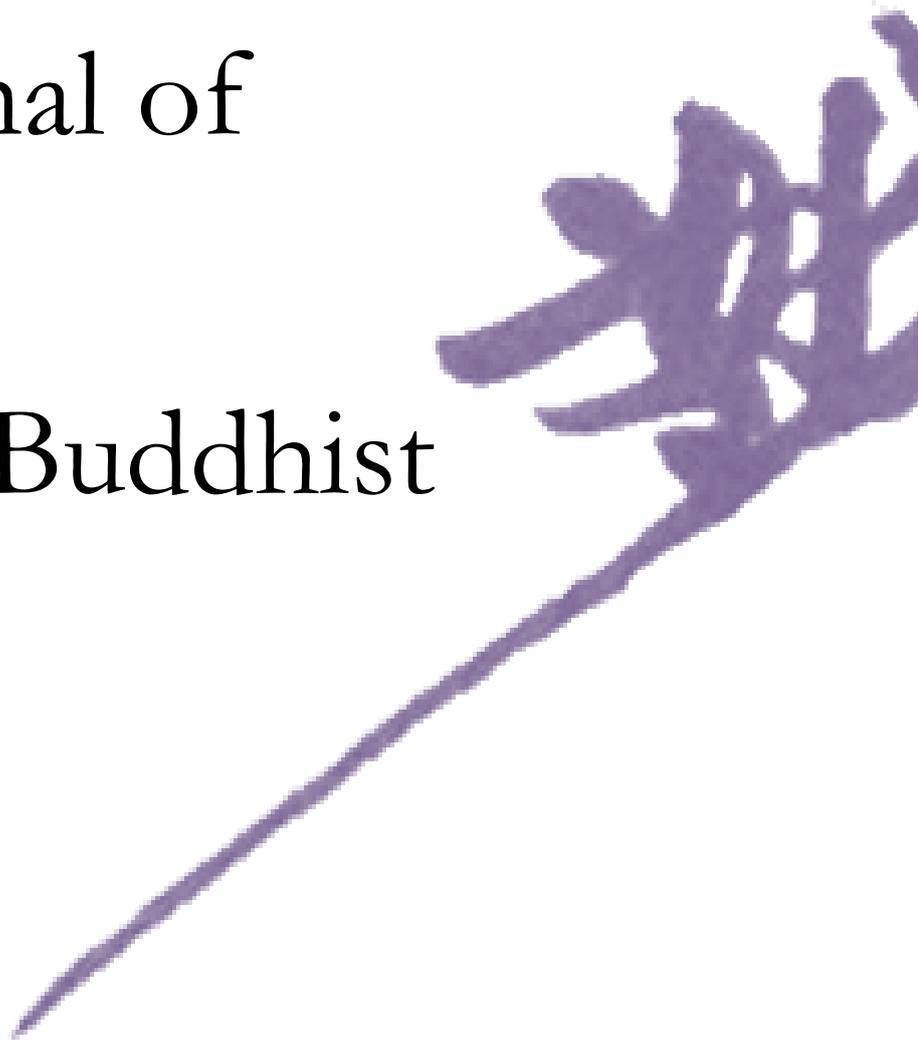


The Journal of
Nichiren Buddhist
Studies



Issue 02-17

An elite group in the Nichiren *sangha*: Hokkeshū and its spinoffs

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Summary

The Hokkeshū (Lotus-sect), as Nichiren sometimes defined it, comprises the Buddhist schools established in Kyoto by third and fourth generation disciples in the XIV century.

Keirin-*bō* Shōjin'in Nichiryū (1385~1464), a native of Toyama in the Momoi clan, established his own doctrine based on Nichiren's teachings after theological disagreements with his peers at Gusokuzan Myōken-ji of the *Shijō* lineage. This group traces its origins to Nichiren's pupil Higo Ajari Nichizō, a half-brother of the senior disciple Daikoku Ajari Nichirō. Nichiryū studied under the fourth Abbot at Myōken-ji, Ryūge'in Nissei. He entered in a disagreement with the fifth Abbot Gatsumyō mainly over the *shōretsu* versus *itchi* approach to the Lotus Sūtra, mingling Buddhist doctrine with nativist Shintō and because Gatsumyō did not use a *nichigō* clerical name, traditional of all Nichiren groups. In addition the Abbot was a former court noble, who still enjoyed networking with samurais and courtiers. Nichiryū left Myōken-ji with his two uncles Nichidō and Nichizon, transferred at an abandoned prayer hall dedicated to Higo Ajari Nichizō and later established Honnō-ji temple.

Nichiryū was one of the third generation leaders, who neither met Nichiren nor his direct disciples who had known him personally. He founded the Eight-chapter School and was the only one that appointed female Abbots at his main temple. Even today nuns, mostly born into the clerical profession and who do not tonsure, tend to have a more active role than in other groups.

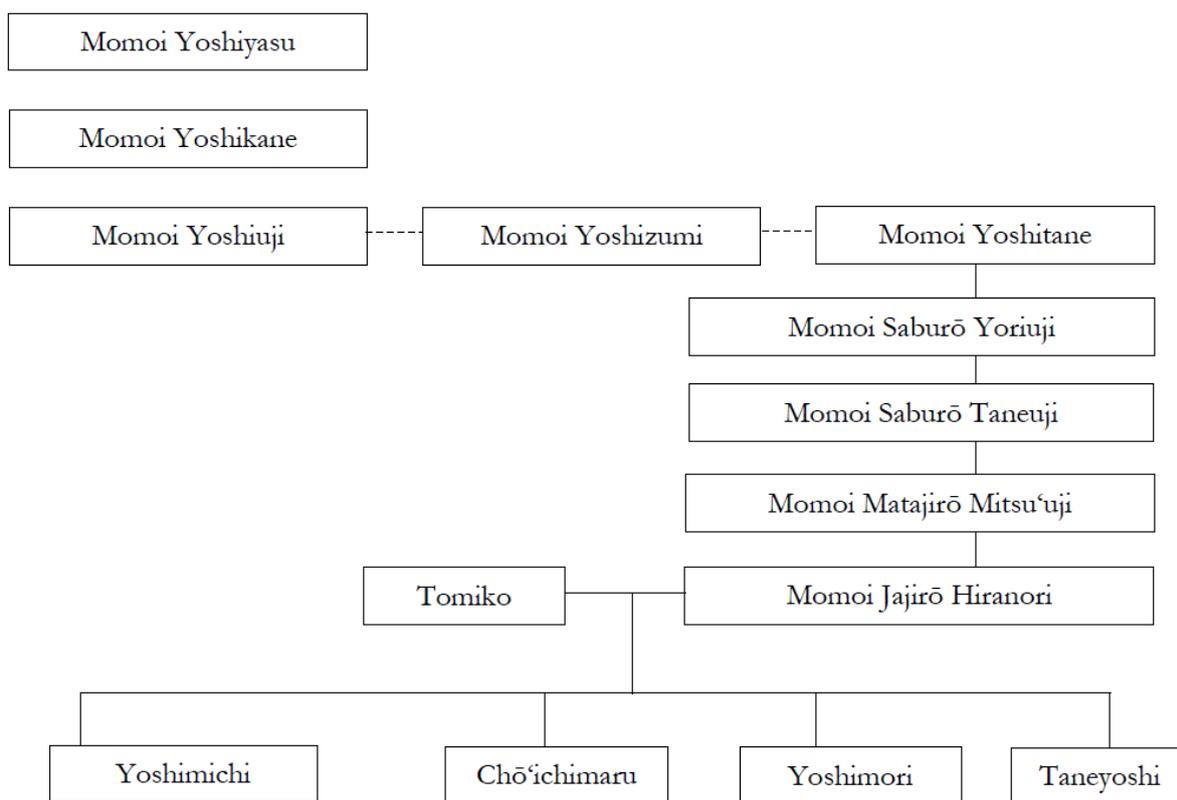
The main line, Hokkeshū Honmonshū comprises four head temples: two founded by Nichiryū, Honnō-ji in Kyoto and Honkō-ji in Amagasaki with the addition of Chōkokuzan Jūsen-ji in Chiba founded by Echigo Ajari Nichiben and Tokueizan Kōchō-ji in Shizuoka founded by Izumi Ajari Nippō. Following changes in the regulations of religious corporations in the XIX and XX century, other temples separated from this original group. Utsugizan Myōren-ji created the spinoff Honmon Hokkeshū. Two factions following respectively the doctrines of Enkō-*bō* Nichijin (1339~1414) and Jōfukyō'in Nichishin (1444~1528) were also created. The first is a schism from the *Rokujō* lineage, while the second also a split from the *Shijō* group.

Kenpon Hokkeshū is the school following Genmyō Ajari Nichijū (1314~1392), based at Myōtōzan Myōman-ji temple in Kyoto that became formally independent in the XX century. Two important branch temples are Hōkōzan Myōkoku-ji in Aizu established by Nichijū and Hō'ōzan Tenmyōkoku-ji in Tokyo attributed to Mino Ajari Tenmoku.

Honmon Butsuryūshū is a *new religion* founded by Nagamatsu Nissen (1817~1890) resulting from a schism with Hokkeshū Honmonshū. From the first group affiliated to Honnō-ji, the congregation became independent after the WWII. Although regarded as a new religious movement, Honmon Butsuryūshū sees itself as being a traditional Nichiren school.

History of the Hokke lineage

The founder Shūjin'in Nichiryū (1385~1464) was born as Chō'ichimaru from an affluent family in Toyama, whose relatives were from the Ashikaga clan. His father Momoi *Umanokami* Hisanori was forced to divorce his wife Tomiko due to their different geographic origins because of the *Namboku* south-north conflict. Hisanori sent Chō'ichimaru to Onjō-ji at the foot of Mt. Hiei. Also known as Mii-dera, it is the head temple of the Tendai Jimon faction founded by Enchin (814~891), posthumously named Chishō Daishi, whom Nichiren repeatedly criticized in his writing, but nevertheless seemed to respect. While he accused Enchin of demoting the Lotus to a lower position, Nichiren also quoted Chishō's works to sustain his own teachings.



Family chart of the Momoi clan in Toyama

Nichiryū received the tonsure with the name Shin'en in 1396. At age 18 he continued his studies under Ryūge'in Nissei the fourth Abbot of Gusokuzan Myōken-ji, along with his uncles, who later became Kōgaku'in Nichizon and Shūjin'in Nichidō. By the time, he changed his name to Keirin-bō Shūjin'in Nichiryū and improved his Tendai education at Mt. Hiei, in addition to comprehensive esoteric studies Mt. Kōya. According to Ōhira Kōryū, the doctrine of Nichiryū is deeply rooted in primeval Tendai thought and philosophy. In fact, based on analysis of Nichiryū's propagation activities, the terminology in his early literature and preaching style in his lineage, Yonezawa Shinnosuke observed that quotes from various esoteric Tendai (*Taimitsu*) masters are often found in his works. In such insight Nichiryū might have found parallels between his own thought and Nichiren's, hence reinforcing the convincement of being a true successor, even if the two never met. Such reasoning of *direct spiritual transmission* is also found in Genmyō Ajari Nichijū (1314~1392) of the Myōman-ji faction, who studied at Enryaku-ji as well.

Successively, Nichiryū came into disagreement with the fifth Abbot of Myōken-ji, Gugaku Gatsumyō (1385~1440). A point of contention was the *shōretsu* issue in addition to the relationships between Buddhist deities and Shintō *kami*. The fact that Gatsumyō did not adopt a *nichigō* adopting a name with the initial ideogram for moon was unseen in the Nichiren tradition, although the second Abbot Daikaku Myōjitsu and his successor Rōgen likewise deviated from the custom. For a short period only, Gatsumyō used the clerical name Nichimyō, but discontinued soon thereafter. He actually continued to be active within the Nichiren community, so that the real reasons for the dispute are not completely clear. One mandala authored by him in the sixth month of 1411 for a lay believer named Nobuo Jien, is still extant at Myōken-ji. Gatsumyō inscribed the Buddha emanations in the second row and placed Nichiren centrally under the *Daimoku*, as the Highly Revered Great Bodhisattva. Fudō and Aizen are almost identical, perhaps revealing his lack of mastership with the Sanskrit syllables, or perhaps he meant to inscribe a double Aizen, just as the Gohonzon inscribed by Nichiren in 1281 for a female believer with the same name *bikuni* Jien. While Nobuo was definitively a male, Gatsumyō could have easily seen this Gohonzon stored at Kōfuzan Honman-ji, not far away from his temple. There are however no other indications that the Nichiren scroll was a source of inspiration for Gatsumyō and there were other works of Nichiren, Nichirō and Nichizō stored at Myōken-ji.

On mandalas inscribed by his successor Nichigu several Shintō deities can be observed and such influence of the native Japanese religion became evidently a point of contention with the group of Nichiryū. Nevertheless it was Higo Ajari Nichizō, the lineage founder, who reintroduced the Japanese deities into the Nichiren pantheon and he was the most creative among all disciples both in terms of the depicted figures on his mandalas as well as the first to introduce pictorials on the Gohonzon, a tradition that was set forth in the early period of Myōken-ji.

Nichizō and his successors were nevertheless connected with the court nobility and Gatsumyō's relations were perhaps not congenial to the network of Nichiryū. In a typical Japanese pattern, the latter left the temple two times and came back and after his third withdrawal, he eventually separated from the *Shijō* lineage to create his own in 1415. Seven priests, including his uncles Nichizon and Nichidō followed him, while the other four later grouped as the Utsugizan Myōren-ji faction. In 1418, the relationship with Myōken-ji and Gatsumyō further deteriorated and other Abbots replaced him. A significant change in the mandalas authored by the sixth Abbot onwards can be observed. Nichiryū was one of the third generation leaders that neither met Nichiren nor his direct disciples who had known him personally. Nevertheless he became a powerful preacher and very prolific writer who also greatly influenced other groups in the Fuji and Shimofusa areas. The mandalas he inscribed reflect his Eight Chapter doctrine as he mainly depicts the Bodhisattvas quoted in the Sūtra chapters that were relevant to his teaching, but generally much less figures than on the mandala format prevalent in Nichiren schools. At times, he inscribed only Bodhisattva Vīśistacāritra (Jōgyō) and Śāriputra as *Miko Sonja*, one of the sixteen early Bodhisattvas in the second row, but maintained the four *devas*, Fudō and Aizen.

During his tenure as head of study at Tokueizan Kōchō-ji, Honga'in Nicchō (1392~1466) invited Nichiryū to reinvigorate the *sangha*, after reading his *Tendai-Hokke Ryōshū Shōretsu-shō*, mostly known as *Shijō-shō* and meeting him in Kyoto. Thanks to his contacts with the Fuji School, Nichiryū could obtain some original Nichiren mandalas for his own temples. Nicchō is said to have been found as a newborn in front of the main gate of Kyūsokuzan Risshō-ji in Katsunuma, another temple converted by Izumi Ajari Nippō. The basic tenets from the Fuji School can be widely observed in the Gohonzon inscribed by Nicchō and his successors, who signed the mandala placing *Nichiren Daishōnin* large and bold under the central inscription, just as his contemporaries at Taiseki-ji, Kitayama and Nishiyama in the same period. The seventh, ninth and tenth Abbot even signed as Nichiren+*zaigoban.*, exactly as in the Taiseki-ji tradition, although Nichiryū donated to Kōchō-ji two Gohonzon inscribed by him. While most of the Nikkō faction (Taiseki-ji, Fuji Honmon-ji, Hota Myōhon-ji, Kyoto Yōhō-ji) adhered to the *shōretsu* principle in any case, a specific doctrinal influence of Nichiryū on the fourth Abbot at Taiseki-ji Ben Ajari Nichidō has been clearly documented. In this period when Nichidō and Nichigō of Hota Myōhon-ji as well as Nichimyo from Kitayama and Nichidai were arguing over the *Honjaku-shōretsu*, the absolute superiority of the *Honmon* part of the Lotus and matters concerning the necessity or not to recite the *Hōben* chapter, Nichiryū influenced Nichidō so that he finally agreed towards positions similar to the *Happō-ha*.

Nichiryū established Hon'ō-ji in 1415 with the support of a local *kosodeya* merchant named Yamamoto Soku and the wealthy families Chaya and Suminokura. The temple does not use a *sangō* title, albeit Nagaoka Atsumasa mentions it to be Utsugizan, the same as Myōren-ji, also in the Hokke lineage. The temple was later rebuilt as Honnō-ji around 1429. At the request of Ashikaga Tadayoshi's (1306~1352) son Nyo'i-maru, the structure moved to Rokkaku-Miyachō and became a center of propagation for the *Eight-Chapter* school. This group was advocating that the second half of the Lotus Sūtra known as the *Honmon*, is superior to the first *Shakumon* eight chapters. This difference of opinion was already discussed during Nichiren's time by some believers associated with Ōta Jōmyō, a fact that Nichiren reprimanded in a letter to Toki Jōnin.

Thanks to the patronage of powerful *daimyō* Hosokawa Mitsumoto (1378~1426), around 1420 Nichiryū could establish also Honkō-ji temple in Amagasaki, which served as a training seminary for priests, while Honnō-ji functioned as a propagation base. Over 100 successive Abbots served their term as chief priests of both temples. Among the early Abbots, who chiefly resided at the center in Amagasaki there were several females and his direct disciples. Honnō-ji and Honkō-ji are among the few Nichiren temples where female Abbesses were appointed since early on and in some cases also tenured at Kōchō-ji or Myōren-ji due to a rotation system. Nichiryū left a legacy of hundreds direct pupils, while his six elder disciples, who all tenured at both Honnō-ji and Honkō-ji, where second Abbot Kōgaku'in Nisshin (1422~1455), third Abbes Shōjin'in Nittō (1422~1459), fourth Abbot Kōgaku'in Nichimyo (1425~1474), fifth Abbes Shōjin'in Nisshin (1430~1465), sixth Abbot Kongō'in Nichiyo (1426~1491) and seventh Abbot Kongō'in Nichizō (1442~1503).

Following the Hokke persecution in the Tenbun period, Honnō-ji and all 21 Nichiren temples in Kyoto were destroyed by fire in 1536. A pardon consenting Nichiren temples to return to the capital was issued six years later in 1542. By 1615, Honnō-ji was thriving again with more than 90 sub-temples receiving support from the Edo government. In 1788, the structure was destroyed by the great Tenmei fire. In 1897, flames damaged the temple once more during a xenophobic revolt against foreign cultural influence, known as the Genji Great Fire.

Honnō-ji and Honkō-ji were actually regarded as a single temple until 1909, under the tenure of the 107th Abbot. At that time, the school had 92 sub-temples. From the 108th Abbot onwards, the two temples have been administrated separately. According to the *Ryōzan Rekiifu*, (history of both temples) Nichiryū could built the temple in Amagasaki thanks to the support of an affluent lay patron, a rice-dealer named *komeya* Jirō. Shortly after establishing Honkō-ji, Nichiryū could earn the support of the province's governor Hosokawa Mitsumoto (1378~1426) in 1423. Thanks his endorsement, Nichiryū erected a relatively large building. The prosperity of Honkō-ji however also owes essentially to the support of Amagasaki's townspeople. In 1617 the temple moved from the original site to its present location due to the construction works for Amagasaki castle. In 1822 the main hall was destroyed by fire and rebuilt in 1827. The seminaries of Tokueizan Kōchō-ji and Honkō-ji were merged in 1914 with the establishment of the Honmon Hokkeshū Gakurin. Honkō-ji also houses a sword which is said to have belonged to Nichiren, known as *Juzumaru*, believed to be the sword given to Nichiren by Hōjō Yagenta. The two temples store several original mandalas inscribed by Nichiren and his disciples Nichirō and Nichizō.

Outline of the doctrine of Shūjin'in Nichiryū

Much of Nichiryū's doctrine is based on the *Honmon happepon shō'i*, "correctness of the essential eight chapters" of the Lotus Sūtra. This principle is also known as *Jinriki shō'i*, which takes its name from the 21st chapter *Nyorai jinriki-bon*, "Divine Powers of the Thus Come One". Here the Buddha transmits the essence of his teaching that is the five-characters of *Myō-Hō-Ren-Ge-Kyō* to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth and entrusts them with the mission of saving humanity in the defiled latter age of Mappō. Although neither Nichiren nor Nichiryū were aware that the Lotus Sūtra itself is composed by older layers or early sections, both were convinced that the *Nyorai jinriki-bon* chapter contained the Sūtra's essential *Honmon* teachings. Today there is wide scholarly consensus that this section is among the earliest, even if among these layers some are believed to be older than others. As an example, while the merits of copying the Sūtra are mentioned in the 10th chapter Hosshi, "Teacher of the Law", during the first centuries after Śākyamuni this teaching was only transmitted orally. The specific passage can hence only be a later addition, but in any case, those who transmitted the Sūtra in China and Japan were convinced that its text were the actual sermons of Śākyamuni. In fact Nichiren considered each logograph of the Lotus as being a golden Buddha to underline he believed in it *word for word*. Therefore Nichiryū based his doctrine upon his own reading of the Sūtra's contents which he believed to be the same interpretation of Nichiren.

Kumarajiva's disciple Tao-sheng, Fa-yün of Kuang-chai temple and Tiantai divided the Lotus Sūtra in two halves, *primary gate* or *essential teaching* and *secondary gate* or *trace teaching* and also systemized its structure for better understanding highlighting the important passages. Before becoming a disciple of Nichiren, Nichiryū studied extensively at Enryaku-ji, Onjō-ji and even at Kongōbu-ji, his background was hence deeply rooted in Tiantai's reading of the Lotus teachings.

Nichiren was convinced that the passage < *Just as the light of the sun and moon illuminates all obscurity, this person will practice among the people and dispel the darkness of all mankind* > was actually meant for him. Likewise Nichiryū was deeply inspired by these verses and elaborated the passage in his work known as *Shijō-shō*, explaining that this verse indicates the correct attitude for a follower of the Lotus teachings. He became one of the pillars in the *shōretsu* faction and an important figure in medieval Hokke scholarship. He emphasized on the transcendence of Śākyamuni rather than the Dharma inherent in each person. Nichiryū was a very prolific writer and authored more than 300 works of which another well-known is the *Honmon Gukyō shō*, an exegesis for propagation of the Honmon teachings. Other important works are the *Gosho Bundanshū*, *Jūsan Mondōshō*, *Myōmoku Kenbun*, *Rokusoku Shiki*, *Gengi Ichibu Kenbun*, *Gengi Yōbun*, *Tōka Yōden* and the *Shogoshorissō*. He advocated that the correct interpretation of Buddhist scriptures was to understand that the true mission of propagating Buddhism was entrusted to Bodhisattva Viśistacāritra (Superior Practices) as explained in the primeval eight chapters of the Lotus teachings. For Nichiryū this was the only true reading of the Sūtra verified through the appearance in this world of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, as explained in Nichiren's *Kanjin Honzon-shō*, "The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind Established in the Fifth Five-Hundred-Year Period after the Thus Come One's Passing".

Nichiryū considered the succession line to start with *Kuon Jissei Honsbi Shakamuni Seson* the “Original Teacher, the Eternal Śākyamuni”, followed by *Honge Jōgyō saitan Nichiren Shōnin* “Nichiren as Reincarnation of Bodhisattva Jōgyō” and the disciples Nichirō, Renmyō Ajari Nisshun, Izumi Ajari Nippō, Echigo Ajari Nichiben, Nichizō, Daikaku Myōjitsu, Rōgen and Ryūge’in Nissei, basically the *Shijō* lineage.

Nichiryū was very active and travelled from eastern to western Japan. Hongai’in Nicchō (1392~1466), fifth Abbot at Tokueizan Kōchō-ji; was looking after about seventy disciples who came from the nearby provinces Suruga, Kai and Izu and requested Nichiryū’s support in order to increase the propagation of Nichiren’s teachings. Kōchō-ji was hence incorporated in the Honmon Hokkeshū faction. For a certain period, Kyūsokuzan Risshō-ji in Yamanashi, also known as Small Minobu or East Minobu adhered to the Happon-ha faction or Eight Chapter School, but later joined the Minobu faction. The temple was converted by Nippō and its Abbot Nichijō, is believed to be a relative of Nisshun, co-founder of Okamiya Kōchō-ji. Interestingly, this temple stores one mandala authored by Nichizō, most probably donated by Nichiryū and another inscribed by Genmyō Ajari Nichijū, founder of Myōman-ji temple in Kyoto, a clear sign that the Hokke lineages from the capital were visiting the Fuji temples in order to extend their influence. It is documented that Nichiryū had also contacts with Sanuki Kōeizan Honmon-ji temple, probably due to his connection with Ben Ajari Nichidō. In fact the Jakunichi-bō Nikke mandala, originally stored there, is now at Honnō-ji in Kyoto. According to one theory, another Gohonzon bestowed upon Setsu-*kō* Nissen was also stored at Sanuki and temporarily taken by Nichiryū or stolen by warriors in 1578 who later sold it to Honnō-ji. An excellent copy of this Gohonzon is extant at Myōren-ji in Kyoto. While Nichiren inscribed a simple bestowal note to the priest Nissen, on the original his supervisor Nikkō added a dedication as he did on the scroll bestowed upon his disciple Jakunichi-*bō* Nikke. The Gohonzon originally located at Sanuki Honmon-ji might have been seized by Chōsokabe Motochika (1539~1599) during a local war and sold to Honnō-ji in Kyoto years after. However, Nichidatsu (1627~1698), the 31st Abbot of Kuon-ji, recorded that during his tenure, the Gohonzon was stored at Minobu, hence another copy exist in this faction. The motives for the transfer are unclear, but it may have been sold to Kuon-ji in order to pay for reconstruction expenses, after Honnō-ji was damaged by fire. The original scroll was later donated to Konoe Motohiro, who passed it on to his daughter Tennei’in Konoe Hiroko. She was a strong supporter of Taiseki-ji and in 1741 as per her last wish the mandala was transferred to Jōsen-ji temple in Tokyo. The two replicas stored respectively at Utsugizan Myōren-ji in Kyoto and Kuon-ji in Yamanashi has been used as a matrix for commercial *okatagi* Gohonzon scrolls. The copy in Kyoto is believed to have been produced centuries ago by the time the original was stored at Honnō-ji.

Historically, the first five temples to form the *Happon-ha* aegis were Honnō-ji, Honkō-ji, Kōchō-ji, Jūsen-ji, and Myōren-ji in 1872. From 1876 it’s Abbots tenured for one year at each temple on a rotation basis until in 1898 the *Happon-ha* or *Nichiryū-monryū* became Hokke Honmonshū. Under the religious corporation laws in 1941 the three branches Hokke Honmonshū, Honmyō Hokkeshū (now Hokkeshū Shinmonryū) and Hokkeshū (now Hokkeshū Jinmonryū) were forced to merge into a single religious corporation under the name Hokkeshū. In 1951 Hokkeshū was disbanded and Myōren-ji became once again Honmon Hokkeshū, Honnō-ji and Honkō-ji formed the Hokke Honmonryū along with Kōchō-ji and Jūsen-ji.

Honmon Hokkeshū

Historically Utsugizan Myōren-ji is considered as having been established in 1294 by Higo Ajari Nichizō and regards itself as the first *Daimoku* practice hall in Kyoto. As with Gusokuzan Ryūhon-ji, the temple separated from Gusokuzan Myōken-ji, but originates from the same first structure named Myōhon-ji, that was established with the support of Kyotos Yanagi-ya brewery owned by a believer named Nakaoki and his wife Myōrenhō-ni. In fact the *sangō* Utsugizan, is given by separating the two radicals composing Yanagi resulting in Utsugi. The first rudimental structure was a Hokke-dō prayer hall named Myōhōrengē-ji in Gojō Nishinogotō'in. After being damaged by fire it became neglected until the building was moved to the Shijō Ōmiya area by Busshō'in Nichikei (1397~1478) between 1394 and 1428, but most probably around 1420. Nichikei initially studied under the fourth Abbot Ryūge'in Nissei, but due to disagreements with his successor Gugaku Gatsumyō over the *shōretsu* issue, he left Myōken-ji together with Nichiryū, Nichidō Nichizon to establish the *Honmon Happon* faction. The differences with Hokke Honmonryū are minimal and originally the same as those between Nichikei, Nichigu (1423~1501) and other priests at Myōken-ji who were supervised by Gatsumyō.

Especially Nichigu, was expecting to become the sixth Abbot after Gatsumyō, but due his young age and lack of study curricula he was quickly ousted in favor of Ryūge'in Nippō (1472~1534), who became the seventh Abbot. The suffix of Nichigu at Myōken-ji is recorded as Ryūge'in. Particularly during the tenure of Gatsumyō, several priests were leaving and entering the temple, a factor which was propaedeutic to form the first Hokkeshū congregation. Nichigu was eager to grasp the real doctrine set forth by Higo Ajari Nichizō and between 1487 and 1488, Jōfukyo'in Nichishin (1444~1528) also left the group to form his own *sangha*. Another issue of contention was the influence of Shintō practices within the Myōken-ji congregation that fueled much debate among the priests. Nichigu was concerned about doctrinal issues regarding the *Jinriki shō'i* versus *Jūryō-hon shō'i*, questioning if the ultimate truth of the Lotus teaching lies in the 16th or in the 21st chapter.

Gyōkuren'in Nichiō (1433~1508), a child of the *kenyō* court noble Iwata Shigeari (1378~1440), was later invited to preside over the temple as a resident Abbot. In the aftermath the initial structure of Myōren-ji transferred to the Imadegawa Shijō area and gained support from Prince Fushiminomiya Sadatsune (1426~1474) and his family. Although considered its eighth Abbot, due to the counting being started by Higo Ajari Nichizō, the actual initiator of Myōren-ji as an independent temple was in fact Nichiō, also a relative of prince Sadatsune. In addition to a backing from the imperial house, Myōren-ji had also allies within the Ashikaga shogunate. The temple however had to transfer to Sakai in 1536 due to the Hokke persecution in Kyoto. In 1542 it returned to the capital, but moved again to its present location in 1587 because of the construction works for the Jūrakudai palace of Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Myōren-ji prospered again, but the great Tenmei fire burned it down to ashes in 1788. Fortunately, the relics could be spared from the flames. The temple with its eight sub-temples became the Honmon Hokke School around 1870.

Hokkeshū Jinmonryū

This school traces back its origins to Enkō-bō Nichijin (1339~1419), a disciple of Myōryū'in Nichijū (1298~1369) from the Rokujō faction. The latter was a second generation disciple of Nichirō, through Maka'ichi Ajari Nichiin (1264~1329) who is said to have met Nichiren as a child at Teradomari. Nichijin was a native of Niigata, son of Sasaki Takasada and Myōgiku, the daughter of Chancellor Imadegawa Kanesue (1281~1339). He tonsured as a child under another disciple of Nichijō named Nichiryū (*Sun-Dragon*). At age 18 Nichijin went to Kyoto and studied at Daikōzan Honkoku-ji during the tenure of Kenryū'in Nichiden (1342~1409), to become a Buddhist scholar. Later he disagreed with his Abbot on doctrinal issues, left Honkoku-ji and established Kōryōzan Honzen-ji in 1406 around the Imadegawa area in Kyoto. Initially Daiken-bō Nittō headed the study department at Honkoku-ji, but after listening to a debate between Nichiden and Nichijin, he decided to side with the latter. In the aftermath Nittō became Nichijin's disciple along with other four priests named Nichijō, Nichizon, Nichidai and Nisshin. Nittō inscribed a mandala for Kurudo-*kō* in 1425 that was later designated as *jōjū honzon* at Honzen-ji. Nichiren is placed in the middle, under the *Daimoku* as *Namu Nichiren Daishōnin* and is signed by him. On the left side Nittō placed his three masters, Nichirō, Nichiin and Nichijin to underline the lineage. While Nichijin returned to his native province and took charge of Honjō-ji established by Maka'ichi Ajari Nichiin, later Honzen-ji suffered the same destiny as the other Nichiren temples in Kyoto, during the Hokke disturbance.

Originally the local lord Yamayoshi Nagahisa and his son Sadaaki, provided means to Maka'ichi Ajari Nichiin to build Honjō-ji, previously named Aorenge-ji in 1297. The *sangō* has been suggested by Nichirō in 1314 and is another reading for Nagahisa's name. After completing his Tendai studies, Nichiin became a disciple of Nichirō in Kamakura at age 31. In 1318 Nichirō was scheduled for a debate sponsored by the regent Hōjō Takatoki (1316~1326), but sent Nichiin instead, due to his old age. The session has been recorded by Nichiin's disciple Myōryū'in Nichijō and is known as *Kamakura denchū-mondō*. The actual establishment of Honjō-ji as a head of the Hokkeshū Jinmon School however is attributed to Nichijin. In 1369, he received the transmission from his teacher Nichijō and based himself at Honjō-ji enjoying imperial blessing and outside protection from a number of samurais and nobles.

Nichijin founded also Jōreizan Honkō-ji temple in the Fuji area around 1383, thanks to the patronage of the Udono clan of Nishi-Mikawa. The structure was originally a sub-temple of Fumon-ji, affiliated to the Shingon School. The first abbot of Honkō-ji was previously a priest at the Yakushi-dō, who debated with Nichijin on a daily basis. After his conversion, he took the name Daijhi'in Nichijō (1344~1425) and his own disciples became Tōkō-bō Nichien and Gomi'oyamada-bō Nichinō. When the two met, Nichijin was 45 and Nichijō 37 years old. After the temple was converted in 1383, Nichijō expanded Honkō-ji even further. He is actually considered the founder, since he was originally the resident priest before the conversion.

The fifth Abbot Nissen (?~1483), himself a disciple of Nanyō-bō Nichizon (1370~1447), fourth Abbot of Chōkyūzan Honjō-ji, could receive support from Udono Fujitarō Hōkon (?~1479) in 1471. He and his clan granted support to Nissen and the Jinmon faction.

The Ōkubo clan, connected to Matsudaira Hirotada (1526~1549), father of Tokugawa Ieyasu, also became supporters of the Jinmon lineage, enabling Chizon'in Nichikei to establish Tokueizan Honmyō-ji in Hamamatsu around 1571. The structure has been transferred several times before being moved to Edo in 1590, but still preserves an early Nichiren mandala, probably inscribed during his Sado exile. The structure was destroyed in the great Meireki fire in 1657 when about 70% of the capital was destroyed and 100,000 lives were lost in the fire and re-built at its present location in the last century.

The doctrine of Nichijin lies mainly within the *shōretsu-ha* and *Shakabonbutsuron*, the notion that Śākyamuni is the Original Buddha. However Nichijin placed a special emphasis on the 16th chapter of the Lotus, the *Nyorai Jūryō-hon*, “Life Span of the Thus Come One”. He framed his ideas based on the *Kamakura denchū-mondō* debate held by Nichiin, where he affirms that one is saved by the Buddha’s compassion expounded in the *Nyorai Jūryō-hon* through the five characters of *Myō-Hō-Ren-Ge-Kyō*. The *Jūryō* chapter is clarified in the last of the *Hokkeshichijū*, Lotus Seven Parables, where the “children” of the “skilled physician” drink the good medicine” and feel its beneficial effects. The children represent all living beings and the doctor the original Buddha.

The offshoot from the *Rokujiō* faction established by Nichijin created a different custom for inscribing the mandala Gohonzon based on his own reading of the Lotus teachings. He inscribed *Namu Nichiren Daishōnin* under the *Daimoku* in the early period of his predication. After he separated from the Honkoku-ji faction once and for all, Nichijin placed his own signature thick and bold at the bottom. This could be seen as a way to establish a distinct identity and reinforce his leadership within the lineage. In 1415 he inscribed a very large Gohonzon made of 20 sheets, measuring mm 1729×756, now preserved at Honjō-ji in Niigata. While no recipient is stated, Nichijin indicated his age under the signature. Since there are no other examples of such large size, this Gohonzon must have been particularly significant. There are about 40 extant mandalas authored by Nichijin. In the early period, next to Nichiren, he inscribes also his predecessors Nichirō, Nichiin and Nichijō. After he disconnected from Honkoku-ji, Nichijō however is no longer found on the Gohonzon. Prior to the separation, sometimes Zentoku Buddha and the emanations of Śākyamuni are accorded a place on the mandala with additional quotations from the Lotus Sūtra. On the Gohonzon in the Nichijin lineage, the placement of Nichiren does not follow a single rule. At times he is inscribed in the middle under the *Daimoku* as *Namu Nichiren Daishōnin* or *Namu Hosshū Nichiren Daishōnin*, while on other mandalas Nichiren is merely placed among the sages followed by Nichirō, while the Abbot’s signature is at the center. His successors at Chōkyūzan Honjō-ji however followed the early patterns and *Namu Nichiren Daishōnin* under the *Daimoku* can be observed on fairly all mandalas authored by the Abbots of Honjō-ji. Please refer to *The Mandala in Nichiren Buddhism*, third volume.

Hokkeshū Shinmonryū

The founder of this Hokkeshū branch was Jōfukyo'in Nichishin (1444~1528), son of Yamanaka Chikamichi (1426~1462), an aristocrat related to the Fujiwara clan. Nichishin took the tonsure under Nichizen of Eikōzan Myōken-ji with the name of Daikyō-bō and later became a disciple of Ryūge'in Nichigu (1423~1501), the eighth Abbot of Myōken-ji in the *Shijō* lineage. He left the group after doctrinal disagreements as he advocated the superiority of the *Nyorai Jūryō-bon*, 16th chapter of Lotus Sūtra and went on to establish a new branch within the Hokke School.

Thanks to the powerful family connections and the patronage of Emperor Kokashiwabara (1464~1526), Nichishin established his base in the Shijō Ōmiya area around 1488, albeit other sources such as the *Shōwa Kyōto meisshozue* give a different explanation. Following the Hokke persecution, the temple was transferred to Sakai in 1536 and returned to Kyoto in 1542. Toyotomi Hideyoshi requested to change its location in 1584. Honryū-ji transferred again in 1657 to its present site and in 1788 the structure was partially damaged by fire, but the main hall remained intact. Other main temples of the *Shinmon* branch are Myōhōzan Byōdōei-ji in Fukui, a IX century temple converted from another school, Chikōzan Honkō-ji in Echizen established by Hongyō'in Nichigen in 1489 and Ekōzan Honkyō-ji, also in Fukui.

Unfortunately, the doctrine of Nichishin and the other Hokke branches became one of the core factors eventually nullifying the Kansho Accord, the agreement aimed to end sectarian discord within the various Nichiren schools. The Nichishin faction advocates the *Jūryō-Chapter* theory and is also sometimes considered an offshoot of the *Rokujiō* lineage of Honkoku-ji. Nevertheless, the strong influence from the Myōken-ji school can be observed on the mandalas inscribed by Nichishin. His *kōmyō* spikes bent upwards, exactly as the *nami-yuri Daimoku* of Nichizō, are particularly evident in the character *KYŌ*. This specific trait is also found on the Gohonzon authored by Rōgen, successor of Daikaku Myōjitsu. On one mandala scroll stored at Honryū-ji authored in 1503, Nichishin inscribed *Namu Nichiren Daibosatsu* at the center, flanked by *Namu Nichirō Bosatsu* on the right and *Namu Nichizō Bosatsu* on the left, a sign that Nichijin considered himself as being a true disciple of Higo Ajari Nichizō, rather than indicating a connection with the *Shijō* lineage.

Kempon Hokkeshū

The school founder Genmyō Ajari Nichijū (1314~1392) was born as Ishizuka Tamachiyōmaru in Aizu. He entered Enryaku-ji at 19 studying under Jōchi'in Jihen, a scholar-monk who worked for the 119th/132nd Tendai Abbot Jigen (1298~1359) whom Emperor Godaigo (1288~1339) highly esteemed. Nichijū was ordained as a Tendai Monk in 1352 and at the relatively young age of 38, Genmyō became head of the study department. He converted to Nichiren's teaching autonomously around 1380 after he read copies of the *Kaimoku-sho* and the *Nyosetsu Shugyō sho*.

Genmyō gave himself the name of Nichijū and moved to Kyoto the following year to convert the imperial family and could win the support of the wealthy Tsuda merchants from Sakai. In 1381 Nichijū became very active. After calling upon Yoshimatsu (1358~1408), the third Ashikaga *shōgun*, he went to Minobu and met with Jōgyō'in Nichiei (1352~1400) the seventh Abbot at Kuon-ji and visited Maman Gūhō-ji during the same trip to discuss with the Nakayama School. The following year, he travelled again to Kamakura to meet with the official Ashikaga Ujimatsu (1359~1398) and later re-established a temple that had been built by Tenmoku in the area where Nichiren used to preach, originally named Kyūzokuzan and renamed it Hokkezan Honkō-ji.

As he could not agree with any of his contemporaries, Nichijū decided to establish his own *sangha* and became convinced that uniting all existing schools into a single Hokke confederation was impossible. Although Nichijū did not receive any transmission even from a second-generation disciple, he advocated a sort of *direct spiritual transmission*, which he then passed to his own six senior disciples. Both Nichiryū and Nichijū initially studied the traditional curricula at Enryaku-ji without being previously ordained at a Nichiren temple, but reached to the same conclusions. Consequently they claimed such *direct spiritual transmission* instead of affirming their leadership through a distinct lineage.

In 1389 Nichijū established Myōtōzan Myōman-ji as main base of his faction, approximately opposite to the spot where Honnō-ji was located. Actually, the structure was transferred six times during its history, the actual building stems from the postwar era. The temple houses one original Nichiren mandala from the Bun'ei era allegedly bestowed upon Mino Ajari Tenmoku (1256~1337) and some fragments of Nichiren's original writings. Recent scholarship has disputed the conferral to Tenmoku, which is judged not to be the handwriting of Nichiren. Tenmoku, apparently a relative of Jinshirō from Atsuhara, deemed that the recitation of the Hōben chapter was not necessary and fiercely debated with his peers in the Fuji area. Tenmoku received also another mandala in 1282, which is now stored at Ekōzan Honryū-ji.

His direct successor, Zennyō-bō Nichijin, is considered the fourth in line after Śākyamuni, Nichiren and Nichijū. In the final period of his life, Nichijū returned to his native province. The site was later converted into Hōkōzan Myōkoku-ji, now located in Aizuwakamatsu. The *Kenpon Hokke* School regards the *Eternal Śākyamuni* as the original teacher, Nichiren as the school founder and Nichijū its initiator. Several mandalas in this tradition are signed as Nichiren *zaigohan*, meaning *in representation of Nichiren*, even though Nichijū and his later successors also used to sign the mandala with their own name or by adding *Namu Nichiren Daishōnin* under the central inscription as in the early days of the Fuji School. Originally known as Myōman-ji faction, it became formally a separate school named Kenpon Hokke.

Kenpon Hokke does venerate some additional Shintō deities such as *Shichimen*, *Daikokuten* (originally Śiva or Mahadeva) and *Inari*. In Japan these are the gods of farming and agriculture. However, Honda Seiō'in Nisshō (1867~1931), a Meiji era reformer of the school, strongly advocated that the object of devotion shall be either the mandala or the representation of the Three Treasures. Nisshō also encouraged Nichiren's followers to be more active in society, a paradigm shift from trying to convert the imperial house. Nisshō was not the only one promoting a stronger commitment in public affairs, rather than focusing on the Emperor. These opinions, which were rife in early *Shōwa* period, contributed to the formation of various Nichiren lay organizations (see JNBS IX-2017). Honda Nisshō usually signed the mandala as Nichiren, adding the formula *zaigohan* as in the Fuji lineages.

The authenticity of some mandalas attributed to him, such as the Gohonzon inscribed for his successor Honkaku'in Nichinin in 1388, is disputed among scholars. On the scrolls signed as Nichijū, at times he signed the mandala as Nichiren *zaigohan* or by placing *Namu Nichiren Shōnin* under the central inscription. Myōman-ji also preserves a pictorial mandala by Nichijū with Śākyamuni and Tahō seated in the Treasure tower facing the audience with the four Bodhisattvas in the front row. Nichinin inscribed a Gohonzon in 1407 placing *Namu Nichiren Shōnin* at the center, *Nichijū Shōnin* on the right and his signature on the left side. He also inscribed passages from the fifth chapter of the Lotus Sūtra, known as *The Parable of the Medicinal Herbs* that refer to the rebirth in favorable conditions. The portions are composed of two sets of four ideograms on the right side when facing. The text has been translated as < *having heard these teachings, they became peaceful in their present lives. In the future lives, they will have rebirths in good places, enjoy pleasures by practicing the Way and bear these teachings again* >. On the left side Nichinin inscribed the phrase *issai shjō* which refers to all living beings. After Myōkaku-ji in Kyoto initiated the uncompromising *Fuju-fuse* regulations in 1413, Myōman-ji set forth a stricter set of rules for the conduct of both the clergy and the laity. Initially known as the *Nichijū-monryū* within Nichirensū, the group became later a separate stream named Kempon Hokkeshū. Several Gohonzon authored in this tradition are signed as Nichiren *zaigohan*, although later the own signature is placed centrally, as in other Hokke lineages.

In 1608, the Tokugawa rulers ordered the 27th Abbot Jōraku'in Nikkyō (1551~1620) to a debate and had his ears and nose cut off afterwards. Nikkyō was a disciple of Bussei'in Nichiō (1565~1630), an advocate of the *Fuju-fuse* movement, *not giving and not receiving* alms from non-believers. After the merge of several sub-factions with Nichirensū, Honda Nisshō restored the group centered on Myōman-ji and separated from Nichirensū completely in 1947.

Along with Tanaka Chigaku, Honda Nisshō can be considered one of the fathers of Nichirenism or "socially engaged Buddhism" (not to be confounded with the militarist rhetoric), which flourished in the XX century and saw the rising of numerous lay organizations based on Nichiren's philosophy. Nisshō's ideas found a fertile ground in the Buddhist response to the anti-Buddhist movements of the Meiji period that wanted to eradicate Buddhism from Japan.

Honmon Butsuryūshū

This group actually belongs to the so-called *older* “new religions” and is a spin-off from the main Honmon Hokkeshū congregation. Originally it was just a group of believers known as Honmon Butsuryū-*keō*, established by the priest Nagamatsu Nissen (1817~1890). Born in a merchant class family as Nagamatsu Seifū in Kyoto, he was a brilliant academic who studied Native religion. He converted to the Nichiren Happon-*ba* school thanks to Zuikō’in Nichiyū and studied under Daikaku’in Nichijō at Honnō-ji temple. Nissen tonsured in 1848 and went to the seminar at Honkō-ji in Amagasaki. Later he took Shinkō’in Nichijō, Abbot at Ryūsen-ji in Hyōgo as his master. After a short while, the latter was appointed as Abbot at Utsugizan Myōren-ji.

Soon Nissen became disillusioned with the current state of affairs in the Buddhist clergy. In this period the *sanzujō-furonsō* debate or *Kaibisaronō*, about the merits of Buddhist practice passed on to deceased people by their descendants, was rife in the Hokke community. The concept basically advocated that those who have fallen into the three evil paths may escape from hell directly to obtain Buddhahood, thanks to memorial rites performed by their living relatives. This debate challenged the professional clergy who performed such rituals against other groups that stressed more on individual practice and accumulating merits individually while still being alive.

Nissen was one of the first preachers that based his preaching on *genze riyaku* or practical worldly benefits, including the use of holy water, sanctified with *Daimoku* to heal burns, wounds and other illnesses. Such benefits could be also obtained by animals that can neither speak nor chant. Nissen based this belief on the recovery of Nichiren’s mother stating that by drinking such holy water she could extend her life for another four years. Seen with suspicion by the medical community for its use of *healing water*, the Honmon Butsuryū-*keō* was severely scrutinized by the Meiji government. The established clergy decided to persecute Nissen through highly ranked officials and he was even briefly imprisoned in 1868 on accusation of practicing Christianity as a deviant religion.

While Nissen tried to emphasize laicism in his organization, he was nevertheless an ordained priest and the group remains bound to the traditional clergy-based model. Nissen is considered a reformer of the Hokke School founded by Keirin-bō Nichiryū, follower of Nichiren’s senior disciples Daikoku Ajari Nichirō and Higo Ajari Nichizō. His doctrine is based on the Eight Chapter School. His successor was Mīmaki Genki Nichimon (1853~1911), who also served as a resident priest at Kōchō-ji and Jūsen-ji temples of Honmon Hokkeshū and Utsugizan Myōren-ji. The third in line, also a disciple of Nissen, was Nohara Benryō Nichizui (1854~1920). The head temple is Aoyagizan Yūsei-ji in Kyoto, originally founded by Echigo Ajari Nichiben converting the noble Fujiwara Sadaie. In the XVII century it became a sub-temple of Utsugizan Myōren-ji, but became neglected until Nagamatsu Nissen restored it.

Honmon Butsuryūshū became formally independent only in 1947, when religious freedom was allowed in Japan. This group is relatively well established in Brazil and the U.S.A., but is recently also growing in Europe.

Conclusion

Currently the Hokke groups within traditional Buddhist congregations are mainly active inwardly, preserving their status and *danka* membership, fervently emphasizing the need of memorial services for the ancestors and – apart from theology – strongly advocate the need to build a tomb, so that the descendants can pray to the enlightenment of the deceased. Generally, the membership in the various Hokkeshū *sangha* appears to be mainly from the medium-upper society strata and its relatively small presence overseas chiefly caters to Japanese emigrants with roots in the Hokke tradition.

Kenpon Hokkeshū and Honmon Butsuryūshū, both also rooted among Japanese communities abroad, the latter particularly in Brazil, seem to have been experiencing a surge in their overseas activities in areas where Nichiren shōshū, S.G.I. and more recently Nichirenshū created favorable conditions or a formed membership in the XIX century, offering an alternative. The current situation has been analyzed in the previous issue of JNBS.

It appears evident, that the differences among the various Hokke groups are in fact minimal, even though the Jinmonryū faction originated from the *Rokujō* lineage, while all the others somehow stem from Keirin-*bō* Nichiryū. A strong Tendai background is another common factor, especially the case of Nichiryū and Nichijū, the latter even having converted to Nichiren's teaching autonomously at Enryaku-ji. A schismatic attitude seems to be an additional characteristic that prevented those groups from forming a united *sangha* or at least a compromised solution as in the case of Nichirenshū that merged several different traditions into one large mainstream group. If with globalization, the more internationally oriented Kenpon Hokkeshū and Honmon Butsuryūshū will be successful in gaining membership in those foreign countries with a population that is accustomed to Nichiren Buddhism, remains to be seen. The reasons for a declining membership in the strongest groups and the drain to an alternative *sangha* are always the same. By offering a more hardline stance than the most known groups, such as Kenpon Hokkeshū and Honmon Butsuryūshū appears to be, perhaps devotees who are comfortable with strong rules will be attracted to those congregations. Considering the current trends toward religion and religious groups among *millennials*, only few however may be interested. However, as the rise in global fundamentalism has caused a subtle, but perilous polarization in religious congregations, there might be a demand for more clear-cut discipline even in Nichiren Buddhism. Such need may also arise due to the contradictions between *preaching and actual practicing* that are becoming evident within established groups and the increasing unveiling of dogmas still present in the doctrines of such congregations.

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