KUKAI, or the Great Teacher Kōbō, of Tō-ji temple stated his opinion that the Lotus Sutra was inferior even to the Flower Garland Sutra, so how much more inferior was it in comparison with the Mahāvairochana Sutra.

Ennin, or the Great Teacher Jikaku; Enchin, or the Great Teacher Chishō; the Reverend Annen, and others stated that the principles put forth in the Lotus Sutra were the same as those of the Mahāvairochana Sutra, but that the former was inferior to the latter in matters pertaining to mudras and mantras. (I have cited their statements in other writings.)

Kūkai, basing himself on the Mahāvairochana Sutra and The Treatise on the Mind Aspiring for Enlightenment, postulated ten stages of the mind by which he attempted to determine the relative worth of the exoteric and esoteric teachings. Among these, he stated that the sixth stage, the “Mahayana mind with sympathetic concern for others,” corresponded to the Dharma Characteristics school; the seventh stage, the “mind that realizes that the mind is unborn,” to the Three Treatises school; the eighth stage, the “mind that understands the one way as it truly is,” to the Tendai school; the ninth stage, the “profoudest mind that is aware of the absence of self-nature,” to the Flower Garland school; and the tenth stage, the “solemn mind, the most secret and sacred,” to the True Word school.

This way of ranking the schools, he said, proceeds from the shallower teachings to those of increasing profundity. The textual evidence to support it is drawn from the “Stage of the Mind” chapter of the Mahāvairochana Sutra and Mind Aspiring for Enlightenment.

If we turn to the text of the “Stage of the Mind” chapter, however, we find that, although the chapter contains the names “Mahayana mind with sympathetic concern for others,” “mind that realizes that the mind is unborn,” and “profoudest mind that is aware of the absence of self-nature,” it is nowhere stated that these three designations refer to the Dharma Characteristics, Three Treatises, and Flower Garland schools respectively.

Moreover, between the designations “mind that realizes that the mind is unborn” and “profoudest mind that is aware of the absence of self-nature,” we do not find any passages or doctrine that would correspond to the designation “mind that understands the one way as it truly is.”

To be sure, at the beginning of the “Stage of the Mind” chapter we find the words “What is the meaning of enlightenment? It means to understand one’s own mind as it truly is.” Kūkai
has taken this passage and has placed it between the designations for the seventh and ninth stages, and declared that it corresponds to the teachings of the Tendai school. He then asserts that, as a result, the Tendai teachings are inferior to those of the Flower Garland school. But in the “Stage of the Mind” chapter there is not a single passage or doctrine that has that meaning. In some cases, there are both words and doctrine to support one’s assertions, and in other cases, no exact words but pregnant doctrine; but in this case there are neither words nor doctrine, and so we can put no trust in such an assertion.

The text of Mind Aspiring for Enlightenment says nothing whatsoever about the relative superiority of the Lotus Sutra and the Flower Garland Sutra. Moreover, although this work is attributed to Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna, there has from times past been much controversy regarding its authenticity. Until this controversy is settled, it would be contrary to the rules of debate to attempt to use it as a basis for argument.

Furthermore, Shan-wu-wei and Chin-kang-chih, setting forth their judgments, have composed The Annotations on the Mahāvairochana Sutra and The Commentary on the Meaning of the Mahāvairochana Sutra, which were written down by the Āchārya I-hsing. In these commentaries, with regard to the relative superiority of the various schools of Buddhism, it is merely stated that the Lotus Sutra and the Mahāvairochana Sutra differ only in that one is broader and the other less detailed in its treatment. How, then, can Kūkai, for all his worth and eminence, go against the opinion laid down by these former teachers [of his school]? Strong objections to his actions have been voiced. (This is the criticism made by Annen.)

In replying to these objections, the followers of Kūkai answer that it is stated thus-and-so in the Protection Sutra, thus-an-so in the Six Pāramitās Sutra, thus-and-so in the Lankāvatāra Sutra, or thus-and-so in the Diamond Crown Sutra, attempting to resolve the controversy in their favor, but their arguments have failed to silence the critics.

Nevertheless, the latter-day scholars of Tō-ji temple, completely awed by the high repute in which the Great Teacher Kōbō is held, go on trying to find some way to resolve the controversy. For lack of any other strategy, they defy the disciplines of debate by asserting that Saichō, the Great Teacher Dengyō, was a disciple of the Great Teacher Kōbō, or that, with regard to the relative superiority of the doctrines of the two schools of True Word and Tendai, there are such-and-such arguments to be put forward.

I, Nichiren, wish to note the following. Tu-shun, Chih-yen, and Fa-tsang of the Flower Garland school, basing themselves on the Lotus Sutra passages “see [the Buddha] for the first time” and “see [the Buddha] now,” held the view that the Lotus Sutra and the Flower Garland Sutra were equal in worth.

Somewhat later, Ch‘eng-kuan of the same school, basing himself on the same passage, stated that the two were equal, and thus did not diverge from the opinion of the patriarchs and teachers of the school. But he added to the earlier argument by stating: “The Lotus Sutra and the Flower Garland Sutra are equal in worth. However, the Flower Garland was preached some time before the Lotus. When the Flower Garland was preached, the Buddha first of all addressed the great bodhisattvas Dharma Wisdom, Forest of Merits, and others, fulfilling the true purpose of his appearance in the world. But the persons of the two vehicles and the ordinary mortals of lesser understanding, since their capacity to receive such teachings was not yet sufficiently matured, could not accept them.
Therefore the Buddha preached the Āgama, the Correct and Equal, and the Wisdom sutras, thereby training and maturing their capacities until these persons were able to return to and embrace the teachings of the Flower Garland Sutra. This process is referred to as the ‘see [the Buddha] now’ aspect of the Lotus Sutra. Once the main camp of the enemy has been overpowered, the remnants of the enemy’s forces are easily dealt with. Thus we see that the Flower Garland Sutra is in fact superior to the Lotus Sutra.”

In our own country, Kūkai encountered the priest Gonsō and others and learned this doctrine from them. Later, he studied the Tendai and True Word teachings, but he did not change his earlier beliefs in this matter. Thus he continued to adhere to this belief [regarding the relative superiority of the Flower Garland and Lotus sutras].

Of course, this opinion that the Flower Garland Sutra is superior to the Lotus Sutra had been subscribed to by all the three southern schools and seven northern schools of Buddhism in China in the period prior to the Ch‘en and Sui dynasties. And even after the appearance of T‘ien-t‘ai, the various schools continued to hold to this doctrine. Thus it was not Kūkai alone who subscribed to it.

However, when Ch‘eng-kuan, basing himself on the passages “see [the Buddha] for the first time” and “see [the Buddha] now,” put forward his assertion that the Flower Garland Sutra is superior to the Lotus Sutra, he had two sources of inspiration for the idea. First was the fact that the Great Teacher T‘ien-t‘ai Chih-che, basing himself on the passage in the Nirvana Sutra that reads, “When this [Nirvana] sutra was preached...the prediction had already been made in the Lotus Sutra [that the eight thousand voice-hearers would attain Buddhahood, a prediction that was like a great harvest. Thus, the autumn harvest was over and the crop had been stored away for winter, and there was nothing left for it],” declared that the Lotus Sutra and the Nirvana Sutra are equal in worth. Second was the fact that T‘ien-t‘ai went on to establish the superiority of the Lotus Sutra over the Nirvana Sutra [on the basis of the fact that the Lotus was preached first and the Nirvana was preached later].

Ch‘eng-kuan borrowed this same idea in setting forth his opinion on the relative worth of the Flower Garland and Lotus sutras. If his view is foolish and erroneous, then how much more so is the same view as put forward by Kūkai!

In the Tendai school’s writings on its True Word teachings it is stated as follows. The Lotus Sutra and the Mahāvairochana Sutra differ in that one is broader and the other less detailed. “Less detailed” refers to the Lotus Sutra. This is because, although the Lotus Sutra is the same in principle as the Mahāvairochana Sutra, it is “less detailed” because it does not discuss mudras or mantras. The term “broader” refers to the Mahāvairochana Sutra, because it not only expounds ultimate principles but also includes descriptions of mudras and mantras.

These works also put forth two statements: one is that the Lotus Sutra is equal, and the other that it is inferior, to the Mahāvairochana Sutra. They state that the two sutras are the same in principle but that the Lotus Sutra is inferior in matters pertaining to practice.

They also put forth two other statements regarding the Mahāvairochana Sutra. They say that, in a general sense, it is to be included among the sutras preached by the Buddha in the five periods of his preaching life; but in a stricter sense, it is to be regarded as separate from the sutras of the five periods.
They also state that the Lotus Sutra is comparable to a fierce warrior who is naked, while the Mahāvairochana Sutra is comparable to a fierce warrior who is fitted with a suit of armor and a helmet. And they say that, without the appropriate mudras and mantras, one cannot know the particular Buddha one is addressing.

I, Nichiren, am puzzled and wish to ask, How do we know that the Lotus Sutra and the Mahāvairochana Sutra are the same in principle?

Answer: It is so stated in On the Mahāvairochana Sutra, in On the Meaning of the Mahāvairochana Sutra, and in the commentaries by Jikaku and Chishō.

I would like to ask further, How do the Tripitaka masters and great teachers who are the authors of these works know that the two sutras are the same in principle?

Answer: One must not question the Tripitaka masters and great teachers!

Objection: An answer such as that not only violates the rules of debate, but also goes against the dying instructions of the Buddha. One must have clear passages of proof from the sutras to back up one’s assertions. If one has no such sutra passages, then one’s doctrines will not be accepted. What do you say?

Answer: Proof is to be found in the Sutra on the Form of the Lotus Mandala, the Sutra on the Yoga Practitioners, and The Rules of Rituals Based on the Lotus Sutra. The passages from these texts will be transmitted orally.

Question: Concerning this assertion that the Lotus Sutra does not mention mudras and mantras—does this date from the time of the Buddha, from the time when the sutra was compiled [after his death], or from the time when it was translated into Chinese?

Answer: Some say from the time of the Buddha, some say from the time when the sutra was compiled, and some from the time when it was translated.

Puzzled by this answer, I ask: If you say that the omission of mudras and mantras dates from the time of the Buddha, and that therefore this proves that the Lotus Sutra and the Mahāvairochana Sutra are the same in principle but that the latter is superior in matters pertaining to practice, then what sutra passages can you offer as proof of this? If you do not know of any such passages of proof, but simply put this forward as your own idle speculation, then it cannot be accepted. And if you say that the omission of mudras and mantras dates from the time when the sutras were compiled, or from the time when they were translated into Chinese, then how can the commentaries referred to earlier claim that the assertion that the Lotus and Mahāvairochana sutras are the same in principle but that the latter is superior in matters pertaining to practice represents the pronouncement of the Buddha? If one is going to assert that the Lotus Sutra and the Mahāvairochana Sutra are on the whole the same, one must inquire very carefully into the matter.

Speaking privately, I, Nichiren, have this to say: If we go by the texts of the Sutra on the Form of the Lotus Mandala and the Sutra on the Yoga Practitioners, when the Buddha expounded the Lotus Sutra, it would seem that it had mudras and mantras in it. If so, then perhaps these were omitted by the persons who compiled the text of the sutra, or by those who translated it into Chinese. The case would then be like that of the Six Pāramitās Sutra, from which such omissions were made when the text was compiled, or like the old translation of the Benevolent Kings Sutra, from which similar omissions were made when the sutra was translated into Chinese.

If this is so, though the Tendai school’s writings on its True Word teachings assert that the Lotus and
Mahāvairochana sutras are the same in principle but different in matters pertaining to practice, this assertion of the relative worth of the two sutras is a judgment that originates with the compilers of the sutras or those who translated them into Chinese, but not what was put forward by the Buddha himself. And this ultimately is what the True Word teaching of the Tendai school maintains. I have stated here my criticisms of the Tendai school in order to make clear just what their position is on this matter. From this it will be apparent that the view put forward by the True Word teaching of the Tendai school with regard to this matter is erroneous.

As for the doctrinal position set forth by the True Word followers of Tō-ji temple, I have not discussed it here because it is obviously erroneous in nature.

In general, there are two criticisms to be made of the view put forth by the True Word teaching of the Tendai school, that is, the position that the Lotus and Mahāvairochana sutras are the same in principle but that the latter is superior in matters pertaining to practice.

First is the fact that there is absolutely no sutra passage to support the view that the two sutras are the same in principle. If we ask which of the two, the Lotus or the Mahāvairochana, was preached first, the answer is that On the Meaning of the Mahāvairochana Sutra has already settled this point, declaring that the Lotus Sutra was preached first and the Mahāvairochana Sutra, later.

If this is so, then the Mahāvairochana Sutra belongs to the category of transmission or propagation, a work that repeats the teachings already set forth in the Lotus Sutra—that is, a single Law has been set forth on two different occasions.

In that sense, the Mahāvairochana Sutra is merely a repetition of the principles expounded in the Lotus Sutra. If that is so, then, if we consider the two sutras as rivals, we should strip the Mahāvairochana Sutra of its principles and restore these to the Lotus Sutra.

That would mean that the Mahāvairochana Sutra would have only its mudras and mantras left to boast of. But mudras are simply actions carried out by the body, and mantras are simply actions of the mouth. If there are the body and the mouth alone but there is no mind or will to direct these activities, then mudras and mantras cannot exist. And if the hands and mouth that carry out these actions are taken away from the Mahāvairochana Sutra and restored to the Lotus Sutra, then one is left with mudras that have no hands to form them, mantras that have no mouth to utter them. And what meaning can there be to mudras and mantras executed in such an empty manner?

With regard to the comparison made of the Lotus Sutra to a fierce warrior who is naked and the Mahāvairochana Sutra to a fierce warrior who is fitted with armor and helmet, if a fierce warrior who is naked advances and overwhels the great camp of the enemy, while a fierce warrior fitted with armor and helmet retreats and fails to overwhelm the enemy camp, which is to be judged superior?

Again, we may say that the fierce warrior represents the Lotus Sutra, while the armor and helmet represent the Mahāvairochana Sutra. But if there is no fierce warrior to begin with, of what use are the armor and helmet?

The above constitute my criticisms of the contention that the two sutras are equal in principle. Next I will give my criticisms regarding the view that the Mahāvairochana Sutra is superior in matters pertaining to practice.

It has been pointed out that the Lotus Sutra includes no description of mudras and mantras, while the Mahā-
vairochana Sutra does. If the absence or presence of mudras and mantras is to be used as a criterion for determining the relative superiority of the two sutas, then, because the Mahāvairochana Sutra contains mudras and mantras and the Lotus Sutra does not, the Lotus Sutra must be inferior.

If so, then, because the Āgama sutas contain a clear description of the formation of the world and the various stages of sages and worthies, while the Mahāvairochana Sutra contains no such description, should this fact be used to pass judgment on the relative worth of the two, and does this mean that the Mahāvairochana Sutra is inferior to the Āgama sutas?

The Two-Volumed Sutra contains a clear description of the forty-eight vows of Amida, while the Mahāvairochana Sutra contains no such description; the Wisdom sutas contain a clear description of the eighteen kinds of non-substantiality, while the Mahāvairochana Sutra contains no such description. Does this mean that the Mahāvairochana Sutra is inferior to these other sutas?

It has also been said that, without mudras and mantras, one cannot know the particular Buddha one is addressing. But now I would reply to this argument by saying that, unless there is an underlying principle of truth, the Buddhas cannot exist, and if the Buddhas do not exist, then all the mudras and mantras are useless.

My opponent may object, saying that things such as the various stages of sages and worthies or the forty-eight vows of Amida are not on a level comparable to that of mudras and mantras.

But I would respond in this fashion. You say that the Lotus Sutra is inferior to the Mahāvairochana Sutra because it lacks these most precious things, mudras and mantras. But if that is so, what about the fact that the Lotus Sutra makes clear that persons of the two vehicles can attain Buddhahood and describes how the Buddha actually attained enlightenment in the remote past, while the Mahāvairochana Sutra lacks these teachings? These teachings on the attainment of Buddhahood by persons of the two vehicles and of the Buddha’s attainment of enlightenment in the remote past are as far removed from the level of mudras and mantras as heaven is from earth, or clouds are from mud!

Mudras and mantras are mentioned in various sutas, so what is so remarkable about the fact that they are described in the Mahāvairochana Sutra? But persons of the two vehicles have dedicated themselves to the task of reducing their bodies to ashes and annihilating consciousness, and if they do not renounce their commitment to that goal, then what use could they have for mudras and mantras [which require a body and a mind for their execution]?

The sacred teachings of the Buddha’s lifetime all discriminate against persons of the two vehicles, stating that they can never attain Buddhahood, and hence in the Mahāvairochana Sutra as well, they are excluded from the category of those who can attain Buddhahood. Even if it is not stated that all persons will attain Buddhahood, of the three categories of persons [voice-hearers, cause-awakened ones, and bodhi-sattvas], two are excluded from the possibility of attaining Buddhahood; out of a hundred persons, more than sixty can never gain the way—how could the Buddha in his great compassion countenance such a situation?

But once the principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life had been expounded, then the way was opened for all to attain Buddhahood, so what more could be lacking? Among those who have attained Buddhahood, there are none whose mouths are mute or whose limbs are
paralyzed [and their words and gestures already manifest Buddhahood], so why would they need mudras or mantras?

Furthermore, most of the sutras speak of the Buddha as having gained correct enlightenment for the first time in India, and do not make clear that there is the eternal Buddha since time without beginning who is endowed with the three bodies. If this erroneous view, that originally there was no Buddha but that now he exists, is accepted, then the Thus Come One Mahāvairocana becomes a mere name that has no reality.

But in the “Life Span” chapter of the Lotus Sutra, the truth of the matter is clearly explained. Thus we see that Shakyamuni Buddha is like the single moon in the sky, while the other Buddhas and bodhisattvas are like the reflection of the moon floating in ten thousand different bodies of water. But I will not go into the details of the matter here.

It has also been stated that, unless we have mudras and mantras, prayers and supplications cannot be carried out. This, too, is an erroneous view.

The various Buddhas of past and present could not attain Buddhahood without the Lotus Sutra. It is through the Lotus Sutra that one gains correct enlightenment. If these Buddhas then cast aside the votary of the Lotus Sutra, they will revert to the status of common mortals, for they will be guilty of failing to understand the debt of gratitude they owe to the Lotus Sutra.

Furthermore, those persons of the two vehicles who are destined to become Buddhas in the future, if they separate themselves from the Lotus Sutra, will become like withered trees or rotten seeds. But now, so long as they have the Lotus Sutra, they can come to life again and bear blossoms and fruit.

If the votary of the Lotus Sutra were to engage in controversy with the votaries of the other sutras, whose side do you suppose Flower Glow Thus Come One and Light Bright Thus Come One would be on? And the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, human and heavenly beings, and beings in the four evil paths mentioned in the Flower Garland Sutra and the various other sutras, all of whom can attain correct enlightenment once they have heard the teachings concerning three thousand realms in a single moment of life and the Buddha who in fact attained enlightenment in the remote past—on whose side would they be?

When the exponents of the True Word school engage in rival controversy with the non-Buddhists or with the votaries of the Hinayana or the provisional Mahayana sutras, it is difficult to predict which side will be victorious. But when they engage in controversy with the votary of the Lotus Sutra, it is like a tiger fighting with a dragon, or a rabbit with a lion—they cannot possibly win the debate.

[When two sons of Emperor Montoku were rivals for the throne], the Tendai priest Eryō prayed with all his might for the success of the younger brother, and he in fact ascended the throne. And through the prayers for protection by the Tendai priest Sōō, the evil spirit of the True Word priest Shinzei [which had taken possession of the consort of Emperor Uda] was overpowered and driven out. These events constitute proof that the votaries of the True Word teaching are inferior to the votaries of the Lotus Sutra.

Question: According to On the Meaning of the Mahāvairochana Sutra, both the Lotus Sutra and the Mahāvairochana Sutra make clear that persons of the two vehicles can attain Buddhahood and that the Buddha gained enlightenment in the remote past. Is this correct?
Answer: Yes, this work asserts that both sutras make this clear. *On the Meaning of the Mahāvairochana Sutra* states, “The phrase ‘the reality of the mind’ in the Mahāvairochana Sutra is the same as the phrase ‘the true aspect of all phenomena’ in the Lotus Sutra.” And it also states, “The words ‘source and beginning’ in the Mahāvairochana Sutra have the same meaning as the words ‘life span of the Thus Come One’ in the Lotus Sutra.”

Question: According to the doctrine of the Flower Garland school, the Flower Garland Sutra makes clear that persons of the two vehicles can attain Buddhahood and that the Buddha gained enlightenment in the remote past. But the Tendai school does not recognize this claim. I leave aside for the moment the doctrinal controversy between the two schools. But if we set aside the opinions of the teachers of these schools and turn to the sutras themselves, we will see that, although the Flower Garland Sutra has passages that seem to say that persons of the two vehicles can attain Buddhahood and that the Buddha gained enlightenment in the remote past, that is not in fact the case. In view of this, I wonder if, though *On the Meaning of the Mahāvairochana Sutra* says that the Mahāvairochana Sutra makes clear that persons of the two vehicles can attain Buddhahood and that the Buddha gained enlightenment in the remote past, it in fact is the case. What is your opinion?

Answer: As in the case of the Flower Garland Sutra, the Mahāvairochana Sutra has passages that seem to state this, but in fact they do not have the principles to support these views.

My own private opinion is this. If persons of the two vehicles cannot attain Buddhahood, then the four universal vows taken by bodhisattvas [to save all living beings] cannot be fulfilled. And if the four universal vows cannot be fulfilled, then neither can the specific vows made by each individual bodhisattva be fulfilled. And if neither the general vows nor the specific vows can be fulfilled, then it is difficult to see how living beings can attain Buddhahood. One should give careful thought to this matter.

Question: *On the Mahāvairochana Sutra* states, “The Thus Come One Mahāvairochana is without beginning and without end. Thus he is vastly superior to [the Buddha of the Lotus Sutra who attained enlightenment at the time known as] numberless major world system dust particle kalpas ago.” What is your opinion?

Answer: The fact that the Buddha Vairochana is “without beginning and without end” is stated in various Mahayana sutras such as the Flower Garland, the Vimalakīrti, and the Wisdom sutras. The statement is not found only in the Mahāvairochana Sutra.

Question: If that is so, then numberless major world system dust particle kalpas ago must be a specific time that has its limitations, one that has a beginning and has an end, while the time described as “without beginning and without end” has no such limitations. If that is so, then [the Buddha described in] the Lotus Sutra must go down in defeat before [the Buddhas of] the other sutras. What is your opinion?

Answer: The proponents of the other schools of Buddhism would agree with this opinion. Those of the Tendai school alone would like to refute it, though they find it difficult to do so effectively.

Now [I wish to note this]. When the Mahāvairochana Sutra and the other Mahayana sutras speak of a Buddha “without beginning and without end,” they are speaking of the fact that the Dharma body of the Buddha is without beginning and without end. They do not mean that all three bodies of
a Buddha are without beginning and without end.

The passage in the Lotus Sutra regarding numberless major world system dust particle kalpas ago is intended to deny that Shakyamuni Buddha gained enlightenment for the first time near the city of Gayā, an assertion that is not denied in the other various Mahayana sutras, by stating that he gained enlightenment in the remote past of numberless major world system dust particle kalpas ago. The Mahāvairochana Sutra and the other Mahayana sutras say absolutely nothing at all of this fact.

The emergence from the earth of the treasure tower; the emergence of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth and the doubts expressed by Maitreya regarding them; the three exhortations and four entreaties recorded at the beginning of the "Life Span" chapter; and Bodhisattva Maitreya's indication of his acceptance and understanding when he said, "The Buddha preaches a rarely encountered Law; one never heard from times past."—all these passages in the Lotus Sutra refer to this fact.

In the various sutras that belong to the True Word category, the first six volumes of the Mahāvairochana Sutra and the seventh volume on offerings, the Diamond Crown Sutra, or the Susiddhikara Sutra, one finds no passages dealing with the three refusals and four entreaties, the three exhortations and four entreaties, the name of the kalpa, of the land, and of the Buddha himself in the case of persons of the two vehicles [that enable them to attain Buddhahood]. They are simply words in Sanskrit that refer to the four noble truths and the twelve-linked chain of causation. And one cannot interpret them as showing any understanding of the undifferentiated nature of the Dharma body as it is inherent in all beings.

Question: Jikaku, Chishō, and the others held the opinion that the Lotus and Mahāvairochana sutras were the same in principle but that the latter excels in matters pertaining to practice. Do you consider yourself superior to these great teachers?

Answer: The Buddha has warned us that we are not to make personal attacks on one another. Would you presume to go against this prohibition laid down by the Buddha? One is simply to use the texts of the sutras themselves to decide what is superior and what inferior.

Objection: If one sees a person such as yourself, a student of a latter age, going against the pronouncements of the patriarchs and teachers, can one help voicing objections?

Answer: If you feel obliged to voice objections when a student of a latter age controverts the patriarchs and teachers, then why do you not object to the fact that Chishō and Jikaku went against the pronouncements of T'ien-t'ai and Miao-lo?

Question: In what way did they do so?

Answer: According to the view of T’ien-t’ai and Miao-lo, among the sutras preached in the three periods of past, present, and future, there cannot be any that is superior to the Lotus Sutra. Therefore, if there were in fact a sutra that was superior to the Lotus Sutra, then their doctrine, which is affirmed by the entire T’ien-t’ai school, would be controverted. If the Mahāvairochana Sutra is truly superior to the Lotus Sutra, then the opinion
of T'ien-t'ai and Miao-lo, which is accepted by the T'ien-t'ai school, is at once invalidated.

Question: Do T'ien-t'ai and Miao-lo have any sutra passages to prove their assertion regarding the sutras preached in the past, the present, and the future?

Answer: They do. The "Teacher of the Law" chapter of the Lotus Sutra states: "The sutras I have preached number immeasurable thousands, ten thousands, millions. Among the sutras I have preached, now preach, and will preach, this Lotus Sutra is the most difficult to believe and the most difficult to understand."

If we go by this passage in the sutra, then of all the sutras preached by Shakyamuni Buddha in the fifty or so years of his preaching life, the Lotus Sutra is to be regarded as foremost.

Objection: The teachers of the True Word doctrine assert that the Lotus Sutra is indeed foremost among all the sutras preached by Shakyamuni Buddha. But the Mahāvairochana Sutra was preached by the Thus Come One Mahāvairochana.

Answer: Would they assert that, in addition to the Thus Come One Shakyamuni, the Thus Come One Mahāvairochana also appeared in the continent of Jambudvīpa, went through the eight phases of a Buddha's existence, and thereby preached the Mahāvairochana Sutra? (This is my first point.)

The Six Pāramitās Sutra states: "The teachings preached by Shakyamuni Buddha in past and present are divided into five categories. Among these is the fifth, the dhāranī division, which contains the mantras, or "true words." If you maintain that the True Word sutras were not among the teachings preached by the Thus Come One Shakyamuni, you will be contradicting this passage in the Six Pāramitās Sutra. (This is my second point.)

The passages in which the Thus Come One Shakyamuni says, "The sutras I have preached number..." are the statements he made after "honestly discarding expedient means." The Thus Come One Mahāvairochana testified to the truth of these statements, as did [the others of] the Buddhas who were emanations of Shakyamuni Buddha by extending their long broad tongues as a sign of their agreement. (This is my third point.)

In the passage [in the Lotus Sutra] dealing with the five categories of Buddhas, all of the various types of Buddhas without exception declare that the Lotus Sutra is foremost. (This is my fourth point.)

Then there is the passage in the Lotus Sutra that reads: "To put it briefly, all the doctrines possessed by the Thus Come One,... all these are proclaimed, revealed, and clearly expounded in this sutra." If we go by this sutra passage, then the Lotus Sutra is not only foremost among all the various sutras preached by Shakyamuni, but is likewise foremost among the sutras preached by the Thus Come One Mahāvairochana and the countless other Buddhas of the ten directions. If someone should assert that, in addition to these sutras, there are other sutras, preached by one Buddha or by two Buddhas, that are superior to the Lotus Sutra, one could put no trust in any such assertion. (This is my fifth point.)

There is no passage in the Mahāvairochana Sutra or the other True Word sutras that states that these sutras are superior to the Lotus Sutra. (This is my sixth point.)

Leaving aside the Buddha himself, there is no Buddhist scholar or teacher of India, China, or Japan other than the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai who has identified by name in his commentaries the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life. If this doctrine did not exist, there would be no way to explain the evil inherent in the nature of a Buddha. And if there were
no way to explain inherent evil, then the assertion that the Buddhas and bodhisattvas manifest themselves everywhere in physical form, the depictions of the wisdom king Immovable or the wisdom king Craving-Filled overcoming various evils, the mandalas of the Ten Worlds, or the thirty-seven honored ones would be no different from the doctrines of the non-Buddhists, something that did not exist originally but was invented later. (This is my seventh point.)

Question: With regard to the seven points you have raised, there are objections that might be set forth, but I will leave aside the first six points. However, I have a question regarding the seventh. Ch’eng-kuan of the Flower Garland school and I-hsing of the True Word school both subscribe to the doctrine of evil inherent in the nature of a Buddha. How then can you say there is no such doctrine in the teachings of these schools?

Answer: It would appear that Ch’eng-kuan of the Flower Garland school and I-hsing of the True Word school stole this doctrine that had been expounded by T’ien-t’ai and made it a part of the teachings of their own schools. But I have dealt with this matter elsewhere.

Question: Volume three of the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai’s Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra states: “The Lotus Sutra constitutes a summation of all the other sutras... [If one persists in viewing it with contempt, then] that person’s tongue will fester in his mouth. One must not allow personal feelings to lead one into persistence in such a grave error.”

And volume three of The Annotations on “The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra” states: “If, failing to understand that the Lotus Sutra expounds the ultimate truth, one claims that the Lotus Sutra speaks only on the phenomenal level in prophesying Buddhahood for the voice-hearer disciples, and hence cannot match the unobstructed mutual fusing and penetrating conveyed in the Flower Garland and Wisdom sutras; and if one persists in such a view even after one has been admonished for doing so, then without doubt that person’s tongue will fester in his mouth... Concerning the sutra passage that states that this wonderful sutra surpasses all those of past, present, and future, such a person persists in going astray. His tongue will fester unceasingly as an omen of what awaits him in the future. For the offense of slandering the Law, he will suffer for many long kalpas to come.”

If what T’ien-t’ai and Miao-lo say in their commentaries is true, then the followers of the three schools in the south of China and the seven schools in the north, along with those of the Flower Garland school, the Dharma Characteristics school, the Three Treatises school, and men such as Kōbō of Tō-ji temple—all these must without doubt have had their tongues fester, and must be suffering for long kalpas to come, must they not? But I will say no more of them.

Men such as Jikaku and Chishō, however, were direct heirs of the doctrines taught by T’ien-t’ai, and yet they supported the view that the Lotus Sutra is inferior to the Mahāvairocana Sutra. If that was indeed their view, did they too have tongues that festered and will they suffer for many long kalpas to come?

Answer: This is the most serious objection that can be raised in regard to the doctrine. It is dealt with in the oral traditions.

Nichiren

This was written on the twenty-ninth day of the seventh month in the first year of the Bun’ei era [1264], cyclical sign kinoe-ne.
Background

This work was written on the twenty-ninth day of the seventh month in 1264, when Nichiren Daishonin was residing in Kamakura. It clarifies the relative superiority of the Lotus Sutra and the True Word teachings. In Japan at the time there were two main streams of the True Word teachings, also called esoteric Buddhism. One was that of the True Word school, founded by Kūkai (774–835; also known as the Great Teacher Kōbō) and centered at Tō-ji temple in Kyoto. The other was the esoteric, or True Word, tradition that existed within the Tendai school centered at Enryaku-ji temple on Mount Hiei overlooking Kyoto. Jikaku (794–864) and Chishō (814–891), the third and fifth chief priests of the school, opened the way for this tradition.

The Daishonin methodically examines and refutes the assertions of these men and others that rank the True Word teachings and the sutras they are founded on as being superior to the Lotus Sutra. In particular, he focuses on the True Word tradition of the Tendai school, a school originally based on the teachings of T'ien-t'ai and Miao-lo in China and Dengyō in Japan.

He begins by stating the positions of the two main streams of the True Word teachings and then points out their errors. First, Kūkai, or Kōbō, of the True Word school associated various Buddhist schools respectively with ten stages of the mind, ranking the Mahāvairochana Sutra in first place, the Flower Garland Sutra second, and the Lotus Sutra third. These are the basic sutras respectively of the True Word, Flower Garland, and Tendai schools. The Daishonin points out that this conclusion lacks scriptural evidence and doctrinal principles.

Next, he mentions the view of Tendai Esotericism that the Lotus Sutra ranks equal to the Mahāvairochana Sutra in terms of principle, but is inferior to it in terms of practice. Equal in principle means that both the Lotus Sutra and the Mahāvairochana Sutra contain the same principles, such as the three thousand realms in a single moment of life, the attainment of Buddhahood by persons of the two vehicles, and the Buddha’s original enlightenment, that are uniquely superior among Buddhist teachings. Superior in practice means that the Mahāvairochana Sutra contains descriptions of mudras (mystic hand gestures) and mantras (mystic incantations), but the Lotus Sutra does not. Because Tendai Esotericism held these practices to be superior in nature, they regarded the Mahāvairochana Sutra as superior to the Lotus Sutra.

The Daishonin assails this position first by questioning whether the Mahāvairochana Sutra is in fact equal in principle to the Lotus Sutra. Tendai Esotericism maintains that the Mahāvairochana Sutra contains principles that are also found in the Lotus Sutra, but the Daishonin makes clear that this in fact is not the case. In the Mahāvairochana Sutra, for example, a concept of the eternal Dharma body is put forth, but not the eternity of all three bodies. And Shakyamuni Buddha is still regarded as having attained enlightenment for the first time under the bodhi tree in India. It does not reveal or recognize Shakyamuni Buddha’s attainment of enlightenment in the remote past as the Lotus Sutra does. Thus the Mahāvairochana Sutra cannot match the Lotus Sutra in terms of principle.

Then he questions whether the inclusion of mudras and mantras in the Mahāvairochana Sutra in fact makes it superior in practice. These mystic words and hand gestures are of no con-
sequence compared to the profound principle inherent in the Lotus Sutra that enables all people to attain Buddhahood, he asserts. And once one attains Buddhahood, of what need are such spells and gestures?

In closing, to counter the conclusion that the Lotus Sutra is foremost among all the sutras Shakyamuni expounded, the True Word teachers argue that the Mahāvairochana Sutra was expounded by the Buddha Mahāvairochana. The Daishonin refutes this argument from seven viewpoints.

In this work the Daishonin avoids quoting in detail various True Word texts and commentaries, but summarizes their positions, saying, “I have cited their statements in other writings.”

Notes

1. “To understand one’s own mind as it truly is” is another designation for “mind that is truly in harmony with the one way.”

2. This is the principle that, though the sutra text has no exact words for a doctrine, a person of wisdom can find the doctrine inherent in the sutra. For example, the Lotus Sutra has no words for the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life, but T’ien-t’ai found it in the sutra.

3. Shan-wu-w’e lectured on the Mahāvairochana Sutra at the request of I-hsing, who wrote down the lectures. This work is known as The Annotations on the Mahāvairochana Sutra, which I-hsing’s disciples revised and entitled The Commentary on the Meaning of the Mahāvairochana Sutra.

4. These passages actually appear in The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra, in the section interpreting a passage from the “Emerging from the Earth” (15th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. “See [the Buddha] for the first time” means to see Shakyamuni attain enlightenment for the first time and preach the Flower Garland Sutra, and “see [the Buddha] now” means to see the Buddha reveal the truth in the Lotus Sutra.

5. A translation by Kumārajīva. In addition, there is a newer translation by Pu-k’ung.

6. Flower Glow Thus Come One is the name of Shāriputra as a future Buddha, and Light Bright Thus Come One is that of Mahākāśyapa. These predictions about persons of the two vehicles were made in the Lotus Sutra.

7. According to tradition, Emperor Montoku (r. 850–858) was unable to decide which of his sons, Koretaka or Korehito, to name as his successor, and the True Word priest Shinzei offered prayers for the elder son Koretaka, while the Tendai priest Eryō prayed for Korehito. Prince Korehito was chosen and became the fifty-sixth sovereign, Emperor Seiwa.

8. According to The Genkō Era Biographies of Eminent Priests, when Akirakeiko, the consort of Emperor Uda (r. 887–897), suffered from a strange illness in 893, the Tendai priest Sō’ō prayed to the wisdom king Immovable for her recovery. He received an oracle from the wisdom king that the evil spirit of the deceased True Word priest Shinzei had taken possession of her and that Sō’ō could overpower the evil spirit by carrying out a prayer ceremony. Because of Sō’ō’s prayers, the consort immediately recovered.


10. According to the “Emerging from the Earth” (15th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni says that the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are his original disciples whom he has been teaching since long ago. Maitreya is perplexed, asking to know how, in the mere forty-odd years since his awakening, Shakyamuni has managed to teach so many countless bodhisattvas. The “three exhortations and four entreaties,” which is mentioned subsequently, means that before Shakyamuni answers Maitreya’s question and reveals his original enlightenment in the remote past in the following “Life Span” chapter, at the beginning of the chapter three times he has exhorted the assembly led by Maitreya to believe his words, and four times they have entreated the Buddha to preach and vowed to accept his words.

11. Lotus Sutra, chap. 17. This chapter follows the “Life Span” chapter.
12. This refers to an occurrence in the “Expeditious Means” (2nd) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. Shakyamuni refused three times to proceed with his preaching about the replacement of the three vehicles with the one vehicle, and Shāriputra entreated him four times to continue to preach.


15. See eight phases of a Buddha’s existence in Glossary.

16. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

17. Ibid., chap. 21.

18. The mandalas of the Ten Worlds may refer to the two mandalas of esoteric Buddhism—the Womb Realm mandala and the Diamond Realm mandala. The thirty-seven honored ones mean the Buddhas and bodhisattvas depicted in the center of the Diamond Realm mandala. They are also thought to refer to the mandalas of esoteric Buddhism that depict the respective beings of the Ten Worlds.