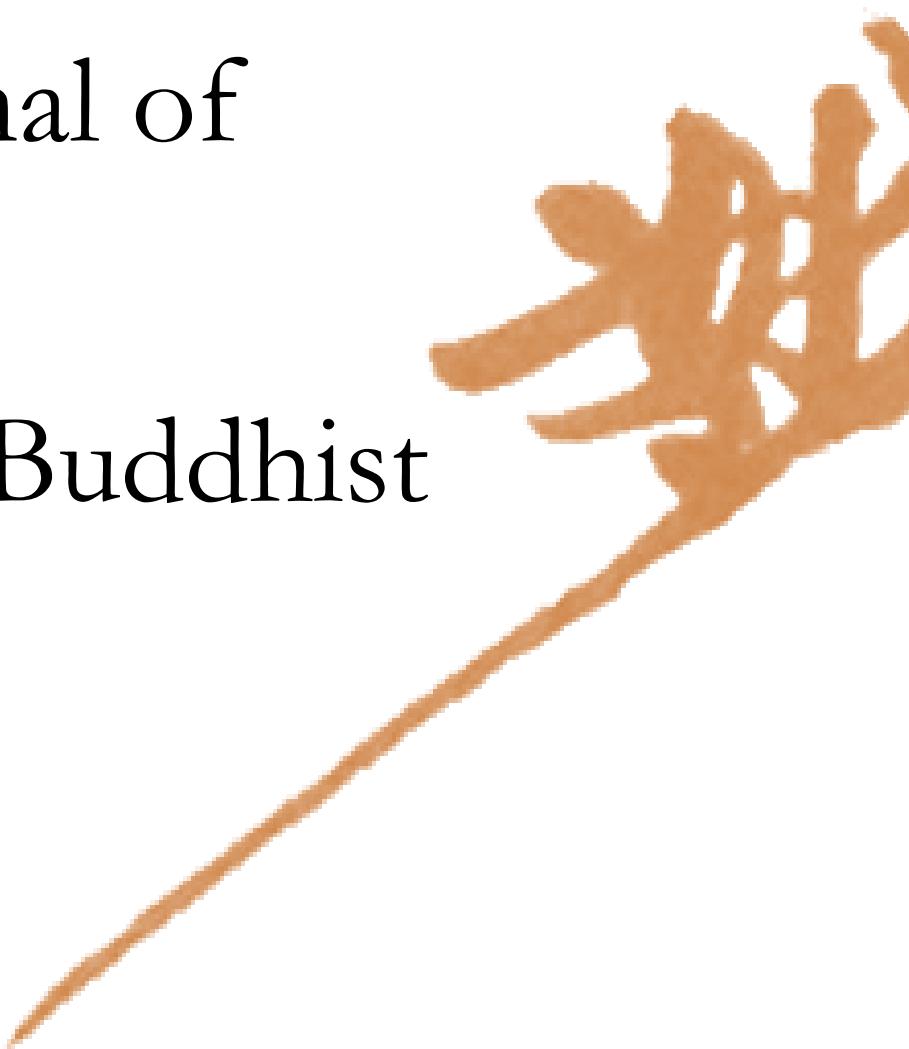


The Journal of Nichiren Buddhist Studies



The mandalas of Sōkagakkai and Nichiren Shōshū in recent history

Essay by Ken Mandara, The Nichiren Mandala Study Workshop

Summary

The object of devotion in the Nichiren Shōshū and Sōkagakkai *sanghas* is a mandala Gohonzon of the type revered in most Nichiren traditions. However its matrix does not stem from an original Nichiren mandala or of the lineage founder (Byakuren Ajari Nikkō), but specifically in the form of a transcription by an Abbot of Taiseki-ji, who has the sole authority of inscribing a Gohonzon. During the course of their mutual relationship, different versions of these mandalas were issued by the head temple and distributed to the parish. These are basically the *okatagi* printed version in various sizes (mostly two for devotees the normal and the *tokubetsu* which is larger and with a special brocade mounting), larger prints for prayer halls and small *omamori* (printed) portable talismans. Temple parishes contributing significantly are entitled to receive a large *jōjū* Gohonzon, also given to some community centers of Sōkagakkai. Taiseki-ji may bestow a wooden Gohonzon for exceptional merits.

The devotees of Nichiren Shōshū are chiefly *danka* members belonging to a certain branch temple (either actively practicing or due to the location of their family grave), in addition to affiliates to lay organizations such as the Sōkagakkai and other groups with a similar structure. The *danka* members are represented by the *Nichirensōshū Hokkekō Rengokai* union, currently led by Yagi Nisshō, the chief priest of Hōdō'in temple in Tokyo Ikebukuro. Other sub-groups of Nichiren Shōshū are Myōkan-*kō* (Rikyō-*bō* at Taiseki-ji), Sosei-*kō* (Minami-no-*bō* at Taiseki-ji), Shōdō-*kō* (Myōkō-ji in Shinagawa) and Hokke-*kō* (Hōdō'in in Ikebukuro). These however are all groups led by clerics of Nichiren Shōshū.

This paper will briefly analyze the mandalas issued by Nichiren Shōshū and the strategies pursued by Sōkagakkai to retain its membership after the separation of the two large groups, once the source for distribution of Gohonzon scrolls was temporarily halted in 1991. Finally some similarities with other lay movements such as the Church of the Latter Saints are considered.

Origin of the Relationship of the two Groups

In his essay “Why did Ikeda quit?” Daniel A. Métraux rightfully recognizes that the first real friction between Sōkagakkai and Nichiren-Shōshū took place around the opening ceremony of the Shō-Hondō building. The conservative priesthood was still advocating that, as a *conditio sine qua non* for declaring the so-called *Kōsen-Rufu* (wide declaration of the teaching), an ordination platform of the true vehicle (*Honmon Kaidan*) had to be erected by imperial decree. In a certain sense, this was also seen as a continuum to the works of Saichō (in Nichiren’s interpretation), who confuted the old schools of Nara Buddhism to establish the first Māhāyāna ordination platform on Hiei-zan. Ikeda Daisaku, at the time president of Sōkagakkai and representative of all lay believers (*sō-kōtō*), including the Hokke-*kō* and those from other groups, had a very different view. He argued instead that in modern times, a *Honmon Kaidan* can be erected by the will of ordinary people. He also renounced to the absolutistic idea of most religious groups that everybody has to convert, by formulating the idea of converting a third of the population (here meaning a large number), while another third may sympathize for Nichiren’s teaching and the rest be neutral or against it. The Nichiren-Shōshū priesthood considered this statement a grave heresy. The discontent fueled also considerable pressure from other traditionalist lay groups affiliated with Taiseki-ji, such as the Myōshinkō. This faction, led by Asai Shōhei, son of the founder Asai Jinbe, represents *nichirenist* hardliners and renamed itself Kenshōkai after disagreements with the clergy.

Anti-Sōka Gakkai factions within the priesthood of Nichiren-Shōshū would later form the Shōshinkai (association for the correct faith) only to be excommunicated following a dispute regarding the succession of 67th Abbot Abe Etsuyō Ajari Nikken, the son of Abe Shinobu Ajari Nichikai, 60th Abbot of Taiseki-ji. Another smaller unit within the priesthood who is strongly against Sōka Gakkai is Myōkankō, whose affiliates belong to the Rikyō-*bō* sub-temple at Taiseki-ji. They formed in 1980, but not as a separate entity such as Shōshinkai or an independent lay organization like Kenshōkai.

It must be understood however, that the Sōkagakkai is not merely a lay organization derived from Nichiren-Shōshū, but basically stems from the encounter of two persons, whose ideals formed a sort of osmosis process. One was Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, an educator who had matured in a post-Meiji cultural environment ripe with western influences, looking for a philosophy that could complement his “theory of value”. The other was reverend Horigome, a Nichiren-Shōshū cleric in search for a lay organization that could spread his interpretation of Nichiren’s teaching into modern society. At the time Reverend Horigome was studying at the prestigious Waseda University and later became 65th High Priest Ryūkoku Ajari Shinjō in Nichijun. Both men however, did not necessarily enjoy the full support of their respective groups. The appearance of an organization such as the Sōkagakkai must be nevertheless seen under this light. For a detailed account, please refer to the essay “SokaGakkai in historical perspective” by Brian Wilson and the Journal of Nichiren Buddhist Studies IX-2017.

Although it is reprehensible that both factions could not reach a common understanding, thanks to the separation of the two groups, Nichiren’s Buddhism spread to virtually any country and territory on the globe. SGI gained international recognition thus consolidating its status as a global movement instead of being a local Japanese *new religious* sect (see JNBS: X-2017). Some sociologists have even compared SGI to the early Protestant movements that separated from the Catholic Church, although this comparison might be overly exaggerated. In fact by trying to preserve some of the basic doctrinal tenets inherited by the Taiseki-ji faction, Sōkagakkai has become somehow more conservative and dogmatic, compared with the progressive stance enjoyed by SGI under Ikeda’s direct leadership.

So far, Nichiren-Shōshū has also gained immensely from its past relationship with Sōkagakkai. In the early shōwa era, between the two world wars, Taiseki-ji was managing just over a hundred temples and thirty-odd prayer halls with less than 500 clerics. It is now the Nichiren School with the largest international presence and the gap between the other independent Fuji-Lineage temples (Nishiyama Honmon-ji, Hōta Myōhon-ji, and Kyoto Yōhō-ji) has become immense. However as several devotees overseas transferred their affiliation from either Nichiren-Shōshū or Sōkagakkai, the international branches of the mainstream Nichiren-Shū group have been revitalized and are now thriving. As *third party next of two contenders*, Nichiren-Shū has also gained from the dispute. Minobu Kuon-ji has always been a prevalent destination for the clergy resigning at Taiseki-ji, but has been demonized by Nichiren-Shōshū and SGI as a group that had grossly misunderstood Nichiren's teaching. Overseas devotees knew virtually nothing about Nichiren-Shū or other Nichiren groups, other than these were heterodox sects, until former SGI devotees changed their affiliation thus allowing the Nichiren-Shū tenets to be made available to an international audience. Although many leaders in local SGI organizations are appointed from the native membership, key figures are generally Japanese Sōkagakkai employees working within a hierarchical system typical of Japanese corporations. Notable exceptions were the late Richard Causton, chairman of SGI in UK and Peter Kühn in Germany.

Nowadays several new devotees are introduced directly into Nichiren-Shū as the truly mainstream orthodox branch of Nichiren Buddhism; hence the membership is becoming more balanced and novice priests and nuns are recruited among the native population instead of being only sent from Japan. Internationalization of membership brings great status in Japan, but groups aiming for global reach must renounce to dogmas and secrecy or otherwise face huge backlashes, at least in the international community. How Taiseki-ji will cope with the modern information age however remains to be seen. The *Nichirensōshū Hokkekō Rengōkai* is still a powerful union; however as younger generations have become less superstitious and evidence about the *Dai-Gohonzon* being a later artifact is widely available, Nichiren-Shōshū will struggle to maintain its doctrinal positions, especially outside of Japan. By the end of 2015 the Sōkagakkai official Seikyō newspaper announced that the organization was no longer supporting the *Dai-Gohonzon* theory following a “soft-landing” strategy. The wooden Gohonzon, once revered as the supreme object of worship inscribed by Nichiren for the whole mankind, is now regarded one of many. Sōkagakkai is hence declaring between the lines that the plank mandala is in fact not an original Nichiren Gohonzon or the unique and sacred *ur-mandala*. This topic has been already discussed elsewhere by several Japanese scholars and in English in the essay *The “Honmon Kaidan Daigohonzon” Of Nichiren Shōshū Taiseki-ji*, by the Nichiren Mandala Study Workshop, 2015.

The focus has shifted towards an Sōkagakkai that is completely independent from Nichiren-Shōshū and there is no intention to “reform” the priesthood, although Kudo Gen’ei, former head priest of Myōhō-ji temple in Los Angeles and chief priest of Chōei-ji in Tokyo with other former Taiseki-ji clerics established the *Association to Reform Nichiren Shoshu*.

The current view of Sōkagakkai is that lay devotees base themselves on Nichiren’s writings without intermediation of the clergy, exactly as during his times. The fact that the source is still the *gosho-zenshū*, the non-critical compilation of Hori Nichikō of Nichiren-Shōshū (that does not aim to distinguish between original holographs and apocryphal), in the Sōkagakkai interpretation is also a point of contention. This issue however will not be discussed here, but much work has to be done by the Sōkagakkai academic-level research team, Institute of Oriental Philosophy, before a real independence from Nichiren-Shōshū can be achieved. One of the goals would be for example producing an scholarly and independently recognized compendium of Nichiren’s writings of the same academic quality of *Shōwa Teibon Nichiren Shōnin Ibun* to fully replace the *Goshozenshū* in use today.

The mandalas issued by Taiseki-ji in recent times

In the early times of their allegiance with Nichiren-Shōshū, new Sōkagakkai members would receive the copy of a mandala inscribed by 26th Abbot Daini Ajari Nichikan, Gohonzons printed from a matrix produced in 1941 by 62nd Suzuki Chikuko Ajari Nikkyō or during the war copies of a scroll from 1942 by 60th Abe Nichikai. In turn the successive Abbots in charge have produced a matrix for printing *okatagi* mandalas; both Hosoi Myōkan Ajari Nittatsu and Abe Nikken have inscribed two or more different templates during their tenure, with no substantial differences. The standard format of Taiseki-ji has been analyzed in *The Mandala in Nichiren Buddhism* vol. 3.

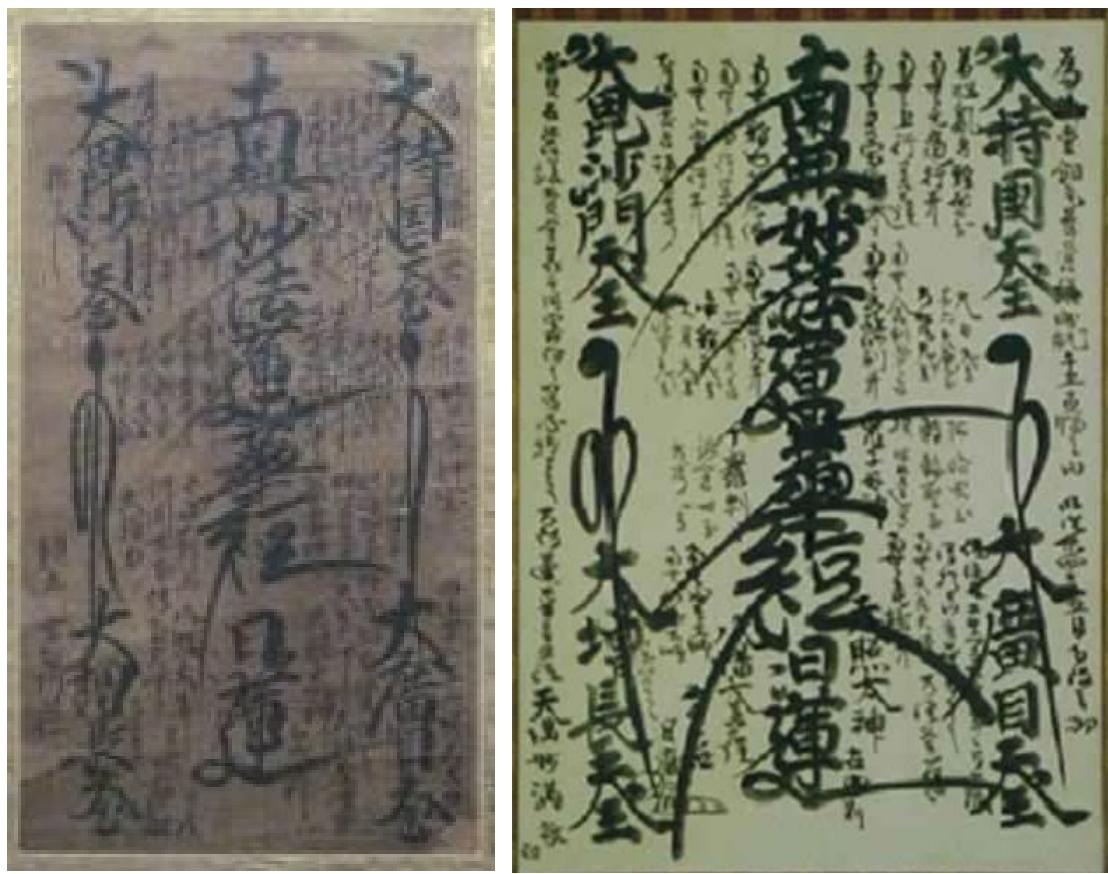
The pictures below show Gohonzon mandalas distributed by Nichiren-Shōshū to their affiliates, on the left an *okatagi* print next to a *jōjū*-Gohonzon bestowed upon the head of a Hokke-*kō* lay devotee with a personal dedication.



Left: first Nichikan *okatagi* matrix (1728); right: *jōjū*-Gohonzon by 64th Abbot Mizutani Settsu Ajari Nisshō (1952)

Copies of the Nichikan *okatagi* Gohonzon were printed at Hōdō'in temple in Ikebukuro, where the grave of Toda Jōsei is located. Scrolls are still available at specialized antique dealers or on the general market. Original handwritten *jōjū*-Gohonzon can be also still purchased at auctions.

Generally large donations to the clergy would entitle a devotee to receive an original calligraphic mandala with a special dedication from the Abbot in charge at the time as other examples shown in the next page.



Left: 55th Abbot Shimoyama Nippu, right: 56th Abbot Oishi Nichiō



Left: 56th Abbot Oishi Nichiō, right: 60th Abbot Abe Nichikai;

Below two different *okatagi* printed mandalas issued by Taiseki-ji. The first on the left, was produced in the Meiji period with a matrix inscribed by Suzuki Nichiden (1817~1890) prior to the collaboration with *Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai*. He tenured as High Priest of Nichiren Shōshū from 1853 to 1862 and was in charge again briefly from 1885 until 1889. In 1848 Nichiden worked at Honnyozan Jōen-ji, the same temple that allowed Sōkagakkai to reproduce a Gohonzon inscribed by Daini Ajari Nichikan in 1993.



Left: *okatagi* Gohonzon by 52nd Abbot Suzuki Nichiden; right matrix by 62nd Abbot Suzuki Chikugo Ajari Nikkyō

The picture on the right of the Nikkyō Gohonzon inscribed in 1941, was originally published on an early Seikyō newspaper of Sōkagakkai, before Hosoi Nittatsu introduced a restrictive policy towards photographing the mandala. This rule is still observed in both organizations, to prevent devotees from printing their own Gohonzon and to avoid discussing the *Honmon Kaidan Daimandara* issue. Generally books reproducing photos of the Gohonzon are considered off-limits by Taiseki-ji and Sōkagakkai.

Suzuki Nikkyō became a disciple of Suzuki Nichiden in 1883 and after serving at several temples in Japan, he tenured as High Priest from 1935 until 1946. The above *okatagi* was hence still produced and distributed to devotees in the early postwar days. The two Abbots who witnessed a massive expansion in membership due to the Sōkagakkai proselytizing were Hosoi Nittatsu and Abe Nikken. They inscribed more than one matrix for common *okatagi* and *omamori* mandalas in addition to handwritten *jōju* Gohonzon scrolls. A few examples are shown in the next page.



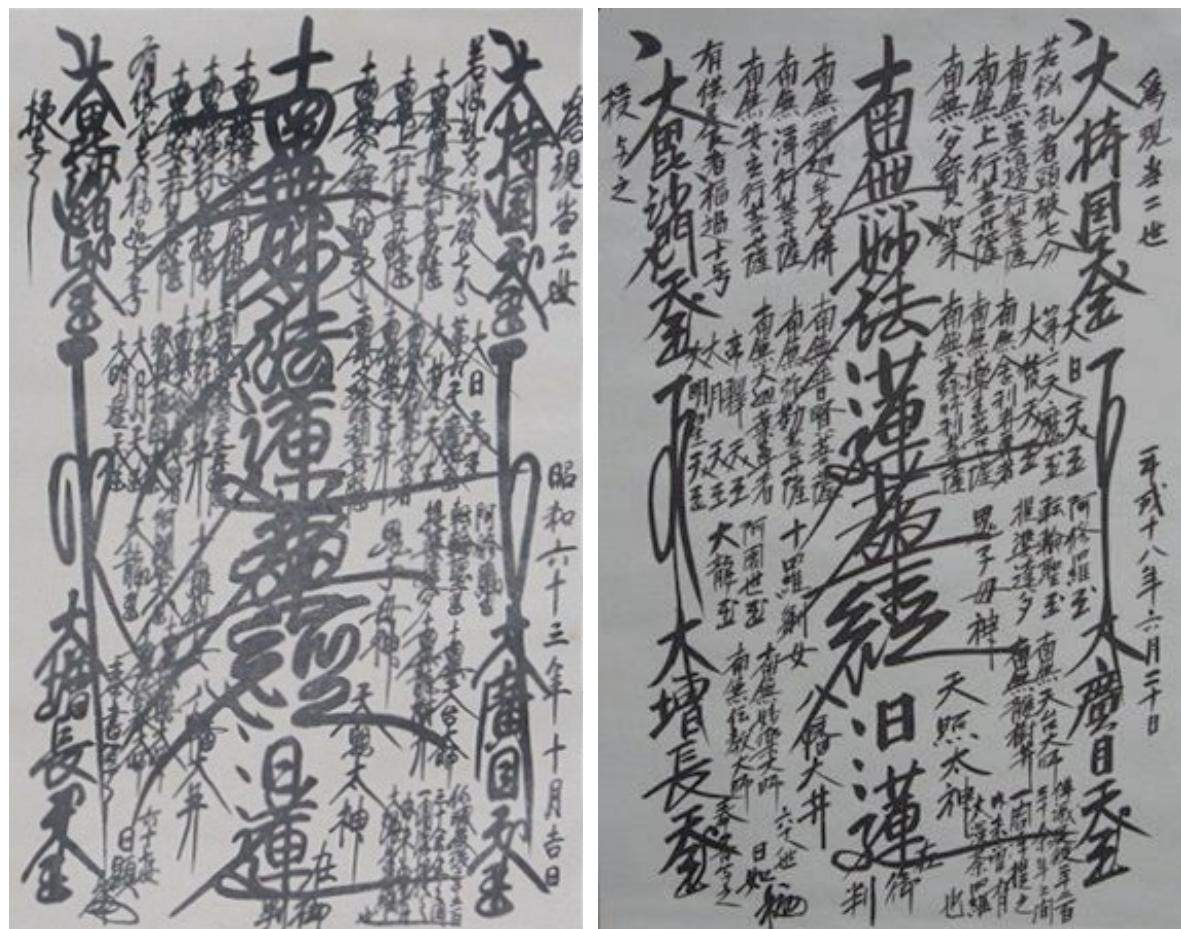
Two matrix templates for *okatagi* Gohonzon by Hosoi Nittatsu (both 1966)



Two *Omamori* Gohonzon by Hosoi Nittatsu (both 1972)



Left and center: two *okatagi* Gohonzon (1980 and 1985), right *omamori* Gohonzon by 67th Abbot Abe Nikken (2002)



Left: *jojū*-Gohonzon by Abe Nikken (1988), right *okatagi* Gohonzon by 68th Abbot Hayase Nichinyo (2004)

Being able to independently manage the distribution of Gohonzon scrolls to their affiliates has been an early interest of Sōkagakkai. During the allegiance between Myōhon-ji temple in Hota and Taiseki-ji, the original Nichiren mandala inscribed in the twelfth month of 1274 was photographed. The company Akazawa Chōyō, who produces large *butsudan* altars for Sōkagakkai prayer halls, was asked to produce ten wooden copies from this matrix. The plan however was not finalized, but the special Gohonzon of Mizutani Nisshō bestowed upon the organization on 01.05.1951 was produced as a plank and sanctioned by the 66th Abbot Hosoi Nittatsu. Later the following planks were indeed produced by Akazawa for Sōkagakkai and used for some time.

- Gohonzon enshrined at the Kansai headquarters of 13.12.1953
- Gohonzon enshrined at the European SGI center in France of 13.12.1964
- Gohonzon enshrined at the Sōkagakkai chairman room of 01.05.1967
- Gohonzon enshrined at the Sōkagakkai culture center of 15.06.1967
- Gohonzon enshrined at the headquarter of SGI America of 29.06.1968
- Congratulatory Gohonzon for the Shōhōndō completion of 02.01.1974
- Personal *omamori* Gohonzon of Ikeda Daisaku of 03.05.1951

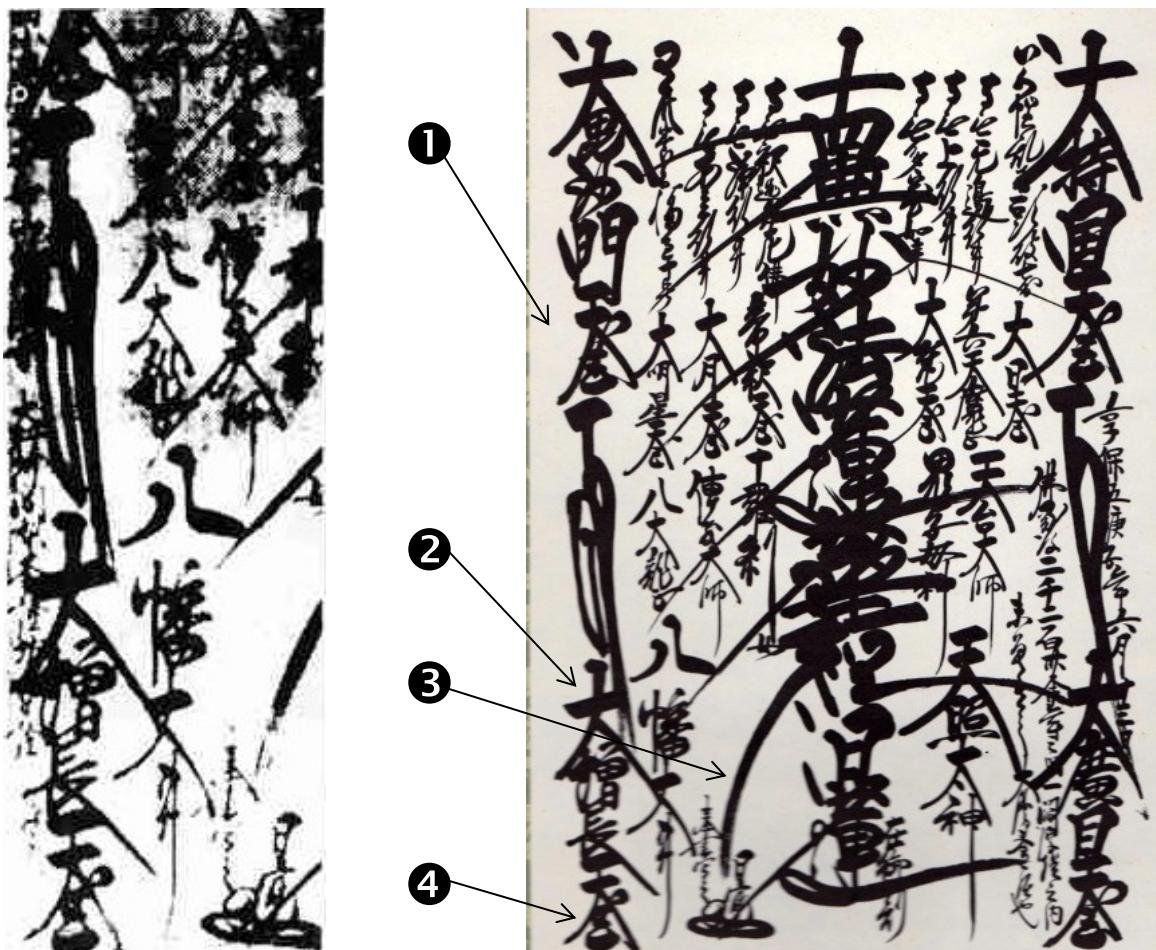


Left: the *omamori* of Ikeda Daisaku; center: the plank of 1967; right: the plank of 1964

Later Hosoi Nittatsu became displeased with the fact that that Sōkagakkai had taken steps to have such wooden mandalas produced independently and the planks were returned to Taiseki-ji. The wooden mandala carved out of the Gohonzon bestowed to Sōkagakkai by Mizutani Settsu Ajari Nisshō remained in their custody and is currently enshrined at the “Hall of the Great Vow” in Shinanomachi. The above photos were posted by affiliates of Nichiren Shōshū hence the central inscription has been covered, however the dedication to Ikeda Daisaku and the dates of inscription are still readable.

The Sōkagakkai mandalas

Nichiren-Shōshū is currently distributing a mandala Gohonzon inscribed by the 68th Abbot Hayase Myō'e Ajari Nichinyo according to their customs. His grandfather was the 56th Abbot Nichi'ō, who established Hōdō-in temple in Tokyo Ikebukuro. The temple played a pivotal role in printing the first version of the Nichikan *okatagi* mandalas. Since 1993 Sōkagakkai is also bestowing copies of a Daini Ajari Nichikan mandala housed at Jōen-ji as shown below. In addition to the two standard sizes (an *okatagi* on a single sheet and a special *tokubetsu*-type with a fabric mounting) and two large sized for meeting halls or for SGI centers are also printed. As shown in the picture below, since the original mandala is stained from time, a few corrections were made and the personal dedication completely removed. The original matrix is a *Jōjū*-Gohonzon inscribed for a priest named Honshō-bō Ajari Nisshō, a monk who was in charge of Jōen-ji at the time. The cancelled inscription reads < *Bestowed upon Daigyō Ajari Honshō-bō Nisshō of Hon'nyozan Jōen-ji, Kogusuri town of Shimotsuke Province*> (下野国小菴邑本如山淨圓寺大行阿闍梨本證坊日證授與之). Although Nichiren-Shōshū has claimed that deleting the original inheritor is tantamount to forgery, cancellation and re-conferral has been a common practice since the past, especially at Taiseki-ji and even on original Nichiren mandalas, as amply demonstrated in *The Mandala in Nichiren Buddhism* (second volume). In other parts of the scroll, some more creative artwork been done, although it is difficult to judge to which extent. Researchers of the Fuji Religious Studies Workshop, who could observe the original Gohonzon, are of the opinion that no significant alterations were made and certainly not with the intent to forge the original matrix.



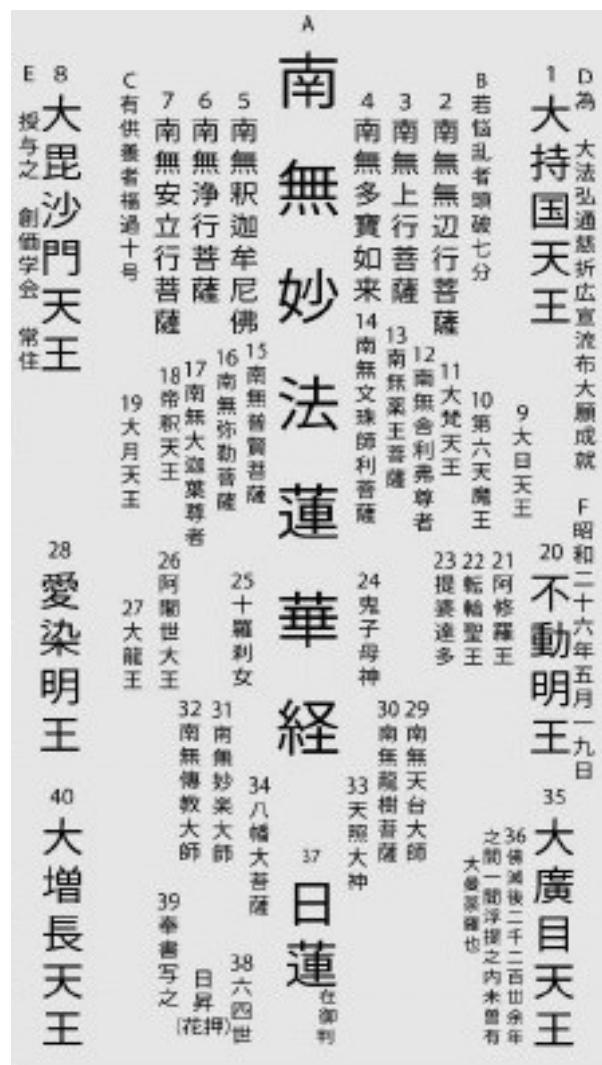
Left: original Nichikan mandala with the bestowal to Honshō-bō Nisshō, right: corrections made on the SGI *okatagi*

According to Sōkagakkai, in early times a Nichikan Gohonzon was bestowed to their affiliates and the 26th Abbot is highly respected and his works such as the *Rokkan-sho* are highly valued and often quoted, albeit at times arbitrarily and out of context. Nevertheless Nichikan is seen as a restorer of once-corrupt Taiseki-ji doctrines. Since the attempt to purchase the original Nichiren mandala from Jūsen-ji of Hokke-shū Honmon-ryū failed, a matrix inscribed by Nichikan seemed a viable option considering that the initial stance was that Nichiren-Shōshū had become corrupt due to the distorted views of Abe Nikken. In 1333 Byakuren Ajari Nikkō composed the *Nikkō Yuikai Okimon* (twenty-six admonitions) just before his passing. He stated that if an Abbot becomes corrupt he is not to be followed. Sōkagakkai found legitimization in the schism basing on the document authored by the Fuji lineage founder. Although Abe Nikken resigned his position in favor of Hayase Nichinyo anti- Sōkagakkai stance remained the same.

The respective teachings of Sōkagakkai and Nichiren-Shōshū are now becoming so increasingly diverse, that some fundamental differences will be hard to harmonize. Future developments are difficult to assess, but in a few decades, no distinct memory of the Sōkagakkai early times will remain. A mandala dedicated to Sōkagakkai is supposed to embody the so-called “*Kansai Spirit*” of propagation. In future the original mandalas bestowed upon Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Jōsei Toda and Daisaku Ikeda will be considered their most sacred treasures and Sōkagakkai needs to consider a time perspective in centuries and not merely decades.

Sōkagakkai received the above mentioned special Gohonzon bestowed upon the whole group, inscribed on 19.05.1951 by Mizutani Nisshō. The laudatory inscription states < *Important treasure of Sōkagakkai* > (創価学会重宝) and < *For the propagation of the Great Buddhist Law, fulfilling the compassionate desire for Kosen-Rufu* > (為大法弘通慈折広宣流布大願成就). The epitaph *jubō*, important treasure, is the same that Byakuren Ajari Nikkō placed on his mandalas to be “enshrined as an important treasure at Honmon-ji”. *Honmon-ji* basically means *temple of the essential teaching* and there are several such temples in the Fuji faction such as Kitayama Honmon-ji, Nishiyama Honmon-ji and Sanuki Honmon-ji in addition to Ikegami Honmon-ji outside this group. Sōkagakkai might basically consider their newly build hall within the Shinanomachi compound as a modern version of *Honmon-ji* temple. The concept has also striking similarities with the Daisei-dō of Risshō Kōseikai, a lay organization that also based on Nichiren’s teaching that likewise separated from Nichiren-shū clergy. Although with a different meaning, the Sōkagakkai “Hall of the Great Vow” is Daisei-dō in Japanese. Risshō Kōseikai has also built a sacred compound around its headquarters in Suginami, with the Daisei-dō (sacred) cathedral, an ossuary and meeting halls. This organization has sidestepped the mandala issue altogether as the object of devotion is now a statue of Śākyamuni flanked by his four attendants, which can be either in form of grouped statues or a picture enshrined in the individual altars of their affiliates.

The Mizutani Nisshō mandala bestowed upon Sōkagakkai has been carved on a black wooden plank with gilded letters in 1979. It was previously housed at the Sōkagakkai Kansai culture center/prayer hall in Osaka and transferred to the “Hall of the Great Vow” near the SGI headquarters in Shinanomachi. The rationale behind deciding not to distribute copies of this particular mandala to SGI affiliates is difficult to assess, but is most probably due to copyright related issues. Taiseki-ji would seek legal action if Sōkagakkai prints millions of Gohonzon scrolls before copyright expires in a few years. However, judging from the international development since 1991 it appears that it would not have made a substantial difference. This point has been already discussed in the Journal of Nichiren Buddhist Studies issue IX-17 *Diverse ideologies in the Nichiren parish: “Ikeda-ism”, “Nikken-sect”, “Minobu-faction” and the “others”*. The Sōkagakkai sacred mandala, including a diagram of the inscriptions, is shown on the next page



A. Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō	21. Ashura'ō
B. If one troubles (a preacher of the Dharma) his head will split in seven pieces	22. Tenrin Jō'ō
C. If one make offerings his good fortune will surpass the ten honorable titles	23. Daibadatta
1. Dai Jikoku Ten'ō	24. Kishimojin
2. Namu Muhengyō Bosatsu	25. Jūrasetsunyo
3. Namu Jōgyō Bosatsu	26. Ajase'ō (King Ajataśatru)
4. Namu Tahō Nyorai	27. Ryū'ō
5. Namu Śākyamuni Butsu	28. Aizen Myō'ō (in Siddham)
6. Namu Jōgyō Bosatsu	29. Namu Tendai Daishi
7. Namu Anryūgyō Bosatsu	30. Namu Ryūju Bosatsu (Nāgārjuna)
8. Dai Bishamon Ten'ō	31. Namu Myōraku Daishi
9. Dai Nitten'ō	32. Namu Dengyō Daishi
10. Dairokuten ma'ō	33. Tenshō Daijin
11. Daibonten'ō	34. Hachiman Daibosatsu
12. Namu Sharihotsu Sonja	35. Dai Kōmoku Ten'ō
13. Namu Yaku'ō Bosatsu	36. Since more than 2230 years after the Buddha's demise, this great mandala was never presented in Jambudvīpa
14. Namu Mañjuśrī Bosatsu	37. Nichiren+zaigoban (in representation of)
15. Namu Fugen Bosatsu	38. 64 th High Priest Nissō + Kō seal
16. Namu Miroku Bosatsu	39. Respectfully transcribed
17. Namu Kāśyapa Sonja	40. Dai Zōchō Ten'ō
18. Taishaku Ten'ō	D. For the propagation of the Great Law and compassionate desire of kōsenrufu
19. Dai Gatten'ō	E. Conferred to Sōkagakkai, resident (Gohonzon)
20. Fudō Myō'ō (in Siddham)	F. Shōwa 26 th year, fifth month, 19 th day

Conclusion

In the early period of independence, Sōkagakkai claimed it had made a gigantic step to counter formalization of religion, encouraging individual choice against the widespread practice of automatically inheriting the parent's religion. However, due to the *de facto* retirement of Ikeda Daisaku and changes in perception towards new religious movements after the Aum Shinrikyō terrorist attack, Sōkagakkai halted their expansion and concentrated their efforts inwards. Levi McLaughlin analyzed this phenomenon throughout in his essay *Did Aum change everything? : what Soka Gakkai before, during, and after the Aum Shinrikyō affair tells us about the persistent "otherness" of new religions in Japan*. While the organization is enthusiastically expanding in other countries it is becoming increasingly conformist in Japan. Afraid of losing grip on third generation members, who do not necessarily marry only within the *sangha* anymore, Sōkagakkai is trying to formalize its practices acting in exactly the same manner as other institutionalized temple religions.

By building large sectarian cemeteries for affiliates only, Sōkagakkai will cause the families of their current members to continue being somehow connected for generations to come, in addition to providing an additional source of income. Truly, the *yūjin-sō* (funeral performed by “friends”) represents a genuine breakthrough with the somehow sterile Buddhist rituals performed by priest that generally have no relationship whatsoever with the deceased and his family. The Sūtra chanting is made collectively and led by a senior leader in the organization, but as “friends”, they are not supposed to accept any reward for the service. Affiliates can thus save some of the considerable funeral costs and the *toba* memorial tablet services offered by the priesthood.

Most Japanese belong to a Buddhist school in name only, without being aware of its core beliefs. To avoid this, the organization will try to foster young affiliates with a strong sense of belonging, even at the cost of a certain “fundamentalism” similar to certain Christian groups. This poses no danger due to its pacifist and non-violent ideals and a core fringe of *ardent believers* is necessary to the survival of any religious group. In order to survive the *post-Ikeda* phase and over the fourth generation devotees, Sōkagakkai has been moving towards full independence as a religious corporation and provided the much needed key elements for an established faith. These would be the following:

- Sacred compound for pilgrimages (*Shinanomachi*)
- Theological studies unique to the organization (IOP, Sōka University)
- Sacred object of devotion (the plank mandala)
- *Trademark* unique mandala (*okatagi* version of the Mizutani Gohonzon)

Sōkagakkai is hastening to complete all these fundamental tasks within the span of Ikeda's lifetime in order to ascribe the achievements to his life work. To which extent he really is behind all the projects is irrelevant. His wife Ikeda Kaneko, one of the few who actually met the three founding fathers Makiguchi, Toda and Ikeda is still in good health and mentally fit. Ikeda's closest aides are determined to make the goals a reality, exactly as Ikeda did with all the plans discussed with Toda Jōsei before his passing. To better understand the future development of Sōkagakkai, it might be useful to consider the history of religious groups such as The Latter Saints movements, also founded by a layperson. This group established two centuries ago, has already witnessed four “Great Awakenings” in the course of history and is today a fully recognized mainstream Christian community, with a strong element of social activism. The condition of *para-temple* organizations (such as Sōkagakkai) growing to the expense of denominational Buddhism, that are increasingly losing affiliates is similar to modern protestant movements. Fostering a direct relationship with the founder (Nichiren) and replace temples with faith centers seems also to be borrowed from lay organizations with a longer history. Sōkagakkai is currently in the process of laying those foundations in order to move away from being a *new religion* and become widely accepted.

Bibliography

Japanese New Religions in the Age of Mass Media, Norman Havens/Carl Freire/Kogakuin University 2017

The Mandala in Nichiren Buddhism 1-3, The Nichiren Mandala Study Workshop 2013-2015

The Dispute Between the Soka Gakkai and the Nichiren Shoshu Priesthood, Daniel A. Metraux JJRS 1992:19/4

Did Aum Change Everything? Levi McLaughlin JJRS 2012 39/1: 51–75

Why Did Ikeda Quit? Daniel A. Métraux JJRS 1980:7/1

The Fourth Great Awakening & the Future of Egalitarianism, Robert William Fogel 2000