

Nichiren Thought in Modern Japan: Two Perspectives

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Japan of the 1930s was marked by a burgeoning militarism leading to the Pacific War. The aggressive imperatives of nationalistic expansion were able to find congruence in 13th-century Nichiren thought. This fostered a movement that I will refer to in this paper as Nichirenism, a movement that was ideologically linked to this rise of militarism. Antithetically, a closer reading of the Nichiren corpus might actually steer clear of nationalist prerogatives and seek a broader landscape. As I interrogate these polarities, I sketch out perspectives of two of the most prominent Nichiren thinkers of the period, Chigaku Tanaka and Tsunesaburo Makiguchi. Further, I will critically question how each of them, consulting the same doctrinal resources, arrived at such different conclusions. For Tanaka, Nichirenism justified militarism. For Makiguchi, Nichiren thought provided a framework for a worldview in opposition to militarism and totalitarianism.

1. Introduction

The influences of Nichiren thought on modern Japan requires an examination of the ideological and social movements that marked the beginning of the era. Arguably the most direct connection of Nichiren thought to prewar ideology was made by former Nichiren Shu priest Chigaku Tanaka (1861–1939), founder of *Nichirensbugi* or the Nichirenism movement. Proponents of Tanaka’s ideas included Chogyu Takayama, the noted writer popularized as the “Nietzsche of Japan,” and Kanji Ishihara, a lieutenant colonel in the Imperial Japanese Army remembered for his notion of “Final War” between the U.S. and Japan.

In those years of renewed interest in Nichiren, the career educator Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944), a contemporary of Tanaka, also created an ideological movement rooted in the principles espoused by Nichiren. Makiguchi founded the lay Soka Kyoiku

Gakkai, which, as the Soka Gakkai, figured prominently among the many new religious movements in post-war Japan. In examining the words and actions of Tanaka and Makiguchi that related the ideas of Nichiren during the early years of the Showa period, I would like to discuss the placement in history of these two representative men of Nichiren thought.

2. The Showa State and Religion

With the Meiji Restoration of 1868, Japan began in earnest to follow the Western powers on the road to building a modern state and in extending its imperial reach.

The wars fought by France against her neighbors in the late 18th century created a wave of nationalist sentiment throughout Europe, especially in Italy and Germany, such that the modern era is known as an era of nationalism. At the dawn of the 19th century, the Italian peninsula was made up of a half-dozen sovereign states. European nationalists cited the distinction of each region to claim heritage of the Roman Empire and the Renaissance for Italian national self-identity. Germany referred not to a nation but to a large area in Central Europe made up of 38 independent kingdoms and smaller states. With the rallying of peoples by ethnicity, European nationalists succeeded in forming powerful, unified states.

A latecomer to modern nationhood, Japan set its sights on becoming a centralized power to confront and compete with Western influences. Pursuit of a nationalist agenda took on the pressure of foreign relations and domestic upheaval to the already weakening cohesion of centralized feudalism. Through the pre-Meiji period, the word *kuni* (now used for “country”) meant a clan-domain, in which loyalty and preservation were greatly valued. The structural transformation from a rigid and restrictive social hierarchy to a unified state power proved more difficult than imagined.

With the abolishment of the Tokugawa shogunate and the restoration of imperial rule, the new officials in the Meiji Government declared the emperor the sovereign focus of national unity. To complete the unification meant, however, that the emperor had to be seen as more than a mere symbol of the nation. It was necessary to establish the centrality of the emperor to the religious life of the nation

as well, to vest in him all manner of moral authority over the people. Thus the achievement of national unity became synonymous with the mobilization of the public to admire and serve the state.

To elevate the status of the emperor, the Meiji Government created a belief structure of myths and rites positioning the emperor as a living descendant of the sun goddess Amaterasu Omikami. The emperor became the embodiment of absolute value, a ruler not only of the temporal but also of the spiritual world.

On the surface, the new nation of Japan resembled the modern nations of the West on which it was modeled. Beneath the surface lay a Japan with rigid connections to its past.

In the West, Christianity had been the most powerful religious force up to the Middle Ages. Renaissance philosophy and the meteoric rise of the natural sciences mitigated some of that influence. Its aspirations for universality inconsonant with the sweeping trend of state-building, Christianity was forced to abdicate its predominance in national ideology to nationalism. With the decline of its political influence at the state level, Christianity refocused its energies into social areas that influenced the moral life of the individual, that is, to the realms of ethics and conscience.

While Japan may have striven to emulate the Western modern state in certain political and economic respects, it made a radical departure in its assignment of the role of religion in national unification. As the European models separated church and politics, Japan moved in the opposite direction toward unification of religion and state powers.

By the 1880s, the whirlwind of Westernization had subsided. There was a new movement toward reinvigorating and preserving Japanese cultural tradition in its national identity. The emergent *kokusuishugi* or cultural nationalism stressed the sacred inviolability of the emperor and of Japan as the “land of the gods.” It became the breeding ground for the national absolutism, or ultranationalism, of prewar Japan.

3. The Religious Response

The fusion of religion and government within the powers of the imperial state represented a critical challenge for religious authority.

Every religion possessed its own most revered object of worship, whose placement had now to be reinterpreted in relation to the emperor as a living god.

The religious response was articulated in one of two ways. One was to cooperate with the imperial system by acquiescing to State Shinto and the emperor as the ultimate authority in all matters of individual belief and morality. The other was to assign greater value to one's own belief system and, as a result, stand in opposition to the authority of the emperor.

Typical of the latter response were acts of non-acceptance, as in the case of the well-known Christian theologian and educator Kanzo Uchimura. In 1890, the *Kyoiku Chokugo* or Imperial Rescript on Education was issued, establishing educational support of the emperor system. Copies of the Rescript were distributed, and each school held a ceremony of acceptance. At the First Higher School ceremony, Uchimura refused to bow before the signature of the emperor on the Rescript.

Very few people, however, took an openly critical stance for religious or any other reasons. It should come as no surprise that Uchimura's defiance drew considerable public condemnation. His disrespect was viewed as evidence of the dangerous foreign influences of Christianity. Buddhist sects in Japan weighed the advantage of the moment and joined in the chorus of derision.

Condemning defiance was in fact the normative response of the religious community in Japan. There was no distancing from the imperial state and its policies. Compliance with the state's dictates went beyond passive acceptance to active participation in achieving national unification by discrediting minority views. Having suffered through the anti-Buddhist iconoclasm of the early Meiji period, the religious community generally moved quickly to a collaborative stance.

4. The Position of Nichirenism

Chigaku Tanaka, the principle proponent of Nichirenism as a response to the Imperial State, was born in 1861 in Edo (modern Tokyo), the son of a doctor. After the death of both parents at an early age, the young Chigaku entered a temple of the Minobu sect of Nichiren Shu. Dissatisfied with the sect's acceptance of other

religions, he renounced the priesthood and returned to secular life to begin his own crusade for religious reform. He founded the Kokuchukai [National Pillar Society] in 1914 for that reason and devised a course of study in Japanese national polity.

Unlike the Christian theologian Uchimura, Tanaka accepted the sacred and inviolable nature of the emperor and in fact worked to reinforce the idea, as his *Nichirenshugi Gairon* [An Introduction to Nichirenism] attests:

In Japan the Son of Heaven is the Path. The emperor, embodiment of morality, monarchical authority and the Imperial throne, and by virtue of the throne given the eternal ranking of emperor and eternal endorsement, is the representative in this world of the Path. Thus as water joins water and air joins air the Son of Heaven is of the Lotus Sutra.

Here Tanaka's interpretation of the emperor affirms the state's promulgation of an unbroken imperial lineage of divinity, and he borrows the terminology of Nichiren Buddhism to lend it credence. In his study of national polity, Tanaka accomplished the fusion of Nichiren Buddhism and the emperor system by identifying the emperor as both descended from the gods and the embodiment of the truth of the Lotus Sutra.

Furthermore, the role of the emperor had to be seen to extend beyond Japan. That is, it was necessary that the emperor be the moral axis around which the entire world revolved. For Tanaka, only Nichiren Buddhism had the breadth of moral suasion to bestow legitimacy on such a postulation.

If the entire world could be rallied around a single god, the world then would become one family. Tanaka found useful the birth myth of Japan. Beyond that, the foundation of Japan could be articulated in religious terms as the true *honzon* or object of worship of the Three Great Secret Laws in the Nichiren canon. This *honzon* provided the fundamental principle underlying the idea and achievement of "all mankind as one and the world as one family" (*Nichirenshugi Gairon*).

We must not lose sight of, however, that this reference by Tanaka to the "world" by no means arises from any notion of universality. As this next extract shows, Tanaka's view of the world as one was

grounded in a belief of special status accorded to the imperial family and Japan and to the discrimination of other nations. He writes:

When you observe the ancestral deities and gods of Japan in the center of “the mandala of the whole world,” the “ancestral mausoleum of Japan” becomes the “ancestral mausoleum of the world” and the sacred will forming the center of the world and the universe clearly the emperor of Japan and national polity of Japan. (*Nichirenshugi Gairon*)

To Tanaka, who believed in the supremacy of the emperor and in Japan as the center of the universe, Nichiren was the “great holy man of Japan” precisely because he “demonstrated to the world the nobility of the great nation of Japan, disclosing its truth and deep significance, and was a powerful advocate on a grand scale of Japan’s mission to unite the world.”

The years during which Tanaka was active, from the Taisho through to the early Showa period, were years when Japan was becoming increasingly democratic relative to the old *daimyo* system. At the same time, the nation was unabashedly revealing its imperialist nature as it embarked in earnest on overseas aggression. Tanaka’s view of a world united around the emperor is clearly empathetic with, and provided a justification for, calls in Japan at the time for military ventures overseas. The simple patriotism of a people excited by their country’s victories in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–95) and Russo-Japanese (1904–05) campaigns and its rise in status to the rank of great power via participation in the First World War was exploited in a drive for further aggression. At the same time, fanning the flames of this patriotic fervor covered up anomalies in society that only increased in gravity as modernization progressed – the oligarchy of the *zaibatsu* conglomerates, the growing gap between rich and poor, and the desolation of rural villages are but a few examples of the ailments of Japanese society as it struggled to join the modern world.

To project the image of Nichiren as an ideologue who supported the view of Japan “as a nation” as promulgated by Tanaka, required Tanaka and other Nichirenist propagandists to cover up or expunge those passages in Nichiren’s writings that went counter to their cause. In other words they manipulated Nichiren’s teaching to their own advantage. Many of Nichiren’s heirs sought ways to reconcile

themselves and be able to coexist with earthly authority, as they toned down or outrightly abandoned the radical aspects of Nichiren's thought. As the process of accommodation took place, the religious perspective that Nichiren opened up for his followers – emphasizing belief in a transcendent power above all earthly authority, on the basis of which one could level criticism against political rulers – was inherited and maintained not by the religious professionals, such as Tanaka or the Buddhist priests ensconced in their established temples, but rather by communities of lay devotees. One example of this was the lay educator Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, a man who would honor the spirit of the Nichiren canon, thus finding not the person or being of the Emperor as the ultimate end in itself but rather as an obstacle to the national polity.

5. The Position of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi was born in 1871 in Kashiwazaki, Niigata Prefecture. He left Niigata for Hokkaido at the age of fourteen. After studying in conditions of poverty he graduated from the normal school in Sapporo and became a teacher at the affiliated elementary school, at the same time continuing his own studies in geography. Eventually he passed the required examination to become a teacher of geography at middle school level, and took up a post at the same normal school.

In 1900 Makiguchi left Hokkaido for Tokyo where he continued his studies while working as secretary to the Meikeikai, the alumni association of the Tokyo Higher Normal School. The results of these personal studies were published in two important books – *Jinsei Chirigaku* [Geography of Human Life] (1903) and *Kyoka no Togo Chushin Tōshite no Kyodoka Kenkyu* [Studies in Folklore As an Integration of Subjects] (1912).

After his work was published, Makiguchi participated in a folk culture study group known as the Kyodokai, led by personalities such as Kunio Yanagida, and edited geography textbooks for the Ministry of Education. In 1913 he returned to teaching as principal of Tosei Elementary School.

There is evidence that Makiguchi attended a number of Tanaka's lectures around the year 1916. He could not, however, agree with

Tanaka's ideas of Nichirenism. Makiguchi therefore did not embrace the teachings of Nichiren until 1928, some twelve years later, when he met Sokei Mitani (1878–1932), a follower of Nichiren Shoshu.

Mitani had become a follower of Nichiren Shoshu, literally the “Nichiren orthodox sect,” in the early Taisho years and was at the time a central figure in the group of leaders known as Taisekiko or “Taiseiki group” at the Nichiren Shoshu Jozai-ji temple. Beyond conducting his own studies of Nichiren Buddhism, Mitani founded a publishing company, Danshosha, with the aim of publishing his work.

Makiguchi's acceptance of Nichiren Buddhism may well have been influenced by writings such as the following from Mitani's only published work, *Rissho Ankokuron Seishaku* [A Detailed Interpretation of 'A Treatise on Pacifying the State by Establishing Orthodoxy']:

The history fabricated for the sake of flattery by scholars patronized by the government is of a kind seen nowhere else. People of good sense and understanding can only feel shame, as these sycophants turn a history we can all be proud of on its head while wrongly insisting that the emperor of Japan is descended from someone who came down from the heavens. This fiction only embarrasses the 70 million of us enormously, but even more egregiously, would have all 70 million of us think as one, and this will only desecrate the sacred stature of the Imperial family that is the center of it all.

Mitani is not denying here the validity of the emperor system nor is he criticizing it. However in the early years of Showa, when nationalist ideology was growing in influence, it is noteworthy that someone would so forcefully challenge the prevailing historical view of Japan as a land ruled by an emperor descended from the sun goddess.

At the root of Mitani's position was a much more rational interpretation of Buddhism, as may be deduced from statements in the same work, such as: “Even the Buddha is human, but where the Buddha differs from ordinary humans is in the way in which his spirit is composed of the most noble law, namely the Lotus Sutra.” Therefore discrimination among humans due to their intrinsic nature, that is, on the grounds of race or origin, is not recognized, and the difference between the Buddha and an ordinary person depended on only one thing – whether that person followed the teachings of the

Lotus Sutra, the highest “law.” In terms of the concept of equality under this law, the emperor could be no exception.

Makiguchi agreed with Mitani’s idea that the law is supreme. He opposed the idea of giving anyone preferential treatment, whether a god or an emperor just because of their status. To that point, Makiguchi writes:

As people today have become more knowledgeable, they are aware that law takes precedence over personal status. What’s more Japan now has a constitution, the main point of which is that the monarch must respect it and the law it represents equally with every other citizen. (The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy)

Makiguchi is not writing of religious law here, but of constitutional law. Nevertheless, this extract does illustrate the idea Makiguchi had of transcending the arbitrary nature of the individual in his search for universal truth. Makiguchi was adamant in his stance against accepting anti-scientific views.

It was therefore impossible for Makiguchi to accept the imperial myth of “unbroken lineage” in which all religious authority is concentrated in the single person of the emperor. Later, when arrested on suspicion of blasphemy, and asked by the Public Security Preservation authorities, “If the emperor came to believe in the Gohonzon of Nichiren Daishonin, would his freedom to express his opinions not be hindered in terms of ruling the nation?” Makiguchi replied:

“I do not think so. During discussions at study meetings etc. and in individual conversations among members, we have often said that the emperor is an ordinary man, who went to school as crown prince and learned how to be emperor. The emperor makes mistakes like anyone else. In the early years of the Meiji Period the emperor was apparently often cautioned by Tōshū Yamaoka and had his mistakes pointed out to him. And it’s true. (*Tōkko Geppo* [Monthly Report of the Special Higher Police] 58)

This statement speaks to Makiguchi’s character and the conviction with which he held to his ideals. It is significant after all that he made this statement while under arrest, charged with blasphemy. Here Makiguchi personally resists the authority of the state in its attempt to force upon the Japanese the idea that the emperor is a “living god.” In the face of state authority he articulates his belief that the emperor is an ordinary

man who like other men must learn in order not to make mistakes. Makiguchi was well aware of the universal and international nature of the ideas of Nichiren, and adopted them as the basis for his own beliefs.

The Imperial Rescript on Education mentioned earlier in this paper, instructed Japanese subjects to cultivate loyalty and filial piety toward the imperial household. It portrayed Japan as a unique polity based on the historical bonds of its benevolent rulers and loyal subjects. Just as Uchimura disdained it, so too was it anathema to Makiguchi who described the Rescript as providing only “a minimal moral principle.” During the war Makiguchi went even further by burning the paper amulets from the Kotai Jingu (shrine of the sun goddess at the Ise Shrine) distributed to each household, calling this action “purging the slander of Buddhism.” He also prohibited members of his educator’s discussion group, the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai, from visiting Shinto shrines.

6. Fragmentation among the Followers of Nichiren

In this paper we have briefly examined the lives of two men – Chigaku Tanaka and Tsunesaburo Makiguchi – both adherents of Nichiren Buddhism, both of whom founded ideological movements in the name of his teachings. Hopefully some light has been shed on the ideas these men embraced in relation to the imperial state. We have seen how those of the religious world in Japan displayed two different responses to the idea of the emperor as the sole temporal and religious authority: acceptance and a distancing of oneself from the system. The respective positions of Tanaka and Makiguchi typify these two responses.

The historical record tells us that Tanaka had a much greater influence on prewar society than did Makiguchi. We also know that Makiguchi was not completely alone among devotees of Nichiren in the attitude he adopted, as the quote from Makiguchi’s mentor Mitani and the following words of Chogyu Takayama indicate.

Nichiren recognizes the state for the sake of truth, not truth for the sake of the state. To him, the truth is always greater than the state. Therefore he approves of the fall of the state for the sake of truth. (*Nichiren Shonin to Nihonkoku* [Leading figures in Nichiren and Japan])

There were others during this time who turned to Nichiren Buddhism as the ideology that supported their world view. Giro Senoo, for example, took the view that Nichiren Buddhism was the ideology that could bring about the international liberation of peoples.

The question that remains is this. How could Nichiren thought be appropriated by two such disparate thinkers as Makiguchi and Tanaka, at polar opposites of their understanding of the role of groups in the imperial state in modern Japan?

I find one reason in the nature of Nichiren's ideas themselves. It however cannot be the sole reason. Were there not perhaps factors in the modern Japan that "discovered" and reevaluated Nichiren that caused this fragmentation of the image of Nichiren?

Keeping this question in mind, let us examine further the reception accorded the ideas of Nichiren in modern Japan and the reasons for the schism among the followers of Nichiren.

7. Between Nichiren and Nichirenism

When considering the relationship between the ideas of Nichiren and the power of the state, what we must first remember is that Nichiren was not the narrow-minded nationalist the Tanaka's of modern Japan would have us to believe.

There is no evidence that Nichiren actually opposed the ruling order of his time, of which the emperor was the pinnacle. Nor however do we know that he viewed the specific political structure of the emperor system as the only possible system of government. Nichiren's ultimate aim was the realization of a religious ideal, and power was only a means to achieve this. The legitimacy of power depended solely on whether those in authority obeyed the true laws, and whether this power contributed to the creation of a better society bringing happiness to the common people.

In the works of his final years, including *Shijo Kingo-dono Motoonfumi* [Great Bodhisattva Hachiman], Nichiren examines the reigns of five emperors from the 81st to the 85th, and powerful figures of the same period Minamoto no Yoritomo and Yoshitoki Hojo, and describes how Yoritomo and his associates received the protection of the gods as rulers because the emperor did not conduct politics correctly. In Nichiren's view, emperors in the past had

actually fallen from their rank as ruler of the nation, and could do so again at any time. In the Middle Ages Nichiren was the only thinker in Japan who publicly denied the authority of the emperor as a descendant of the gods, and in fact, the only person to publicly endorse the revolutionary notion of a shift of the post of monarch from the imperial family.

Continuing in this vein, Kanzo Uchimura also made the following interesting comment about Nichiren. He writes:

Of all the Japanese who saw receiving the endorsement of the government as the greatest privilege, Nichiren was the only one to dismiss it lightly. Emperor of emperors, watchman of watchmen, this was the position of a sacred man of religion. (*Nichiren Shonin o Ronzu* [Discussing Nichiren], 61)

Looking back over Japanese history, Uchimura, who believed in the supremacy of religious truth over temporal authority, found in Nichiren, a religious personality of the Kamakura Period, a man cut from the same cloth as himself.

On the other hand, as the words, “Of the fifteen *kuni* [domains] along the Tokaido, Nichiren is of the twelfth, Awa, of the county of Nagasa and the village of Tojo – a child of a fisherman from the edge of the sea,” indicate, it would be true to say that Nichiren felt a strong sense of belonging and attachment to his birthplace. Furthermore he believed that a world of international truth could only be attained by facing up directly to the tragic situation in Japan at the time and changing it for the better. On this point Nichiren, by relinquishing any interest in society and preaching that we should return directly to the world of religious truth, was different from other priests of the Kamakura era such as Shinran and Dogen, neither of whom included any elements of nationalism in their religious tradition. In the doctrine of Nichiren, universal salvation is not attained by spiritual exile from the land of one’s home, but instead is structured in such a way as to only become possible following a proper grappling with the national reality.

In the religion of Nichiren, a national sense of crisis and international goal of salvation were intimately connected. One’s image of Nichiren can therefore depend upon which of these elements one chooses to focus.

8. Modern Japan Rediscovered Nichiren

Here I have identified certain characteristics of Nichiren as I compare him to his contemporaries Shinran and Dogen in the context of his attempt to rebuild the Japan of Mappo or the Final Dharma Age from an objective point of view. His aim, I think, was to construct the ideal Buddhist domain. Nichiren clearly indicated who were to be the initiators of this revolution. It made his religious beliefs even more powerful. I am referring here to the “bodhisattvas springing from the earth” described in the Lotus Sutra.

There is a scene in the Lotus Sutra when an enormous number of bodhisattvas appear from below the earth and are charged with spreading the true teachings to the evil world after the demise of the Buddha. By likening himself and his disciples to these bodhisattvas springing from the earth, Nichiren attempted to justify the actions of his disciples in religious terms.

If they are indeed bodhisattvas springing from the earth, their actions must be sacred actions for the purpose of making the prophecies of the Buddha reality. This is the supreme mission, to be carried out even at the risk of death. Thus Nichiren provides us with specific initiators of change in the land, and by assigning religious meaning to their actions, the religion of Nichiren came to incorporate into its own structure the will to change current circumstances. A rare event for the times. In modern times, particularly since the beginning of the Showa period, this aspect of Nichiren ideology has been the focus of particular interest.

Policies of Westernization handed down from the Meiji years onward dramatically changed the face of Japanese society. Such rapid modernization brought about major distortions and contradictions that permeated the society. Under capitalist monopolies, for instance, factory workers were forced to labor long hours in inferior conditions, and the poverty of tenant farmers in the villages, left behind in the rush toward modernization, grew more serious every year.

No matter how adamantly one might proclaim Japan to be the sacred land of the emperor, or the authority of the living god, of itself it provided not a single solution at the grass-roots level. If reality was to be seriously confronted, it would require bold new ideas that would close the gap between reality and the ideal. A

methodology would also be needed to put these ideas into action. The ideology of Nichiren was rediscovered and embraced in modern Japan as a response.

Earlier in this paper I discussed how the aim of Nichiren ideology was to create a land of the Buddha in the present. Nichiren had the ordinary masses in mind, that is, the bodhisattvas springing from the earth, as the ones who would bring about this change. His logic was sound. Here were ordinary people, liberated from a class system that had been maintained by a clan structure, now being tossed upon the waves of modernization, unable to find guidelines and principles for behavior. These would be the very leaders of a revolution initiated and fomented, not from the top, but from “the earth.” Ikki Kita, in *Shina Kakumei Gaishi* [Unofficial History of the Chinese Revolution] demonstrates in plain terms his understanding of the ideas of Nichiren from this perspective:

Bodhisattvas springing from the earth refers to the group of saviors buried beneath the earth, in other words the heroes of the fields and marshes, the righteous and great of the lower classes.

In addition, as a precondition for carrying out the act of salvation, Nichiren demanded a total empathy for the one being saved. He believed that without dealing with people on their own level and sharing their pain, the energy of life-risking actions could not be generated. Nichiren Buddhism, which appropriated Buddhist terminology familiar to Japanese people for centuries, while declaring its mission as one of saving of the masses, was more likely to win the hearts of people of the time than any imported revolutionary theory.

9. Legacy of Nichirenism

Thus the ideas of Nichiren were reevaluated in the modern era as an answer to the contradictions and problems of the period. Both Chigaku Tanaka and Tsunesaburo Makiguchi advocated a lay-oriented religion, and were equally vocal about the role they thought religion ought to play in daily life. They also stressed how the ideas Nichiren espoused were not limited to seekers of spiritual peace and enlightenment and salvation at a personal level, but were in fact principles that could inform society overall, and prove efficacious as the foundation of mass

movements. This tells us that the views of Nichiren held by these two men were filtered through the lens of the modern age.

However while they may have had these points in common, there was one definitive difference between Tanaka and Makiguchi. This was their respective views on what constituted the ideal society – that is, a Buddhist land – as the ultimate goal. While Tanaka saw it as the imperial state in its ideal form, Makiguchi separated his view of the perfect society from any connections with nationhood such as the emperor or Japan.

As a result, Tanaka's perspective saw in Nichirenism the concept of Japan as the center of the universe. His aim therefore was for Nichirenism to bridge the gap between the ideal and reality in a nation centered on a divine emperor. From an international perspective, Nichiren thought could then be the basis for justifying Japan's overseas aggression.

In contrast, Makiguchi saw Japan as having the potential to be the ideal Buddhist land in a different dimension from that of the national polity. He was opposed to any notion of an imperial state in an international context.

Makiguchi's attitude toward State Shinto and the notion that Japan was the land of the divine emperor had its roots in his religious beliefs. It was not directly linked to any criticism of the authorities in the political sphere. However, in the eyes of the authorities of a state that was trying to make the emperor a "living god" with his "unbroken lineage" the foundation of national unity, Makiguchi represented a dangerous threat, a person dismantling the national myth at its most fundamental level. In 1943 as Japan's fortunes in war gradually took a turn for the worse, Makiguchi was arrested and charged with blasphemy toward shrines and infringement of the Public Security Preservation Law. He would die of old age and malnutrition, in prison.

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