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Originators: Transformation and Collaboration in the Production of Original Written Artefacts

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Article

Nichiren's *Daimandara*: Originators and Originating Factors in the Serialised Production of Written Artefacts

Steffen Döll | Hamburg

1. Introduction

Between the years of 1271 and 1282, the Japanese monk Nichiren 日蓮 (1222–1282)¹ produced a series of written artefacts. They are held in highest regard in the Nichiren school and tradition and are deemed to be imbued with pronounced spiritual powers. These *daimandara* 大曼荼羅 ('great *maṇḍalas*')² share a common layout, content, and ideological background as well as a complex religious functionality. After Nichiren's death, his *daimandara* were carefully preserved and transmitted, and a great number of them remains extant to the present day. His successors, in turn, made copies and epigones of the *daimandara*,³ which to this day are being reproduced, mass-produced, forged,

authenticated or consecrated, and the legitimacy of single specimen are being discussed, approved and negated. Numerous factors contribute to the origination of the *daimandara* as individual specimens and also as a coherent group of written artefacts.

The following overview uses this specific instance of a serialised production of interconnected written artefacts to characterise the multiplicity of originators and the associated factors. It will first discuss the *daimandara*'s dogmatic position and religious relevance, including issues arising later in their transmission and authentication. It will then proceed by sketching the general characteristics and the features shared by this group of written artefacts. It will conclude with three representative examples from Nichiren's holographs. They are paradigmatic *daimandara* due to the following features: their particular materiality, layout, content (especially in relation to canonical scriptures), historical setting, and their contexts (such as references to, and adaption of, canonical scriptures and Nichiren's own writings) as well as their subsequent preservation and transmission. Indeed, the *daimandara* derives its originality from the charismatic authority of Nichiren, and also, to a lesser degree, of his successors; however, it will become clear that it also stems from various historical circumstances, canonical references and ritual invocations. Arguing on a theoretical level, this text presents originality as a specific type of ascription. It proceeds on the assumption that the originality of the *daimandara* is not, as such, premised on any feature inherent in the written artefact's material, format or content, but rather on believers religiously and socially engaging with the artefact.

¹ Nichiren was originally ordained in the Tendai 天台 school. During the second half of his life, he came to be regarded as the founder of an eponymous school of Japanese Buddhism in competition with the Tendai establishment. Stone 2019 lucidly describes Nichiren's biography and related issues.

² Alternative terminologies include *Hoke mandara* 法華曼荼羅 ('*Lotus* [*Sutra*] *maṇḍala*'), *mandara honzon* 曼荼羅本尊 ('the *maṇḍala* as the main object of veneration'), *Hoke gohonzon* 法華御本尊 ('the main object of veneration [according to] the *Lotus* [*Sutra*]'), or simply *gohonzon* 御本尊 ('main object of veneration'). The prefix *go* in the latter two cases indicates reverence towards the *daimandara* as a work of Nichiren's creation manifesting the salvific powers of the *Lotus Sutra* rather than towards the *sutra per se*. For detailed, if confessionally biased introductions to the topic, see Komatsu 2014 and Nakao 2004. Whether Nichiren's *daimandara* may adequately be described as *maṇḍala* in the sense used, e.g., in the emic and etic terminology that (self-)describes and analyses esoteric and tantric forms of Buddhism must remain, at this point, an open question. From Nichiren's texts the fact is obvious that he believed his mandalic instantiations of the *Lotus Sutra* to be superior to, but in line with, esoteric practices and doctrines. For the purposes at hand, it may suffice to point out that the *maṇḍala* nomenclature in Japanese Buddhism and related religious traditions is used inclusively. The term refers to pictorial and symbolic representations in a general sense such as in the case of the *Taima mandara* 當麻曼荼羅 ('*maṇḍala* of Taima [monastery]'), see Snodgrass 1992, and the pictorial category of the *sankei mandara* 熊野參詣曼荼羅 ('pilgrimage *maṇḍalas*'), see Moermann 2005, 81–89, and Knecht 2006. On Japanese *maṇḍalas* in general, see ten Grotenhuis 1999.

³ For a facsimile collection of representative examples in outstanding quality, see Nichiren shōnin monka rekidai daimandara honzon shūsei kankōkai 1986.

2. The *daimandara* in Nichiren's dogmatics

Nichiren perceived his day and age to be dominated by a historiographical and soteriological model known as *sanji* 三時, i.e. that of the 'three times' of the Buddhist teaching. The term subsumes a complex argument, the gist of which observably varies across the temporal and regional dissemination of the Buddhist tradition.⁴ However, in the Japanese case in general,⁵ and in Nichiren's in particular,⁶ it can be summarized as follows: The *buppō* 佛法 ('teachings of the Buddha'; Skt. *Buddhadharma*), i.e. the true teachings preached by the historical Buddha, are not immune to the passing of time and deteriorating influences. The first period of *shōbō* 正法 ('true' or 'correct dharma') – frequently calculated to last for either five hundred or one thousand years after the Buddha's passing – was believed to avail believers and practitioners of the full salvific efficacy of his teachings. The next one thousand years of *zōhō* 像法 ('semblance dharma' or 'dharma as image') already held immense difficulties for adherents of Buddhism: while they still nominally possessed the teachings, and were able to practice accordingly, the final goal of liberation had become virtually impossible. In the third and final age of *mappō* 末法 ('degenerate dharma'), it was no longer even possible to rely on the remnants of the Buddha's teachings nor on the self-empowerment of religious practice, let alone any justifiable hope of salvation. In Japan, it was believed that it was accurate to date the starting point of the apocalyptic situation to the year of 1052, some two hundred years before Nichiren began producing the *daimandara*. He claimed that, while the age of *mappō* was as inevitable as it was universal, his interpretation of the canonical scripture of the *Lotus Sutra*⁷ opened up the single valid means of salvation. His claim was far-reaching and included the conviction that Japan, removed in space and time from the original location of the Buddha and his preaching, held an advantageous, even singular, position in the Buddhist cosmos and in Buddhist history; that, by the same token, the exaltedness of the LS

meant that adhering to any other form of Buddhist teaching and practice was offensive and merited unconditional rejection; and that, having deciphered the hidden meaning of the LS for the time and place at hand, imbued him with a unique spiritual authority, enabling him to produce the *daimandara* not as mere symbols of the LS's teachings⁸ but as instantiations of its salvific efficacy.⁹

をさなき人の御ために御まほり（守）さづけまいらせ候。この御まほりは法華經のうちのかんじん一切經のげんもく（眼目）にて候。たとへば、天には日月、地には大王、人には心、たからの中には如意寶珠のたま、いえにははしらのやうなる事にて候。このまんだら（曼荼羅）を身にたまちぬれば、王を武士のまほるがごとく、子ををやのあいするがごとく、いを（魚）の水をたのむがごとく、草木のあめをねがうがごとく、とりの木をたのむがごとく、一切の佛神等のあつまりまほり、晝夜にかげのごとくまほらせ給フ法にて候。

For the benefit of the powerless, to them I consign this talisman. This talisman is the living heart [*kanjin* 肝心, lit. 'liver and heart'] within the LS, and the most important asset [lit. 'eyeball'] of all canonical scriptures. To give examples, it is like the sun and the moon to the sky, a great sovereign to the earth, the heart to a human being, the marble of the wish-fulfilling jewel among the [many] treasures, or the central pillar to a house. If you keep this *maṇḍala* with you, then – as if a sovereign was protected by their warriors, as if a child was loved by their parents, as if a fish relied on the water [which surrounds it], as if grasses and trees delighted in the rain [that falls on them], as if a bird holds on to the tree [it builds its nest in] – this is a method for all buddhas and deities and such to gather and protect you, and to keep you from harm day and night as if they were your own shadow.

Thus, it comes as no surprise that the talisman or, more to the point, the apotropaic artefact of the *daimandara* assumes a significant, even primary, role in Nichiren's LS-related

⁴ See Nattier 1992.

⁵ See Rhodes 2004, Marra 1988a and 1988b, and Fischer 1976.

⁶ See Stone 1985a and 1985b.

⁷ Nichiren relied on the *Lotus Sutra* (Skt. *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*) translation by Kumārajīva (344–413), completed in 406. Its title is in Japanese articulation *Myōhō renga kyō* 妙法蓮華經 ('canonical scripture of the lotus blossom of the sublime teachings'). It will be abbreviated henceforth as LS. For the standard edition of the Chinese translation, see Takakusu and Watanabe (eds) 1924–1932 (henceforth abbreviated as *T*), no. 262, vol. 9, 1a01–62c14. Numerous English translations are available; the following makes reference to Hurvitz 1976.

⁸ For a contradictory interpretation, see Watanabe 1994.

⁹ From the letter *Myōshin ama gozen gohenji* 妙心尼御前御返事 ('response addressed to the nun Myōshin'), dated 1275 (Kenji 建治 1), eighth month, 25th day; quoted according to Risshō daigaku shūgaku kenkyūjō 1952, vol. 2, 1105. Also available online <https://www.日蓮聖人御遺文.net/texts/妙心尼御前御返事_建治元/> (last accessed on 8 September 2023). All translations by the author.

readings and practices.¹⁰ The so-called *sandai hihō* 三大秘法 ('three great secret teachings') epitomise his interpretation of the LS, and their respective relation to the *daimandara* can be outlined as follows:

(1) *honmon honzon* 本門本尊 ('main object of veneration according to the original [i.e. Nichiren's] teachings'): The LS's dogma that all sentient beings may achieve liberation, even during the lifetime of their present existence, is expressed (technically, *zuken* 圖顯, 'made to appear in writing') in the form of the *daimandara*, or *honzon*, which *in nuce* contains all of the Buddhist teachings as well as the orthodoxy of Nichiren's exegesis.

(2) *honmon kaidan* 本門戒壇 ('ordination platform according to the original teachings'): The enshrinement of the *honzon* for the purpose of worshipping the artefact enables Nichiren's followers to reduce their burden of unwholesome karma and promote their aspiration for buddhahood. The religious practice focussing on the *honzon* does not discriminate between gender, social standing or position in the religious hierarchy; it is therefore at least equal to, or even above and beyond, the ordination practices of established Buddhist schools.

(3) *honmon daimoku* 本門題目 ('stating the title [of the LS] according to the original teachings'): The pious adoration of the *honzon* is usually given verbal expression in the chanting of the LS's title with the phrase *namu Myōhō renge kyō* 南無妙法蓮華經 ('I take refuge to the LS'). It is simultaneously the audible manifestation of the all-inclusive teachings of the LS and the believers reaching the Buddha's self-same liberation.

The *daimandara* hold a prominent position in the overall context of Nichirenist dogmatics. Historical developments commencing immediately after Nichiren's death reflect this fact: his popularity, which won him numerous followers, on the one hand, and his acerbic polemics against other, in his view heterodox, interpretations of Buddhist canonical literature and established practices, on the other, contributed to internal strife within his denomination.¹¹ In some cases, their divergent claims to his heritage and secessionist politics

crystallized in issues relating to one specific *daimandara* specimen or the overall status of the *daimandara* group of written artefacts. Since a detailed tracing of the venues and nodes of arguments and their institutional implications is beyond the scope of this paper, a single episode shall suffice for illustration.¹²

The Hōandō 奉安堂 ('hall of veneration and enshrinement') at Taisekiji 大石寺 ('great stone temple')¹³ houses a wood carving believed to copy the Nichiren holograph of a *daimandara*. The holograph is dated to the year of 1279 (*Kōan* 弘安 2), and it is believed to have been transferred from paper to wood by Nippō 日法 (1258–1341), a direct disciple of Nichiren. It is formally known as *honmon kaidan no dai gohonzon* 本門戒壇之大御本尊 ('great main object of veneration at the ordination platform according to the original teachings') and commands a position of ultimate sanctity in the Nichiren shōshū 日蓮正宗 ('orthodox school of Nichiren'). Between 1952 and 1990, the Nichiren shōshū had been officially affiliated with the Sōka gakkai 創価学会 ('study group for the creation of values'), a Nichirenist lay movement. While infrequent tensions are observable throughout the four decades of their affiliation, discussions over conflicting views on issues of hierarchy and the respective roles of clergy and laypersons came to a head in the late 1980s. In particular, the Sōka gakkai's chairperson, Ikeda Daisaku 池田大作 (b. 1928), criticized the Nichiren shōshū's head priest, Abe Nikken 阿部日顕 (1922–2019), for demanding inappropriate sums of money for copies of Taisekiji's *dai gohonzon*, which adherents were generally expected to purchase and enshrine in their home altars. When Ikeda would not back down, the Nichiren shōshū unsuccessfully attempted to have him removed from office and finally took the drastic step of collectively excommunicating the Sōka gakkai. Since then, it has been the unofficial, but frequently voiced position of the Sōka gakkai to deny the authenticity of the *daimandara* wood carving enshrined at Taisekiji, and generally facilitate believers' access to 'authentic' copies of *daimandara*.¹⁴ In short, control over the *daimandara* and

¹⁰ See also the analysis in Stone 1999, 402–405.

¹¹ See Stone 2014 for an in-depth analysis of an early example of struggles within the Nichirenist traditions.

¹² See Métraux 1992. For a general introduction to the history of the Sōka gakkai, see Fisker-Nielsen 2019; Wallinder-Pierini 2018 and MacWilliams 2006 for presentations of issues related to the material and digital reproduction of *daimandara*.

¹³ Taisekiji is the headquarter (*sōhonzan* 総本山, 'mountain of general origin') of the Nichiren shōshū 日蓮正宗 ('orthodox school of Nichiren'). It is located in the city of Fujinomiya 富士宮, Shizuoka 静岡 prefecture.

¹⁴ On this issue, sometimes referred to as the Nichiren 'temple wars', see MacWilliams 2006 and Hurst 1992.

the ability to attest or object to its authenticity-cum-efficacy as a Nichiren original stands central in this recent conflict between Nichiren Buddhist organizations.

The eminence that is generally – if in some cases not without contestation – attributed to the *daimandara* depends to a large extent on Nichiren's authorship. The following section will introduce the metrics, structure and historical setting of Nichiren holographs.

3. General outline of the *daimandara* as a group of written artefacts

3.1 Extant *daimandara* and their metric data

Research on the *daimandara* has hitherto mostly been conducted on a series of single-surface written artefacts that had been identified – by tradition and scholarly palaeographic analyses, with only some rare cases of disagreement – as holographs by the hand of Nichiren. 123 specimens of Nichiren holographs were catalogued by Yamanaka Kihachi 山中喜八¹⁵ and the Risshō ankokukai 立正安國會 in 1952¹⁶ with a series of grey literature by The Nichiren Mandara Study Workshop – in part also confessionally motivated – updating, correcting and revising the Yamanaka catalogue.¹⁷ Information on several more specimens, now apparently lost, is available so that the number of *daimandara* by the hand of Nichiren certainly amounts to 128, possibly even more than that. They had been produced between 1271/10/09 (earliest dated specimen) and 1282/06 (a few months before Nichiren's death on 1282/10/13). At times, Nichiren seems to have manufactured multiple *daimandara* per month: eight specimens are dated to 1280/04, while the dates of 1278/07/05, 1279/04/08, and 1280/05/08 have each been inscribed on two distinct *daimandara*. Two specimens are dated 1276/08/13, with one more the following day of 1276/08/14. The sheer amount of *daimandara* and the frequency with which they were written already makes it obvious that their main originator, Nichiren, was following

a template to be discussed in detail below. At the same time, a surprising variety is equally observable: no two specimens have exactly the same size. The smallest (cat. no. 10) measures 142 mm width by 270 mm length, while the largest (cat. no. 57) clocks in at a staggering 1249 mm width by 2439 mm length. Three specimens feature silk as writing support, with two of them extant today (cat. nos. 11 and 58), respectively measuring 773 mm by 1651 mm and 403 mm by 836 mm. All other 125 artefacts are written on mulberry paper. Larger surfaces are created by conjoining (obviously irregularly sized) sheets of paper so that we may note the distribution as listed in Table 1.

The relatively high percentage to which Nichiren's holographs were inscribed on either single sheets of paper or the larger surfaces of three smaller sheets glued together may reflect that the *daimandara* were intended either as portable personal talismans to be kept continually close to the beneficiary's person or as artefacts to be enshrined in smaller places of worship of a growing community of believers that had, however, not yet solidified in the large-scale, permanent religious institutions of later Nichiren temples.

3.2 Scripts and languages

Without exception, all specimens are inscribed with black (at times 'blue', i.e. blackish) ink. Nichiren employs Chinese characters both for terms taken from East Asian vocabularies (mainly personal names such as Ch. Tiantai *dashi*, Jap. Tendai *daishi* 天台大師 for one of the founding figures of the Chinese Tiantai school of Buddhism, or Tenshō *daijin* 天照大神 for Amaterasu *ōmikami* 天照大御神, the sun goddess of the Japanese pantheon) and for the translation of Sanskrit terms (such as the title of the LS) or, respectively, their transliteration (as in Ch. *pusa*, Jap. *bosatsu* 菩薩 for Skt. *bodhisattva*). His signature is also present in (slightly cursive) regular script (*kaisho* 楷書), partly overlaid with his *kaō* 花押 ('flower-like impression'), i.e. his 'wet signature' comprising drastically abbreviated characters with partly rearranged stroke orders. A large part of *daimandara* also has Siddham letters inscribed, which Nichiren borrowed from the esoteric Buddhist traditions for the purposes of writing Sanskrit *shuji* 種子 ('seed syllables') that invoked superhuman agencies.¹⁸ Typically, these invoke and represent

¹⁵ Yamanaka was born in 1902 and became secretary of the Nichirenist Risshō ankokukai 立正安國會. In 1992 and 1993, the two-volume *Yamanaka Kihachi chosaku senshū* 山中喜八著作選集 ('collection of selected works by Yamanaka Kihachi') was published by Yūzankaku 雄山閣, Tōkyō, which contains a *jijo* 自序 ('preface by the author'). It is unknown to me when he died or whether he was alive when this paper was published.

¹⁶ Republished in Yamanaka and Risshō ankokukai 1977.

¹⁷ See the five-volume series *The Mandala in Nichiren Buddhism* (henceforth abbreviated as NMSW) 2013–2023, and, more concisely, Finocchiari 2018. The expanded catalogue, almost complete with transcriptions, images and context information is also available online via the website *Nichiren shōnin daimandara ichiran* 日蓮聖人大漫荼羅一覽 ('overview of the *daimandara* of Nichiren, the sagacious one'), <<http://juhoukai.la.coocan.jp/mandara/mandaraitiran.html>> (accessed on 9 September 2023).

¹⁸ On Nichiren's relation to the esoteric traditions of East Asian Buddhism, see Dolce 1999.

Table 1: The measurements of Nichiren's written artefacts.

no. of sheets	avg. width (mm)	avg. length (mm)	no. of specimen	percentage of specimens
1	326	500	52	41,6%
2	420	672	10	8,0%
3	500	938	51	40,8%
4	489	1135	4	3,2%
6	570	1273	1 (cat. no. 13)	0,8%
8	985	1334	1 (cat. no. 37)	0,8%
10	986	1571	2 (cat. nos. 34 and 81)	1,6%
12	1088	1976	1 (cat. no. 101)	0,8%
18 ¹⁹	1030	1570	1 (cat. no. 9)	0,8%
20	1121	1894	1 (cat. no. 18)	0,8%
28	1249	2439	1 (cat. no. 57)	0,8%

the deities (*myōō* 明王, 'luminous [read: powerful] kings', Skt. *vidyārāja*) Fudō 不動 on the right ('the unmoved', Skt. Acala), and Aizen 愛染 ('tainted by desire', Skt. *Rāgarāja*) on the left edge of the written artefact's surface. In very few instances, other usages of Siddham script may be observed: cat. no. 8 has the two seed-syllables of Dainichi *nyorai* 大日如來 ('Great Sun Buddha', Skt. *Mahāvairocana tathāgata*) as manifest in the hierarchies of the Diamond and Womb realms. The written artefacts' languages, then, are generally Chinese, Japanese and Sanskrit, represented in the three different writing systems of the Chinese script, its Japanese adaptation, and Siddham letters.

3.3 Typical layout and inscriptional units

The fundamental structure of the *daimandara* may be described as one which creates a space between a centre and a peripheral circumference with tiers of invocations running from top to bottom and representing a specific hierarchy. Nevertheless, some elements of the *daimandara* are not captured by this characterization and, in a letter to a female adherent of his teachings, Nichiren outlined the ideas behind his creation.²⁰

¹⁹ Finacchiaro 2018 documents 19 sheets for specimen cat. no. 9.

²⁰ From the letter *Nichinyō gozen gohenji* 日女御前御返事 ('response addressed to Nichinyō'), dated 1277 (Kenji 3), eighth month, 23rd day; quoted according to Hori 1975, 1243. Also available online <<https://gosho-search.sokanet.jp/page.php?n=1243>> (accessed on 8 September 2023).

竜樹天親等・天台妙楽等だにも顕し給はざる大曼荼羅を・末法二百余年の比はじめて法華弘通のはたじるしとして顕し奉るなり、是全く日蓮が自作にあらず多宝塔中の大牟尼世尊分身の諸仏すりかたぎたる本尊なり、されば首題の五字は中央にかかり・四大天王は宝塔の四方に坐し・釈迦・多宝・本化の四菩薩肩を並べ普賢・文殊等・舍利弗・目連等坐を屈し・日天・月天・第六天の魔王・竜王・阿修羅・其の外不動・愛染は南北の二方に陣を取り・惡逆の達多・愚癡の竜女一座をはり・三千世界の人の寿命を奪ふ惡鬼たる鬼子母神・十羅刹女等・加之日本国の守護神たる天照太神・八幡大菩薩・天神七代・地神五代の神神・総じて大小の神祇等・体の神つらなる・其の余の用の神豈もるべきや、

This great *maṇḍala*, which neither Nāgārjuna²¹ nor Vasubandhu²², neither Tiantai [Zhiyi, 538–597]²³ nor Miaole [(alt. Miaolo) Zhanran, 711–782]²⁴ had given expression to, I was the first to dare to put into form as a banner for the dissemination of the [teachings of the] LS at this time of

²¹ Nāgārjuna's life dates are uncertain but must be located between the 1st and the 3rd centuries. The usual dating of 150–250 given in scholarship is problematic. See Ye 2019.

²² There is no need to go into the infamous debate on the dating of Vasubandhu, or the question of whether there were one or two persons of that name. For an excellent overview and evaluation of scholarship, see Kritzer 2019.

²³ See Bowring 2019b.

²⁴ See Bowring 2019a.

more than 200 years since the [beginning of the age of the] degenerate dharma. But it is by no means a creation merely by myself, Nichiren. It is the main object of veneration of the great *muni* [i.e. sage], the World-Honoured One, and all the buddhas that are his emanation bodies in the shape of a woodblock [for printing]. Since this is the case, I have placed the five characters of the head title in the very centre, while the Four Great Heavenly Kings sit to the four sides of the jewelled *stūpa*. [The buddhas] Śākya[muni] and Many Jewels as well as the four bodhisattvas of [these two buddhas'] original transformations stand side by side. Samantabhadra, Mañjuśrī, Śāriputra, Maudgalyāyana, and the other [bodhisattvas and disciples] comply on their seats. The deities of the sun and the moon, the Demon King of the sixth sphere of the heavens, the Dragon King, and the *asuras*, and furthermore Fudō and Aizen take up formation to the South and North directions. The evil, fault-committing Devadatta and the ignorant Dragon Princess are deployed[, as well]. Not only the mother goddess of demons and the ten *raksa* [i.e. demon] women and others, who are malevolent spirits that rob the people of the trichilocosm of their lives, are listed but also the Great Goddess that Illuminates the Heavens and the great bodhisattva Hachiman, who are the guardian deities of the realm of the sun's origin [i.e. Japan], the seven generations of the deities of the heavens and the five generations of the deities of the earth along with the greater and lesser heavenly and earthly deities in total and those deities [that possess] corporeal forms. How could one give [additional] space to the deities of other [and less important] functions?

In conformity with Nichiren's own narration of the *daimandara*'s layout, the invocation (*namu* 南無 for Skt. *namo*, 'I take refuge in [...]') of the LS's title (i.e. the so-called *daimoku* 題目) is inscribed in the centre, and, mostly in larger script than the other elements on the written artefact's surface. While the composition of inscriptional units usually varies to some degree from one written artefact to the other, the *daimoku* – together with Nichiren's signature – is the only element present in every single specimen. Next to the *daimoku*, most specimens feature the two principal buddhas of the *Lotus Sutra*, one on either side: Tahō nyorai 多寶如來 ('buddha of many jewels', Skt. *Prabhutaratna tathāgata*) on the right, the historical Buddha Śākyamuni 釋迦牟尼佛 on the left. The constellation is one that locates the written artefact firmly in the dazzling narrative of the LS's eleventh

chapter, *Ken hōtō bon* 見寶塔品 ('chapter on seeing the jewelled pagoda'), which has these two buddhas sitting side by side within a *stūpa*.²⁵ Given the fact that a *stūpa* originally designated a shrine for the Buddha's relics, it is small wonder that the LS subsequently elaborates its own text as a superior type of *stūpa* by which the bodily presence of said two buddhas becomes manifest. This is precisely the idea that gives shape to Nichiren's *daimandara*: Invoking the LS's title as the quintessence of the narratives it contains, it is supposed to enable the recipient-cum-practitioner of the *daimandara* to find themselves in the presence of the buddhas and their entourage. This entourage is then explicated in the names listed next to and below the two buddhas.

There are the four bodhisattvas of the fifteenth chapter, *Jūchi yōshutsu bon* 從地涌出品 ('chapter on welling up out of the earth').²⁶ There, it is disclosed that they had been taught the text of the LS in the far-removed time of aeons past by the Buddha, their names inscribed only slightly lower than those of the two buddhas. One tier down, there are the Buddha's disciples as well as the wisdom kings, guardian deities, and demons of canonical scripture. With growing distance from the top, the *daimandara*'s structure represents the temporal and geographic removal from the LS's foundational description of the episode of the two buddhas: the third tier typically has the later South and Central Asian as well as the Chinese patriarchs whose tradition Nichiren locates himself in. Lowermost, we finally find Japanese deities, namely Amaterasu and Hachiman 八幡.

The *shitennō* 四天王 ('four heavenly kings') are located on the periphery: one in each corner, while the right and left margins of the surface are occupied by the Siddham letters invoking Fudō and Aizen *myōō*. The bottom part of the writing surface features various quotes from canonical scriptures, Nichiren's signature in regular script and his *kaō*, an emphatic statement of the originality of the *daimandara*, and possibly further inscriptions detailing the processes of transmission and preservation of the specific written artefact. Some of the latter may have been written by a hand other than Nichiren's (see case study no. 3 below).

²⁵ The scene is also known by the term *kokū e* 虚空會 ('congregation [floating] in empty space'). See *T* no. 262, vol. 9, 32b16–34b22, and Hurvitz 1976, 183–194.

²⁶ These are known by the names of Jōgyō 上行 ('superior practice'), Muhen gyō 無辺行 ('universal practice'), Jōgyō 淨行 ('pure practice'), and Anryū gyō 安立行 ('peacefully established practice'). See *T* no. 262, vol. 9, 39c18–42a28, and Hurvitz 1976, 225–236.

We may then analyse the structure as follows: The circumference is guarded by those entities which are believed to protect the Buddhist tradition and its practitioners from both physical and spiritual harm. They stand equidistant from the centre, which focusses the LS. In light of the immediate presence of the two buddhas of the Pagoda Chapter, this must be interpreted as the shrine of the corporeal presence of the Buddha himself. The bottom part, as well as the snippets of inscriptions in between the primary, mandalic structure, must be read as paracontent that avails the reader-cum-practitioner of the written artefact – and in contexts of transmission, possibly, its recipient – of information on the origin, efficacy and pedigree of the *daimandara*. The *daimandara*'s inscriptional units may be described as follows:

- (1) the invocation of the LS's title in the centre,
- (2) the LS Pagoda Chapter's two buddhas immediately adjacent to the *daimoku*,
- (3) bodhisattvas and disciples in the vicinity of the two buddhas, with their relative distance translating into their respective hierarchical position and doctrinal importance,
- (4) various figures from the general Buddhist pantheon and
- (5) specifically Japanese deities organized in descending tiers,
- (6) Nichiren's signature and
- (7) his *kaō* towards the bottom, and
- (8) quotes from canonical scriptures and
- (9) the self-eulogy are interspersed.

The case studies below will illustrate that, although not every inscriptional unit is present in every *daimandara*, the stereotypic structure is a useful matrix to describe the particular layouts and features of individual specimens.

One more feature in the above quotation opens yet another perspective on the question of what the *daimandara* were intended to achieve. In his letter, Nichiren applies military terminology: the written artefact is identified as a 'banner' (*hatajirushi* [旗印] or [幟]), the bodhisattvas 'comply' (*kutsu shi* 屈し) to the two buddhas' orders, and the *myōō* and other deities 'take up formation' (*jin wo tori* 陣を取り) on the lower tiers and on the circumference. The *daimandara*'s strict symmetry and unambiguous organization in this sense borrows its layout from military battle formations. This reflects a proselytization strategy in Nichiren Buddhism

known as *shakubuku* 折伏 ('to break and subdue'; Skt. *abhibhava*), i.e. the forceful elimination and subsequent conversion of those forces opposing the LS as the ultimate truth. In its dogmatic context, it is complementary to *shōju* 攝受 ('to gather and receive'; Skt. *saṃgraha*), i.e. the persuasion of those that have not yet found their faith in the LS by means of compassion and kindness. In Nichiren's own words:²⁷

無智・惡人の國土に充滿の時は攝受を前とす安樂行品
のごとし、邪智・謗法の者の多き時は折伏を前とす常
不輕品のごとし、譬へば熱き時に寒水を用い寒き時に
火をこのむのごとし、

When the ignorant and malevolent abound in the realm, then one puts *shōju* first as in the [LS's] 'chapter on peaceful and pleasant practices'²⁸. When those of aberrant wisdom and those that denigrate the dharma are many, then one puts *shakubuku* first as in the [LS's] 'chapter on never taking lightly'²⁹. This is, for instance, as if one would make use of cold water when it is hot or as if one was drawn to the fire when it is cold.

Against this background, it turns out that the *daimandara* is not only an apotropaic talisman that protects its believers but also a projection of the LS's power to subdue the impious. It is precisely for the reason of this eliminative function of the *daimandara* that their production peaked in the face of military confrontations during Nichiren's times.

3.4 Historical setting of the production of *daimandara*

Nichiren produced his holographic *daimandara* roughly during the last ten years of his life. This period largely coincides with the Mongols' occupation of the East Asian mainland and their subsequent demands for recognition of their overlordship and tribute payments. When the Japanese denied all concessions, the threat of a Mongol attack became imminent. Tensions escalated in the 1274 and 1281 assaults

²⁷ From the treatise *Kaimoku shō* 開目抄 ('Excerpts [for the purposes] of opening your eyes'), dated 1272 (Bun'ei 文永 9), second month; quoted according to Hori 1975, 235. Also available online <<https://gosho-search.sokanet.jp/page.php?n=235>> (accessed on 8 September 2023). With this treatise, Nichiren intended to explain to his followers (lit. 'open their eyes') the reason for him and them being persecuted, discriminated against, and sent into exile, citing the prophecies of the LS that the adherents of the true dharma would be subjected to a variety of sufferings.

²⁸ See *T* no. 262, vol. 9, 37a09–39c17, and Hurvitz 1976, 208–224.

²⁹ See *T* no. 262, vol. 9, 50b23–51c07, and Hurvitz 1976, 279–285.

of Mongol-Chinese-Korean fleets on Japanese territory, specifically the coast of the southernmost main island of Kyūshū 九州.³⁰ Nichiren perceived these military conflicts with an outside power as tell-tale signs of the definite arrival of the age of *mappō*, and at the same time staunchly believed to have the singular and absolute instrument of the LS at hand to save the realm of Japan and its people from the foreign aggressors (along with all other types of harm). Nichiren characterised the end times he believed himself and the world around him to be in, but also the sole soteriological option that remains open to him and his contemporaries, by referring to an alleged prediction of the Buddha:³¹

法華經の本門の肝心たる妙法蓮華經の五字をゆつらせ
給て、あなかしこあなかしこ、我滅度の後正法一千
年、像法一千年に弘通すへからず、末法の始に謗法の
法師一間浮提に充滿して、諸天いかりをなし、慧星は
一天にわたらせ、大地は大波のこつくをとらむ、大旱
魃・大火・大水・大風・大疫病・大飢饉・大兵乱等の無量の大
災難並をこり、一間浮提の人人、各各甲冑をきて弓杖
を手ににきらむ時、諸仏・諸菩薩・諸大善神等の御力の
及せ給さらん時、諸人皆死して無間地獄に墮こと、雨
のこつくしけからん時、此五字の大曼荼羅を身に帶し
心に存せは、諸王は国を扶け、万民は難をのかれん、
乃至後生の大火災を脱へしと仏記しをかせ給ぬ。

[The Buddha] graciously provided us with the five characters of the *myōhō rengekyō* [i.e. the LS's *daimoku*], which are the living heart [lit. 'liver and heart'] of the essential teachings of the LS. With much trepidation, he graciously gave this prediction: These [five characters] must not be disseminated during either the one thousand years of the correct *dharma* after my liberation-through-cessation or the [subsequent] one thousand years of the resemblance *dharma*. At the beginning of the [age of the] degenerate *dharma*, [false] teachers of Buddhism that [in reality] slander the dharma will be present everywhere [on this our continent of] Jambudvīpa, and all the different deities will be furious, and comets will circle throughout the heavens, and the great earth will tremble as

if [its surface was made up of] great waves. Innumerable enormous disasters will occur, one after the other, such as great droughts, great fires, great floods, great storms, great epidemics, great famines, great wars, and others. When the people of Jambudvīpa then each will have girded their armour and taken in hand their bows and staffs, neither the buddhas nor the bodhisattvas nor the great benevolent deities nor the other [superhuman powers] will graciously extend their powers. At that time, all the people will fall into the [lowermost,] nonterminating hell upon their deaths, and they will keep doing so like rain [that is ceaselessly falling to the ground]. Then, if one was to keep close to oneself this *daimandara* of the five characters, the sovereigns would assist their realm, the myriad inhabitants would escape their hardships, and posterity was liberated³² from such great fires and calamities.

During the long-lasting final age of *mappō*, spiritual maturation and religious liberation are deemed to have become impossible for all intents and purposes. Nichiren, however, believed to have found the last, final, and ultimate possibility of salvation in the text of the LS; hence his forceful, even ruthless propagation of the text. Again, a letter of his to a female adherent attests to the fact:³³

法華第四に云く、仏滅度後能解其義は諸天人世間之眼
と云云。此の経文の意は、法華經は人天・二乗・菩薩・仏
の眼目なり、此の眼目を弘むるは日蓮一人なり [...] 此の眼の字顯われて見れば煩惱即菩提・生死即涅槃な
り、今末法に入つて、眼とは所謂未曾有の大曼荼羅な
り、此の御本尊より外には眼目無きなり云云。

The LS says in its fourth chapter:³⁴ 'If after the Buddha's liberation-through-cessation there is one who is competent to explain [this sutra's] meaning, [such a one] is as the eye

³⁰ For Japanese Studies research on the Mongol attacks, see Conlan 2001 and Turnbull 2010. For a complementary perspective from Mongolian Studies, see May 2018, 195–198.

³¹ From the letter *Niama gozen gohenji* 新尼御前御返事 ('response addressed to Niama'), dated 1275 (Bun'ei 12), second month, 16th day; quoted according to Hori 1975, 905–906. Also available online <<https://gosho-search.sokanet.jp/page.php?n=905>> and <<https://gosho-search.sokanet.jp/page.php?n=906>> (accessed on 8 September 2023).

³² Alternative reading: 'during their own future rebirths, they would be liberated'.

³³ From the lecture notes *Onkō kikigaki* 御講聞書 ('writing down what I heard during [Nichiren's] venerable lectures'), authored by Nichiren's disciple Nikō 日向 [1243–1314], between 1278 and 1280), quoted according to Hori 1975, 840–841. This specific lecture's title is *Myōhō renga kyō no goji wo manako to iu koto* 妙法蓮華經の五字を眼と云う事 ('on the five characters of the LS being termed "eyeball"'). Also available online: <<https://gosho-search.sokanet.jp/page.php?n=840>> and <<https://gosho-search.sokanet.jp/page.php?n=841>> (accessed on 8 September 2023).

³⁴ The fourth chapter of the LS is titled *Shinge bon* 信解品 ('chapter on liberation through belief'). See *T* no. 262, vol. 9, 16b07–19a11, and Hurvitz 1976, 84–100.

Table 2: The production of Nichiren's written artefacts after years.

<i>year</i>	<i>minimum of specimens produced</i>	<i>percentage of total (108)</i>
1271	1	0.9%
1272	1	0.9%
1273	1	0.9%
1274	6	5.6%
1275 (Bun'ei 12)	5	4.6%
1275 (Kenji 1)	4	3.7%
1276	11	10.2%
1277 (Kenji 3)	5	4.6%
1278 (Kōan 1)	9	8.3%
1279	13	12.0%
1280	30	27.8%
1281	15	13.9%
1282	7	6.5%

in the realms of deities and human beings.³⁵ The meaning of this passage of the sutra is that the LS is the eyeball of human beings, deities, [adherents of the] two vehicles, bodhisattvas, and buddhas. And it is Nichiren who propagates this eyeball. [...] When we see this character for 'eye' come to light, then our afflictions are none other than *bodhi* [i.e., awakening], and birth-and-death is none other than nirvana. Now that we have entered [the age of] the degenerate dharma, what is called 'eye' is the great *maṇḍala* in question. Apart from this worthy main object of veneration there is no eyeball (and further elaborations were given).

Thus, it is no wonder that his *daimandara* were produced during a time of heightened tension and outright military aggression, correlating historical circumstance with Nichiren's deeply-held conviction. The chronological distribution of the *daimandara* group of written artefacts attests to this fact. During the Bun'ei 文永 era (1264/02–1275/04), 25 to 28 *daimandara* were produced; during the Kenji 健治 era (1275/04–1278/02), the number was 20 to

22; during the Kōan 弘安 era (1278/02–1288/04), 74 to 78. Table 2 presents production to year relations (non-dated written artefacts are omitted).

The chronological distribution of the *daimandara*'s origination suggests a correlation, if not a causal relation, to historical circumstance: immediately after the 1274 assault, and prior to the invasion of 1281, production numbers peaked. If we take the years of 1274 to 1281 as one, more than 90% of all *daimandara* were produced during this period. The conclusion that political tensions and the overall historical situation contributed to the origination of the series of written artefacts seems highly plausible.

The preceding remarks have given an overall idea of the *daimandara* group of written artefacts, their stereotypical structure and their historical background. The following case studies explore Nichiren's authorship in greater detail. At the same time, they complicate the question of originators and originating factors by emphasizing those circumstances and conditions that are not, or not directly, tied to the person of Nichiren.

³⁵ Nichiren quotes from the LS's Pagoda Chapter. See *T* no. 262, vol. 9, 34b20–21, and the alternative translation in Hurvitz 1976, 193–194.

4. Case studies

4.1 Specimen cat. no. 10

The first case study to be considered (Fig. 1) is the smallest of all extant *daimandara*, nicknamed the ‘main object of veneration [written] onboard a ship’ (*senchū gohonzon* 船中御本尊) or ‘willow twig main object of veneration’ (*yōshi gohonzon* 楊子御本尊). It is a single sheet of paper of 142 mm width and 270 mm length in the possession of Myōhōji 妙法寺 (‘temple of the sublime dharma’) in Niigata 新潟 prefecture, catalogued as no. 10 of Nichiren’s holographs. Even though there are some worm holes in the paper, the legibility of the few inscribed characters is unimpeded. While the written artefact gives no indication as to the time and circumstance of its production, it was written, according to tradition, when Nichiren returned from exile on Sado 佐渡 island (off the Northern coast of Honshū 本州) to Kamakura 鎌倉. He is supposed to have been on board a ship (hence the first nickname) from Maura 真浦 on the island *en route* to Kashiwazaki 柏崎 on the coast of Honshū. Two versions of the story how the written artefact originated exist. One has the vessel’s captain asking for a *gohonzon* in commemoration of having aboard the infamous passenger. Another dramatically elaborates that when the weather turned, and a storm hit the vessel, Nichiren was successful in warding off the storm’s calamities by inscribing the title of the LS in the centre of the sheet and calling for metaphysical aid from the sun, the moon and the multitude of stars (in the right column) as well as the Four Heavenly Kings (in the column on the left). Either way, seeing that no brush was at hand, Nichiren is said to have made use of a willow twig, normally used to clean one’s teeth by chewing on it (hence the second nickname), as a writing tool. While the circumstances of the written artefact’s origin remain unclear, the background narrative may possibly tell the truth on this point, since the uneven and inhomogeneous *gestalt* of the characters corroborates the use of an unusual utensil. If indeed we proceed on what tradition reports, the willow twig *daimandara* was produced on the date of 1274, third month, 15th day. Having made landfall, it was presented to the ship’s captain, and subsequently came into the possession of the Nichiren temple where it is now archived.

Whether the quoted narratives are fact or fiction is high irrelevant for the present purpose. What is important is that at least certain members of Nichiren’s tradition believed them to be true, and valued the written artefact as an original precisely because of its origin narrative: it was

held (1) to have been written personally – and therefore empowered – by the founder of the school, and in a highly extemporary, spontaneous and informal setting; (2) to have been efficacious because of its invocation of the LS and of metaphysical entities; (3) to have been tried and tested in dire circumstances; and (4) to have been transmitted authentically within the tradition. While originating factors (2) and (3) are matters of personal belief and hagiography, and (4) an issue for further research, the person of the originator (1) is attested to in the fact that, below the three columns, the written artefact bears Nichiren’s name in clear script and is signed with his *kaō*. Also, the authenticity of these signatures has been confirmed not only by denominational ascription but also by modern scholarship through palaeographic analysis. All of these originators – the LS’s textual authority, the metaphysical entities acting in unison, Nichiren both as bearer of religious charisma and as scribe (but not as author, since the *daimoku*, the title of the LS, is not Nichiren’s creation but originates with the historical Buddha as a manifestation of the metahistorical, eternal buddha, Prabhutaratna), the averse situation onboard and the protective effect the talisman is supposed to have had, and the transmission of the written artefact among Nichirenist believers and institutions – contribute to the willow twig *daimandara*’s status as an original.

4.2 Specimen cat. no. 81

Next, we turn to catalogue no. 81 (Fig. 2), the so-called *Rinmetsudoji gohonzon* 臨滅度時御本尊 (‘main object of veneration from the time when [Nichiren] expected his liberation-through-cessation’). The written artefact consists of ten sheets creating a paper surface of 1027 mm width and 1615 mm length. Together with several other *daimandara*, it is preserved at Myōhonji 妙本寺 (‘temple of the sublime origin’) in the city of Kamakura. Again, it is a complete holograph: all of its many inscriptions are in Nichiren’s hand, and while there is a background narrative that tells the story of its implementation and transmission, none of it reflects in the materiality and visibility of the written artefact. The *daimandara* no. 81’s large surface provides ample space for (1) a number of invocations, (2) a eulogy stating the originality of the artefact,³⁶ (3) an imprecise date, and (4) Nichiren’s signatures.

³⁶ See Kuwana 2018.



Fig. 1: Yamanaka 1977, specimen cat. no. 10 ('willow twig *gohonzon*').

Re (1): The written artefact's layout generally follows the outline given above. Its centre features the seven stereotypical characters invoking the LS. In its immediate vicinity, further invocations are inscribed in horizontal symmetry. From top to bottom, we read the names of Śākyamuni to the left, and Prabhutaratna to the right, of the LS's title, set in larger script than the rest of the names. Both buddhas' names are each flanked on their outer sides by two bodhisattvas. Below these six names is a tier of bodhisattvas, buddha disciples, and deities and heavenly beings, totalling twelve names. Yet lower, and in loose spatial and prosopographical coordination, there are seven names (three to the left, four to the right) of figures of Buddhist myth, sovereigns of realms of transmigration and female demons. Four names follow which invoke representatives of the Buddhist tradition. Lowermost, the names of Hachiman *daibosatsu* and Tenshō *daijin* (i.e. the Sino-Japanese reading of Amaterasu *ōmikami*, the Sun Goddess and mythological origin of the Japanese imperial lineage) are given. The interjacent names descend by way of a religious hierarchy from spiritually advanced bodhisattvas through a who's who of canonical scripture to profane authorities, scholiasts, and deities particular to the Japanese context. The periphery of the invocatory tableau has the Four Heavenly Kings in the corners, while the left and right margin are dominated by the names of Aizen (left) and Fudō (right) in cursive Siddham script. Many, but by no means all, of these names are preceded by the phrase *namu*, lit. 'I take refuge in' or 'I pay homage to'. Clearly, the names are inscribed for the purpose of summoning their referents and compelling them to action.

Re (2): The small-scale block of text on the lower right reads: 'This is a great *maṇḍala* the likes of which for the 2,220 and more years since the Buddha's liberation-through-cessation have never before existed on [this continent of] Jambudvīpa'. The text states the novelty and uniqueness of the written artefact. No source is to be found for this turn of phrase, and it is therefore assumed to have been coined by Nichiren. As such, it is to be placed in the specific context of the Nichirenist championing of the LS as the sole valid soteriological option, and his own role in its propagation (the *daimandara* as the 'banner of the LS').

Re (3): The date is given as 'third year of the Kōan era, when Tai Sui [i.e. a specific group of celestial bodies are located in the area of] yang-metal and dragon, in the third month', which translates to late spring of 1280. No day is mentioned.

Re (4): As is customary for Nichiren's *daimandara*, he signs both in clear script and by his *kaō*. In this specific case, the pronounced curve in the final stroke of the *kaō* has been likened to a snake's tail; hence the written artefact's nickname of 'snake-formed *honzon*' (*jagyō gohonzon* 蛇形御本尊).

Naturally, Nichiren looms large in an attempt to distinguish the originating factors involved in the production of the written artefact. He is both the conceptualizer of the *daimandara*'s specific visual, referential and metaphysical layout (1) which immediately results in its alleged efficacy, and the scribe of the holograph. His authorship, in contrast to the previous case study of the *senchū gohonzon*, is asserted in characteristic no. (2) which states the disconnection between the text of the LS and its implementation in the form of the *daimandara*. While in Nichiren's understanding the LS was disclosed more than 2,220 years ago, it is only his unique position – the conjunction between his person, that precise point in time during the age of the degenerate dharma and that particular location of Japan – that allows for the production of the *daimandara* as the LS's manifestation. In this sense, Nichiren assumes an authorship here that is far more consequential for the written artefact in question.

With regard to the written artefact's transmission, its more formal designation, *Rinmetsudoji gohonzon*, indicates yet another facet of origination. It is believed that when Nichiren felt his end draw near, he requested that the disciples that were with him hang the *daimandara* by his bedside where it is supposed to have remained until after his passing. Accordingly, this particular specimen of *daimandara* is partly ascribed its status as an original in light of its biography: it shared in Nichiren's final moments and his demise, which was an event of fundamental significance to the subsequent tradition and is thus unique among all other *daimandara*. The reverence with which this particular specimen is regarded is attested to by two additional phenomena: one is that Nichiren's name, as well as the surface below, appear eroded beyond the wear and tear of the rest of the written artefact. It has been convincingly conjectured that these result from years and decades of believers touching the *daimandara*,

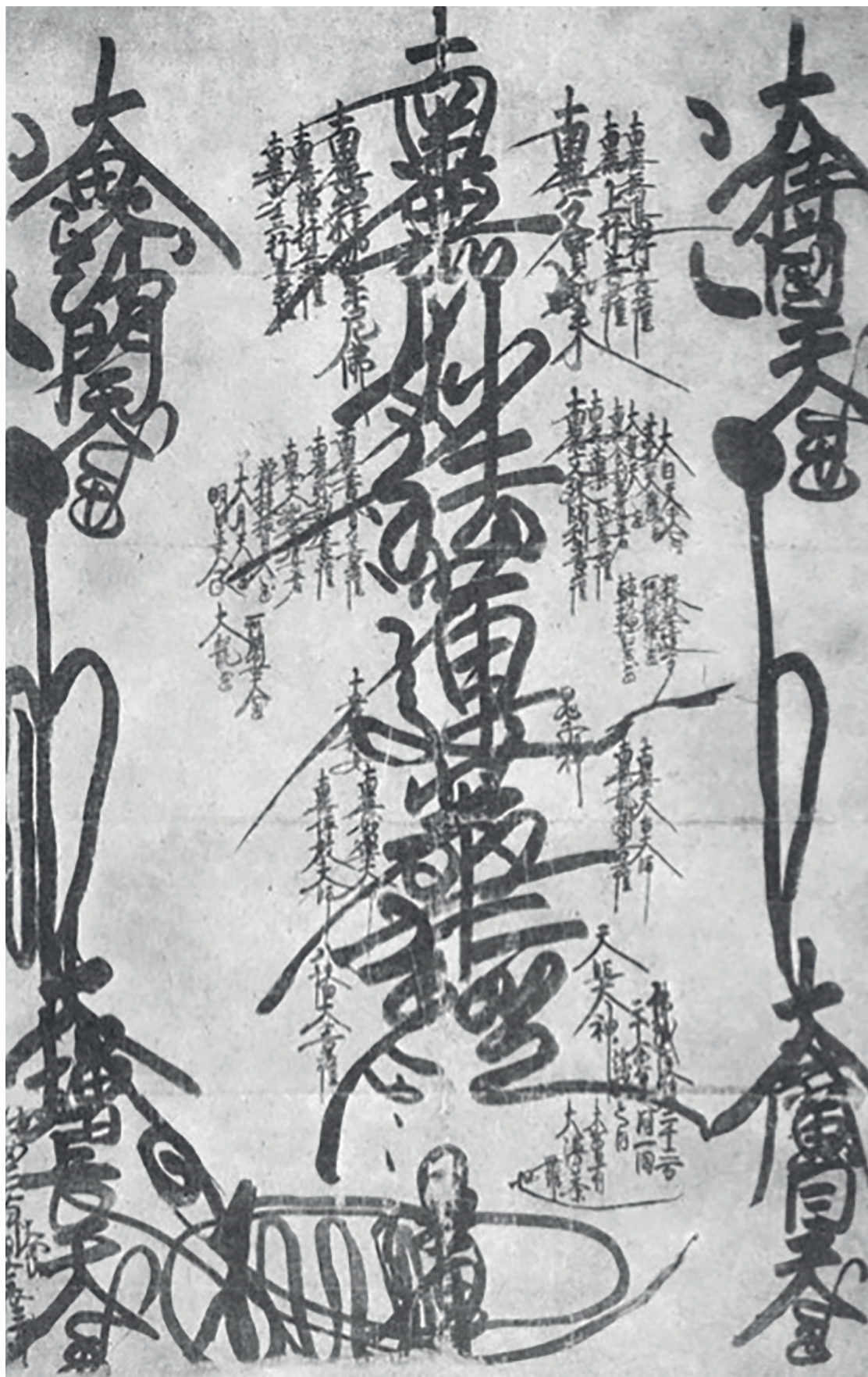


Fig. 2: Yamanaka 1977, specimen cat. no. 81 ('gohonzon from the time when [Nichiren] expected his liberation-through-cessation'). This specimen is also available as a full-colour reproduction in Nakao and Terao 2012, 83.

hoping to create a karmic, if not physical, connection to their religion's founding figure.³⁷ This also suggests that the written artefact was first mounted on some kind of board at a height that allowed pilgrims to reach it; only later was it remounted in the fashion of a hanging scroll and removed to the temple's altar area beyond the reach of the pilgrims. In fact – and this is the second attestation – inscriptions on the back of the written artefact document its production, transmission and restoration. The earliest one of these verso inscriptions are the signature and *kaō* of Nichirō 日朗 (1243–1320), whom Nichiren publicly designated as one of his six main disciples³⁸ immediately before his demise. In conjunction with the fact that it was Nichirō who was installed as the founding priest of Myōhonji (where this specific *daimandara* is located), this inscription indicates that Nichirō had received the written artefact from Nichiren himself.³⁹ Further verso inscriptions as well as inscriptions on the wood of the scroll's axes dated 1631, 1729, 1766 and 1833 detail the repairs and restorative works that had been performed. Naturally, these must also be regarded as being part of a continuing process of the origination of the written artefact.

4.3 Specimen no. 107

As a final case study, a look at one of the *daimandara* in the possession of Honmanji 本満寺 ('temple of the plenitude of the origin') in Kyōto 京都 is in order (Fig. 3). While it follows the paradigmatic structure reviewed above, it also features some noteworthy idiosyncrasies. Most importantly, it reflects several hands in addition to Nichiren's holograph: a fact which further complicates the question of originators and originating factors. The written artefact consists of three conjoined sheets of paper, creating a surface of 534 mm width by 982 mm length. Despite some differences in script size and cursivity, most of the written artefact's inscriptions are in Nichiren's hand and follow the stereotypical layout: the *daimoku* stands central. The top tier gives one of the two buddhas of Pagoda Chapter to either side, followed horizontally by the four bodhisattvas. The following tiers diverge little, if at all, in regard to verbiage

and selection of personnel from those given in the above typology and the concrete example of specimen no. 81. The features of Nichiren's signatures at centre bottom, the date of inscription to the bottom left (here, it is Kōan 4, i.e. 1281, fourth month, 25th day), and the self-eulogy to the bottom right are also almost identical. The most significant differences between the preceding specimen no. 81 and the *daimandara* under discussion here can be observed on the surfaces' periphery and in the interspersed inscriptions. The left and right edges of the writing surface feature two Siddham syllables; however, in divergence from Nichiren's usual pattern he inscribed the representation of Aizen *myōō* on both left and right. For this reason, the written artefact's nickname is *Ryō Aizen mandara* 両愛染曼荼羅 ('*maṇḍala* with Aizen on both [sides]'). Furthermore, to the immediate left of Nichiren's *kaō*, a passage in small script, but in Nichiren's hand, reads: 'I bestow this [*daimandara*] on the *bhiksuni* [i.e. nun] Jien' (*bikuni Jien kore wo sazu-ke-atafu* 比丘尼持圓授與之).⁴⁰ Further details about the nun Jien may be gleaned on the lower right part of the written artefact, where an inscription in two lines is wedged between the edges of the surface and the large characters of *Daikōmoku tennō* 大廣目天王 representing the guardian deity Virūpākṣa. According to this statement,⁴¹

甲斐國大井庄々司入道女子同國曾弥小吾郎後家尼者日興弟子也 仍申與之

the nun [Jien] was the daughter of the renunciant who had been the provost of Ōi district in Kai province⁴² and widowed heir to her husband Sone Kogorō. She was a disciple of Nikkō's. I thus hereby state that this [*daimandara*] was given to her.

The handwriting has been identified as that of the self-same Nikkō 日興 (1246–1333) mentioned in the text.⁴³ His *Honzon bun'yo chō* 本尊分與帳 ('register of the distribution

³⁷ See Nakao and Terao 2012, 82.

³⁸ For the purposes of reference, the main disciples are formally known as the *roku rōsō* 六老僧 ('six old monks'). They are Nisshō 日昭 (1221–1323), Nichirō 日朗 (1245–1320), Nikkō 日興 (1246–1333), Nikō 日向 (1253–1314), Nitchō 日頂 (1252–1317) and Nichiji 日持 (born 1250).

³⁹ It even seems reasonable to assume that Nichiren had given the specimen no. 81 to Nichirō much earlier, and that the latter brought the written artefact with him when he attended his teacher during the latter's final days.

⁴⁰ For further information on Jien, see Nakao and Terao 2012, 92.

⁴¹ The following inscriptions by the hand of Nikkō (see below) are quoted according to Nakao and Terao 2012, 105.

⁴² The designated locality corresponds to the cities of Kōsai 甲西 and Masu 増穂 in today's Yamanashi 山梨 prefecture.

⁴³ Nikkō was one of Nichiren's six principal disciples. He also came from Kai province and founded the Honmonji 本門寺 ('temple of the gate to the origin') in Omosu 重須 (i.e. a part of Numazu 沼津 city in present-day Shizuoka prefecture 静岡) in 1298. As the founder of Taiseikiji 大石寺 (see the outline of the 'temple wars' above) in 1290, he is regarded as the secondary founding figure of the Nichiren shōshū mentioned above.



Fig. 3: Yamanaka, specimen cat. no. 107 ('two Aizen *gohonzon*'). This specimen is also available as a full-colour reproduction in Nakao and Terao 2012, 93.

and bestowment of the main objects of veneration', 1298)⁴⁴ corroborates the information contained in this inscription and adds further details: Jien is recorded to have subsequently become the disciple of Nikke 日華 (1252–1334, referred to here by his hermitage name, Jakunichi-bō 寂日房). Furthermore, the Register states that she turned her back on the congregation after Nichiren's demise.⁴⁵ If these statements are taken to be fact, this leaves a narrow window of time for the inscription at hand: it must have been made after Nichiren authored the *daimandara* (1282/04/25), but in all probability before his demise (1282/10/13).

Yet another inscription in Nikkō's hand can be observed to the immediate right of Nichiren's dedicatory inscriptions: 'This [*daimandara*] has been inherited by and transmitted to the offspring, the great second lord Nisshō' 孫大貳公日正相傳也.

While it remains difficult to ascertain the identity of the mentioned persons,⁴⁶ the following attempt at a reconstruction of events may yield a plausible explanation. After Nichiren's death, when Jien had apparently become estranged from Nikkō and Nikke, the *daimandara* has come into the possession of her 'offspring' (read: grandson) who obviously was of Nichiren adherence. He must have returned the written artefact to Nikkō, for a third inscription in Nikkō's hand to the immediate left of the *Daikōmoku tennō* characters reads: 'This [*daimandara*] is to be the precious treasure of Honmonji' (*Honmonji no chōhō to nasubeki nari* 可為本門寺重寶也), referring to the Hononji of Nikkō's founding in the year of 1298.

In addition to these post-production additions on the *daimandara*'s surface, this written artefact also has inscriptions on the scroll's axes, detailing three restorations during the Edo period (1690, 1709 and 1813). Its present state thus turns out to be the composite result of a number of scribes and craftsmen, personal allegiances, and biographical vagaries. The group of originators and their categories are mostly identical to no. 81, with the exception of three other factors, namely: (1) the person of Nikkō, one of Nichiren's direct disciples and partial heir of the founder's charisma; (2) the nun Jien and her (largely unknown) religious

inclinations and reservations, through which the *daimandara* seems to have returned into Nikkō's possession, even though she has not left any material traces on the written artefact as such, and (3) the enshrinement of the written artefact at Honmonji and, later on, Honmanji as religious institutions representative of a particular formation within the group of traditions claiming to originate with Nichiren.

5. Conclusions

The *daimandara* exemplify how originators produced written artefacts and did so acting in different capacities – both in the sense of being involved in the written artefact's production and transmission in individual ways, and in the sense of one person or factor acting in different capacities at the same time. While Nichiren obviously acts as protagonist in the complex constellation that enabled the origination of the *daimandara*, his role cannot be described without ambivalence. He certainly functions as the artefacts' scribe, but is it correct to describe him as their author? Indeed, this seems to be the case for some inscriptional units, but it would certainly be incorrect to see Nichiren as the author of the *daimoku* or the inscribed names of the pantheon. Saying that the resulting apotropaic artefact was efficacious solely because of Nichiren's personal charisma would also be tantamount to misrepresenting the emic view, since it is first and foremost the invoked entities that grant protection to the practitioner. Along similar lines, it is noteworthy that, while the *daimandara* must be classed as a group of written artefacts that was produced serially, it is also indisputable that no two are exactly the same. Rather, it is their very own idiosyncrasies and biographies that grant the *daimandara* specimens their respective individuality, authenticity and prestige. These are typically reflected in changes to the artefacts' materiality in the form of additional inscriptions by Nichiren, his successors, or other beneficiaries and involved parties; the mounting of inconspicuous paper surfaces on boards and scrolls; the maintenance and restoration of such artefacts; and the performative endowment, negotiation, and substantiation of efficacy. However, this must not hide the fact that originators may have been present without leaving any discernible traces on the artefact. And finally, Nichiren shōshū's positioning of the Taiseikiji *dai gohonzon* – significantly a woodblock-carved copy of an inscription by Nichiren – as the single true *daimandara* may be described as a surprising strategy to reduce, even eliminate the originality of Nichiren's other, serially-produced holographs. By the

⁴⁴ The source is edited in Nichirenshū shūgaku zensho kankōkai 1921, 112–118.

⁴⁵ *Shōnin gometsu no gō, somuki owannu* 聖人御滅後背了 ('after the Sagacious One's extinction, she turned her back absolutely'), quoted according to Nichirenshū shūgaku zensho kankōkai 1921, 116. While the name of Jien is not mentioned as such, the familial relations are identical.

⁴⁶ Ueda 1980, 22.

same token, Sōka gakkai's repudiation of the *dai gohonzon* illustrates the fact that originality remains a characteristic defined neither by the materiality of the written artefact, nor palaeographic or historical evidence, but by the ongoing attribution and negotiation of the stakeholders in religious discourse.

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