

On Fingerprints and stains on Nichiren's mandalas

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Abstract

The major expert on the Nichiren (1222~1282) calligraphic mandala, Nakao Takashi already published a report about fingerprints that he detected on an original Nichiren mandala authored in the third year of Kōan (1280), currently stored in Numazu at Ryū'ō zan Myōkai-ji temple. These fingerprints were discovered during restoration works of the scroll in March 2003.

Due to the performative nature of the act of inscribing a mandala, such occurrences were far from rare. Instead of producing the scrolls in solitary confinement or perhaps with only his closed disciples attending, it is much likely that several people were present at such times. It is documented that there were occasions at Minobu were lectures, ritual music and dance, and theatre was staged as a live action".

During his career, Nichiren produced over two hundred calligraphic mandalas. This estimate includes the works that are no longer extant and exist only as replicas or catalogued in the records of Hōki-bō Nikkō (*Byakuren deshi bunyōmōsu o'fude no Gohonzon mokuroku* NSZ2:116). The surviving Nichiren holographs are thought to be approximatively between 130 and 140, but since the authenticity of few scrolls is still being discussed, there is no unanimous consensus on the exact number.

Those authenticity issues notwithstanding, it is exactly those fingerprints, occasional stains and smudges that hint at a collective and dynamic experience, while in any case these are echoing the exact moment when the scrolls were inscribed. Nichiren appears to have chosen a collective act, rather than secluding himself. This instead might have been the case for other votive scrolls, such as the *Sanjisanpōrai* mandala of the revered monk Myōe (1173~1232), judging from the legends that surrounded him (JJRS 9/2-3:171-198) or the image conveyed by the *Myōeshōnin Jujōzazen* painting¹. Myōe was a skilled *zazen* meditator and preceded Nichiren and other contemporaries, such as Shinran (1173~1263) and Ippen (1234~1289), in producing those votive scrolls with sacred calligraphic invocations (Miyake Moritsune, *Myōe Shōnin no Sanjisanpōrai ni tsuite*, IBK 24/2:650-651, 1976). From this perspective, apparent mishaps as a fingerprint or an ink smudge, are a living testimony of the specific event, as if imprinting the motion on canvas, thus impregnating the mandala with an inimitable proof of authenticity.

The present essay examines a total of seven scrolls, on which fingerprints and various stains can be detected. Indeed, by closer scrutiny, more such findings can be documented, however this paper is limited to the original holographs observed directly. These are 1) the 1274 scroll preserved at Jōzaizan Sōgenji in Mobarā; 2) the second largest *moji* mandala made from twenty sheets of Chōkyūzan Hondoji in Matsudo; the scrolls bestowed upon 3) Nanjō Tokimitsu (1253~1332), 4) Renzō bō Nichimoku (1260~1333), 5) Minbu kō Nikō (1260~1333) and 6) Jakunichi bō Nikke (1252~1334). The latter was inscribed on the same day of a similar 7) mandala stored in Numazu, whose recipient has been cancelled which is the aforementioned scroll examined by Nakao in 2003.

Keywords: Nichiren, mandala, *Daimandara*, *shodō*, calligraphy, Buddhism

¹ The painting, portraying Myōe seated in meditation on a pine tree is an artwork of 1450×590 mm, color on paper, designated as a national treasure, is currently stored at Toga no'ō Kōzanji temple outside Kyoto.

In regard with the whole Nichiren mandalic corpus, Yamanaka Kihachi (NGS Vol.1, 1992-93) catalogued 123 scrolls, adding three mandalas later on, two early one sheet talismans and one *Daimandara* made out of three sheets, for a total of 126 works. While he asserted that there are no genuine Nichiren mandalas among the “new discoveries”, some scrolls could indeed not be photographed, chiefly those preserved at temples affiliated to the *Nichiren Shōshū* faction.

Other scholars such as Hori Nichikō (FSY, 1956) and Yamaguchi Handō (NSK, 1993) lists 140 scrolls. This count includes at least two or three apocryphons and few single works whose authenticity is still being discussed at various levels. Both Hori and Yamaguchi mention five scrolls outside from the Yamanaka compendium (FSY 1:177-178), one bestowed upon Shōsuke *bō* Nichizen², one to Settsu *kō* Nissen, both considered to be authentic and another three³ about which not many details are known.

Two of the mandalas listed by Hori and Yamaguchi are located in Tokyo, at Kōshōzan Myōkōji in Shinagawa and Kuonzan Jōsenji in Sumida ward respectively (NKK p. 366). While these are believed to be genuine, there is no consensus about the scrolls as authentic Nichiren holographs. Another mandala, previously owned by Fujimoto Kanzō (NSK, p. 151; *Hōzō sōō hōbō*, p. 9, *Nichiren to honzon denshō*, p. 60), whose replica can be examined at Kitayama Honmonji, is now housed at Taisekiji temple along with yet another scroll⁴ (NSK, p. 155; *Nichiren to honzon denshō*, pp. 60) donated from the Nagai family from Tsuchiura.

Nakao Takashi has added a total of six scrolls in his 2013 compendium (NHS p. 43, 47, 51, 72, 78, 84). Three are simple works dated from the Bun’ei era, stored at Sesonji, Myōsenji and Honjōji in Niigata prefecture; one *Byōsoku shōmetsu* mandala from the Kenji era preserved at Nakayama Hokekyōji dated 16.03.1278 and one each at Myōhonji in Kamakura and Honpōji in Kyoto authored in the Kōan era.

The *Risshō Ankokukai* preserves three authentic Nichiren scrolls which are generally aired on the second Sunday of October each year, weather conditions permitting. During his lecture in occasion of the mandala airing in October 1993, Yamanaka reported that his mentor Kataoka Zuiki (1887~1949) travelled extensively in Japan for about seven years from February 1928, visiting various location from the northern provinces of Ōshū (today Iwate prefecture) to the southern regions of Kyūshū to photograph and examine over two thousand scrolls that at the time were said to have been authored by Nichiren. After selecting only one fourth worth of detailed scrutiny, he confirmed the authenticity of 126 in total (Kawasaki Hiroshi, *Hokke Bukkyō Kenkyū* 16/2003:79).

The rather minor differences in the listings are due to the scrolls housed at Taiseki-ji and its sub-temples, that could be photographed or independently analyzed. In addition, three to four replicas of extant mandalas that are housed at Kitayama Honmon-ji are listed as authentic in several reports. Two such replicas would be those produced from the scrolls donated by Tsuchiura and Fujimoto, one from the Nichizen mandala in addition to another small protective *omamori* bestowed upon a follower named Kameya.

² Shōsuke *bō* Nichizen (? ~1331), was a disciple of Hōki *bō* Nikkō. After being acquired from a pawn shop, the scroll was previously housed at Hōdō’in in Tokyo’s Ikebukuro ward and later transferred to Taiseki-ji.

³ These three scrolls are listed as being granted to layman (*zoku*) Nichizō dated eleventh month, second year of Kōan (1279) with a laudatory inscription from Nikkō; *shamon* Yūsei Nichigō dated eighth day, eighth month of the same year and one to *shamon* Minbu Nikō dated fifth day, eighth month of the following year. It however unlikely that Nikkō would have taken the scroll elsewhere and that Nichiren gave the title *shamon* instead of *jakushi* (child of Śākyamuni).

⁴ The recipient is supposed to be Ishikawa *shin-hyōe* Munetada (1233? ~1303?), the steward of Omosu who donated land for Kitayama Honmon-ji temple.

Although not exactly resembling the original, this replica (examined 13.04.2013) is of great importance because it was produced before the recipient's name was cancelled and additions were made on the extant holograph and thus offers a proof of the original inscriptions made Nichiren.

In addition to the imperfections mentioned in this paper, there are also other marks of action such as visible signs of intense chanting sessions. On a scroll housed at Honnō-ji temple in Kyoto, known as *kirihaku Gohonzon* (NGS Nr. 46) visible damages can be observed, mainly due to stains resulting from smoke candles and incense. During the XIII and XIV centuries, locally produced incense was made with wood and oily essences.

Candles were also made of greasy materials, thus the resulting smoke of both candles and incense must have been very dense and stained the mandala. As described in *Goshinseki ni fureru* (Nakao Takashi, p. 46), this should not be viewed as carelessness, but rather as a proof of dedication of the early *Daimoku kō* groups, who regularly met to pray collectively. Those stains are in fact the result of such prayer sessions, like a shadow imprinted on a surface.

The same might be also affirmed for areas on some mandala that became tattered, not by the decay of time, but due to devotees rubbing or touching the mandala in order to feel a deeper connection with Nichiren. This act of devotion perpetuated through the centuries, finally resulted in almost deleting the ink.

While there are ongoing discussions⁵ (Hanano Jūdō, IBK 63/1:170-175, 2014) about the calligraphic *honzon* versus its tridimensional version is as the *Ittōryōson* (one *Daimoku* tablet flanked by two Buddha), *Ittōryōson Shishi* (the same with adding the four *honge* Bodhisattvas) or even a complete set of statues, the calligraphic element represented by the *Daimoku* tablet cannot be sidestepped and is hence essential. In addition, the calligraphic *Daimandara* is an immediately recognizable guild of identification of the Nichiren teaching and its *sangha*.

The first Nichiren calligraphic mandala that has been documented, is a relatively simple work, later known as the *Yōji honzon*. It was supposedly produced with a twig brush (albeit some scholars are of different opinion) and dated by Nichiren himself on the ninth day, tenth month, eighth year of Bun'ei (1271). He inscribed the scroll while being held in custody in Sagami province (today part of Kanagawa prefecture) at the residence of Honma Rokurō *saemon* Shigetsura, the constable of Sado.

Nichiren started to produce his early calligraphic mandalas while in exile on Sado continuing for the three years of his permanence and beyond. The definition *Sado hyappuku no honzon* (the hundred Sado *honzon* scrolls) may refer to a large unaccounted number. The fact that at least a few have survived intact to this day, indicates that Nichiren produced several of scrolls; the many apocryphons do also testimony the great appeal of these small talismans. Strictly speaking, this grouping comprises the nine scrolls from the Yamanaka compendium numbered 2, 3, 3/2, 3/3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 25. This numbering has been arranged due to editorial issues

The extant Nichiren mandalic corpus is currently stored at various temples affiliated to different Nichiren denominations or individuals. Most of them are under the aegis of *Nichirensū* whose head temple is Minobusan Kuon-ji; about one tenth of the corpus is at temples of the Fuji school, mainly *Nichirensōshū* (seven or eight at Taiseki-ji and two at sub-temples), one each respectively at Nishiyama Honmonji, Hota Myōhon-ji and Kyoto Yōhōji;

⁵ The article originally titled *Nichiren honzonron wa daimandara ka issonshihi ka*, has been rendered in English as “Nichiren's Object of Worship: The Great Mandala or the Buddha and Four Attendants?”.

26 scrolls are stored at temples of the Hokkeshū faction and sub-factions (Utsugizan Myōren-ji offshoot, *Honmon*, *Jinmon*, *Shinmon* and *Kempon* factions), three at the Risshō Ankokukai headquarter in Chiba in addition to another one in private ownership.

While nominally stored at the temples mentioned above, mandalas are mostly de facto stored at museums or specialized facilities. Several of these scrolls are also known by an epithet that has been given in later centuries such as *Yōji honzon* or *Kirihaku honzon*. However, for an exact reference, many scholars use the sequential numbers given by Yamanaka (NGS). This paper will thus also refer to those numbers for an easier and immediate reference.

The six sheet *daimandara* of Jōzaizan Sōgenji (NGS Nr. 13)

After being pardoned from banishment on the Sado Island in the third month of 1274, Nichiren briefly sojourned in Kamakura and moved to a makeshift hermitage on Mt. Minobu in the province of Kai (today Yamanashi) on the fifth month, at the urgings of local steward Nambu Hagii Rokurō Sanenaga (1222~1297). Two months after Nichiren settled at his new dwelling amidst the forest in the mountains, on the 25th day, seventh month, eleventh year of Bun'ei (1274), he inscribed this large *moji* mandala composed of two vertical stripes with three sheets each, for a total of six sheets, measuring 1273 × 570 mm. He used ink of good quality and the mandala was probably enshrined as a *Jōjūhonzon* for regular worship.

According to Nakao, traces of ferrous particles, suggest that it was attached to a rod and under the character *DA* for *Daibadatta*, there is trace of a fingerprint either from Nichiren or an adjutant holding the scroll (NHS p. 56). After Nichiren's passing, the mandala was taken by Minbu *kō* Nikō to Mōbara Sōgen-ji along with other holographs when he moved back to his native province in the final years of his life.

This relatively large scroll already shows an enormous difference with the first rudimental *Yōji honzon*; by comparison it can be considered as an early tentative to create a unique and dynamic votive object to be used for collective prayer. While Nichiren also produced several smaller talisman *omamori honzon*, generally made out of one sheet and that were kept folded and attached to the body, the larger calligraphic mandala was conceived for collective prayer.

The twenty sheet *daimandara*, Chōkyūzan Hondoji (NGS Nr. 18)

Although undated, this imposing mandala stored at Hondoji, is thought to have been inscribed by the end of the Bun'ei era. In Yamanaka's compendium, this *daimandara* is placed after a scroll dated on the end of the eleventh month in 1274 and before another work considered to have been authored at the new year of 1275. It can be hence deduced that it was probably produced between the end of the eleventh month or after the twelfth month of 1274. Nakao suggests the eleventh month (NHS p. 35). According to Murakami Arinobu (*Myōshū sentetsu Gohonzonkan* 2:16; Kyoto 1884) and Onden'in Nichikō (*Gohonzonkan: Onten'in Nichikō shōnin*, p.25), the scroll was produced in the eleventh month of the first year of Kenji (1275). This however might be an error since Yamanaka places this mandala before another scroll dated "new year" intending that it was produced in 1274. It is a unique mandala, as next to Śākyamuni and Tahō respectively, Nichiren placed *Taizōkai Dainichi Nyorai* and *Kongōkai Dainichi Nyorai*, a direct reference to the esoteric mandalas of Kūkai (774~835), whom he vehemently criticized in his writings. According to Lucia Dolce ("Criticism and Appropriation: Nichiren's Attitude Towards Esoteric Buddhism", JJRS 26/3-4:249 1999), Nichiren wanted to prove the inferiority of the celestial *Mahāvairocana* (Dainichi) Buddha since he considered all other Buddhas to be emanations of the *dharmakāya* Śākyamuni.

Nichiren placed the two manifestations of *Mahāvairocana* expressed with their Sanskrit⁶ glyphs only on another undated scroll⁷ (NGS Nr. 8), also preserved at Hondoji. Instead, the *jippō bunshin butsu*, the manifestations of Śākyamuni in the ten directions placed on the left side of Śākyamuni before Bodhisattva *Viśuddhacāritra* (Pure Practices), can be observed on twenty-three other scrolls produced in the Bun'ei and Kenji eras.

This twenty sheets mandala is the second largest inscribed by Nichiren, next to the scroll bestowed upon the villagers of Odachimura, which is made of 28 sheets and nominally granted to Watanabe Fujitayu Nicchō (NGS, Nr. 57). The twenty sheets *moji* mandala, stored at Hondoji temple in Matsudo, was produced by pasting together four stripes made of five sheets each attached vertically, but with the sheets spun and pasted on the short side. Each sheet measures approximately between mm 293 × 398 mm, 300 × 413 mm, and 263 × 436 mm for a total of 1894 × 1121 mm (*Hondoji Shiryō*, 1985). The four panes on top are visibly damaged, but the inscriptions are almost intact, and the original sheets have been pasted onto a proper support pane. On the elongated *shiddham* character *hum*, symbolizing *Rāgarāja* (Aizen myō'ō), a relatively large ink stain remains clearly visible and is most probably from Nichiren himself. After briefly observing the original work on other occasions such as museum settings, I could analyze it directly at Hondoji on 28.11.2014 and once more at the Matsudo Municipal Museum on 23.09.2017. The ink smudge goes from the upper tip of *Rāgarāja*, up to the *gyōgetsuten* (the Siddham script *anusvāra* representing the nasal sound), the part that is floating separately from the main stem of *hum*, known as *chandrabindu* or “moon dot”. As the other depicted figures on the pane are clearly inscribed with a smaller brush, the width of the smudge appears to be compatible with the same brush used by Nichiren in inscribing the two wisdom kings *Rāgarāja* and *Ācala*.

While the recipient is not specifically stated on the mandala, Hiraga Hondoji temple preserves an enclosed letter from Chikugo bō Nichirō (1245~1320) to Jirō *hyōe* Norinobu (1224~1298), best known as Soya Kyōshin, written when he sent this mandala to be enshrined at the Hokke dō prayer hall that later became Hondoji (*Hondoji monogatari*, 2005). This letter is dated 01.12.1311 and on this occasion, Nichirō sent several items through his acolyte. This would indicate that the large scroll was kept elsewhere for decades after Nichiren's passing. Nakao suggested that it was previously housed at Myōhonji in Kamakura (*Nichiren Shōnin to Hokke Mandara* p. 35). Watanabe Hōyō has published an essay⁸ in 1990 where he explains how large mandala scrolls were bestowed upon lay supporters who had converted part of their estates into Hokke dō prayer halls, that later developed into major temples of the Nichiren tradition. Even with relatively scarce resources, Nichiren produced an object that could convey the magnificence required for a captivating collective ritual. He may have witnessed sumptuous prayer ceremonies at Enryakuji or other temples in Kyoto and Nara in addition to the facilities used by the various study groups he frequented and received esoteric initiations (Lucia Dolce *Girei no chikara: chūsei shūkyō no jissen sekai*, 2010). From his own experience, Nichiren knew that the visual aspect was an essential requirement for votive rituals. While there is little evidence of Nichiren's whereabouts during his formative years at Enryakuji, Ichikawa Tomoyasu (*Nichirensōnin no ayumareta michi*, 1989) speculates that he visited the major Buddhist temples in Kyoto and Nara.

⁶ The Siddham seed character on the right side is supposedly *Kongōkai Dainichi*, the *Mahāvairocana* of the diamond realm is missing one stroke.

⁷ The late Yamanaka has annotated that considering the arrangement of the depicted figures, the catalogue placement of Nr. 8 needs further scrutiny as the scroll might have been produced earlier than commonly understood (NGS, p. 317).

⁸ *Nichiren no Honzon kimyō no kitei ni aru mono*, Nihon Indogaku Bukkyōgakkai 38/2:1990.

Kūkai, who introduced esoteric mandalas to Japan along with Saichō (767~822) in 804 and 805 respectively, did not paint the scrolls himself, but commissioned them to specialized artists and focused instead on his main discourse, the ritualistic aspect, of which those mandalas were an important instrument, but not the quintessence (see Abe Ryūichi, *The Weaving of Mantra: Kūkai and the Construction of Esoteric Buddhist Discourse*). Instead, both Nichiren contemporaries Shinran and Ippen (1234~1289) inscribed their *myōgō* scrolls personally and enshrined them at private *dōba* prayer halls, a similar concept to the *Hokkedō* halls in the Nichiren group and it is exactly within this context that the *moji* mandala proves to be an ingenious creation. Along with Myōe, Shinran and Ippen proved that the zeitgeist in the Kamakura era was ripe for this type of votive object. Nichiren did most certainly not have a chance to see the scrolls nor the magnificent *Kinji Hōtō* mandalas. These are extremely refined artwork category (see H. O’Neal), depicting scenes of the jeweled stūpa where the outline of the drawing is in fact a succession of Chinese characters that constitutes the text of either the Golden Light or the Lotus Sūtra. The text thus the Buddha’s words become the architectural element composing the jeweled pagoda. The highly innovative atmosphere of the Kamakura era was thus not, as previously assumed, a sign of decadence and decline (Halle O’Neal, *Word Embodied: The Jeweled Pagoda Mandalas in Japanese Buddhist Art*, 2018), but epitomized the great creative energy of the era in which Nichiren lived and thrived.

Next to the enormous altarpieces that required a sophisticated craftsmanship even for only producing large paper-canvas, Nichiren created also a three-sheet (albeit sometimes four) format *honzon* that he bestowed to the leading disciples in his group, regardless of gender or their status in the *sangha* of being either lay followers, semi-ordained or fully tonsured clergy. As other Nichiren “artworks”, the twenty sheet *daimandara* is thus a vibrating testimony of performative and votive action that still echoes Nichiren’s thought, next to the scroll’s obvious historical, cultural, and artistic value as a work of *shodō* calligraphy.

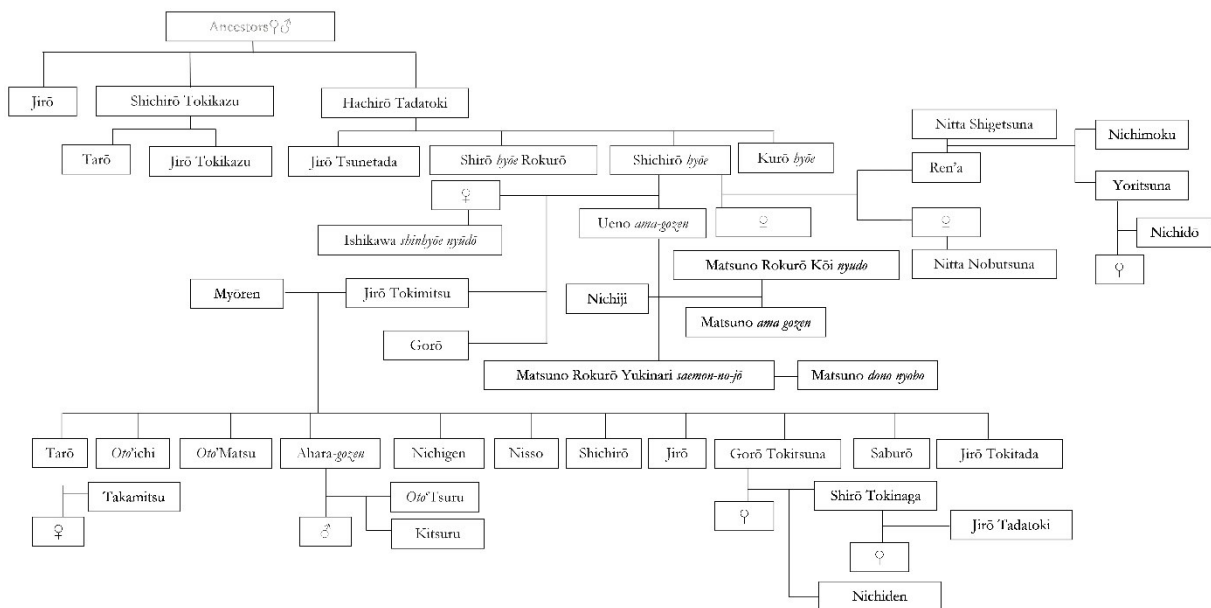
Four sheet mandala, Chōseizan Myōkenji (NGS Nr. 26)

The shift from a merely protective talisman or *omamori honzon* for personal prayer to an obvious function as an altarpiece, can be best observed in the larger three to four sheet mandalas that that were bestowed to leading followers and lay disciples alike. After more than a year of permanence in Minobu, in the seventh month of the first year of Kenji (1275), Nichiren bestowed three identical mandalas to Toki Tsunenobu Nichijō (1216~1299), Ōta Gorō *saemonjō* Jōmyō (1222~1283) and his wife Kyō *nyō*. These were originally stored at Nakayama Hokekyō-ji until they disappeared at the beginning of last century. Toki’s wife Myōjō (? ~1303) was feeling ill at the time (STN:861) and could not make the trip to the hermitage in the mountains. Nichiren inscribed a different mandala (NGS Nr. 55) for her, which is currently stored at Gusokuzan Myōkakuji in Kyoto. While the scroll is undated by Nichiren, an inscription of Hōki *bō* Nikkō grants the mandala to the mother of Jakusen *bō* Nitchō and inserts the date as the ninth month, third year of Kōan (1280). Yamanaka however, notes that judging by the calligraphy, the inscription date should be around the ninth month of 1278 (NGS, p. 202). Therefore, the scroll has not been bestowed upon Myōjō immediately, but later. It can be assumed that the date inserted by Nikkō corresponds to the woman’s recovery as from the contents of a letter⁹ from 1276 it can be evinced that she had been ill since then.

⁹ *Toki ama gozen Goshō* (The Bow and Arrow) STN:1147 dated 27.03.1276, original holograph stored at Nakayama Hokekyō-ji.

The samurai Nanjō Shichirō (? ~1265), an early follower active in Kamakura, was the *jitō*, the local steward of Ueno district in Suruga (today Shizuoka prefecture). From an extant letter¹⁰ (STN:319) dated thirteenth day, twelfth month, first year of Bun'ei (1264) it is known that Shichirō was seriously ill. In fact, he passed away months later and the rest of the Nanjō family met Nichiren when he went pay his homages to the grave of the deceased Nanjō. He was succeeded by first son Shichirō Tarō, probably a child from his previous marriage. Following the passing of Tarō in 1274, the second son, a relatively young Nanjō *hyōe* Jirō Tokimitsu (1259~1332), became the *jitō* instead.

From several extant and catalogued letters, it is known that Tokimitsu sent monetary offerings and provisions to Minobu every month to support the whole community living with Nichiren, who bestowed him the Buddhist name of Daigyō Sonrei. Three months after Nichiren granted the mandalas to Toki, Soya and his wife, in the tenth month of 1275 Nichiren produced a four sheets mandala sized 1282 × 551 mm for Tokimitsu. The scroll is currently stored at Chōseizan Myōkenji in Niizo, Saitama. On a separate document Hōki *bō* Nikkō grants the mandala to Jirō, son of Nanjō Hirae Shichirō (NGS p. 335). The scroll was previously held at Shimojō Myōrenij, the temple erected on the Tokimitsu estate, albeit it is not clear how and when the scroll was transferred to the current location. This work is impressively radiant in its simplicity and conveys Nichiren's deep affection for his young disciple Tokimitsu. The family chart below, based on the research of Kajikawa Takako (*Tokusōhikan Nanjōshi no Kisōteki Kenkyū*, 2008), although far from exhaustive, provides a clear image of how many among the extended Nanjō clan were following Nichiren and thus the importance of the role of Tokimitsu as a lay supporter and his leading position.



(Above: Nanjō family chart, *Nichiren's Sangha Series Lay Disciples: Nanjō Tokimitsu*)

¹⁰ The title of this letter has been given as *Nanjō hyōe dono Goshō* ("Encouragement to a Sick Person" in the English translation) and the holograph is extant but scattered at eleven locations. One of the largest portions is preserved at Kōyōzan Honzenji in Kyoto and another at Mukōjimazan Chōgenji in Fukui, while more fragments are stored at other locations including one private individual, one temple outside Nichiren denominations and the *Hongemyōshū Renmei* organization, in addition to an original copy produced by Hōki *bō* Nikkō (*Nichirenshōnin Goshinsekishūsei* Vol. 4).

The scroll was closely examined on September third, 2018. The mandala was repaired along another scroll from the Kōan period upon completion of a new hall that houses and display the two scrolls. The Tokimitsu mandala shows a few ink smudges that can be immediately noticed, around the top of the *siddham* symbol *kān* representing *Ācala*. The two main stains are located left and right at the end of the horizontal stem right under the horizontal brushstroke.



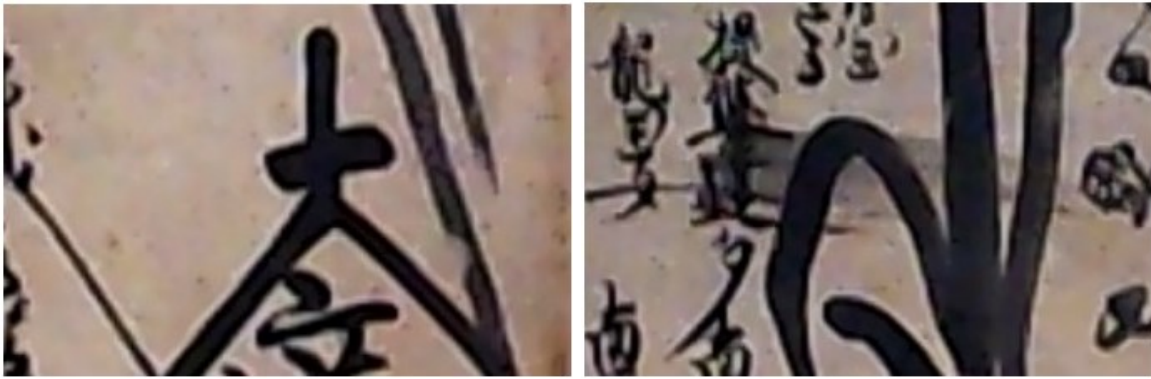
The Tokimitsu mandala photographed in 2018 next to an enlarged detail

In the eleventh month of the same year, one month after granting this scroll to Tokimitsu, Nichiren produced a slightly smaller four-sheet mandala of 1161 × 461 mm known as *shokukin honzon*, due to the pattern of brocade frame. The recipient is not marked on the front side and when the scroll was shown in 2009 at the *Nichiren and the Treasures of the Lotus Sect*¹¹ exhibition in Kyoto, Nakao Takashi wrote on the explanatory notes of the catalogue (*Nichiren to Hokke no Meihō*, p. 249) that the recipient remains unidentified. However, when it was restored, he discovered a dedication to Jimyō *nyō* on the lower backside behind *Zōchō Ten'ō* (*Okayama no Nichiren Hokke*, p 113, NHS p. 164). Nakao stated that the recipient was the female believer named Jimyō (? ~1300), the maternal aunt of Hōki *bō* Nikkō. At Honkōji temple in Amagasaki, there is another mandala dated second month, second year of Kenji (1276) that has been surely granted to Jimyō, widow of the lay priest Takashi Rokurō *hyōe* (*Honkōji Reikishi to Hōmotsu* p. 46, Amagasaki 1981) On the right side, between *Kōmoku Ten'ō* and the laudatory inscription (*sanmon*), Nikkō placed an annotation conferring the mandala to Jimyō *ama*, widow of Fuji Nishiyama Kawai *nyūdō* (NGS, Nr. 32).

¹¹ The full name of the exhibition is „Nichiren and the Treasures of the Lotus Sect: The Efflorescent Culture of Kyoto's Townspeople” (*Nichiren Shōnin to Hokke no Meihō*), held from October 10th to November 23rd, 2009.

Nichimoku *jakushi honzon*, Myōenzan Juryō-ji (NGS Nr. 60)

In the second month, second year of Kōan (1279), Nichiren inscribed a mandala for his young acolyte Renzō bō Nichimoku. One peculiarity of this work is that the positions of *Rāgarāja* and *Ācala* are switched. This is one of only two observable cases, next to another scroll where Nichiren inscribed *Rāgarāja* twice. Nichiren placed the two Wisdom Kings in swapped positions on a small one sheet mandala of 418×288 mm (NGS Nr. 2), that he inscribed on the sixteenth day, sixth month, ninth year of Bun'ei (1272).



Left: remains of Nichiren's fingerprint; right: the ink smudge on the Nichimoku mandala photographed in 2012

This *moji* mandala bestowed upon Nitta kō Nichimoku, is a classic three sheet scroll measuring 949 × 527 mm of the type that Nichiren bestowed upon his ordained disciples. In the conferral inscription, Nichiren refers to Nichimoku as *jakushi*, “disciple of Śākyamuni”, a title he gave only to full ordained monks. In addition to the depicted figures present at the “assembly in open space¹²” (*kokūe*) as described in the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren adds floating passages from the *Fahua wenju* (*Hokke Mongu*) of Chanjan (711~782) and the *Ebyōshū* of Saichō (767~822) as often observed on his works from the previous year. This is the only extant *moji* mandala where Ryū'ō *nyo*, the Naga dragon's king daughter can be observed (Yamanaka, NGS p. 366).

The scroll was inscribed with a soft brush using a thinned ink solution; the movements of the brush are hence still visible. Also in this case, again, *Daibadatta* is stained and a large smudge covering the last two characters extends towards the right, spreading over the left ringlet of the *Rāgarāja* glyph can be also clearly observed. The scroll was visually analyzed at the Kuwana city museum in July 2012. On the lower stroke of *Rāgarāja*, right over the point where it crosses the character *Dai* of *Daikōmoku Ten'ō* there is a spot that appears to be a fingerprint, or at least a round blank spot.

On the lower right corner an inscription of Hōki bō Nikkō (1246~1333) has been cancelled (NGS p.365). Near the character *Ō*, of *Kōmoku Ten'ō*, the two characters of Nikkō's name were observed documented by Yamanaka Kihachi (NGS p. 232, 365, 366), but became difficult to detect. In his record *Byakuren deshi bunyo no shinpitsu Honzon mokuroku*¹³, Nikkō annotated that the mandala was bestowed upon Niida *kyō* Nichimoku “foremost among Nikkō's disciples”, a formula that he often used for his direct disciples.

¹² The term *Kokūe* is sometimes translated as „Ceremony in the Air“, here I use the translation of Jaqueline stone from “The Moment of Death in Nichiren's Thought”, Princeton 2003

¹³ *Shūgaku zenshū, Kōson zenshū* pp. 112.

Nikō hōsshi honzon, Jōzaizan Sōgenji (NGS Nr. 61)

On the eighth day of the fourth month in the second year of Kōan (1279), an auspicious day traditionally considered the Buddha's birthdate, Nichiren inscribed a three-sheet mandala of 949 × 527 mm. The recipient was one of his six designated elder disciples (*rokurōsō*), Minbu kō Nikō. The scroll was inscribed with high quality ink, probably of the *seiboku* type. Between the lower tip of *Rāgarāja* and Nichiren's *kaō* signature is a fingerprint, believed to be from Nichiren's left hand, also observed by Nakao (NHS p. 76). Due to his old injuries sustained during the Komatsubara ambush of 1264, he probably lost balance and slipped. Also in this case, Nichiren inserts the inscriptions from the *Fahua wenju* and the *Ebyōshū* (< *ukuyōsha fukuka jūgō* >, < *nyanōran shazuha shichibu* > and < *sansha sekifuku oanmyō* >, < *bōjakai zui ue mugen* >). These are placed somewhat diagonally as if "floating" within the scene that depicts the *kokūe* scene, as if these were the words of Śākyamuni still reverberating in the air. The Minbu *ajari* Nikō mandala was observed during the airing at Jōzaizan Sōgenji in May 2012.

Yamaguchi (NSK p. 151) mentions that another three sheets mandala was inscribed on the same day, known to be housed at Tokyo Kōshōzan Myōkōji temple in Shinagawa, Tokyo. The scroll is catalogued in two of the temple's annals (*Myōkōji hyakunenshi*, p. 87; *Myōkōjishi*, p. 63) and the mandala has been deemed an authentic Nichiren work on the 25th day of the ninth month in the 33rd year of Meiji (1900), by Ōishi Nichiō (1848~1922) by the 56th abbot of Taisekiji (*Myōkōji hyakunenshi*, 1996). The date on the mandala is extremely difficult to read, but according to the two lectures¹⁴ given by the temple's eighth abbot Obayashi Nisshi, by juxtaposing the pictures of the Nikō and the Myōkōji scrolls these appear to match. It has been thus determined to be the fourth day, eighth month, second year of Kōan (1279). The name of the recipient however is not readable, just the definition *ubasoku* remains. Kawasaki Hiroshi has examined the original on 18.05.2008 and published the results in 2013 (*Nichiren Shōnin no Gohonzon ni Kōsatsu*, Hokke Bukkyō Kenkyū 16/2013:76-80). However, as Kawasaki mentions, permission to publish pictures of the scroll has not been granted; hence, while in his opinion it might be a genuine Nichiren holograph, the authenticity cannot be proven with absolute certainty.

Myōkōji temple was established only in 1616 and thus not directly connected with the original inheritor of the mandala, such as in other cases. Myōkōji was originally built in Ujima village, Suntō district, Suruga province (Shizuoka) by the fifteenth Taisekiji abbot Nisshō (1562~1622) and moved to Edo (Tokyo) in the 28th year of Meiji (1895). The earliest records of the mandala scroll being stored here date from 1900, the first recorded collective airing ceremony. In any case, as it appears to be probable, if the Myōkōji mandala is authentic, this would signify that on the same day, Nichiren inscribed at least three scrolls since on the same day he bestowed another scroll of 975×515 mm, upon a believer known only by his *nichigō* alias Nichiden.

On the bestowal inscription, Nichiren adds the title *ubasoku*, which denotes that the recipient was not an ordained priest, but a devoted lay follower. *Ubasoku* is the Japanese transliteration for the Sanskrit word *upāsaka*, literally "attendant", but in a broader sense, indicating a lay person who had taken certain vows. Ueda Honshō speculates that Nichiden was visiting Nichiren at Minobu along with Nikō, since both received their mandala on the same day (JBK 45/1:220-226, 1996 "*Minobusan no Nichiren Shōnin to danshinto*"). As the *Gohonzon* was housed at Kyō'ōzan Myōhōkke-ji in Tamazawa (now preserved at the Mishima City Museum), it might be assumed that Nichiden was a resident of Suruga province.

¹⁴ Kōshōzan:98, *Myōkōji go shinpitsu Gohonzonsama ni tsuite* 18.05.2003; *Hōkei go goreihō ni tsuite*, Kōshōzan:243, 01.07.2008. At the time of this writing however, while the text of the 2008 lecture is still available online, the 2003 lecture cannot be retrieved anymore. Kawasaki however has summarized the contents of the 2003 lecture in his article (*Hokke Bukkyō Kenkyū* 16/2013: 80).

Myōkōji temple was originally established in the Suruga province and Ueda Honshō suggest that Nichiden could have been a resident of the area, it cannot be thus excluded that the two lay followers were in the same group that made the trip to Minobu to participate to an event being held on the auspicious occasion of the Buddha's birthday. However, since both are not mentioned in the register of Nikkō's disciples they could have been from a group under the guidance of Minbu *kō* as he received his scroll on the same occasion.

Given the auspiciousness of such day, it might be conceivable that to celebrate the Buddha's birthday some sort of event was held at Minobu and thus few faithful devotees would take part in the gathering and receive a large *Daimandara* on that occasion. It is known that the Nichiren *sangha* performed the *Ennen* dance on special anniversaries. On the twenty-fifth day of the eleventh month in 1281 for example, Nichiren wrote a letter¹⁵ to Hagii Sanenaga informing him about a traditional *Ennen* ceremony that combined ritual performances combined with drama, music, and dance.

On the twenty-fourth day, we conducted the annual lecture on the doctrines of the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai and performed the *Ennen* ceremony

The lecture was held every year on the anniversary of the passing of founder of the Tendai School Zhìyǐ (538~597), at the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month. In the letter, Nichiren informs Sanenaga that more than thirty people were present. The *Ennen* dance is said to have originated sometimes during the Heian era; it was a ritualistic dance and music event performed at venues such as the Tendai temple Nikkōsan Rinnōji. This perspective allows a more holistic view of Nichiren's activities at Minobu, particularly on collective ceremonies, such as inscribing the calligraphic mandala or the *Ennen* dance. For producing three large scrolls on one day, a well-organized and streamlined teamwork was indeed essential.

In 2003, Nakao Takashi published¹⁶ the discovery of some fingerprints on a mandala produced on the eighth day, fifth month, third year of Kōan (1280), housed at Myōkaiji in Numazu. The most evident one is imprinted on the characters *Dai Zōchō Ten 'ō*, especially the ideograms *TEN* and *Ō*, as well as on Nichiren's signature for a total of ten fingerprints. This area, at the lower left corner is supposed to be inscribed at last, before placing the signature seal. Therefore, Nakao theorized that the ink might not have yet dried completely. The fingerprints are not detectable from a distance, but by looking more closely, they became quite visible. There are also several fingerprints in the area between the above mentioned *Zōchō* and Nichiren's *kaō*. It can be speculated that due to the uneven pattern of the battened paper, Nichiren might have slipped and thus used both hands to sustain himself, causing his left hand to leave the fingerprint mark. It is improbable that anybody else would have touched the mandala during the inscription. To be noted that these fingerprints are very difficult to detect even from a short distance, suggesting that Nichiren had rather small fingers. In fact, when the mandala is displayed to the public every year on January eighth an enlarged photograph is displayed right under the scroll.

As also noted by Nakao, on the same day, Nichiren inscribed another three-sheet mandala for his young disciple Jakunichi *bō* Nikke (1252~1334), now housed at Honnōji in Kyoto. Due to later adding of paper on the upper side, the size is given differently as 951 × 588 mm by Yamanaka Kihachi and 1133 × 388 mm by Honnōji¹⁷, while the width of 388 mm is most probably a typing error.

¹⁵ *Jibiki gosho* („Leveling the Land“), STN:1894. The letter not extant anymore, original transcript at Minobusan Kuon-ji.

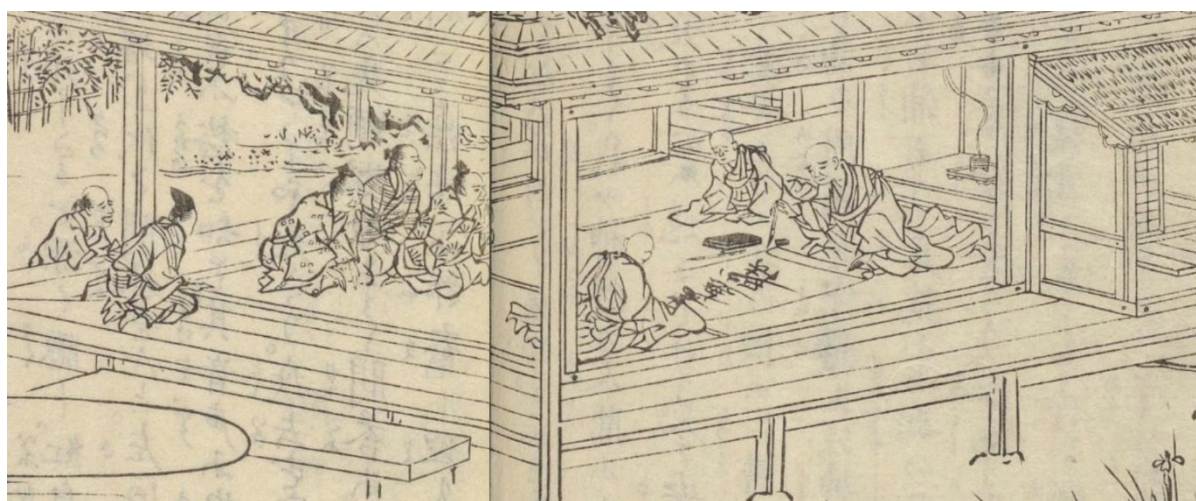
¹⁶ *Shizuoka Shimbun* and *Nichirenshū Shinbun* (10.12.2003).

¹⁷ *Honnōjishi*, Fuji Manabu et al., Hokkeshū Daihonzan Honnōji, Kyoto 2002.

The scroll was originally housed at Sanuki Honmonji and came later in the hands of Shūjin'in Nichiryū (1385~1464) in 1449, as Enoki Kyōdō has documented that he won over the temple to his *Happonha* faction for a certain period (*Fujimonryū no rekishi* p.291-292, Shizuoka 2007). According to the chronicles of Sanuki Honmonji, a plank version of this mandala was carved on 15.04.1482, which may indicate that the scroll was transferred around this period. In the XVI century, the history of the Sanuki temple has seen many controversies and ongoing warfare in the region. The Nikke mandala might have been temporarily preserved by Nichiryū or stolen by warriors in 1578 who later sold it to Honnō-ji, probably between 1578 and 1650. On this scroll, also around the stem of the *siddham* symbol representing *Ācala*, two relatively large fingerprints, probably from the index and the middle finger can be observed. These fingerprints are visible on the internal side of the stem, approximately at the height of the Ashūra'ō.

Conclusion

The authoring of a large mandala was a collective event, which Nichiren could not have enacted alone. These scrolls are thus not only a testimony of religious belief, but also a tangible product of action and performance. After a request was made, either in person or through a representative of the local *sangha*, in most cases the recipients would also need to make a pilgrimage to visit Nichiren at Minobu to demonstrate their commitment. The journey was rarely an individual trip; most devotees came as a group. To produce large scrolls that required more paper sheets to be pasted together, in addition to the manufacturing of the paper itself, teamwork was a necessity. Traditional iconography usually depicts the act of inscribing a large mandala as a collective act, a point is further elaborated in “Nichiren’s Calligraphic Mandala as Artwork” (*Nichiren moji mandara no bijutsusei*, forthcoming).



Nichiren inscribes a large *Dai mandara* assisted by his disciples and followers (*Nichiren Daishi Shinjitsuden*)

Apart from aesthetic considerations about the visual and performative nature of the Nichiren calligraphic mandala, it can be noted that in some observed cases the fingerprints and stains are located in proximity of *Rāgarāja* or around *Ācala* and the signature. Those fingerprints and ink stains imbues the mandala scrolls with deeper significance providing a living testimony of what is known about Nichiren, his followers and the times they lived in. Those impromptu signifiers are equivalent to a biological relic and must hence be preserved when restoring the scrolls. In fact, it might be that some of those “relics” might have been lost when ink was added on the original inscriptions during nearly eighth centuries.

Another detail of more practical nature becomes evident. Since the two small mishaps on the scrolls of 08.05.1280 are related, it can be theorized that Nichiren streamlined the mandala production when two or three scrolls were scheduled to be produced on the same day. In fact,

there are at least three instances in which two or more scrolls were inscribed on the same day. In 1279, the mandalas bestowed upon Minbu *kō* Nikō, *ubasoku* Nichiden and another unnamed *ubasoku* lay followers. In 1280, the scrolls granted to Jakunichi *bō* Nikke and the mandala housed at Myōkaiji in Numazu whose name has been cancelled. In 1281, the double *Ācala* mandala for Jien *bikuni* and the other given to Settsu *kō* Nissen. These three cases were not isolated instances.

Another known occurrence was in the eighth month of the second year of Kenji (1276), when Nichiren granted three identical protective mandala talismans to the believers named Kamewaka, Kameya and Kamehime. These were children or relatives of Chiba Yoritane (1239~1275), believed to be a superior of Toki Jōnin. His son Tanemune (1268~1312) was named Kamewaka and received the *Kamewaka gosankō yōraku honzon* dated on the thirteenth day along with brother Kameya Munetane (1265~1294), while the scroll of Kamehime is dated on the next day.

Another case when Nichiren produced three identical mandalas on the same day, has been also documented. While the original holographs have disappeared in 1900, it is known from the records of Nakayama Hokekyō-ji (*Sei Nakayama Hokekyōji Goreihō Mokuroku*) and other annals, that Nichiren inscribed three identical mandalas on the 16th day of the seventh month in the first year of Kōan (1278), one each for Toki Jōnin, Ōta Jōmyō and his wife Kyo *nyo*. Shinnyo'in Nittō (1654~1720?) produced a replica of the scroll inscribed for Kyo *nyo* as a specimen for the three mandalas on 16.07.1711 and annotated this on the drawing on the right side, next to *Daibirurokusha*¹⁸ (transliteration of *Virūdhaka*), on top of his own seal. It is also mentioned that the bestowal to Kyō *nyo* was inscribed on the front side under the date placed on the lower right, while for the other two scrolls the inheritor was written on a different sheet of paper (Terao Eichi, *Nichiren Mandarahonzon no Keitai to Denrai ni Tsuite*, 76-81).

On the seventh day of the fifth month in the first year of Kōan (1278), Nichiren produced two scrolls made of three sheets. One was bestowed upon a disciple named Nichimon from the Wakamiya *sangha* and was previously preserved at Nakayama Hokekyōji before being transferred to Monpōzan Chōmyōji in Kyoto. This is the first extant scroll where Nichiren inscribes the *shiten'ō* with their Japanese names instead of their Sanskrit transliteration or a combination, two in Japanese and two in transliterated Sanskrit. The second mandala inscribed on the same day is known as the *Rinpō honzon*, due to the pattern of its mounting brocade; the recipient has been cancelled, but since it is housed at Honkokuji temple in Kyoto it is suggested that it was originally stored in Kamakura. As both scrolls were inscribed for two individuals in the Kantō area it cannot hence be ruled out that they belonged to the same group, in any case they most probably attended the same event at Minobu.

To be also noted that on several works in the Bun'ei and Kenji eras, only the year and month are marked, without the day. In the eleventh year of Bun'ei (1274), Nichiren produced a total of seven mandalas, albeit only three are extant, while four were lost to the great Minobu fire in 1875 and are documented only as copies¹⁹ made by Onden'in Nichikō (1646~1722), the 33rd abbot of Kuonji. Also, in the first year of Kenji (1275), both in the eleventh and the twelfth month Nichiren inscribed four scrolls on each month. In this period however, Nichiren was still transitioning from enlarging the works initially conceived between 1271 and 1273, just before being exiled and on Sado Island. These prototypes were enlarged from one to three sheets adding figures to the *tableaux* scene while larger or extra-large altarpieces were also produced.

¹⁸ In the first year of Kōan (1278), Nichiren used to inscribe two of the *Shiten'ō* (four heavenly kings) with their transliteration from the original Sanskrit names. In the following year, Nichiren uses *Zōchōten'ō* the translated Japanese name for *Virūdhaka*.

¹⁹ *Gohonzonkan: Onden'in Nichikō Shōnin*, Fujii Kyōyū, Minobusan Kūon-ji, Yamanashi 1970.

A sort of “homogenous individualization” started to develop in the Kenji era between 1275 and 1278 after which disciples, regardless of gender and status (*zoku*, *ubasoku*, *ama*, *bikuni*, etc.) either ordained or not, were bestowed a three sheets mandala. His ordained disciples and those very committed to the *sangha* would be bequeathed a *nichigō* or *myōgō* alias, irrespective of their being in the clergy or laical state. Although there were exceptions, *nichigō* aliases were usually for males while *myōgō* for females. However, once ordained both would be named with a *nichigō*. For the laity, these aliases were composed with one Chinese character of their names after to *nichi*. The Nichiren community was hence developing a unique protocol that became evident later in the Muromachi and Sengoku periods among believers in the provinces of Shimōsa and Katsusa (Chiba prefecture) centered around Nakayama Hokekyōji as well as the *machishū* groups in Kyoto in the *Shijō* and *Rokujō* lineages with their connected branches in Hizen, Bizen on the Kyūshū island, developed by Kuonjō in Nisshin (1407~1488). Since all Nichiren lineages developed very similar, if not identical customs, it can be evinced that certain protocols had been already firmly established by the time Nichiren was alive. Using one same logograph in the name, was a distinctive sign of belonging also in the secular world. The Hōjō regents used a combination or alternation of “*toki*”, such as in Tokiyori whose children were Tokimune, Tokimasa, Munemasa, Munetoki, Masayori and Muneyori. Also in the religious world, sometimes a monk would use a certain *moji*, such as *kū* or *ran* for the followers of Kūkai and Shinran (1173~1263) respectively, albeit this has never been an established rule. While the clerical name Nichi’un was common among the priests of Kōyasan in medieval Japan, it is however among the followers in the Nichiren *sangha* that their affiliation could be unmistakably revealed from their *nichigō* aliases.

From the examples quoted earlier, it can be demonstrated that Nichiren produced identical or very similar mandala scrolls for more than one individual at the same time. He probably positioned the paper side by side and then proceeded with the brushwork, therefore, distinctive marks such as fingerprints and smudges provide further insight on Nichiren’s activities in Minobu, thanks also to the dating and recipient’s name. Even if this might have been the case, it is still remarkable that works that clearly convey a deep sense of beauty, such as the two scrolls of 1280 display the same excellence in calligraphy and passion, undoubtedly inscribed with the recipient in mind and not merely as a rationalized and streamlined work.

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Abbreviations:

- IBK Indogaku Bukkyogaku Kenkyu
JJRS Japanese Journal of Religious Studies
NSZ Nichirensū Shūgaku Zenshū
NGS *Nichiren Shōnin Goshinseki no Sekai*
STN *Shōwa teihon Nichiren Shōnin ibun*
NSK *Nichiren Shōshūshi no kisōteki kenkyū* (Study of fundamentals of Nichirensūshū history)
FSY *Fuji Shūgaku Yōshū* (Essential Teachings of the Fuji School)
NHS *Nichirensūshōnin to Hokke no Shihō, dai ikkan Mandara Honzon*

Commonly used Japanese terms

Omamori protective talisman

Daimandara large mandala

Moji logographs, Sinojapanese *kanji* characters

nichigō the Buddhist alias composed by *nichi* (sun as *Nichiren*) and a second logograph usually the person's name using a different reading of the same character.