

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

RISSHO ANKOKU RON or *Establish the Right Law and Save our Country*. By Nichiren. Translated by Senchu Murano. Published by Nichiren shu Headquarters, Tokyo, 1977. Introduction + 39 pp. .

Despite the fact that a number of excellent introductions to Nichiren's (1222-1282) life and teaching have been available to Western readers since the early part of this century, the most outstanding among them no doubt being Anesaki Masaharu's *Nichiren, the Buddhist Prophet* (Oxford, 1916), to many in the West Nichiren may still remain an enigmatic figure. This translation of his *Risshō ankoku ron* ("Establish the Right Law, Save the Country") could perhaps serve to further a fuller understanding of this great religious teacher, who was one of the leading masters of the reformation which swept through Japan in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The thesis of this tract is that the nation, in order to save itself from destruction, must establish itself on the basis of the Buddha-dharma or Right Law. Nichiren was thirty-eight at the time he presented this tract to the Kamakura shogunate in 1260. In retrospect, his words seem to presage the imminent Mongol invasion some twenty years later. Though ostensibly submitted to the shogunate as a criticism of their policy, it does not take the form ordinarily found in such polemical works but is written as a series of dialogues. These dialogues, nine in all, take place between a wayfarer and a master. The former is a lay Buddhist with Pure Land leanings who is at first suspicious of the master, who is Nichiren himself. In the course of the exchanges, the process of conversion is depicted in which the Pure Land devotee is transformed into a staunch believer in the Lotus Sutra doctrines expounded by Nichiren. The conversational style in which *Risshō ankoku ron* is written has no doubt contributed much to making it accessible to a wide circle of readers through the centuries.

To the best of my knowledge, *Risshō ankoku ron* was first translated into English by Ehara Ryozui, entitled "Selections from Nichiren's Writings: On the Establishment of Righteousness and the Security of the Country," *Young East*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Summer 1936, pp. 16-27). Although I have not been able to compare the two translations in detail, I think it can be said that Murano's is an improvement on the earlier work in that it supplies the reader with copious footnotes that should prove valuable in helping the Western reader, especially the student of Buddhism, gain a fuller understanding of Nichiren's teachings.

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