished them saying that if they did not place their faith in the True Law of the Lotus Sutra, the country would be destroyed. His words went unheeded.

Three times he had admonished the ruling powers to unite the country by having national policies administered in the spirit of the Lotus Sutra, and thrice these admonitions were in vain. The Saint, feeling there was no further need for him to remain in Kamakura, left on 5/12/1274. Spring showers fell as he bade farewell, accompanied by his followers Nichirō, Nikkō, Nitchō, Nichiji and a few others. They arrived in the deep wooded hills of Minobu on the 17th and were greeted by Sanenaga Nambu, lord of the region. Since his residence was located in the Hakii

area, Sanenaga was often called Lord Hakii. While a hermitage was being built, the Saint journeyed up the Fuji river to spread the Lotus Teachings for a month or so. The hermitage was a simple structure with grass in place of tiles on the roof, but it was the first place of his own in which he was able to live in peace.



Scene 25 An Assignment For Kyō-ichi-maro

On 10/8/1282, six steward disciples were chosen. On the 10th, there was a distribution of mementos and, on the 11th, thirteen year old Kyōichimaro was summoned. After being briefed on the evangelical mission thus far, the Saint gave him the assignment of spreading the Lotus Teaching to the people in Kyoto and the western regions of Japan. Tutored by Nichirō, he lived up to expectations and is remembered as Nichizō.

On 10/13/1282, while the Saint was chanting the sixteenth chapter of the Lotus Sutra, he quietly passed into *nirvāna*. At that time, although it was not the season for cherry blossoms, all at once the cherry trees in the garden of Munenaka's mansion began to bloom, majestically marking the Saint's passing. He had been born with blooming lotuses and passed away with the blossoming of cherries.

Scene 24 The Last Sermon

During the eight years while St. Nichiren was on Mt. Minobu, he wrote many works and taught countless disciples. However, due to the daily persecutions he had suffered up to that time and the severe climate on Mt. Minobu, his health deteriorated. Consequently, on 9/8/1284, he left Mt. Minobu and set out for the mansion of Munenaka Ikegami (located in present day Tokyo).

In a letter dated 9/19/1282 and addressed to Lord Hakii, the Saint noted in part, "Protected by your son I was able to arrive here without incident. For eight years you have provided for me most generously. I remain deeply indebted to you. No matter where I might die, I would like to have my remains buried in Minobu." On the 25th, a new temple in the Ikegami estate was consecrated and St. Nichiren gave his last sermon in its sanctuary.

Cover Paintings

The paintings on the covers of this book depict St. Nichiren on a journey from Kamakura to Kyoto. At that time (1242) he was twenty-one years old and, having finished his study of Buddhism in Kamakura, was traveling to the Tendai monastic institution located on Mt. Hiei, the center of Buddhist learning in Japan.

The right-hand scene in the painting on the front cover depicts St. Nichiren leaving Kamakura. The left-hand scene illustrates his negotiation of the pass through the mountains at Hakone, an extremely difficult stretch of the Tokaido. Mt. Fuji appears very far away in this scene.

The right-hand scene in the painting on the rear cover pictures the Saint having crossed the Hakone Pass and proceeding to cross the Fuji River located in modern day Shizuoka Prefecture. Mt. Fuji can be seen to have grown much larger than in the previous scene. The left-hand scene illustrates the Saint, again moving west, crossing the Seta Bridge near Lake Biwa. Kyoto is located just over the next mountain range.

In these two examples we see how two scenes are included in one painting. The scenes progress from right to left and, at the same time, the passing of time is represented.

A Description of *Emakimono*

The painting of *emakimono* (picture scrolls) is an ancient, traditional art form in Japan which has been passed down from the Heian (794-1192) and Kamakura (1192-1333) periods. *Emakimono* are composed of a number of scenes illustrating narrative tales, biographies and so on to which corresponding textual descriptions are attached. Since they were originally made as *makimono* (scrolls), they were intended to be viewed from right to left; the left hand unrolling and the right rerolling the scroll. Because this book is a bound version of a traditional *emakimono*, its pages are not ordered in the traditional Western fashion. It is meant to be opened to the right and the scenes on each page are to be viewed from right to left. As each scene changes, time also passes. In one painting, two or three different times and/or places may be illustrated. Most scenes are divided by intervening mountains or trees and shrubs while some are separated by clouds or banks of mist. Each painting is also bordered by banks of mist at the top and bottom. This is a special characteristic of Tosa-e, a traditional painting school of the Yamato-e (painting styles of Japan).

In addition, the omission of a roof or ceiling in order to draw the viewer's eyes to a particular area of a scene is also a technique unique to the Tosa-e school. All the paintings contained in this book are executed in a gentle, graceful style, creating an overall presentation of refinement. This is also a special characteristic of Japanese painting schools.



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Date of issue :September 1st. 1986

Edited by Nichiren-shū Asia Buddhist Friendship Association

3-2,Kodenmacho, Chuo-ku, Tokyo, Japan 103

Phone 03-661-3996

Published by Nichiren-shū

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Printed in Japan Kougasha Co., Ltd.