

A History of Women in Japanese Buddhism: Nichiren's Perspectives on the Enlightenment of Women

Toshie Kurihara

OVERVIEW

THE Buddhist thinker and reformer Nichiren (1222–1282) is considered among the most progressive of the founders of Kamakura Buddhism, in that he consistently championed the capacity of women to achieve salvation throughout his ecclesiastic writings.¹ This paper will examine Nichiren's perspectives on women, shaped through his interpretation of the 28-chapter Lotus Sutra of Gautama Shakyamuni in India, a version of the scripture translated by Buddhist scholar Kumara-jiva from Sanskrit to Chinese in 406. The paper's focus is twofold: First, to review doctrinal issues concerning the spiritual potential of women to attain enlightenment and Nichiren's treatises on these issues, which he posited contrary to the prevailing social and religious norms of medieval Japan. And second, to survey the practical solutions that Nichiren, given the social context of his time, offered to the personal challenges that his women followers confronted in everyday life.

THE ATTAINMENT OF BUDDHAHOOD BY WOMEN

Historical Relationship of Women and Japanese Buddhism

During the Middle Ages, Buddhism in Japan underwent a significant transformation. The new Buddhism movement, predicated on simpler, less esoteric religious practices (*igyō-do*), gained widespread acceptance among the general populace. It also redefined the roles that women occupied in Buddhism.

The relationship between established Buddhist schools and women was among the first to change. It is generally acknowledged that the first three individuals in Japan to renounce the world and devote their lives to Buddhist practice were women. Many others were to follow in their footsteps. Throughout the Nara period (710–794), nuns were accorded the same status as monks.

In the subsequent Heian period (794–1185), however, as monks began

to assume a larger role in the conduct of the public functions of state Buddhism, the official duties borne by nuns dwindled as a result. Nuns were excluded from public positions held at state ceremonies, for example, while opportunities for the formal ordination of women disappeared in the face of growing controversy over the perceived lack of specific precept platforms to ordain them.

Further exacerbating the trend to exclude women was the implementation of an annual quota system by the Tendai and Shingon schools that required priests seeking official ordination to undergo a harsh regimen of ascetic practices over extended durations in mountain retreats. This led to the eventual disappearance of women from the clerical ranks of those schools.

As a consequence, the number of officially ordained nuns declined sharply. Existing convents were either closed or converted into monasteries. Women, increasingly ostracized by their male peers as being "impure," were prohibited from sacred grounds and sites of worship (*nyonin-kinsei*, *nyonin-kekkaï*).

Nevertheless, historical records show that a sizeable number of women in the Heian aristocracy began to renounce the world in order to serve as nuns without formal ordination—an indication that Buddhism may have had a larger following among the female population in general. Indeed, some women at the time had secured relatively autonomous positions within medieval Japanese society, despite restrictions imposed on their involvement in social activities. Many assumed the mantle of decision-maker in household matters; they adopted and raised children on their own, succeeded their deceased husbands as the head of the family, or inherited the right to dispose of property. A few individuals are known to have personally donated alms to temples and priests as well.

The new Buddhism evolved within this social context and the role women played in its development is clearly evident in Nichiren's congregation. Women constituted a significant proportion of his followers, and many of his letters were addressed to them. Although supported and managed by male priest-disciples, the congregation's foundations rested with lay believers of both genders. Female followers, moreover, were respected as individuals embracing faith in the Nichiren school in their own right.²

These women can be classified into two groups: women living fully integrated in society, including married women and lay nuns. The former group includes Nichimyo Shonin, the wife of Shijo Kingo and Nichinyo; as well as the wives of Ikegami Munenaka, Ikegami Munenaga and Ota Jyomyo. Among the lay nuns were Sennichi, Niiama, Oama,

Myoichi, Myoshin and Jimyo.³

Of 443 writings of Nichiren addressed to followers that Kansho Kuwana of Minobusan University has researched, 90—more than one-fifth of his letters—were for women. Of the 124 existing mandalas (*Gohonzon*), wooden objects of devotion inscribed by Nichiren that were conferred specifically to individuals of proven faith, 19 were granted to his priest-disciples, 47 to lay believers, and 59 were for unverified individuals. Of the 47 mandalas conferred upon lay believers, 15—or some 30 percent—were known to have been given to women, against 32 to men. Kuwana believes this breakdown provides evidence that Nichiren were actively engaged in proselytizing and teaching women.⁴

In examining Nichiren's perspectives on women, it is necessary to distinguish two key components: his doctrinal corroboration on the female capacity for enlightenment (to assure them they were entitled to religious salvation); and the practical advice he offered within the framework of social constraints of that historical period.

Buddhist Misogyny and Nichiren's Response

As Masayuki Taira of Osaka University points out, the transition from ancient to medieval times signaled the end of an era in which men and women were regarded as equals and the beginning of an age of religiously-rooted social misogyny. By the Kamakura period (1185–1333), formally ordained nuns were a rarity, while their lay counterparts grew in numbers. For the most part, women were treated merely as religious subjects needing to be saved.⁵

The roots of Buddhist misogyny run deep, driven in part by the social and cultural bias against women of Shakyamuni's India. The earliest doctrinal appearance of misogynic dogma—traced to the Buddhist Order's first schism, which occurred roughly a century after Shakyamuni's death—is also its most damning, as it essentially denies women the opportunity for Buddhahood. Termed *henjo nanshi* in Japanese, this doctrine holds that a woman cannot achieve spiritual salvation unless she transforms herself into a male, either literally, before a public gathering, as proof of her transformation, or symbolically, by becoming a nun and renouncing the secular world.

Acceptance of the *henjo nanshi* doctrine was to become widespread in the Heian period, when it emerged from the Buddhist clergy and temples and began to be assimilated by society, even to be found in the collection of popular songs, *Ryojin hisho* (Secret Selection of Rafter Dust), compiled around 1169 (Kodansha's Japan: An Illustrated Encyclopedia)⁶. Its assimilation was facilitated by social and cultural factors indigenous to

Japan as well, and later boosted by the introduction of the Bloodbowl Sutra (*Ketsubon Kyo*) that will be examined in greater detail later.

Nichiren was fully aware of the doctrine, as his criticism of a Shingon school practice during the Kamakura period indicates: "Since last year, Shingon teachers of Kamakura have performed the rituals to transform female fetuses into males... Over 7 and 800 Shingon teachers and To-ji of Kyoto conducted all the Tendai grand ceremonies and secret ceremonies, but in vain."⁷

In his letter, *Nyonin jobutsu sho* (On the Attainment of Buddhahood by Women)⁸, Nichiren provides a sampling of the range of misogynic descriptions existing in Buddhism by citing passages from a number of scriptures predating the Lotus Sutra:

In pre-Lotus Sutra teachings, women are strongly despised. The Flower Garland Sutra states, "Women are messengers of hell who can destroy the seeds of Buddhahood. They may look like bodhisattvas, but at heart they are like yaksha demons." The Silver-Colored Woman Sutra says that, even if the eyes of the Buddhas of the three existences were to fall to the ground, no woman could ever attain Buddhahood.

Women are doomed to the five obstacles and three obediences for their profound sins. Buddhist scriptures reveal the five obstacles. Non-Buddhist scriptures teach the three obediences, which mean that, when a woman is young, she must obey her parents. When she reaches maturity, she must obey her husband. And when she is old, she must obey her sons. She can never do as she pleases at any stage of her life.

Jung Ch'i-ch'i⁹ numbered among his three pleasures the fact that he had not been born a woman.

The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai stated, "The other sutras only predict Buddhahood for bodhisattvas, but not for the two vehicles, and for men, but not for women." He maintained that no sutra other than the Lotus Sutra predicts Buddhahood for women.

The depiction of women as being beyond salvation and damned to eternal wretchedness is not unique to pre-Lotus Sutra Buddhism, but it is a theme that is common to numerous ancient scriptures, both Buddhist or non-Buddhist. As Nichiren maintains in another letter, *The Daimoku of the Lotus Sutra*:

... [Women] are strongly condemned in both the Buddhist and non-Buddhist writings. The works known as the *Three Records* and the *Five Canons* of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors of ancient China depict them as fawning and crooked. For this reason, disaster is said to

have come about because of the three women of antiquity. Thus women are identified as the cause of the downfall of a nation and its people.

... The Nirvana Sutra, the Buddha's last teaching that he delivered in the grove of sal trees, says, "All rivers and streams are invariably winding and devious, and all women are invariably fawning and crooked." It also says, "If all the desires and delusions of all the men throughout the major world system were lumped together, they would be no greater than the karmic impediment of one single woman."...

The passage in the Nirvana Sutra cited above says that, just as all rivers and streams twist and wind, so too are women perverse and devious. Because water is a pliant substance, when its path is blocked by some hard object such as a rock or a mountain, it will split into two streams or turn aside, flowing now this way, now that. Women are the same; their minds are soft and weak. Though they may believe that a certain course is right, if they come up against the strong will of a man and find their way blocked, then they will turn in some direction quite different from the one they originally intended.

Again, though you may trace pictures on the surface of the water, nothing of what you have drawn will remain. Women are the same, for lack of steadfastness is their basic character. Hence they will think a certain way at one moment, and then a moment later have quite a different view. But the basic character of a Buddha is honesty and straightforwardness. Hence women, with their devious ways, can never become Buddhas.¹⁰

Nichiren systematically refutes these elaborate caveats by comparing them to passages in the Lotus Sutra that affirm instead the capacity of women to achieve enlightenment. Indeed, the rejection of misogynic notions is a theme Nichiren consistently underscores in his writings, as with his belief that women are capable of enlightenment. In the ensuing passages of *The Daimoku of the Lotus Sutra*, for instance, Nichiren describes the sutra's empowerment of women through Buddhahood:

Yet though all female beings were so despised in the various sutras, when Bodhisattva Manjushri spoke the single character *myo*, a woman was instantly able to become a Buddha....

Thus the passage in the Buddha's first sutra declaring that women "can destroy the seeds of Buddhahood," and that in his final sermon in the sal grove about how "all rivers and streams are invariably winding and devious," were utterly contradicted, and the views reflected in the Silver-Colored Woman Sutra and *Great Perfection of Wisdom* were proven to be nonsense. Wisdom Accumulated and Shariputra were

obliged to still their tongues and shut their mouths, while all the human and heavenly beings present at the great gathering where the Lotus Sutra was preached pressed their palms together in an excess of joy. All this was due entirely to the virtue of the single character *myo*.¹¹

It appears that Nichiren took particular interest in pointing out that the “five obstacles and three obediences” mentioned earlier should not condemn women to lead indentured lives. In his letter to the lay nun Konichi, for example, Nichiren writes: “The ropes that bind you to the three obediences will be severed in this lifetime, and the five obstacles have already disappeared. The moon in your mind shines through unclouded, and the impurities of your body have been completely eradicated. You are a Buddha in your present form. How deserving of veneration!”¹²

And, as he adds in another letter, the key in emancipating his women followers from the shackles imposed by religion lies with the Lotus Sutra:

... [W]omen are burdened with the five obstacles and the three obediences, and so their sins are said to be profound....

... Women are thus despised in both the Buddhist and non-Buddhist scriptures. And yet, in the case of the Lotus Sutra, even though they neither read nor copy the text, women who receive and uphold it in body, mouth, and mind, and in particular chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with their mouths, will be able to attain Buddhahood readily, as did the dragon king’s daughter, Gautami, and Yashodhara, who lived at the same time as the Buddha.¹³

Given the overwhelming indictment of women in these texts, the following statement is likely to have inspired a strong sense of hope among his women followers: “When I, Nichiren, read the sutras other than the Lotus Sutra, I have not the slightest wish to become a woman.”¹⁴ He goes on to state that only in the Lotus Sutra do we read that a woman who embraces this sutra even surpasses all men.¹⁵

Enlightenment through the Lotus Sutra: the Devadatta Chapter

Nichiren rejected the traditional Buddhist view that women were denied religious salvation because of their sex. He is consistent in his co-equal treatment of men and women with regard to their spiritual capacity for enlightenment, making frequent reference to “the attainment of Buddhahood by women” in his writings. The definitive chapter in the Lotus Sutra on the issue that he cites for affirmation is its 12th, named after

Shakyamuni's cousin and avowed persecutor, Devadata.

The chapter contains a parable of the dragon king's eight-year-old daughter (or "dragon girl") to which Nichiren assigns profound significance. He describes in *Nyonin jobutsu sho*¹⁶ how Shariputra, reputed as the wisest of Shakyamuni's disciples, and Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulated questioned her capacity for enlightenment in light of the pre-Lotus Sutra scriptures. Their reservations are repudiated for all to witness, however, when the creature appears before the Buddha and his followers, and receives Shakyamuni's prophecy that she will attain Buddhahood in the future just as she is, to propagate the Lotus Sutra not only as a female, but as an animal and a child.

For Nichiren, the dragon girl's salvation carried great meaning: "When the dragon king's daughter attained Buddhahood, it opened up the way to attaining Buddhahood for all women of later ages."¹⁷ In another of his writings, Nichiren posits what lies at the core of his perspective on women:

Do not these interpretations make clear that, among all the teachings of the Buddha's lifetime, the Lotus Sutra is first, and that, among the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, that of women attaining Buddhahood is first? For this reason, though the women of Japan may be condemned in all sutras other than the Lotus as incapable of attaining Buddhahood, as long as the Lotus guarantees their enlightenment, what reason have they to be downcast?¹⁸

And, as he writes in *Nyonin jobutsu sho*:

Various pre-Lotus sutras denied women the capacity to attain Buddhahood, regardless of whether one belonged to the realm of humanity or heavenly beings. It is thus wondrous that the dragon king's daughter attained Buddhahood without having to change her physical appearance as a being of the World of Animality, retribution she suffered for neglecting the precepts.¹⁹

A major point he emphasizes is that women have the capacity for attaining Buddhahood in their present form. "The model of (the attainment of Buddhahood in one's present form) is the dragon king's daughter," he wrote.²⁰ He adds: "... the example of the dragon king's daughter, who achieved Buddhahood in her reptilian form through the power of the Lotus Sutra."²¹

He also states: "... the eight-year-old dragon king's daughter, without changing her reptilian form, attained the wonderful fruit of Buddhahood in the southern realm. Therefore, how much more likely is it that women

who have been born into the human realm should be able to do so!”²²

The focal issue here is the female body. The dragon girl does transform herself into a male being when she comes before Shakyamuni and his assembly, although she also appears in a land to the south called Spotless World as an enlightened being, as a female animal and as a child. In Nichiren’s view, her transformation to a male body is not an issue of biological or physiological disposition, but more a gender issue with social and cultural connotations. He believed that physical differences do not hinder Buddhist salvation in any way.

This belief in the attainment of Buddhahood in one’s present form was based on the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life (*Ichinen sanzen*), which holds that all life possesses infinite possibilities that can be manifested from moment to moment. It is for this reason that Zeho Miwa, assistant professor at Minobusan University, asserts that the *ichinen sanzen* doctrine precludes the need to change one’s form to attain enlightenment.²³ Nichiren writes:

... In the various Hinayana sutras that were preached before the Lotus Sutra, it is denied that women can ever attain Buddhahood. In the Mahayana sutras other than the Lotus Sutra, it would appear that women can attain Buddhahood or be reborn in the pure land. But they may do so only after they have changed into some other form. It is not the kind of immediate attainment of Buddhahood that is based on the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life. Thus it is an attainment of Buddhahood or rebirth in the pure land in name only and not in reality. The dragon king’s daughter represents “one example that stands for all the rest.”²⁴

However, this parable must also be viewed with some reservation because the Lotus Sutra’s 12th chapter is understood to be unique among the other 27 chapters in that it was probably added to the sutra at a latter date.

It should be noted, however, that the Encouraging Devotion Chapter that follows the Devadatta Chapter also has Shakyamuni declaring that Mahaprajapati, his aunt and foster mother, will become the Gladly Seen by All Living Beings Buddha. Yashodhara, the mother of Shakyamuni’s son Rahula, became a Thus Come One Endowed with a Thousand Ten Thousand Glowing Marks, while the 10 demon daughters, who belong to the World of Hunger, attain enlightenment in this chapter as well.

Given these examples of successful salvation that are unique to the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren concluded that women in particular should embrace its teachings²⁵ because they need not be reborn as men, a flat

rejection of *henjo nanshi* that insisted the opposite to be true.

This view provided the philosophical underpinnings for Nichiren's co-equal treatment of men and women in terms of their spiritual capacity and faith in the Lotus Sutra. In one letter, he admonishes his followers: "There should be no discrimination among those who propagate the five characters of Myoho-enge-kyo [representing the Lotus Sutra] in the Latter Day of the Law, be they men or women. Were they not Bodhisattvas of the Earth, they could not chant the daimoku [a recitation of the sutra's essential power of salvation according to Nichiren]."26

In the end, faith, not gender, is the primary determinant: "... the Buddha surely considers anyone in this world who embraces the Lotus Sutra, whether lay man or woman, monk or nun, to be the lord of all living beings."27 Nichiren also wrote: "... anyone who teaches others even a single phrase of the Lotus Sutra is the envoy of the Thus Come One, whether that person be priest or layman, nun or laywoman."28

Seen from another perspective, Nichiren held that a woman is not damned by negative karma arising from her womanhood, but only by the cardinal offense of slandering the Lotus Sutra—which, in turn, creates the fundamental cause in which she must be born as a woman and suffer the social and cultural burdens that entails.29 In fact, as mentioned above, he held that his women followers could actually better their male peers if they established themselves as votaries of the Lotus Sutra, devoted to its practice and propagation: "Only in the Lotus Sutra do we read that a woman who embraces this sutra not only excels all other women, but also surpasses all men."30

Nichiren's teachings on the efficacy of the Lotus Sutra for women garnered a loyal following among a small but dedicated group of women, as he acknowledged in a letter to the lay nun Sennichi:

... [T]he lay nun Sennichi sent a letter via her husband, Abutsu-bo, from Sado Province to a mountain recess called Mount Minobu, in Hakiri Village, in Kai Province, in the same country of Japan.

In the letter she says that, though she had been concerned about the faults and impediments that prevent women from gaining enlightenment, since according to my teaching the Lotus Sutra puts the attainment of Buddhahood by women first, she relies upon this sutra in all matters.31

Sennichi and her husband Abutsu-bo assisted Nichiren during his exile on Sado Island in 1271, providing him with food and other necessities until he was pardoned three years later. They continued to offer alms after he went to live at the foot of Mt. Minobu in 1274. Nichiren

praised Sennichi's sincerity, writing that she must be the reincarnation of his mother, and he presented her with 10 volumes of the Lotus Sutra in recognition of her strong faith.

Sennichi was one of many women followers Nichiren held in high esteem for their faith and dedication. Others, as such as Nichimyo, were accorded the honorific of sage or venerated person (*shonin*) by him.³²

Position of Nichiren's Peers

What were the views on women attaining enlightenment held by Nichiren's contemporaries? Let us briefly examine the positions on the issue of Jodo Shinshu founder Shinran (1173–1262) and Sotoshu founder Dogen (1200–1253).

Shinran was unique for a Buddhist monk of his time, having expounded the "dream oracle" regarding sexual relations with women that he purportedly received from Bodhisattva Mercy (*Nyobon no mukoku*), and he lived in outright violation of a Buddhist precept by taking a wife, Eshinni. Despite his audacious flaunting of Buddhist convention, Shinran seldom discussed gender issues in his writings, either in his treatises or letters to female followers, leading to assertions that he did not address such matters.³³

There is, however, literary evidence on the position of the Jodo Shinshu school that Shinran founded with regard to the potential enlightenment of women. The 10th hymn of the Large Sutra of Buddha Infinite Life of the Hymns of the Pure Land (*Jodo wasan*, rhymed scriptures written in an easily understood language for the purpose of proselytization) reads:

Amida Buddha's compassion is broad and profound,
His wisdom manifests its wonderful power in this world
He vowed to transform the female form into male
To enable women to attain Buddhahood.³⁴

This particular hymn is presented as "the spirit of the 35th of the 48 vows of the Dharma Treasury" (*Hozo biku*, the name of Amida Buddha in a previous lifetime) in the Large Sutra of Buddha Infinite Life. This vow pertains to women's attainment of Buddhahood. According to Jodo Shinshu Buddhism, then, a woman had to be reborn as a man before manifesting Buddhahood, based on the 35th vow of Amida Buddha. This was apparently a legacy Shinran inherited from his master Honen.

Moreover, the third hymn on Shandao Dashi (*Zendo daishi*) of the Hymns of the Pure Land Masters (*Jodo koso wasan*) reads:

Without taking refuge in the Vow of Amida Buddha
 The five obstacles will not be severed
 And the female form will not be transformed
 Before one hundred and ten million kalpas pass.³⁵

According to “the power of the other,” or *Tariki hongan*, women, given their grave sins, can be reborn into the Pure Land only through absolute dependence on Amida Buddha’s mercy.

Dogen offers an interesting contrast, having begun as an ardent advocate of gender equality who rejected the constraints of “the five obstacles and three obediences” and the prohibition of women from ritual grounds. In a passage from Volume 28 of *The Treasury of Knowledge of the True Law (Shobo genzo)*, he noted:

Space is space. The four elements are four elements. The five aggregates are five aggregates. Women are the same. There is no distinction between men and women in attaining the way. Place precedence only upon the practice of the Buddhist way, and do not argue over the difference between the sexes. This is the ultimate principle of the Buddhist way.³⁶

Dogen also directed scathing criticism at the sexist exclusion of women from ritual sites that Kyoto-based Buddhist schools such as the Tendai practiced:

There is a laughable thing in Japan. There are temples and shrines that are regarded as sacred sites and places of Mahayana learning, where no nuns or lay women are allowed to enter. This practice has been widespread for a long time, but no one has recognized its error.³⁷

However, it appears that Dogen began to retreat from his earlier convictions around the time he entered Eihei-ji Temple, when he began to emphasize the importance of formal ordainment and gender distinctions instead:

It is only through renouncing the secular world and receiving the precepts that people can attain the way. The virtue of becoming ordained as a priest is immeasurable because it is consistent with the universal law of Buddhas. Shakyamuni’s sacred teachings expound that attainment of Buddhahood by lay people, but it is not an orthodox teaching. They also expound the attainment of Buddhahood by women, but this is not orthodox either. The ultimate teaching of the Buddha is the attainment of Buddhahood by those who have renounced secular life.³⁸

It is interesting to note that Dogen would never again affirm the potential for enlightenment of women in the treatises he wrote at Eihei-ji Temple.³⁹

Defilement by Blood

One of the central factors influencing extant views on the attainment of enlightenment by women was the notion of impurity, which served as a basic pretext for religious misogyny and exclusion of women in Japanese Buddhism. The concept of ritual impurity (*kegare*) had taken root in Japan from ancient times, and its hold on Japanese culture grew in significance from the mid-Heian period and was increasingly reinforced during the medieval era.

While defilement by death affected men and women equally, the impurity of blood was intimately associated with women as a result of physiological functions such as childbirth and menstruation. Over time, the female gender itself came to be regarded as impure.

Aversion to impurity emerged first within the Imperial Palace and its circle of courtiers, but it eventually spread beyond the confines of the court to influence the samurai warrior caste and the general population as well, expanding outward from Kyoto to the rest of Japan. Such beliefs in ritual impurity became central in the social milieu over the 700 years of the Japanese Middle Ages (1185–1868).⁴⁰

The Bloodbowl Sutra, a scripture developed in China that purported to be Buddhist in origin, is believed to have been introduced to Japan in the Muromachi era (1392–1573), and various versions of the sutra were popularized in modern times. It claims that the blood spilt by women from menstruation and childbirth had defiled the god of the earth (*chijin*), and that by washing their soiled clothes in streams and rivers, they not only polluted the water but also the tea served to various sages. For that sin, women had to suffer the retribution of falling into a “Bloodbowl Pond” after death.⁴¹ Their bodies and physiological functions thus became synonymous with religious impurity, and this doctrine was eventually internalized in the Japanese female psyche.

Kinki University professor Aiko Ogoshi offers this intriguing observation:

Women were not despised as being impure for their association with the pollution of menstrual blood. In the semantic scheme of religion, women were equated with ritual impurity. The significance of blood as pollution was stressed in order to justify their degradation and exclusion.

Women's bodies were not subjected to control because they possessed excessive sexual energy. They had to be classified as being secular as the semantic scheme of religion defined the holy and secular. The danger they supposedly presented was exaggerated in order to integrate them into the secular value system.

All discourses blaming women were nothing more than a mechanism of violence with multi-layered deceptions built into it that were designed to degrade women, and justify and convince them of its legitimacy.⁴²

It was therefore natural for Nichiren's women followers to be subjected to this "mechanism of violence" and seek counseling for ways to cope with it through their faith. The wife of Hiki Yoshimoto, for example, asks Nichiren in a letter as to the proper practice of his teachings during menstruation, given the commonly accepted stigma attached to the physiological function. He answers in a letter entitled *The Recitation of the "Expedient Means" and "Life Span" Chapters*:

...[I]n your letter, you say that three times each day you bow in reverence to the seven characters of the daimoku, and that each day you repeat the words *Namu-ichijo-myoten* ten thousand times. At times of menstruation, however, you refrain from reading the sutra. You ask if it is unseemly to bow in reverence to the seven characters or to recite *Namu-ichijo-myoten* without facing [the Gohonzon], or if you should refrain from doing even that during your menstrual period. You also ask how many days following the end of your period you should wait before resuming recitation of the sutra.

This is a matter that concerns all women and about which they always inquire. In past times, too, we find many persons addressing themselves to this question concerning women. But because the sacred teachings put forward by the Buddha in the course of his lifetime do not touch upon this point, no one has been able to offer any clear scriptural proof upon which to base an answer.⁴³

Nichiren's reply is an unequivocal rejection of the ritual impurity of menstruation:

... In my own study of the sacred teachings, though I find clear prohibitions on certain days of the month against the impurity of things like meat or wine, the five spicy foods, or sexual acts, for instance, I have never come across any passage in the sutras or treatises that speaks of avoidances connected with menstruation.

While the Buddha was in the world, many women in their prime

became nuns and devoted themselves to the Buddha's teachings, but they were never shunned on account of their menstrual period. Judging from this, I would say that menstruation does not represent any kind of impurity coming from an external source. It is simply a characteristic of the female sex, a phenomenon related to the perpetuation of the seed of birth and death. Or in another sense, it might be regarded as a kind of chronically recurring illness. In the case of feces and urine, though these are substances produced by the body, so long as one observes cleanly habits, there are no special prohibitions to be observed concerning them. Surely the same must be true of menstruation.⁴⁴

Having stated the above, however, Nichiren suggests that her practice be simplified during her menstrual period from the standpoint of *zuiho bini*—flexible and sensible adaptation to local customs on condition that no serious offense is involved:

... [E]ven if your menstrual period should last as long as seven days, if you feel so inclined, dispense with the reading of the sutra and simply recite Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. Also, when making your devotions, you need not bow facing the sutra.⁴⁵

Nichiren's answer provides a glimpse into the empirical and practical sensibilities he adopts regarding everyday issues, a remarkably progressive approach in an age of universal gender discrimination. In the ensuing sections, we will look at the wide range of practical advice he offers to women followers that are unique to their personal circumstances.

WOMEN IN THEIR DAILY LIVES

Women's Nature

Nichiren made frequent references to the nature and fundamental tendencies of women in his writings as in this instance:

For example, when a woman becomes jealous, a great flame roars in her heart. Her body turns red, and her body hair stands on end. She begins to shake from head to toe, and her complexion kindles. Her face grows vermilion, and her eyes become as wide as those of a cat stalking a mouse.⁴⁶

He describes in detail the differences between men and women on occasion. In *Letter from Sado*, Nichiren observed: "The way of the world dictates that one should repay a great obligation to another, even

at the cost of one's life. Many warriors die for their lords, perhaps many more than one would imagine. A man will die to defend his honor; a woman will die for a man."⁴⁷

Although Nichiren describes women here as being dependent on men, such comments are likely to be more of a reflection of the social circumstances in which people lived in the Kamakura period than any sexist notions or prejudice.

The passage below is often cited as proof that Nichiren discriminated against women. Yet, as shown in the earlier sections of this paper, the overwhelming body of evidence suggests he was describing the prevalent views toward women in Buddhist sutras other than the Lotus Sutra:

The character of man and woman differs from the outset. Fire is hot, and water, cold. Fishermen are skilled in catching fish, and hunters are proficient in trapping deer. A sutra states that women are clever at being jealous, but I have never heard that women are clever at Buddhism. A woman's mind is compared to a refreshing breeze; even if one could bind the wind, it would be hard to grasp a woman's mind. A woman's mind is likened to writing on water because the characters do not remain on the surface. A woman is likened to a liar, for sometimes a liar's words are true, and sometimes, false. A woman's mind is compared to a river, for all rivers bend.⁴⁸

On Spouses

Nichiren's notions on matrimony are very sensible, relevant and sensitive, not only to the needs of women but to the role they were obligated to fulfill as both spouses and Buddhist practitioners. As we would expect from the Kamakura period, the alternatives available to a woman for her livelihood beyond that provided by marriage and motherhood were virtually nonexistent, with the husband naturally the center of gravity in the lives of the vast majority of women.

Nichiren acknowledged this reality, as his letters addressed to Nichimyo demonstrate. Although she is believed to have separated from her husband when her daughter, Oto, was still an infant, it is not known whether her separation was the result of a divorce or death. Nichimyo, however, remained steadfast in her faith as a single parent, both extraordinary feats for that era that Nichiren lauded:

Women regard their husband as their soul. Without their husband, they lack a soul. Nowadays, even married women find it difficult to get along in the world. Though you have lost your soul, you lead your life more

courageously than those who have one. Furthermore, because you maintain your faith in the gods and you revere the Buddha, you are indeed a woman who surpasses others.⁴⁹

In the continuation of the letter quoted above which likens a woman's mind to a river, also addressed to Nichimyo, Nichiren says, "Even if one were to cross the ocean carrying Mount Sumeru on his head, one could never find a woman like you... You are the foremost votary of the Lotus Sutra among the women of Japan."⁵⁰

Other passages ostensibly assert that a woman's way of life is shaped solely by her husband, but a closer examination reveals that Nichiren's purpose may have been to affirm the dignity of her relationship to a spouse devoted to the Lotus Sutra, as he wrote in a letter to the lady of Sajiki:

A woman is like water, which takes on the shape of its container. A woman is like an arrow, which is fitted to the bow. A woman is like a ship, which is dependent on its rudder. Therefore, if her husband is a thief, a woman will become a thief, and if her husband is a king, she will become the consort. If he is a man of goodness, she will become a Buddha. Not only this life but also the life to come depends on her husband.

At the same time, Hyoe no Saemon is a votary of the Lotus Sutra. No matter what may happen, because you are Saemon's wife, the Buddha must acknowledge you as a woman of the Lotus Sutra.⁵¹

Among the hallmarks of Nichiren's views on marriage at a time when the wife was seen as a proprietary object, is his belief that the institution is a complementary partnership. In one letter, he wrote:

A man is like a pillar, a woman like the crossbeam. A man is like the legs of a person, a woman like the trunk. A man is like the wings of a bird, a woman like the body. If the wings and the body become separated, then how can the bird fly? And if the pillar topples, then the crossbeam will surely fall to the ground.

A home without a man is like a person without a soul.⁵²

And he adds in another:

Explain all this to your wife, too, and work together like the sun and moon, a pair of eyes, or the two wings of a bird. With the sun and moon, could there be a path of darkness? With a pair of eyes, no doubt you will see the faces of Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and the Buddhas of the ten directions. With a pair of wings, you will surely fly in an instant to the treasure land of Tranquil Light.⁵³

Another element is the emphasis on the responsibility of married women to guide and nurture the Buddhist faith in a marriage, even to the point of incurring the displeasure of their husbands:

You two wives should have no regrets even if your husbands do you harm because of your faith in this teaching. If both of you unite in encouraging your husbands' faith, you will follow the path of the dragon king's daughter and become a model for women attaining Buddhahood in the evil latter age.⁵⁴

No matter whom you may marry, if he is an enemy of the Lotus Sutra, you must not follow him.⁵⁵

In another letter, Nichiren described the example in the Lotus Sutra of a woman who introduced her husband to Buddhism as a model for others to emulate: "The 'King Wonderful Adornment' chapter of the Lotus Sutra is especially applicable to women, for it explains how a wife encouraged her husband. In the latter age as well, though her name may differ, a wife who leads her husband to take faith will enjoy the same benefit as Lady Pure Virtue."⁵⁶ There are also passages that express acknowledgement of and gratitude for a man's service to Nichiren as being made possible through the behind-the-scenes efforts of his spouse:

It is the power of the bow that determines the flight of the arrow, the might of the dragon that controls the movement of the clouds, and the strength of the wife that guides the actions of her husband. In the same way, it is your support that has enabled Toki to visit me here now.⁵⁷

Women, for example, are like the wisteria, and men are like the pine. If the wisteria happens to be parted from the pine for even an instant, it never rises again. And yet, in such a turbulent world, and when you do not even have servants you can rely on, you have sent your husband here. This shows that your sincerity is deeper even than the earth...⁵⁸

While many of Nichiren's letters which deal with marriage describe the bond of man and wife in very sacrosanct terms, he was also very pragmatic:

... There is the sorrow of parting from one's lord, of parting from one's parent, and of parting from one's spouse, none of which can be lightly dismissed. However, one may serve another lord or find comfort in remarrying.⁵⁹

Motherhood

Before we turn our attention to the subject of maternity and motherhood, it may be appropriate to mention here that Nichiren referred to it nearly 90 percent of the time in conjunction with fatherhood, as in “father and mother” or “compassionate father and merciful mother.” This repeated reference is a good indication that he believed the two were intimately associated, without emphasizing one at the expense of the other.

Nichiren apparently empathized closely with the pain and hardship women underwent to bear children, a sacrifice which offspring must strive to repay, as he illustrated in this fairly dramatic, yet poignant, manner:

In particular, we should recall the debt of gratitude we owe our mother because of the pain she suffers for nine months when the child is in her womb. At that time her belly is swelled as tight as a drum and her neck as unstable as a needle. She can only exhale but not inhale, and her complexion is the color of withered grass. When she lies down, her belly seems ready to split apart, and when she sits up, she can find no restful position for her limbs. When the time for her delivery draws near, the pain is so great that her hips seem to be torn apart and her eyes stare as though they would fly out of her head into the heaven.

Once she has succeeded in giving birth to this enemy who has caused her such pain, one might suppose that she would fling it to the ground, tear open its belly and toss it aside. But such, of course, is not the case. On the contrary, she forbears to think of her own pain, but hastens to take the child in her arms, wipes away the blood, washes off the unclean matter, and clasps it to her breast, and for a period of three years assiduously nourishes it.⁶⁰

Although Nichiren does not indicate in his writings that women should be confined to motherhood, it is clear from his letter congratulating the pregnancy of Nichigen-nyo, the wife of his close disciple Shijo Kingo, that he regards childbirth as a joyful event:

... You will surely bear a jewel of a child who is going to inherit the seed for the propagation of the Lotus Sutra. I wholeheartedly congratulate you... I expect that the child will be born quickly.⁶¹

Nichiren’s endearment to his mother is a well-established fact, and he repeatedly expressed his indebtedness to her throughout his life. Indeed, it may have assisted in deepening his conviction that women possessed

the capacity for Buddhahood, as the following passage implies:

With regard to the debt of gratitude owed to our parents, our father may be likened to heaven and our mother to the earth, and it would be difficult to say to which parent we are the more indebted. But it is particularly difficult to repay the great kindness of our mother.

If, in desiring to repay it, we seek to do so by following the non-Buddhist scriptures, such as the *Three Records*, the *Five Canons*, or *The Classic of Filial Piety*, we can provide for our mother in this life, but we cannot hope to do anything for her next life. Although we can provide for her physically, we will be unable to save her spiritually.

Turning to the Buddhist scriptures, we find that, because the more than five thousand or seven thousand volumes of Hinayana and Mahayana sutras teach that it is impossible for women to attain Buddhahood, it is impossible to repay the debt owed to our mother. The Hinayana teachings flatly deny that a woman can attain Buddhahood. The Mahayana sutras in some cases seem to say that a woman may attain Buddhahood or may be reborn in a pure land, but this is simply a possibility mentioned by the Buddha, and no examples of such a thing actually having happened are given.

Since I have realized that only the Lotus Sutra teaches the attainment of Buddhahood by women, and that only the Lotus is the sutra of true requital for repaying the kindness of our mother, in order to repay my debt to my mother, I have vowed to enable all women to chant the daimoku of this sutra.⁶²

In the end, the Lotus Sutra appealed to Nichiren and his followers because it promised salvation to all people, without regard to age, gender or past offenses:

... Only with the preaching of the Lotus Sutra, in which the dragon king's daughter attained Buddhahood, did it become evident that the attainment of Buddhahood was a possibility for all mothers. And when it was revealed that even an evil man such as Devadatta could attain Buddhahood, it became evident that Buddhahood was a possibility for all fathers. The Lotus Sutra is *The Classic of Filial Piety* of Buddhism.⁶³

CONCLUSION

Empowering the Underprivileged

As we have seen above, Nichiren provided detailed advice to his women followers in accordance with the particulars of their personal circum-

stances. Moreover, while Nichiren's view of the equality of men and women evolved around his affirmation of the capacity of women to attain Buddhahood, it should also be recalled that this discussion of the equality between the sexes is based on a consideration of the historical religious implications of the issue. The discussion does not take place within a modern social context.

Some of his writings portray women as a subordinate presence, and appear to rigidly distinguish the nature and roles of men and women. However, the discussion of the differences between the sexes should not be confused as sexist, as Nichiren lived in an age in which the primary roles of women were limited to those of wife and mother. Because his advice was intended to address in a pragmatic manner the specific needs and real-life problems of his followers, they were provided within the framework of the social constraints of his day. It is thus inevitable that some aspects of Nichiren's counsel are no longer relevant to another age.

In ancient Japan, the Buddhist clergy was commonly referred to as "monks and nuns," for both assumed official responsibilities. But with the lessening emphasis on the role of nuns, so, too, the spiritual autonomy accorded to women decreased. In time, the notions of female impurity, together with the denial of enlightenment for women and their banning from sacred sites, infiltrated mainstream society and were gradually internalized by both nuns and lay women.

Against this backdrop, Nichiren's assertion that women were as capable of spiritual salvation as men was a dramatic and radical declaration, challenging many of the entrenched philosophical notions upon which the established Buddhist schools were founded. As he once wrote: "...I have made a vow to save all the women in Japan, and that sincerity cannot be ignored."⁶⁴ His outspoken claims most likely attracted much of the revilement and persecution that he and his followers were forced to endure, especially in a nation with an acknowledged distaste for confrontation and non-conformity.

How did Nichiren, who remained celibate throughout his life, develop a profound degree of empathy with the plight of women? A key determinant appears to lie in his close identification with the disadvantaged, for he often described himself as having been born poor and lowly to a *chandala* family.⁶⁵ His perspective derived from this identity is likely to have led him to question the dogma and practice of prejudice, to conclude through his understanding of Buddhism that all life was fundamentally equal and champion the inherent dignity of human beings. As evidenced by the following passage, Nichiren felt that women, who had

to bear the brunt of discrimination in the sutras and in society, were especially entitled to salvation:

In Volume Five of the Lotus Sutra, the dragon king's daughter says, "I unfold the doctrines of the Great Vehicle to rescue living beings from suffering." What are these "doctrines of the Great Vehicle" that she will unfold? They are the Lotus Sutra. And what is meant by the sufferings of living beings? It does not refer to the living beings in hell, or to the living beings in the realm of hungry spirits. It refers simply to women; that is what is meant by the words "sufferings of living beings."

There are the five obstacles and three obediences, the three persons that women must obey and the five obstacles that they face. The dragon king's daughter was a woman and she had experienced and understood the sufferings of women. Therefore she was not concerned about other matters, but vowed that she would be a guide and leader for other women.⁶⁶

In light of the fact that the dragon girl—being female, an animal and a child—is clearly symbolic of the masses, it seems inevitable that Nichiren's disposition toward women and their plight would engender a higher sense of purpose and compassion for the socially disadvantaged in general. Ultimately, it spawned a philosophy of individual empowerment that was both unique for its time and universal in its appeal.

As the following passage attests, he held that everyone, regardless of sex or status, equally possesses the potential for salvation:

In this sutra, [the Lotus,] [the attainment of Buddhahood occurs] mainly through hearing it. Because this sutra does not discriminate against evil persons, women, persons of the two vehicles, and icchantikas or persons of incorrigible disbelief, it says, "All attain the Buddha way." This is also known as "the great wisdom of equality."

When one hears [the sutra teaching] that good and evil are not two, that the correct and the incorrect are as one, one will eventually attain inner enlightenment. Therefore, it is called the attainment of Buddhahood in one's present form. Because one attains enlightenment in this a single lifetime, it is also called the attainment of perfect enlightenment in one lifetime. Though there are persons who do not understand the meaning, if they chant the daimoku, the Buddhas will rejoice. This is what the sutra means when it says, ["This sutra is hard to uphold; if one can uphold it even for a short while,] I will surely rejoice and so will the other Buddhas."⁶⁷

Nichiren Buddhism was unable to achieve the critical mass to inspire

feminist thought and activism in Japan during Nichiren's lifetime. Over time, sexism—aided by a broad spectrum of influences—became an established component of the Japanese social and cultural milieu. It was only after the Lotus Sutra-based religious groups came into existence in the post-World War II period that Nichiren's teaching assuring women of their capacity for spiritual salvation was restored and promoted in Japan.

Notes

¹ Junko Oguri, *Nyonin ojo: Nihon-shi ni miru onna no sukui* (Women's Capacity to Be Reborn in the Pure Land: Women's Salvation in Japanese History); (Jimbun Shoin, 1987), p. 122.

² Hoyo Watanabe, *Nichiren shonin to josei shinto*, (Sage Nichiren and Women Followers) in the Japan Buddhist Association (ed.); *Bukkyo to josei*, (Buddhism and Women), (Heirakuji Shoten, 1991), p. 115.

³ Yutaka Takagi, *Nichiren to josei dannotsu*, (Nichiren and Women Believers), in *Miyazaki eishu sensei koki kinen ronbun-shu kanko-kai* (Publication Committee for the Collected Treatises Commemorating Dr. Eishu Miyazaki's 70th Birthday) (ed.); *Miyazaki eishu sensei koki kinen ronbun-shu*, (Collected Treatises Commemorating Dr. Eishu Miyazaki's 70th Birthday), (Heirakuji Shoten, 1983), p. 396.

Historian Yutaka Takagi classified and closely examined the women believers mentioned in Nichiren's letters. He asserts Nichimyo and the mother of Oto are different individuals.

⁴ Kansho Kuwana, *Nichiren Shonin no josei-kan*, (Sage Nichiren's Perspective on Women), in the Japan Buddhist Association (ed.); *Bukkyo to josei*, (Buddhism and Women), (Heirakuji Shoten, 1991), p. 98.

⁵ Masayuki Taira, *Nihon chusei no shakai to bukkyo* (Society and Buddhism in Medieval Japan); (Hanawa Shobo, 1992), p. 392.

⁶ Concerning this point, see Toshie Kurihara, "Kodai nihon ni okeru bukkyo to josei," (Buddhism and Women in Ancient Japan); *The Bulletin of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy*, no. 12, 1996.

Hitoshi Ohara argues that Confucian philosophy, which preceded Buddhism in Japan and views women as subservient, was instrumental in the Buddhist doctrines of *henjo nanshi* and the inability of women to attain enlightenment being accepted without resistance.

See Hitoshi Ohara, "Tennyō jobutsu setsu no jūyō ni tsuite," (On the Acceptance of the Theory of Women's Attainment of Buddhahood), In *The Research Society for Women's History* (ed.); *Nihon josei-shi ron shu* vol. 5, *josei to shukyo* (The Collection of Treatises on the History of Japanese Women, vol. 5, Women and Religion), (Yoshikawa Kobun-kan, 1998), p. 142.

⁷ *Homon mosarubeki you no koto*, (Letter to Sammi-bo) GZ, p. 1268.

⁸ *Nyonin jobutsu sho*, (On the Attainment of Buddhahood by Women), in Nichiko Hori (ed.), *Nichiren Daishonin Goshō Zenshu* (The Complete Works of Nichiren Dais-honin); (Soka Gakkai, 1952), pp. 470–473.

⁹ Jung Ch'i-ch'i (n.d.) lived during the Spring and Autumn period (770–403 B.C.E.) in China. According to Lieh Tzu, he stated that he had obtained three pleasures in this

world. The first was to have been born a human being, the second was to have been born a man, and the third was to be able to enjoy a long life. This is mentioned in Nichiren's *The Unity of Husband and Wife*.

¹⁰ The Daimoku of the Lotus Sutra, in The Gosho Translation Committee (ed./trans.); *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, (Soka Gakkai, 1999), pp. 147–148.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 148–149.

¹² *Konichi-ama gohenji* (Reply to Lay Nun Konichi), GZ, p. 934.

¹³ How Those Initially Aspiring to the Way Can Attain Buddhahood through the Lotus Sutra, WND, p. 884.

¹⁴ The Unity of Husband and Wife, WND, p. 463.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 464.

¹⁶ *Nyonin jobutsu sho*, GZ, p. 472.

¹⁷ The Opening of the Eyes, WND, p. 269.

¹⁸ The Sutra of True Requit, WND, p. 930.

¹⁹ *Nyonin jobutsu sho*, GZ, p. 473.

²⁰ Opening the Eyes of Wooden and Painted Images, WND, p. 88.

²¹ The One Essential Phrase, WND, p. 923.

²² Conversation between a Sage and an Unenlightened Man, WND, p. 121.

²³ Zeho Miwa, *Gender-ron kara mita Nichiren no seisa-kan* (Nichiren's View on the Differences between Males and Females from the Perspective of the Gender Theory); *Minobu ronso* (The Minobu Collection of Treatises), vol. 2, March 1997, pp. 35–36.

²⁴ The Opening of the Eyes, WND, p. 269.

²⁵ *Nyonin jobutsu sho*, GZ, p. 473.

²⁶ The True Aspect of All Phenomena, WND, p. 385.

²⁷ The Unity of Husband and Wife, WND, p. 463.

²⁸ A Ship to Cross the Sea of Suffering, WND, p. 33.

²⁹ *Zenmui sho* (On Shan-we-wei), GZ, p. 1236.

³⁰ The Unity of Husband and Wife, WND, p. 464.

³¹ The Sutra of True Requit, WND, p. 928.

³² *Oto gozen haha gosho*, (Letter to the Mother of Oto), GZ, p. 1222.

³³ Some scholars claim there was no particular need for Shinran to address the issue of women attaining enlightenment or being reborn in the Pure Land:

“Shinran did not need to place particular emphasis on the potential for enlightenment for women or being reborn in the Pure Land... he did not call for the equality between men and women by criticizing the misogynic notions in the scriptures based on the fundamental principle of Buddhism. He transcended sexism by regarding women as his equals.”

See Fumio Ando, *Shinran ni okeru nyonin jobutsu no mondai*, (Shinran's View on the Problem of Women's Attainment of Enlightenment), in the Japan Buddhist Association (ed.); *Bukkyo to josei*, (Buddhism and Women), (Heirakuji Shoten, 1991), p. 714.

³⁴ *Teihon shinran shonin zenshu*, (The Complete Works of Sage Shinran, the Standard Edition), vol. 2, p. 38.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 109.

³⁶ Doshu Okubo (ed.), *Dogen zenshi zenshu*, (The Complete Works of Dogen Zenshi), vol. 1, (1969), p. 250.

Also:

“Even women and animals should be sought and revered (as teachers that renounced secular life to pursue Buddhist practice if they correctly practice the true way of the

Buddha). Though they may be 100-year-old priests, those who have not seen the truth of the Buddha's way cannot match men and women who have attained the way. Those old priests should not be revered; instead, treat them with the respect one would offer his guest.

"Those who have practiced Buddhism and attained the way are teachers of the Buddha's four disciples of monks, nuns, lay men and lay women, and compassionate fathers of living beings, even if they are a seven-year-old female. This is like the example of the dragon king's daughter attaining Buddhahood. One should be devoted to and revere them as if to various Buddhas.

"This is the tradition of the Buddha's way. Those who lack this knowledge and are unable to transmit it is to be pitied." (Ibid., p. 251.)

³⁷ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 254.

³⁸ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 612.

³⁹ Junko Oguri, Ibid., p. 122.

⁴⁰ The Research Society for Women's History (ed.), *Nihon josei no rekishi: bunka to shiso* (History of Japanese Women: Culture and Thought); (Kadokawa Shoten, 1993), p. 65.

⁴¹ Noboru Miyata, *Sei to mibun* (Gender and Social Status); (Shunju-sha, 1989).

Hideaki Matsuoka defines the Bloodbowl Sutra doctrine as the following: 1) The belief that women will fall into the Blood Pond Hell for their impurity of blood; and 2) the belief that women who die in childbirth will fall into the Blood Pond Hell.

See Hideaki Matsuoka, *Waga kuni ni okeru ketsubon-kyo shinko ni tsuite no ichi-kosatsu* (A Study of the Cult of the Bloodbowl Sutra in Japan), The Research Society for Women's History (ed.); *Nihon josei-shi ron-shu* vol. 5, *josei to shukyo*, (The Collection of Treatises on the History of Japanese Women, vol. 5, Women and Religion), (Yoshikawa Kobun-kan, 1998), p. 258.

⁴² Aiko Ogoshi, *Josei to shukyo* (Women and Religion); (Iwanami Shoten, 1997), p. 180.

⁴³ The Recitation of the "Expedient Means" and "Life Span" Chapters, WND, p. 71.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 71–72.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 72.

⁴⁶ *Myoho bikuni gohenji*, (Reply to Lay Nun Myoho), GZ, p. 1416.

⁴⁷ Letter from Sado, WND, p. 301.

⁴⁸ Letter to the Sage Nichimyo, WND, p. 324.

⁴⁹ The Supremacy of the Law, WND, pp. 613–614.

⁵⁰ Letter to the Sage Nichimyo, WND, p. 325.

⁵¹ The Offering of an Unlined Robe, WND, p. 533.

⁵² The Treasure of a Filial Child, WND, p. 1043.

⁵³ Earthly Desires Are Enlightenment, WND, p. 319.

⁵⁴ Letter to the Brothers, WND, p. 502.

⁵⁵ The Supremacy of the Law, WND, p. 615.

⁵⁶ An Outline of the "Entrustment" and Other Chapters, WND, pp. 914–915.

⁵⁷ The Bow and Arrow, WND, p. 656.

⁵⁸ The Gods Same Birth and Same Name, WND, p. 316.

⁵⁹ Letter to Konichi-bo, WND, p. 662.

⁶⁰ *Kyobu saemon-no-jo nyobo gohenji*, (Reply to the Wife of Kyobu Saemon) GZ, pp. 1398–1399.

⁶¹ Easy Delivery of a Fortune Child, WND, p. 186.

⁶² The Sutra of True Requitai, WND, pp. 930–931.

⁶³ The Opening of the Eyes, WND, p. 269.

⁶⁴ The Sutra of True Requitai, WND, p. 932.

⁶⁵ Letter from Sado, WND, p. 303.

⁶⁶ *Shushishin gosho*, (On Sovereign, Teacher and Parent), GZ, p. 389.

⁶⁷ *Ichinen sanzen homon*, (Three Thousand Realms in a Single Moment of Life), GZ, p. 416.