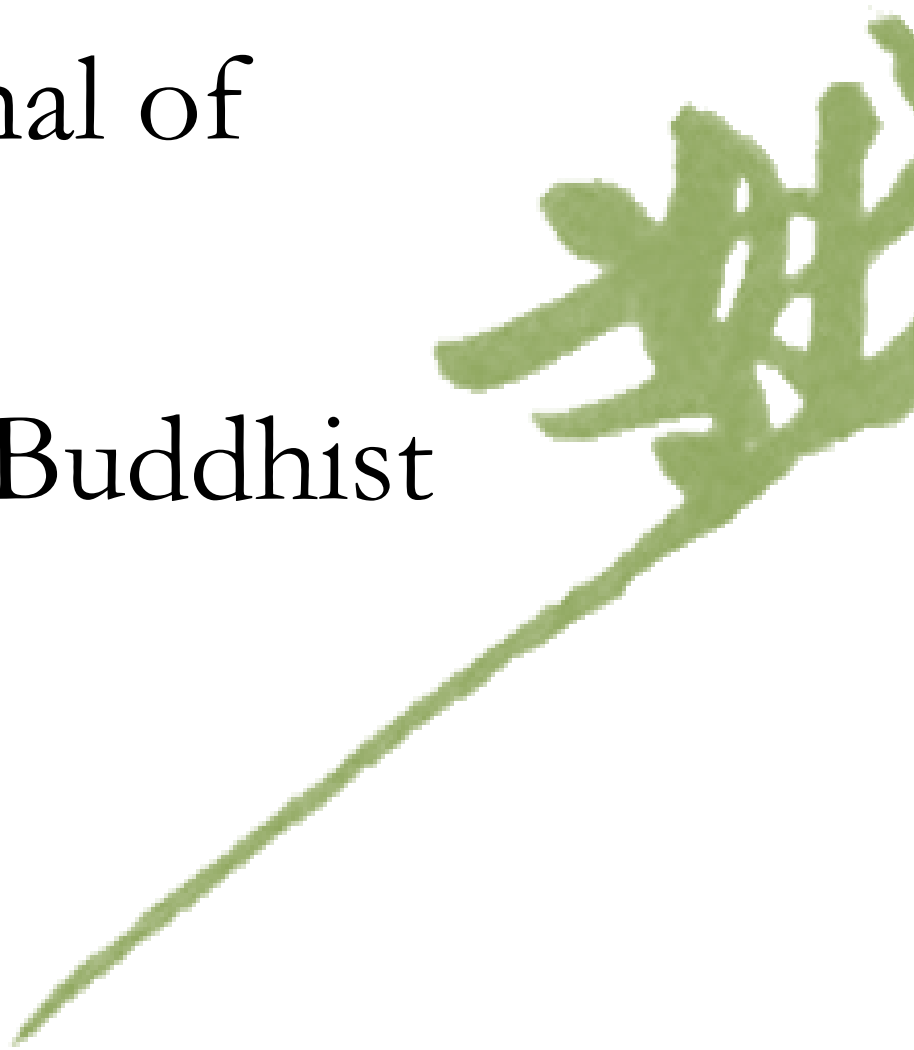


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**Diverse ideologies in the Nichiren parish:
“Ikeda-ism”, “Nikken-sect”, “Minobu-faction” and the “others”.**
Essay by Ken Mandara, The Nichiren Mandala Study Workshop

Summary

While competing for shrinking membership within the different Nichiren *sanghas*, all are facing the same challenges of every religious corporation, traditional or new alike. The so-called *millennials* have a completely different approach to spirituality. Nichiren *sanghas* need to come to terms with a new way of actively practicing religious faith in modern times. Dogmas cannot be justified anymore in an era of widely available information and need to be addressed with sincerity.

In times of news that can be easily fabricated (*fake-news*), people all the more want to see real *human thickness* and *substance* over theology. For sure, every global issue is more multi-faceted than it appears to be by viewing it just from an angle, but in an epoch where *organized* religion has lost its meaning, particularly *millennials* are in need for clear-cut answers.

Those born in the XX century have reached a level of maturity were they either believe without questioning the way that was taught to them or developed an own set of beliefs within a certain current. There is no room for fundamentalism and no antidote to these global trends. Only the groups that follow suit may have a chance in the future, while others may hardly survive the first millennium of Nichiren’s Buddhism, other than perhaps in the form of a tourist attraction or a very restricted number of hardliners.

The very role of traditional Buddhism is being mainly concerned with practical aspects of afterlife, that are funerals and graveyards. In Japan, this business is being increasingly taking over by *non-affiliated* services. These are plain of multi-story constructions built in easily accessible urban areas with a *butsudan*-like (Buddhist home-altar) space that contains the ashes of the defunct. This saves cost and space and can even be remotely-accessed via internet. The physical grave at a temple is not necessary anymore and so is the interaction with the clergy. A business firm administers the whole service with manageable costs and practical benefits. This frees the descendants from the obligation of belonging to the same congregation of their ancestors, as it is the case in many Japanese families. Young people are so uninterested in religion that many have no clue to what Buddhist school their parents or grandparents are affiliated to.

The challenges lies in creating a sense of belonging to a certain school, rejuvenating rituals and creating new paradigms in a constantly changing world. The following essay analyzes the *status quo* of some major Nichiren congregations, with a particular focus, but not limited to the Fuji School.

Definition of religious corporations

In common language the term *shinkō-shūkyō*, meaning "newly arisen", indicates recently established religious corporations versus the traditional Shintō and Buddhist schools. However, a group like Tenrikyō, a Shintō-based belief, is considered a typical example of *shinkō-shūkyō*, even if it has arisen in the late Edo period. This perception is the same also for Sōkagakkai and Risshō Kōseikai, both established between the two world wars, but almost a century ago. While not commonly used even in academic jargon, there is however a distinction between the "old-new" and the "new-new". These would be for example God-Light-Association (GLA) or Kōfuku-no-Kagaku (Happy Science) founded in 1969 and 1986 respectively.

Japan's purge against new religious movements traces its origin much earlier than the current dislike in popular media. The Tokugawa shogunate already forbade the establishment of such groups outside the traditional system, which was strictly regulated. The laity for example needed a non-Christianity certificate issued by a local temple, but by the end of the Edo period, new religious congregations based on Shintō beliefs started to appear. After the Meiji restoration (1868-1912) some of them gained considerable membership. With the westernization of Japan, several newspapers were founded and such new religions would feed the needs for sensationalism and gossip, a pattern that continues to the present day. The mixture of scandal, exposure and fabricated news has been proven valid since the early 1900s. In order to counter potential threats to the social system, the government began to strictly regulate religious activity and several *shinkō-shūkyō* founders were arrested. With the end of the last war, the crime of *lèse majesté* was abolished and these forefathers could walk out prison in 1945.

In Japanese society, *shinkō-shūkyō* is generally synonym of deception, brainwashing and swindle, while after the Aum Shinrikyō attempted mass-murder case the negative association has become even stronger than before. At best, a person declaring his affiliation with a *shinkō-shūkyō* would raise eyebrows in a similar manner that would a membership with the Jehovah's Witnesses in many western countries. This regardless of how many famous entertainers in the show-business publicly declare their particular affiliation, including international stars. On the other hand, traditional Shrine Shintō and sectarian Buddhism are generally well accepted, even if excessive show of devotion does not always meet with favor. The majority of Japanese regard Shrine Shintō as a service-provider for festive traditional rites such as *hatsu miyamairi* (first shrine visit of newborn infants), *shichi-go-san* (celebration for seven, five, and three years of age) and weddings. There is no indoctrination, reading of scriptures or affiliation required as with Christian rites and people turn to Buddhist temples for funeral services, including the inscription of a posthumous name on a *toba*-tablet (transliteration of Buddhist stupa). These services have been recently extended also to home-pets. Active members of sectarian Nichiren Buddhism however, tend to have all these ceremonies conducted at their family temple. Japanese are said to be syncretic by nature and disinterested in spirituality. However large urban centers are filled with people who engage in palm readings and physiognomy, and perform various kinds of divination and faith healing. It is not infrequent that people turn to them for lifestyle advice and personal counselling.

The case of major Nichiren-inspired groups

The derogatory terms mentioned in the title, refer to religious corporations as they are being named by their *opponents*. Although contemptible, such antagonism shall not be taken directly at face-value. This point however is fairly understood and such terms, not offensive per se, are merely an attempt to create a sense of legitimacy versus the *other* group, implying the supposed *deviation* of the *others* from the correct interpretation of Nichiren's teaching. Lucia Dolce and Jaqueline Stone have amply discussed that even Nichiren's harsh invective against the Tendai patriarchs Ennin (Jikaku) and Enchin (Chishō) was part of a strategy of legitimation for his own teaching, which owed much to its roots in both Tendai and esoteric *Taimitsu* doctrines. Although this might somehow be an overly simplification, rebuking of the *other* is a common pattern in most Nichiren-inspired groups, particularly those in the Fuji School.

Some lay organizations within the Nichiren tradition were originally affiliated with traditional sectarian Buddhist groups to become later independent. Prominent cases are Sōkagakkai-Nichirenshōshū, Nisshō Kōseikai-Nichirenshū and Hokkeshū-Honmon Butsuryūshū although the latter is a clergy-centered group with a *danka* (family association) system. The *Shūkyō taikan* survey states that in the year Sōkagakkai was established, Nichirenshōshū was managing less than seventy temples with about 80,000 *Hokekō danka* affiliates. After sixty years of cooperation with Sōkagakkai, the Agency for Cultural Affairs stated that the temples had increased to 645 and the membership of Sōkagakkai less surged to 17.7 million members. While the number of temples might be accurate, the real membership can be estimated between three and five million. It was hence only expected that Sōkagakkai started to pose a threat to the Nichirenshōshū clergy. The 66th High Priest Hosoi Nittatsu promptly created a dogma prohibition to photograph the mandala issued by Nichirenshōshū in order to prevent a possible bypassing by Sōkagakkai. Unless Nagamatsu Nissen, initiator of Honmon Butsuryūshū, Sōkagakkai founding fathers Makiguchi Tsunesaburō, Toda Jōsei and Ikeda Daisaku were not ordained clerics. Hence they seemed not to pose a possible danger to the authority of Nichirenshōshū in the same way that Nagamatsu Nissen was for Honmon Hokkeshū. Honmon Butsuryūshū, Kokuchūkai (later Risshō Ankokukai) and Reiyūkai were reformist groups with a distinct orientation towards laicism. Such sentiments could flourish within the paradigm created, among others, by Honda Nisshō who advocated a socially engaged Buddhism.

Ikeda-ism is used to refer to the Sōkagakkai and its sister-organizations to underline that their affiliates follow of a *distorted* doctrine created by its honorary president Ikeda Daisaku and label it as a *cult*. The *distortion* would be Ikeda's focus on original Sōkagakkai concepts such as the *Human Revolution* and the *Sanctity of Life* as well the SGI "Seven Bells of Peace" program, for whose implementation Nichirenshōshū has no primary role. In turn the Sōkagakkai names the Nichirenshōshū clergy as *Nikken-sect*, implying that the schism between the two organizations, that where once interdependent, occurred under the leadership of the then 67th Abbot of Taisekiji head temple Abe Nikken, considered the sole responsible for the rupture. This would imply that the Sōkagakkai-Nichirenshōshū cooperation would be essentially correct, if it were not for the *distortions* of Abe Nikken. Those would be concepts such as the *infallibility of the High Priest* and a diametrically opposite interpretation of *Kōsen-Rufu*. Literally the term means widespread

declaration [of the Lotus teachings], but for Sōkagakkai it became synonymous of World Peace, given that a third of the population would indeed convert, another third will be favorable to it and the rest against, departing from the absolutistic view of other religious groups. At the time, Nichirenshōshū advocated that the Japanese emperor shall convert to Nichirenshōshū. An original Nichiren mandala was designated to be enshrined in the *Shishinden* Throne Hall at the Imperial Palace in Kyoto (see *The Mandala in Nichiren Buddhism* 2:156-158). While the breakup indeed occurred under the tenure of Abe, the fundamental discrepancies became evident under his predecessor Hosoi Nittatsu and are amply documented elsewhere. The two groups could not remain united for any longer than they have already been and their parting ways was beneficial to both. When the two groups separated, Sōkagakkai put their extremely efficient organizational mechanism in place, to avoid drainage of its members towards the Hokke-kō *danto* parish organizations. The campaign was meticulous and successful, but with the fundamental flaw of using the same rhetoric of Nichirenshōshū. Since then Sōkagakkai has been increasingly looking *inward*, constantly battling *outside* enemies such as Nichirenshōshū and the negative tabloid press. This in turn provided unity to the group and a sense of legitimation for being *attacked*. As it will be discussed later, the causes for stagnant membership and continuous stigmatization in society however do not lie in the conflict with Nichirenshōshū.

The *Minobu-faction* is generally used in the Fuji School, especially by both of the above congregations to refer to the Nichirenshū group, whose head temple Kuon-ji is located at Minobu. Nichirenshū is rebuked by the Fuji School for *misunderstanding* and *distorting* Nichiren's teachings and original intent. While such diatribe finds its origins in the very first schism in the Nichiren early community set forth by Byakuren Ajari Nikkō, the controversy was exacerbated by Nikkō's later disciples. His hard stance towards his former peers, as enunciated in the *Gonin-shoba-shō* (Refuting the Five Priests) by Nichijun of Kitayama Honmon-ji in 1326, best describes the origins of such still ongoing animosity. A main point of contention is the controversy of the *Original Buddha* being identified with either Nichiren or the Eternal Śākyamuni. Such ideas took shape way after Nichiren and his direct disciples passed away and are just another example of strategies for legitimation.

Since the group dynamics have changed, Sōkagakkai has no further need to confute Nichirenshū and instead is trying to find ways to collaborate, at least on a scholarly level. Curious enough, the Sōkagakkai's Soka University does not have a course for studying Nichiren Buddhism, but only Tendai. Some research is done by the Institute of Oriental Philosophy (IOP), without touching dogmatic themes that were taboo during the partnership with Nichirenshōshū. In any case, at least public invective of Sōkagakkai towards other Nichiren groups have ceased completely. Still many affiliates remember the old dogmas about *others* not regarding Nichiren as the *Original Buddha* and interpreting his Buddhism from a *distorted* point of view. Sōkagakkai however has different priorities in the second decade of the new millennium and will probably mend their ties in the future. Nichirenshū in turn is experiencing a slow, but nevertheless dramatic increase of their overseas presence. In areas with a history of strong Japanese immigration, such as Brazil, Hawaii and California, Nichirenshū has deep roots. Around the turn of the century however, several disgruntled Sōkagakkai (SGI) affiliates worldwide had either turned to independent groups or directly to Nichirenshū. The initial drain however attracted also several new affiliates who were interested in Buddhism, but hesitant due to the negative reputation of Sōkagakkai for being too restrictive, exclusivist and harsh toward any other form of spirituality including self-

healing formats such as meditation, Yoga or *Reiki*. The affiliation to Nichirenshū is way more loose and open than Sōkagakkai. It is not uncommon for it's parish to follow other spiritual interests in shamanism, copying of sutras or even going to church and taking part in different rituals outside the Nichiren tradition. In Asian countries, Nichirenshū could take advantage of their clerical status which provides as sort of neutrality, versus the Sōkagakkai which has a very *Japanese* image, as their political arm Kōmei (Clean Government) may or may not influence decisions by the Japanese government that could affect neighboring countries. More young people are being spiritual, but in a new and different way that Nichirenshū seems more willing to adapt to than Sōkagakkai, not to speak of Nichirenshōshū. Nichiren however, never referred to himself as neither the *Original Buddha* nor a Bodhisattva, but just as a *Votary of the Lotus Sūtra* although he seemed to imply that his mission in this world was to fulfill the mission of Viśistacāritra (Jōgyō), as hinted in some of his writings and a specific holographic mandala (see *The Mandala in Nichiren Buddhism* 1:94-96), on which he explicitly mentions Viśistacāritra as being the one who propagates this teaching.. In the Lotus Sūtra, Viśistacāritra is described as leading the *Bodhisattvas of the Earth* in the achievement of *Kōsen-Rufū*. While such doctrinal issues will not be discussed here as these are well known, it is certainly useful to analyze the dynamics of such ongoing debate that hinders to a harmonization within the Nichiren community in a precise historical moment where religious strife is endemic in the world.

Until 1991 Sōkagakkai and Nichirenshōshū (Taiseki-ji) considered themselves as two aspects or branches of the same entity, yet their understanding of how to achieve a common goal was indeed different from the very beginning. Their goals were even not the same at all, except the obvious one of increasing membership. Since the two head temples Taiseki-ji and Kuon-ji (Minobu) were in competition, the enthusiastic zeal of Sōkagakkai lay devotees was used by Taiseki-ji as a tool to confute the *distorted* views of Nichirenshū adherents. The *distortion* is based on the first schism in Nichiren's community caused by Byakuren Ajari Nikkō, but currently as Nichirenshū does not identify Nichiren the *Original Buddha*, as advocated by the Fuji school. Such enmity however should not be accepted as it appears to be, but rather deserves closer scrutiny.

Some decades earlier Nichirenshōshū, Nichirenshū and other Nichiren groups joined efforts to have Nichiren officially named Great Teacher Risshō (Risshō Daishi) by the Taishō Emperor on the 700th anniversary of his birth on 16.02.1922. A second-generation disciple in Kyoto, Daikaku Myōjitsu (1297~1364) had already succeeded in having Nichiren named Great Bodhisattva by the imperial court, but such title was not recognized by all other Nichiren groups unanimously. Moreover, while Emperor Go-Daigo had awarded Nichiren's direct disciple Higo Ajari Nichizō with the title of *Shikai Shodo* (missionary to the whole world), the Tembun Hokke Rebellion of 1536 definitively hampered the hegemonic expansion of the Nichiren group in the capital.

Currently the eight Fuji temples are affiliated to five different schools:

- Taiseki-ji and Myōren-ji = Nichirenshōshū.
- Kitayama Homon-ji, Itō Jissō-ji and Fujisan Kuon-ji = Nichirenshū
- Nishiyama Honmon-ji = Hokkeshū, Kōmon faction
- Kyoto Yōhō-ji = Nishiren Honshū
- Hota Myōhon-ji = independent, formerly Nichirenshōshū

Kitayama Homon-ji, the former Omosu seminary for study and training priests established by Byakuren Ajari Nikkō is actually the original main temple of the Fuji School, Myōren-ji the former residence of lay supporter Nanjō Tokimitsu and Taiseki-ji his family temple. Nishiyama, Yōhō-ji and Myōhon-ji were all established by Nikkō's disciples.

Some of the minor temples changed affiliation several times, but their respective Abbots often tenured on a rotation basis at different religious corporations with somehow differing doctrines, although the mandalas were all inscribed in the same manner, given some insignificant differences. Sōkagakkai in turn vehemently used to attack and engage in debate members of the rivaling lay organization Risshō Kōseikai. When the founder Nikkyō Niwano passed away in 1999 however, the fifth Sōkagakkai president Einosuke Akiya was officially present with high ranking representatives. Sōkagakkai used to be very critical of the small group that comprises Nishiyama Honmon-ji and its few branch temples, while the clergy of Taiseki-ji, Myōren-ji, Nishiyama and Omosu Kitayama were on friendly terms personally. It must be considered that these temples are located at close range within a rural area. While Nichiren's Buddhism has witnessed an unprecedented internationalization, the Fuji district still remains very countrified and conservative. To spread such dogmatism into the global community can be perhaps considered as one major *faux-pas*.

Within the network of Nichiren's sangha, there are many ramifications, schisms and sub-groups competing for a shrinking membership. While promoting their own publications, religious corporations discourage objective study using powerful anchors such as various dogmas. One notable example would be the prohibition in the Taiseki-ji group to photograph the mandala Gohonzon worshipped by Nichiren followers. Consequently, since Sōkagakkai has sustained this view for sixty years, it has yet to come to terms with this issue. Regarding the background of this particular prohibition, please refer to the article *The mandalas of SGI and Nichiren-Shoshu in recent history* by Ken Mandara, NMSW.

The Nichirensōshū group had other affiliated organizations parallel to the Sōkagakkai. A large group is represented by the Fuji Taiseki-ji Kenshōkai, formerly Myōshinkō. This organization is said to count over one million affiliates and is the most conservative group guided, as in the case of Risshō Kōseikai, by a family lineage. After strongly criticizing the construction of a large temple building known as Shō-Hondō, mainly with donations of Sōkagakkai, Myōshinkō was excommunicated by Nichirensōshū and later renamed itself Kenshōkai. The structural organizations of Risshō Kōseikai, Sōkagakkai and Kenshōkai are relatively similar, while doctrinally the first is being the very liberal and the latter utmost conservative. Their hierarchical structure is the same as in every Japanese organization, association or any private corporation.

Kenshōkai, another lay organization established in 1942 by Asai Jinbe, traditionally uses a classical mandala Gohonzon issued by Taiseki-ji temple. Kenshōkai, Nichirensōshū and Sōkagakkai are hence using the same type of scroll for their daily worship. The organization was granted several mandalas, such as from the 28th Abbot Nisshō, 54th Nichiin, 55th Nippu, 56th Nichiō, 60th Nichikai, 62nd Nikkyō and 64th Abbot Nisshō, the same who bestowed the special Gohonzon dedicated to Sōkagakkai. The two rivaling groups were both present at main events at the Nichirensōshū head temple, but Kenshōkai fiercely opposed the construction of the Shō-Hondō building. The controversy actually caused Myōshinkō to disband in 1974 and regroup as

Kenshōkai. Their actual leader Shōhei Asai, also referred to as “sensei” (teacher or master) is the founder’s son. It must be understood that in Japan addressing someone as sensei is relatively common, in fact it is the case for diet members. Controversies around the Shō-Hondō building, especially the opening ceremony speech by Ikeda Daisaku, caused also difficulties to Sōkagakkai. Ikeda was forced to step down from several leadership positions, including representing all lay believers of Nichirenshōshū and was *demoted* to Sōkagakkai honorary president, leaving the seat for Hōjō Hiroshi. Being later appointed president of SGI, the global umbrella organization of all Sōkagakkai groups overseas, originally established in Guam as International Buddhist League (IBL) in 1975, Ikeda concentrated his efforts outside Japan. His initially broader IBL idea, suggesting a much wider spectrum, was perhaps hampered by conservative forces advocating a more exclusivist stance, rather than the *Sanctity of Life* promoted by Ikeda. Meanwhile, Sōkagakkai took steps to become independent, since the divergences with Nichirenshōshū were becoming incompatible. Afterwards Sōkagakkai changed the arrangement of their daily worship (while being the same base as Nichirenshōshū), shortening it to a format more suitable for the times and an international membership. Later it became completely autonomous in bestowing the mandala Gohonzon and built their sacred space and cathedral in Shinanomachi, Tokyo.

From “new” to “normalization”

Since the involvement of Ikeda in SGI activities overseas, its worldwide presence grew exponentially. While remaining relatively stagnant in Japan, progressively the *Sōka ideals* gained more visibility, gradually replacing the mere study of Nichiren’s doctrine. Such ideas were referred as Ikeda-*ism* by the clergy while hostile press and other clerical congregations mocked the term, referring that the ideas such as *Human Revolution* and non-exclusivism implied in converting only one-third of the population were a *deviation* from traditional sectarian Buddhism. Every religious group, as it was the case for Nichiren’s *sangha* in the XIII century, needs to undergo a “normalization” process in order to be part in a societal routine. The consequent challenge would be to avoid the stagnation resulting from diminishing religious fervor and the tendency to resemble traditional sectarian Buddhism. One catalyst of *normalization* is often the passing of a founder and in the case of Sōkagakkai the baton has been already passed on to three masters Makiguchi-Toda and Ikeda, who would for a sort of triumvirate or three-pillars of faith. In order to preserve the driving force within a religious group, doctrines needs to be systematized and the founders idealized. The majority of other groups have created succession lines within family lines such as sons, daughters, adopted children and wives. In this hindsight Sōkagakkai is somehow unique.

Nevertheless, to undergo a *normalization* process the forefathers will be highly idealized and all sorts of “tales” will be created. Perhaps not as part of a precise strategy, but naturally by the surviving disciples who have met them and the later generation that had contact with those *outstanding* devotees until after a century the idealized figures may become mystical and without errors, almost possessing supernatural powers. This point however is not limited to *shinkō-shūkyō*, but a matter of fact not necessarily essential in this context.

While increasingly idealizing the last founding father Ikeda, Sōkagakkai is still in the process of institutionalizing several doctrinal issues, trying to create their own tradition without contrasting too markedly with the tenets of Nichirenshōshū which were previously followed with zeal and diligence. While the mandala Gohonzon is still be central to daily worship, the authenticity of the so-called *Dai-Gobonzon* (see NMSW) of Nichirenshōshū is not directly challenged, but is made a secondary issue. This because the organization is waiting to sanctify the mandala bestowed upon Sōkagakkai on 19.05.1951 by Mizutani Nisshō, 64th Abbot of Taiseki-ji. The original matrix is actually protected by copyright and an ancient specimen by the 26th Abbot of Taiseki-ji is currently used. This point has been already discussed in *The mandalas of SGI and Nichiren-Shoshu in recent history*. The wooden plank carved from original matrix, is currently being worshipped at one the Sōkagakkai halls in the same manner that used to be for the *Dai-Gobonzon* of Nichirenshōshū, with the additional feature of reciting the Sūtra with the recorded voice of Ikeda. Here the same principle of Eternal Return (see also *The mandalas in Nichiren Buddhism*, Vol. 1) applies. The catalytic event for Sōkagakkai that crystallizes the mentor or Master-Disciple relationship (*Shitei-funi*), a core principle in Sōkagakkai was the so-called Kansai campaign. Under the directive of Jōsei Toda and the leadership of Ikeda Daisaku, the organization achieved 750,000 converts during the so-called Kansai campaign. More than the Makiguchi-Toda relationship, it was this particular event that sanctioned the Toda-Ikeda *Shitei-funi* relationship. The physical object of worship (*Honzon*) is embodied in the wooden plank and by reciting the Sūtra with the recorded voice of Ikeda, believers can eternally return to this event that will be even more mythicized in the future. Not specifically worshipped *as* Bodhisattvas like the case of Risshō Kōseikai, but central in the core beliefs are hence the Three Presidents, Tsunesaburō Makiguchi, Jōsei Toda and Daisaku Ikeda. Such concept will see further doctrinal development in the future, perhaps after the passing of the last founding president Ikeda. The three have been however already included in the daily worship in the form of a silent prayer, a certain form of canonization is thus not to be excluded. There are striking similarities with the sanctification of Niwano Nikkyō and Naganuma Myōkō of Risshō Kōseikai that has likewise distanced from the clergy of Nichirenshū. Risshō Kōseikai, is a schism from the lay Nichiren group Reiyūkai and in the past used to worship a mandala *Gobonzon* typical of the Nichiren tradition, but later changed to an effigy of Śākyamuni sometime flanked by his four attendants, Bodhisattvas Jōgyō, Muhengyō, Anryūgyō and Jōgyō. The founders Naganuma Myōkō and Niwano Nikkyō were given a Bodhisattva status and their names are usually enshrined inside the home altars of believers.

Judging by the above organizational moves, a common pattern can be observed. As in other Nichiren *sangha* from the XIV century onwards, rivaling for status head temple in all groups has been amply documented. The main centers contending for power were Ikegami (Honmon-ji, Hondo-ji and Chōkōzan Myōhon-ji), Nakayama Hokekyō-ji with its sub-temples and the Fuji School (mainly the five Fuji temples). The spin-off in the western capital of Kyoto started another form of competition with the *Shijō* and *Rokujō* lineages, originally transferred from the Kantō and the successively formed Hokke lineages that originated directly in Kyoto. One attempt to cease religious strife was made in the XV century with the short-lived Kanshō accord of 1466, followed by another attempt in 1564, when fifteen temples signed the Eiroku treaty, but the *Fuju-Fuse* stance (Not-Giving-Not-Receiving to *infidels*) served as a powerful dividing force. While such attitude in the end caused immense suffering among the parish, the fundamentalist clergy was more than willing to immolate themselves on the example set forth by Kuonjō'in “*Nabekannmur*” Nisshin. Several different traditions, with the exception of the Fuji and Hokke lineages, were

incorporated into Nichirenshū and have somehow managed to harmonize very different sub-schools into one large religious group providing a simple, but convincing identity under the general name of Nichirenshū. While “*shū*” simply means religious group and not *sect* as in the somehow western derogatory term, it is devoid of all supplementary connotations such as *shōshū* (orthodox), *hōshū* (real, truthful) or the identification with a certain stream or faction such as *ha* or *ryū* preceded by the founder’s name.

Hence the pejorative terms *Ikeda-ism* is implying that the honorary president of Sōkagakkai has distorted the orthodox teaching established by Nichirenshōshū. Likewise, *Nikken-shū* denotes that the orthodoxy of Nichirenshōshū has been slanted by Abe Nikken while both refer to *Minobu-faction* to underline that this group is misguided in principle. This because the Fuji School asserts that Byakuren Ajari Nikkō is the sole heir and legitimate successor of Nichiren, while other disciples, the elders or the mid-tier, have all betrayed their master’s true intention. The major differences in matters of worship have been already discussed in *The Mandala in Nichiren Buddhism*, third volume.

Nichirenshū has managed to keep its distance from overt controversy up to this point. However, it is foreseeable that, due to the constant influx from former non-Japanese devotees of both Nichirenshōshū and Sōkagakkai along with their group-cultural backbone, controversy and debate might rise. Nichirenshū could sublimate religious strife through centuries of harsh persecution while Nichirenshōshū and Sōkagakkai still base their rhetoric on a *right-vs.-wrong* approach. Other corporations in the Nichiren universe are the Hokkeshū with its various subjects and Honmon Butsuryūshū, also a schism from Hokkeshū. Butsuryūshū has recently ventured on the international stage expanding in societies where Nichiren Buddhism is already well known, having already taken roots in Brazil as explained by Nakamaki Hirochika in *Japanese religions at home and abroad: anthropological perspectives*. Their approach to Buddhism is not dissimilar than the one of Sōkagakkai or Risshō Kōseikai. All these organizations actually owe their roots in the mid-Meiji trend towards a modernist, multicultural, wide-ranging lay Buddhism active in society. All Japanese Buddhist schools owe their purge from Edo-period superstitious Buddhism to priest-scholars like Inoue Enryō and Anshitsu Jitsuzen. They created fertile ground for Honda Nissei, Tanaka Chigaku, Tsunesaburō Makiguchi, Niwano Nikkyō to cultivate their ideas. What is currently regarded as new religion has hence more deep roots in Japanese history and cannot be simply dismissed as *Shinshūkyō*, an euphemism for cult. A general overview can be found in several publications such as *Japanese New Religions in the Age of Mass Media* by Inoue Nobutaka, while objective and substantiated analysis of the current Sōkagakkai situation has been scrutinized throughout in the essays *Why Did Ikeda Quit?* by Daniel A. Métraux, *Nichiren Modern Successors* by Jaqueline Stone and *Did Aum Change Everything?* By Levi Mclaughlin.

Status quo

Buddhism is said to be the teaching based on the sermons of Śākyamuni, who is generally – but not unequivocally – accepted as having existed as an historical figure. His teachings, the Sūtras, were not transmitted in written form, but orally conveyed for centuries. The Lotus Sūtra itself is widely believed to be the result of translations and additions occurred over at least five hundred years. The Chinese translation used in Japan at the time of Nichiren, based on the works of Kumārajīva is known to be very different from the supposed Sanskrit text, in itself already a translation from Pali. Nichiren also seems to hint at the fact that the rivalling teachings based on Kūkai's Mantrayana esoteric school, might have been a distortion in translation from the Lotus teachings, either including (adding) or excluding (withdrawing) Mūdras and Mantras. While such affirmation may be a tentative to refute esoteric teachings, it seems rather clear that Nichiren did not consider the Lotus – as in the form that was available to him – as the actual words of Śākyamuni. He seemed to have been aware that the Hokkekyō was a collective work finalized through the centuries, although he considered this scripture as final. In fact he often reiterates to consider each ideogram of the Sūtra as being a golden Buddha.

From this overly simplistic timeline, it becomes clear that between the spoken word of Śākyamuni and the teaching on which Nichiren based himself, there have been numerous renditions, additions and translations. However since the first generation disciples, that is the six elders and the eighteen mid-tier followers, as well as their later successors and reformers, up to the present-day religious corporations, all the interpretations of Nichiren have been widely documented. Yet the debates are such numerous that even classification itself presents a challenge and the different Nichiren-inspired factions are numerous.

After the Meiji revolution of the XIX century, lay Buddhist movements filled the void in response to the westernization of Japan and the purging of superstition from Buddhism that was inevitable for its very survival in the country. Since Buddhism was first introduced in Japan from the kingdom of Kudara (Baekje) in the VI century thanks to the support of prince Shōtoku, it had always met with opposition from many Japanese who considered Buddhism a foreign religion. Nichiren however generally considered the Chinese monk Jiàn Zhēn (Ganjin 688~763) as the one who brought Buddhism to Japan. While he was familiar with the *Nihonshoki* (Chronicles of Japan), Nichiren did not mention that the first Japanese Buddhists were actually the nun Zenshin and her two female followers Zenzō-ni and Enzen-ni, who were initially trained by the Korean ex-monk Hyep'yon (Ebin). According to the chronicles < *Buddhism in Japan began with this* >. It shall not be underestimated that Buddhism is de facto a foreign religion in Japan that met fierce resistance even during the Meiji restoration.

Hence after more than 1,200 years after its introduction to the country, Buddhism became accepted in Japan. Its secularization and modernization is widely thanks to early XX century thinkers, yet sometimes with diametrically opposed views, such as Honda Nisshō, Tanaka Chigaku, Makiguchi Tsunesaburo, Niwano Nikkyō and to some extent Kubo Kakutarō for the Nichiren schools. They were advocating a form of socially engaged Buddhism based on the teachings of Nichiren, who was unique in purging the teaching from superstition. Honda Nisshō is respected or revered in Nichirensū, particularly the stream of Minobusan Kuon-ji, Kenpon Hokkeshū (Myōman-ji) and Risshō Ankokukai. Tanaka Chigaku, the father of radical *Nichirenism*

has established Kokuchūkai (Pillar of the Nation Society) and later Risshō Ankokukai to which extent Tanaka has been a deleterious example, needs to be assessed within the context of the historical period he lived. Offshoots, counting each one million affiliates or much less are the Bussho Gonenkai Kyōdan, Myōchikai Kyōdan and Myōdōkai Kyōdan for Reyūkai and Kenshōkai for Nichirenshōshū. The largest groups are still led by descendants of the founders.

While the secularization of Nichiren Buddhist thought has been propaedeutic for its spreading to the rest of the world, it is undeniable that from the 21st century onwards, lay movements are increasingly juxtaposing their own interpretation claiming it to be the correct reading of Nichiren's teachings. Hence the mutual accusations of *Ikeda-ism*, *Nikken-sectarianism* and other negative epithets derive from the need of affirmation rather than genuine concern of orthodoxy. This might be in retrospective the same dynamic found in Nichiren's writings when he rebuked other schools he owed a doctrinal debt in order to affirm his teaching.

Similarly it can be observed that the harsh stance of lay Nichiren groups in post-war Japan has consistently softened, while it is still present on many levels in respect to taboos and prohibitions. Such rules however only remain in place to protect the contradictions of each group. One typical example would be the counterfeiting of the *Ikegami Sojō* and the *Minobu Sojō* (transmission documents from Nichiren to Nikkō) and the *Honmon Kaidan Daimandara* (the ur-Gohonzon) in the case of Nichirenshōshū. More nuanced cases would be the use of mandalas out of imitation mandala matrixes in Nichirenshū, although the Gohonzon is not so central in this group, hence there is no real contradiction.

Sōkagakkai striving for independence from Nichirenshōshū Taiseki-ji since the disagreement between Hosoi Nittatsu and Ikeda Daisaku, has taken a number of actions that were in contradiction with the doctrine adopted from Nichirenshōshū. While still adhering to the taboo of taking pictures of the mandala without an explicit permission from the clergy, Sōkagakkai photographed and reproduced seven plank mandalas. All but one were *duly* returned to Taiseki-ji, except the wooden mandala currently worshipped the newly constructed Hall of the Great Vow for Kosen-rufu, that has been built for purpose of legitimization. Once the original matrix can be freely distributed, the operation is completed and Sōkagakkai will achieve a status of full-fledged religious movement, since on top of the Nichiren tenets, it meets the basic requirements:

- *Sacred* compound for pilgrims, the Shinanomachi area.
- Unique relevant *honzon*, original matrix donated to Sōkagakkai by Mizutani Nisshō.
- Main Sanctuary, the *Hall of the Great Vow for Kosen-rufu*

Once the above physical location and *honzon* have been legitimized, the distinctive ideas of the Three Founding Presidents, namely Makiguchi, Toda and Ikeda would be fully materialized. In such perspective it is totally irrelevant which object is genuine or not, being it the plank mandala or the later writings attributed to Ikeda Daisaku, perhaps being composed by one or more ghost-writers. Ikeda is already too debilitated for composing essays and a distinctive change in the choice of his wording can be observed from the early 2000s. While researchers might one day analyze the huge collection of essays attributed to Ikeda, their findings will be restricted to a relatively small circle of academics, if ever. Anything that would be seen to discredit Ikeda will be dismissed false accusations of those trying to undermine his noble intentions. In the best case,

other groups will try to keep out of a controversy that has no way to be clarified because such rhetoric is simply feeding on itself. Sōkagakkai would hence achieve all its goals by skillfully using (peaceful) expedient means. Such pragmatism is to be viewed within the Japanese logic that uses a completely different set of moral values than in the West, which tends to be more yes/no or black/white. Japan for example is home to the *Tatemaie/Hon'ne* common sense meaning implicit (generally accepted) understanding versus official behavior. While Sōkagakkai would be very keen on abiding to the taboos adopted by Taiseki-ji, the objective reality of their situation does not allow it. The first attempt of Sōkagakkai to gain some grade of independence from Taiseki-ji in the 1970s was unsuccessful and resulted in a publicly announced “Pilgrimage of Apology”, by their leadership. While the details were not elaborated in the Sōkagakkai official new organ the *Seikyō* paper, the fact was not kept secret from the membership. The second attempt in the early 1990s was to purchase an original Nichiren mandala Gohonzon from Jūsen-ji temple in Chiba, who rejected the deal and instead accused Sōkagakkai of trying to steal the scroll at knifepoint, which is however very unlikely. While the large mandalas bestowed upon Makiguchi Tsunesaburō or Toda Jōsei must have been considered as viable options, finally the third effort was successful. A matrix inscribed by the 26th Taiseki-ji Abbot Nichikan was not donated physically, but granted for reproduction by the chief priest of a local Nichirenshōshū temple, sympathetic with the Sōkagakkai. This move has stirred a long controversy based on the Taiseki-ji rhetoric over counterfeiting the mandala Gohonzon distributed to the Sōkagakkai membership, but so far the response internal to the group has been positive.

Although such information was only leaked over the internet, Sōkagakkai has applied for patent copyright of the original mandala Gohonzon bestowed upon the group in 1951 in occasion of their large proselytization efforts known in the Sōkagakkai history as the *Kansai campaign*, marking the accomplishment of *shiteifuni*, the sublimation of master-disciple relationship between Toda and Ikeda. The object of devotion that inspired this historical achievement in propagation of Nichiren's teaching is seen as an actual proof of the Sōkagakkai inheritance (*Kechimyaku*) of his true will and intent. Considering themselves hence legitimized as the only modern heirs, Sōkagakkai will thus continue to strive for achieving their goals of widespread propagation of its teaching, which is basically the osmosis between the open approach of Horigome Nichijun and the Theory of Value of Makiguchi Tsunesaburō. Horigome's group provided for a religious construct and worship methodology, while Toda at first and most of all Ikeda infused new universal values in order to be accepted worldwide.

However, in the recent decades all the shortcomings of lay group organizations came to light. The oldest groups such as Kokuchūkai and Risshō Ankokukai are almost on the verge of disappearance, although the latter do in fact possess three original Nichiren mandalas and some holographic manuscript fragments. Their core conservative nature and lack of international membership prevents these groups from rejuvenating and further development. Both Sōkagakkai and Risshō Kōseikai instead face another daunting task. The baby-boom and the post (economic)-bubble generations have completely lost their interest in organized religious groups. The 1990s incidents caused by Aum Shinrikyōkai were a definitive blow to any such movement, regardless if their intentions were genuine or merely profit oriented.

Yet the more recent surge of another lay organization named Kōfuku-no-Kagaku, established in the 1980s, even though it is widely criticized as a cult, could persuade many adherents. Their

centers are visibly located in prime areas of important cities and the success shows that the Japanese are still interested in spirituality, but presented in a different way.

The other challenge for Sōkagakkai and Risshō Kōseikai is their greying membership, which also reflects the same problem in Japanese society as a whole. As already described elsewhere, those who have actually met all the three Sōkagakkai presidents remain very few. Among them, notably Ikeda Kaneko, wife of Daisaku, who met Makiguchi in her childhood and married to Ikeda with the blessing of Toda. While she and their two sons are active in the organization, there are no signs that they will succeed Ikeda Daisaku at the helm as in other groups. Even those with a personal connection to Ikeda, also among the membership overseas, are now middle-aged. The same is inevitably true also for the Risshō Kōseikai group. Facing with widespread disinterest or even mistrust and hostility in society these groups are now focusing inwards, trying to foster capable successors among their third generation devotees, who are historically proven to be the link in a chain of a lineage.

Their approaches are different, but both are being successful at reorganizing the respective doctrines, sanctifying their sacred areas (Shinanomachi and Nakano Hongo respectively) and in solving the problems related to the object of worship: Sōkagakkai by creating their own within the framework of original Taiseki-ji rhetoric and Risshō Kōseikai by eliminating the mandala Gohonzon altogether and substituting it with an easily reproducible effigy of Eternal Sākyamuni. While Sōkagakkai pursues their pacifistic goals, the political activity is clearly intermingled with the religious one. Sōkagakkai does not consider it as such, as the active support of Kōmei candidates is considered part of the duty of an Sōkagakkai supporter. Generally in front of every home altar that enshrines a Sōkagakkai issued mandala Gohonzon, members display various directives encouraging at victory of the designated candidates in their jurisdiction. The adherents do not see the deep contradiction in it, rather the opposite. During the tenure of Sōkagakkai second president Jōsei Toda, he openly declared that the Buddhist goal was to realize the doctrine of *obutsu-myōgō*, which is the implicit fusion of politics and religion.

It has been since one of the most essential and intriguing principles for an understanding of the Sōkagakkai, as explained by John Kie-Chang Oh in his article *The Fusion of Politics and Religion in Japan: the Sōka Gakkai-Komeito*.

Although later, Ikeda Daisaku softened and modernized the stance, it must be considered that every religious or cultural group is actively supporting a political party. The main conservative vote reservoir is found within Shintō adherents, which basically means all the Japanese not belonging to sectarian faith. All parishioners of the Fuji School, including Nichirenshōshū, Sōkagakkai and others for example cannot visit shrines. Pure Land parishioners, farmers who are usually pampered by generous subsidies, largely vote for the conservative LDP. The JCP is generally sustained by teachers or educators; hence the former ties with the Kōmei party.

Similarly as with the campaign for the Seikyō newspaper subscriptions, members do not force or openly solicit votes. Rather they use a sort of *point-system* figuratively named as “friendly dialogues” that would be simply explaining in a non-campaign atmosphere about the Kōmei point of view and enunciate their great achievements. In this sense it is an indirect support within the Japanese legal framework, but still an enormous vote-gathering machine that has no precedent in history.

Regarding the above mentioned Seikyō newspaper subscriptions, in the past these were actively and vigorously solicited by Sōkagakkai members. Later it was rather suggested to encourage the reading of its contents, as Sōkagakkai is convinced that the hostility towards them is caused by “misunderstanding” of their activities based on the negative tabloid press. Hence, rather than seeking subscriptions, many members take for example multiple subscriptions – such as five or ten – and place them outside their homes in a “please take free” basket. The hope is that many people will take a copy out of curiosity and through reading it, change their view of Sōkagakkai. However most of these contents tend to portray Ikeda as an idol thus unwittingly confirming the impression that it is in fact a sect run by Ikeda. In addition, the Seikyō is not even a “real” newspaper. While the society strata that tends to read or believe gossip tabloid press, will continue to remain convinced of their negative opinion, more cultivated, intellectual and international-minded people do likewise not have a positive opinion.

The Asia-Pacific Journal 13:41:1/2015 article by Levin Mc Laughlin explains in detail how Sōkagakkai activities mingles with politics and also accurately describes a first occurrence where Sōkagakkai members openly protested against Kōmei decisions to support the ruling coalition in the highly controversial “Right of Collective Defense” issue. Up to this time, most Sōkagakkai members have been mainly pampered with smaller tokens such as giveaways of some pocket-money for children and elderly, deliberately avoiding all unpopular and heavy-loaded issues such as the death penalty or abandoning nuclear power. Such problems are too complex for the unprepared Kōmei diet members: the current key figure Yamaguchi, was previously a Sōkagakkai young men division leader without the necessary experience and weight to tackle such delicate questions. Unwillingness of Kōmei and or Sōkagakkai to seek advice and counsel by accredited experts (who by definition tend to be *neutral* and *objective*) does not help the group to really take a lead on delicate, but key issues. Regarding major problems such as energy and environment, Kōmei offers only a mere lip-service, without pursuing real energy reforms even in spite of the great dangers of using nuclear power in an earthquake-prone country as Japan. This to avoid collision with a huge number of powerful industry groups, hence the idea of “fighting powerful enemies” following the example of Nichiren, is done in theory only.

Conclusion

Virtually everybody has been at least once petitioned for votes or newspaper subscriptions and perhaps even supported Kōmei-tō out of trust in the person who solicited in the first place. As the Sōkagakkai local activities are too hectic, once a campaign is over, members have to go on with their demanding schedule and human contacts are lost. The negative image of Sōkagakkai is then confirmed in many cases. Those who are actively involved in Sōkagakkai activities, including elections, have actually little social life outside Sōkagakkai circles. After dedicating time to their work and family relationships, which tend both to be very demanding, the time normally allocated to cultivate personal relationships and friendships is virtually none. The whole election-machine functions as any other multilevel sales method, even if those perpetuating the mechanism are firmly convinced of its rightfulness. Based on the principle of “Faith instead of Wisdom”, members are convinced that finally everybody will recognize Sōkagakkai member as true heroes of the modern world. While legally becoming a fully-fledged religion, Sōkagakkai has gradually institutionalized most classical religious services.

At birth it is possible to request that *Ikeda* names the child through Sōkagakkai headquarters. Marriage ceremonies can be performed at Sōkagakkai centers and officiated by senior leaders, while special Sōkagakkai cemeteries have been built. Funerals can be performed at any cremation facility, since these are equipped for any type of religious format. In conclusion, the situation is positive for Sōkagakkai. With a century since its establishment nearing, the general public is becoming less suspicious of a possible *cup-d'état* while a simple uneasiness with religious fervor remains. The *normalization* process is on its way and the group is clearly heading in the direction of total independence, regardless of the presence of an appealing leader such as Toda or Ikeda. When Toda Jōsei passed away, many expected a collapse for Sōkagakkai, but instead it grew more vigorously than before. For sure, the problems with and within this organization are many and are being amply documented by independent scholars. However, Sōkagakkai represent a tremendous driving force than could be channeled positively with more openness, innovative spirit, courage to tackle real issues and renouncing inherited dogmas definitively.

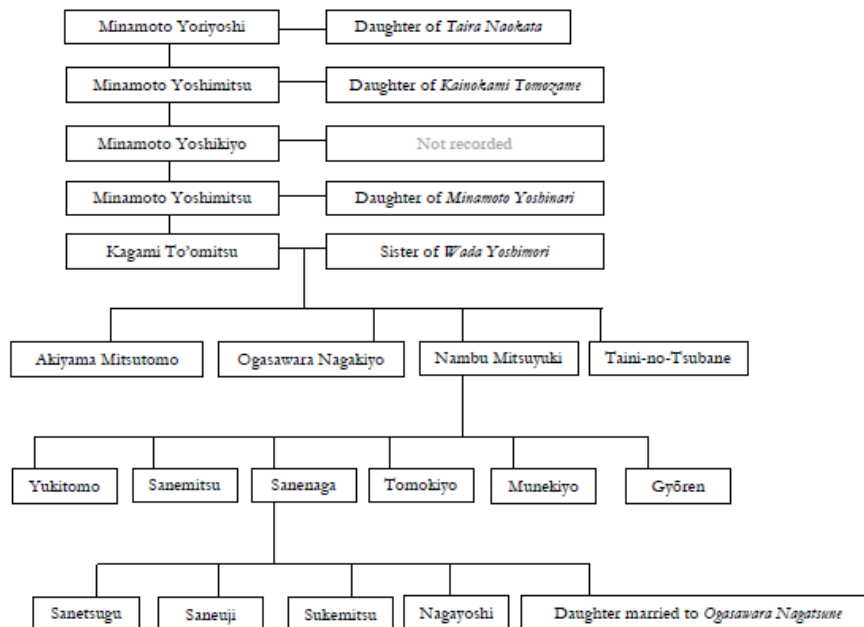
Charismatic reformers do repeatedly appear during history, while any organization necessarily needs to be administered by an echelon with the necessary capabilities. This concept was also elaborated by Ikeda himself when preparing Sōkagakkai for the *post-Ikeda* era, which has in fact already begun way before his physical disappearance. Although the successive presidents of Sōkagakkai, Hōjō, Akiya and Harada were very close to Ikeda, the designated *successors* are actually deemed to be his “Youth Division” disciples, basically anyone who has grasped the Sōkagakkai core values of *Human Revolution* and the *Sanctity of Life*. If the still rigid and Japan-centered organizational structure can manage not to suffocate those *successors*, then Sōkagakkai might have a future. Otherwise it will hardly survive the fourth and fifth generation as exhaustively documented in case studies of other *shinkō-shūkyō*. While traditional sectarian Buddhism can survive through a blend of history, architecture, academia, art and culture, Sōkagakkai can only rely on its human capital. If it fails, there will be enough options for its membership to be absorbed by other Nichiren-inspired congregations or the demand may simply cease to exist. People may learn to chant the *Daimoku* or the Lotus Sūtra as non-denominational training courses of Zen meditation, Yoga or Reiki that are offered at sports or recreation centers.

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Nichiren lay followers: Hagii Sadenaga

Hagii Sadenaga (1222~1297 波木井実長) was part of a clan that originated in the Kai province, today Yamanashi. Their ancestries are traced back to a descendant of Emperor Seiwa (清和天皇 850~881) from the Heian period. Minamoto-no-Yoriyoshi (源頼義 988~1075) a member of the Seiwa *genji* (originator) clan, a powerful line descending from the Minamoto warriors, fathered Yorimitsu Shinra Saburō (義光新羅三郎 1045~1127). His grandchildren moved to the provinces of Kai (Yamanashi) and Shinano (Nagano) and developed into affluent clans. They were hence named Kai-Minamoto-*shi* and Shinano-Minamoto-*shi* respectively. Minamoto-no-Yoshinaka (源義仲) became the patriarch of the Shinano branch. According to oral tradition, one of the Seiwa *genji* clan members, was Nambu Saburō Mitsuyuki (南部三郎光行 1165~1236). One of his children was Hagii Sadenaga, who became a disciple and offered shelter to Nichiren, his acolytes and their disciples. From the family chart below, it can be evinced that Sanenaga was affluent and powerful with a noble ancestry.



According to different sources, Sanenaga is said to be the sixth, third or even fourth son of Mitsuyuki. Accordingly his name was Nambu Rokurō Saburō (南部六郎三郎), Nambu Rokurō (南部六郎) Hagii Saburō (波木井三郎). According to the *Seiren Daijirin* annals, the third son of Kagami To'omitsu was Mitsuyuki, named Nambu Saburō. He had five male descendants and Sanenaga was his third son. However in the family charts of Hagii or Hakiri village it is recorded that Hakiri-*dono* Rokurō Sanenaga was the fourth son of Mitsuyuki, who gave shelter to Nichiren in the Bun'ei era. At that time the province of Kai (Yamanashi) was composed by the four districts of Yamanashi, Yatsushiro, Koma and Tsuru. Sanenaga was the steward of Minami-Koma, Mimaki and Iino. The area where his clan settled was hence named after him and he became Lord Hakiri Sanenaga. Also other disciples of Nichiren from the vicinity, connected to Sanenaga were Ōi Sōji *nyūdō* (大井莊司入道), steward of the Nakano village in Koma district, Akiyama Yoichi *saemon* Minamoto Nobutsuna (秋山与一左兵衛源信綱), as well as several villagers of Sone-*mura* in Higashi-Yashiro district.

The letters that Nichiren sent to Lord Hagii were addressed to either Nambu Rokurō Sanenaga, Nambu Rokurō Saburō, Nambu Rokurō , or Hagii-*dono* hence his actual name has many roots to trace. While in the *Seiren Daijirin* Nambu Rokurō and Rokurō Saburō are given as the same person, in the list of disciples made by Byakuren Ajari Nikkō they are recorded as two different individuals. It is therefore supposed that Rokurō Saburō was the third son of Sanenaga. There are two different accounts about Sanenaga. One account identifies the two as being the same person and the other as two individuals from the same clan.

The first theory sees that Sanenaga (実長) adopted a different logograph (恒長) for his name at a certain point or that there was a transcription error when copying the letter, while the second can also be read as Tsunenaga. In any case as the original holograph is not extant a conclusive explanation could not be reached. The second account supposed that the person listed in the records of Nikkō was the eldest son of Sanenaga. In other words, the person named Hara-*dono* to whom Nikkō sent a letter when he left the Minobu community might have been the son of Sanenaga. However there is no conclusive evidence to sustain this theory. However, from the contents of the personal letter it can be supposed that Nambu Rokurō Sanenaga (南部六郎恒長) and Hakiri Sanenaga (波木井実長) were the same person.

According Onden'in Nichikō, Sanenaga was extraordinarily generous and a very direct person. Following the customs of his times, he followed Pure Land teachings. Although Sadenaga was a resident of Hagii village, for work related reasons, he often commuted from and to Kamakura. While going back and forth, Sadenaga often passed by Fuji Kawanishi at the Shūjuku'in where Nikkō was a resident priest. After discussing several times, Sadenaga decided autonomously to renounce the Nembutsu, convert to the Lotus teachings and became a disciple of Nichiren. He received the Buddhist name of Hōjaku-*bō* Nichien (法寂房日円) and one of the first rudimental mandalas, which is still extant and bears conferral notes from Nikkō. Soon the whole family became followers under Nikkō's supervision, who annotated in his *Deshibunchō* records:

- Aimata Sakan *nyūdō* Rokurō-*nyūdō dono* from Kai province, Nambu District is a disciple of Nikkō, hence received it (the mandala) < 一 甲斐国南部遇俣志入道者、六郎入道殿の弟子也、仍て日興之を与へ申す >
- Hagii Tō-*hyōe nyūdō* from Kai province, Nambu District, is a disciple of Nikkō, hence was bestowed as above < 一 甲斐国波木井藤兵衛入道者、日興が弟子也、仍て与へ申す所件の如し >
- Rokurō-*nyūdō* from Kai province, Nambu District, is the foremost disciple of Nikkō, hence as above < 一 甲斐国南部六郎入道者、日興第一の弟子也、仍て与へ申す所件の如し >
- Rokurō Jirō from Kai province, Nambu District, is a disciple of Nikkō, hence received it < 一 甲斐国南部六郎次郎者、日興が弟子也、仍て与へ申す所件の如し >
- Yarokurō from Kai province, Nambu District, is a disciple of Nikkō, hence was bestowed as above < 一 甲斐国南部弥六郎者、日興が弟子也、仍て与へ申す所件の如し >
- Yarokurō Jirō *nyūdō* from Kai province, Nambu District, is a disciple of Nikkō, hence was bestowed as above < 一 甲斐国波木井弥次郎入道者、日興が弟子也、仍て与へ申す所件の如し >
- Hagii Yasaburō *hyōe nyūdō* is a disciple of Nikkō, hence was bestowed as above < 一 甲斐国波木井弥三郎兵衛入道者、日興が弟子也、仍て与へ申す所件の如し >

Nikkō visited the Hagii family several times, giving lectures and providing guidance. As a result, Harima-*kō* (播磨公) and Echizen-*kō* (越前公) became his disciples and took the tonsure. Other children of Sanenaga, such as his eldest son Nambu Sanetsugu (南部実継 1262?~1332), followed suit. After Nikkō transferred to the estate of Nanjō Tokimitsu, Minbu Ajari Nikō became the sole resident senior at Minobu. Before his passing, Nikō returned to his native Mobarā and received support from the Chiba clan. Around fifty years after Nichiren's passing in 1331, the Genkō war marked the fall of the Hōjō shogunate in Kamakura. Meanwhile Ashikaga Takauji took side with Emperor Godaigo and proclaimed himself as shōgun of the Namboku era in 1336. Takauji was a maternal uncle of Myūryū'in Nichijō (妙龍院日静 1298~1369), a second generation disciple of Nichirō founder of the *Rokujō* lineage in Kyoto. Although Takauji did not convert, he supported his nephew Nichijō, son of his sister Uesuki Hiroko (上杉清子 1270?~1343). The children of Sanetsugu, named Nagatsugu, Masayuki and Moroyuki prospered for centuries up to the Meiji restoration, when the feudal system came to end. The fourth son of Sanenaga, Hagii Nagayoshi (波木井長義 ?~1313) was known as Yarokurō, while his real name went by Kiyonaga (清長). According to another explanation he was the eldest son, not the last. This might be due to the fact that Nagayoshi (Kiyonaga) and Sanetsugu had a different birthmother. It is also believed that Nagayoshi was the original addressee of the letter that Nichiren sent in the ninth month of the first year of Bun'ei (1264), *Rokurō Tsunenaga go-shōsoku*. The English title is also given as *The Two Meanings Implied in the Nembutsu Leading to the Hell of Incessant Suffering*. As mentioned the name can be read as Tsunenaga and also Sanenaga. In any case, in his final years, Nagayoshi took the tonsure with the name of Nichikyō (日教). His family prospered through the Edo period. Nichikyō had received already his Buddhist name and a mandala Gohonzon from Nichiren (Nr. 99 of the catalogue), inscribed in formal style on the 8th day, 9th month in 1280. The scroll is still extant and now preserved in Yokohama at Enōzan Shōdō-ji, a temple that was transferred from a town nearby Kamakura around 1681. As the mandala is bestowed upon *Ubai* Minamoto Nichikyō it is not completely clear, who the recipient really was because *Ubai* seems to indicate a woman. In the *Saidō Zōhō Butsureku*, Onden'in Nichikō explicitly mentions Hagii Nichinaga.

In the same month Nichiren bestowed also a similar mandala to a lay believer from the Fuji Ueno area, named Nichimoku, known to be Saburō Shigemitsu Sakon *nyūdō*.