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# The mandala in Nichiren Buddhism

Special Feature:

*The “Honmon Kaidan Daigohonzon”  
Of Nichiren Shōshū Taiseki-ji*

## Foreword

The *Honmon Kaidan Daigohonzon* (本門戒壇の大御本尊), or the “Great Gohonzon of the Essential Platform”, is a *Honzon* from the Nichiren tradition, carved on a camphor plank that has been lacquered black and the logographs gilded. Its format, with engraved characters, is typical of the Fuji School temples, but can be also found at sites of other Nichiren lineages. Nichiren Shōshū conversely enshrines only this *Honzon* format.



The Hōandō Hall at Taiseki-ji (The Nichiren Mandala Study Workshop)

This wooden mandala, commonly known as *Dai-Gohonzon*, is a sacred object of devotion of the Fuji Nichiren Shōshū lineage of Nichiren Buddhism. The *Dai-Gohonzon* is currently enshrined in the Hōandō hall that replaced the older Shō-Hondō. In the past centuries it was stored at the Hōanden, another building within the Taiseki-ji compound. The first image of the *Dai-Gohonzon* was published in 1911 by Kumada Ijō<sup>1</sup>, but the plank has not been the subject of scrupulous academic scrutiny, other than for the purpose of debating sectarian issues internal to Nichiren schools. Nevertheless there is no available picture of the laudatory inscription, so that its calligraphy and the actual contents cannot be independently verified.



The original book “*Nichiren Shōnin*” by Kumada Ijō

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<sup>1</sup>“*Nichiren Shōnin*”, Kumada Ijō (Munejirō), Hōchisha, Tokyo 1911.

The scholar-priest Inada Kaiso (稲田海素 1869~1956) has authored of one of the first photographic collections of Nichiren's mandalas, the *Gohonzon Shashinchō*<sup>2</sup> and published the *Nichiren Shōnin Go-ibun Taishōki*<sup>3</sup>. Inada was involved in the publishing of *Nichiren Shōnin Goshinseki*<sup>4</sup> as well. He was an acquaintance and contemporary of Hori Nichikō (堀日亨 1867~1957), also a scholar-priest, who tenured as the 59<sup>th</sup> Abbot at Taisei-ji for a short time.

As Nichikō, Inada traveled extensively across Japan in order to examine Nichiren's extant holographs. Being affiliated to different Buddhist schools, the nature of their relationship cannot be defined accurately, but they were undoubtedly very close. It is recorded that Inada was granted hospitality at the Jakunichibō lodging of Taisei-ji. Although there are no official records, through this connection, Inada was able to examine both the *Dai-Gohonzon* and the Nichiren mandala said to have been used as a matrix for the plank<sup>5</sup>. Inada was of the idea that the wooden plank has been fabricated using different sheets traced from two Nichiren mandalas. This analysis was done considering four different areas of the *Dai-Gohonzon*. First the depicted figures of the tenfold path, Nichiren's *kaō* signature, the laudatory inscription "for more than 2,200 years after the Buddha's passing..." and the other invocatory<sup>6</sup> caption with a dedication to Kunishige and its dating:

＜ 右為現当二世 造立如件 本門戒壇之 願主 弥四郎国重 法華講衆等 敬白 弘安二年十月十二日 ＞ which can be roughly translated as " *hereby for the present and future, this is built (erected) by request of Yashirō Kunishige (in representation of) Hokekeō group and others, with deep respect, Kōan second year, tenth month, twelfth day* "

While the ten worlds and *kaō* are no doubt traced from an original Nichiren holograph, they were copied from two different Gohonzon. The laudatory and invocatory inscriptions instead are believed to be from someone else. The text contained in those two elements is known only through a transcription<sup>7</sup> made nearly three centuries after by the 14<sup>th</sup> Abbot of Taisei-ji, Kunaikyō Ajari Nisshū (宮内卿阿闍梨日主 1555~1617).

Neither Yamanaka Kihachi nor Kataoka Kunio of the *Rissbō Ankoku Kai* have openly discussed this subject or released any photo. In recent years Kimbara Akihiko<sup>8</sup> published the result of his own investigation with an impartial stance, but the results were the same as Inada Kaiso's initial assessment. A contemporary picture of the *Dai-Gohonzon* was published on the internet-blog of a researcher using the pen-name of *Saikakudoppo* (犀角独歩). He has amply investigated about the *Dai-Gohonzon* issue, albeit from a critical point of view.

The central inscription of the *Dai-Gohonzon* is commonly believed to have been traced from an original matrix that Nichiren himself bestowed upon a priest disciple named Shosuke-bō Nichizen (少輔公日禪 ?~1331). He was one of the six senior disciples of Byakuren Ajari Nikkō (白蓮阿闍梨日興 1246~1333), who was involved in the events known as the Atsuhara persecution. For a detailed account of the incident from an historical perspective, please refer to the article<sup>9</sup> of Prof. Jaqueline I. Stone titled "[The Atsuhara Affair, The Lotus Sutra, Persecution, and Religious Identity in the Early Nichiren Tradition](#)".

<sup>2</sup> (御本尊写真帖) Suharaya Shoten, Tokyo 1912.

<sup>3</sup> (日蓮聖人御遺文對照記) Kaiso Inada, Tokyo 1906.

<sup>4</sup> (日蓮聖人御真蹟) Nichiren Shōn Goshinseki Kankōkai, Tokyo 1930.

<sup>5</sup> *Fuji Kyōgaku Kenkyūsho Kōbō*, Tokyo 6/2015.

<sup>6</sup> This is known as "gan-mon" (願文), which basically translates as *Buddhist Prayer* or written pledge.

<sup>7</sup> The document is known as Kaidan Honzon Yōsho (戒壇本尊腰書), stored at Taisei-ji.

<sup>8</sup> "*Nichiren to honzon denshō: Taisei-ji kaidan itabonzon no shinjitsu*", Kimbara Akihiko, Sueisha, Tokyo 2007.

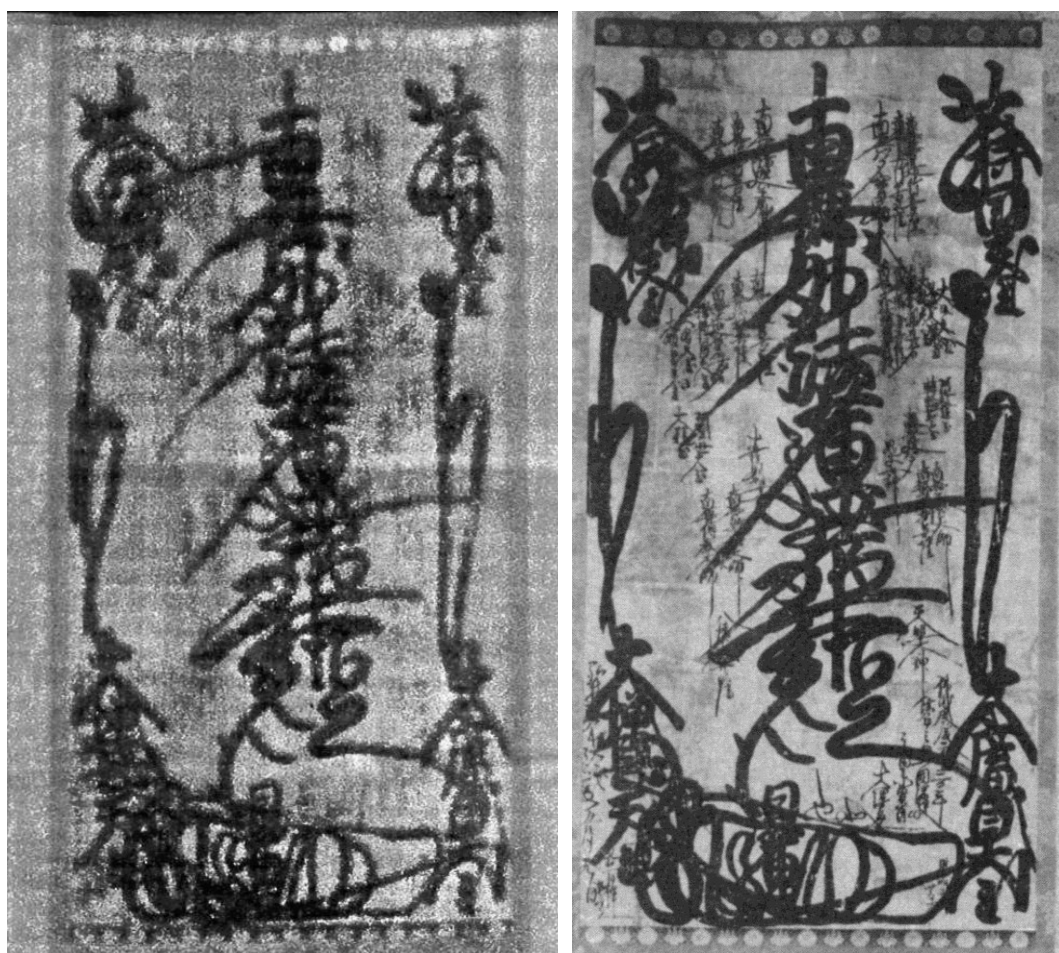
<sup>9</sup> Japanese Journal of Religious Studies 41/1:153-189, Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture 2014.



The picture published by *Saikakudoppo*

## Some practical aspects of the *Dai-Gohonzon* issue

Granting that the *Daigohonzon* was fabricated by tracing parts of the Nichiren mandala, there are actually two copies<sup>10</sup> of this Gohonzon. One scroll is stored at Taiseki-ji and another is preserved at the nearby *Omosu* Kitayama Honmon-ji temple. The holograph of Taiseki-ji is believed to be the authentic mandala, the other a copy. The two pictures below, that have no copyright claimant that is known of, are the only commonly available photos of these Gohonzons. The mounting appears to be similar, perhaps made by the same artisan. The original has changed ownership a few times in the past centuries, which shall explain the presence of a duplicate. There are other examples of Nichiren mandalas known to have been stored at Kitayama Honmon-ji and that were later transferred to another temple or private collector, for which a replica was produced. There is one more point of contention since the addendum inscribed by Nikkō is missing one logograph<sup>11</sup> on the Kitayama mandala leading to consider the Taiseki-ji Gohonzon as genuine.



Left: the Taiseki-ji scroll; right: the copy at Kitayama Honmon-ji

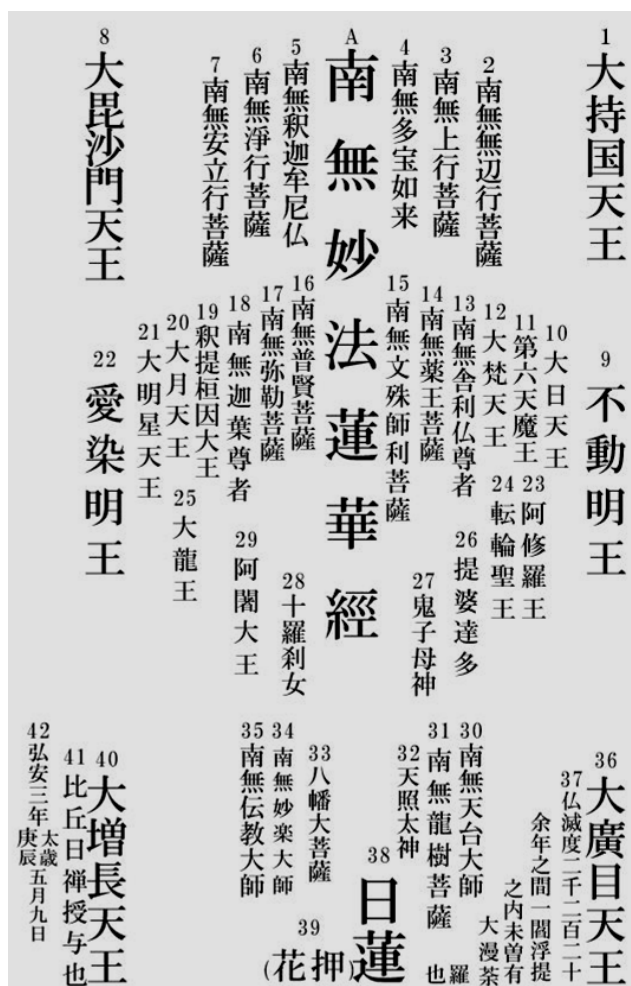
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<sup>10</sup> Please refer to “*The Mandala in Nichiren Tradition, part two: Mandalas of the Kōan period*” (page 199), The Nichiren Mandala Study Workshop, Tokyo 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Please refer to “*The Mandala in Nichiren Tradition, part three: Analysis of the mandala structure and development of the Gohonzon within successive Nichiren lineages*” (page 89), The Nichiren Mandala Study Workshop, Tokyo 2015.



The following diagrams compare the inscriptions of the *Dai-Gobonzon* (left) and the Nichizen mandala (right). These are exactly the same, with the exception of the date and conferral.



#### A. Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō

1. Dai Jikoku Ten'ō
2. Namu Muhengyo Bosatsu
3. Namu Jōgyō Bosatsu
4. Namu Tahō Nyora
5. Namu Śākyamuni Butsu
6. Namu Jōgyō Bosatsu
7. Namu Anryūgyō Bosatsu
8. Dai Bishamon Ten'ō
9. Fudō Myō'ō (in Siddham)
10. Dat Nitten'ō (Sun King)
11. Dai Rokuten Ma'ō
12. Dai Bonten'ō
13. Namu Sharihotsu Sonja
14. Namu Yaku'ō Bosatsu
15. Namu Mañjuśrī Bosatsu
16. Namu Fukyo Bosatsu
17. Namu Miroku Bosatsu
18. Namu Kāśyapa Sonja
19. Shaku Dai Kan'in Dai'ō
20. Dai Gatten'ō (Moon King)
21. Dai Myōjō Ten'ō (Star King)
22. Aizen Myō'ō (in Siddham)
23. Ashura'ō
24. Tenrin Jō'ō (Wheel Turning King)
25. Dai Ryū'ō (Great Dragon King)

26. Daibadatta
27. Kishimojin
28. Jōrasetsunyo
29. Ajase'ō
30. Namu Tendai Daishi
31. Namu Ryūju Bosatsu (Nāgārjuna)
32. Tenshō Daijin
33. Hachiman Daibosatsu
34. Namu Myōraku Daishi
35. Namu Dengyō Daishi
36. Dai Kōmoku Ten'ō
37. Since 2220 years after the Buddha's demise, this great mandala was never presented in Jambudvīpa
38. Nichiren
39. Kaō seal
40. Dai Zōchō Ten'ō
41. Conferral to *Biku Nichizen*
42. Kōan third year (sexagenary cycle: *Kanoe-Tatsu*), fifth month, eighth day
41. Hereby for the present and future, this is built (erected) by main request of Yashirō Kunishige, Hokkekō group and others, with deep respect, Kōan second year, tenth month, twelfth day (no sexagenary cycle)

The earliest mention about this wooden mandala is found in a work authored in 1561 by Taiyū Ajari Nichiga (大夫阿闍梨日我 1508~1586), the 14<sup>th</sup> Abbot and reformer of Kōdaisan Myōhon-ji, who jointly administered Fujisan Kuon-ji-ji temple near Taiseki-ji. Successively, Nisshū of Taiseki-ji mentioned the plank when he made a copy of Nikkō's will in 1580.

Later in 1610, Daihō'in Nikken (大法院日憲), chief-priest of Shōhōzan Myōkō-ji in Shimofusa, transcribed a diagram of the *Ita-Honzon*, including depicted figures, size, dating and laudatory inscription as well as the dedication to Yashirō Kunishige. So far the original documents mentioning the *Dai-Gohonzon*, were all produced by the end of Muromachi era (1333~1573), which is consistent with the notion that the wooden Gohonzon was produced during the tenure of Taiseki-ji's ninth Abbot Nanjō Nichiu (日有 1409~1482).

It is not sure who actually carved the mandala however, those who believe in its authenticity claim that it is the artwork of a talented sculptor named Izumi Ajari Nippō (和泉阿闍梨日法 1259~1341), who was a direct disciple of Nichiren. This is also reported in the book<sup>12</sup> "*Nichirenschōshū Taiseikiji*".

The calligraphy on mandalas authored by Nippō, being on paper or carved on wood, however does not resemble the artwork of the *Dai-Gohonzon*. In addition Nippō inscribed the Gohonzon signing with his own name. As Nippō was Nichiren's contemporary, attributing the *Dai-Gohonzon* carving to him, would substantiate the notion that it was produced under Nichiren's supervision, perhaps directly inscribed on a plank. Given the fact that every single activity was carefully documented, at least Nikkō would have recorded the event. One of the first to mention Nippō as a possible author of the plank Gohonzon, was Daihō'in Nikken. A calligraphic evaluation based on other extant mandalas inscribed during the alleged period however shows limited similarities. Basically, the entire structure differs considerably compared to other Gohonzon inscribed in 1279. The central *Daimoku* and the signature are much longer and differently proportioned than any other 1279 mandala, as shown in the pictures below.



Left: mandala Nr. 68, center: Nr. 68/2 and left: the *Dai-Gohonzon*

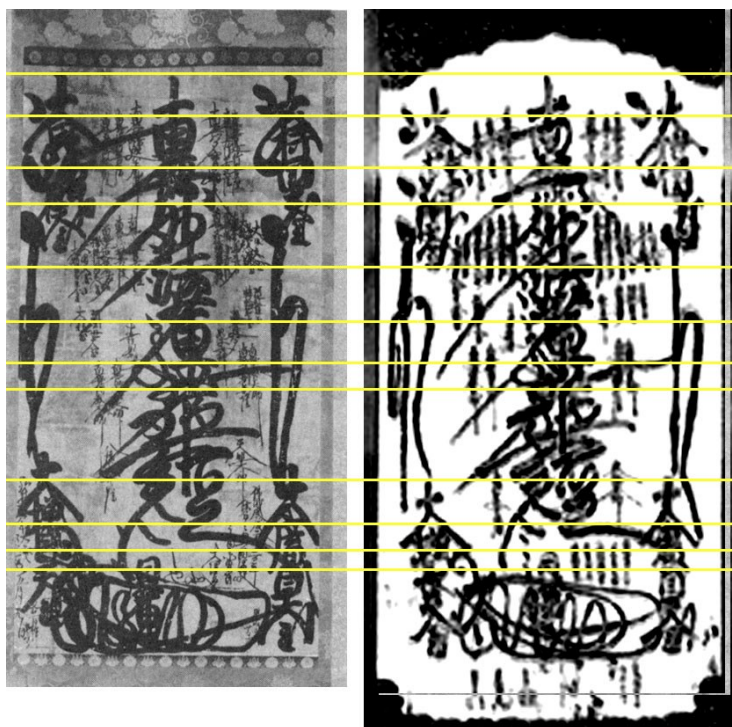
In the second year of Kōan (1279), Nichiren used to depict the extremities of the last character *KYŌ* quite elongated and spiky. Those spikes are known as *kōmyōten*. On the *Dai-Gohonzon*, however these spikes are not elongated. They are actually blunt, shorter and, comparing mandalas inscribed in October/November 1279, the calligraphy and layout appears to be quite different.

<sup>12</sup> (日蓮正宗大石寺) Shinohara Zentarō/Nichirenschōshū Taiseikiji Henshū Iinkai, Tōzai Tetsugaku Shoin 1970

There are a number of other differences as well. For example, the style Nichiren used to write the Siddham character Aizen seems not to be consistent with the one of the *Dai-Gohonzon*. The same goes for Nichiren's signature. By comparing it with other mandalas inscribed in the same year, the divergence becomes more evident. The plank seems rather the result of some kind of patchwork, with the central inscription copied from the mandala bestowed upon Nichizen. This might be also substantiated by several factors, the size being one of them:

- Nichizen mandala housed at Kitayama Honmon-ji: mm 1136 × 586
- Nichizen mandala housed at Taisekiji: mm 1110 × 583
- *Dai-Gohonzon*: mm 1440 × 651 (actually mm 1439.2 × 651.2)

By comparing the *Dai-Gohonzon* with the mandala bestowed upon Nichizen, at least the central inscription seems to coincide almost perfectly. The inscription height of mm 920 is the same.



The above graph shows height comparisons of the central inscription on the *Dai-Gohonzon* and the Nichizen mandala. A more detailed examination with several pictures, has been published by *Saikakudoppo* on his website, which is however critical of Taiseki-ji in principle.

Niken of Myōkō-ji recorded the size as being 5 *Shaku* in height and 2.4 *Shaku* wide (approx mm 1515 × 727.2), although this point cannot be verified independently. According to the records of Minobusan Kuon-ji (久遠寺述記) the plank is 4.75 *Shaku* in height, 2.15 *Shaku* wide and 2.2 *Shaku* thick, (approx mm 1440 × 651.5 × 66.6). Kyōdō'in Nichi'in (經道院日因 1687~1769), the 31<sup>st</sup> Abbot of Taiseki-ji, recorded the same sizes with the exception of the thickness, as 2.17 *Shaku*. The differences in size were often recorded after a great fire damaged the Nichiren-Shōshū head temple. According to exhaustive research by Mr. Kawasaki Hiroshi, the current *Dai-Gohonzon* may be just one of several reproductions made over time, after fires at Taiseki-ji destroyed previous copies. In fact, there are several discrepancies in the records regarding size and inscriptions. In some cases there are even differences as huge as 100 mm; accordingly the actual *Dai-Gohonzon* is believed to have been produced around 1865 after a great fire occurred.



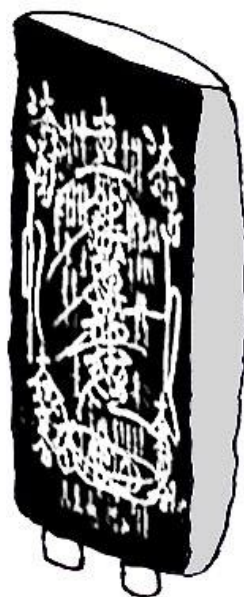
One early transcription of the *Dai-Gobonzon*, shows the “curse and benefit<sup>13</sup>” inscriptions, while these are not present on the actual plank mandala. There are at least four documents that shows differences, especially the presence or absence of the above mentioned inscriptions:

| Year | Document name/author  | Japanese title |
|------|---|----------------|
| 1600 | Nikken- <i>zu</i>   | 日憲図            |
| 1764 | <i>Kansoku-<i>zu</i></i>  | 完則図            |
| 1911 | <i>Yamagisawa-<i>zu</i></i> (based on the Kumada picture)         | 柳沢図            |
| 1953 | <i>Kinoshita-<i>zu</i></i> (with “curse & blessing” inscriptions) | 木下図            |

| Fire outbreaks at Taiseki-ji buildings |  |
|--|--|
| 1569                                   | Taisekiji is destroyed by fire   |
| 1631                                   | Several buildings at Taisekiji are destroyed by fire (some sources state 1635) |
| 1807                                   | The Rikyō-bō is destroyed by fire  |
| 1860                                   | Fire outbreaks from Taiseki-ji lodgings destroy nearby buildings               |
| 1865                                   | The Kyakuden, Mutsubō and Dai-bō are destroyed by fire                         |
| 1909                                   | The Hyakkan-bō is destroyed by fire  |
| 1924                                   | The Honkyō-bō is destroyed by fire   |
| 1933                                   | The Ren'yo-an is destroyed by fire   |
| 1945                                   | Several buildings are destroyed by fire  |

| Size change after fire outbreaks at Taiseki-ji buildings |   |
|--|---|
| 1569→1600  | Niken drawing measure: mm 1515 × 727                    |
| 1631→1764  | <i>Kansoku-<i>zu</i></i> drawing measure: mm 1439 × 651 |
| 1865→1911  | Yanagisawa drawing measure: 1410 × 660                  |

The *Dai-Gobonzon* is currently inserted into a wooden casing measuring 675 mm in width (the frame is 30 mm on each side) and 1,680 mm in height, including 30 mm top frame + 76 mm for the dais inserts. The shape on the backside is convex and rounded. After the enshrinement in the new-built Hoanden hall on 12.10.2002, a commemorating plaque was inserted, mentioning that the work was commissioned by the 67<sup>th</sup> Abbot Nikken (平成十四年十月十二日 奉安堂建立記念六十七日顕).



Drawing of the convex shape

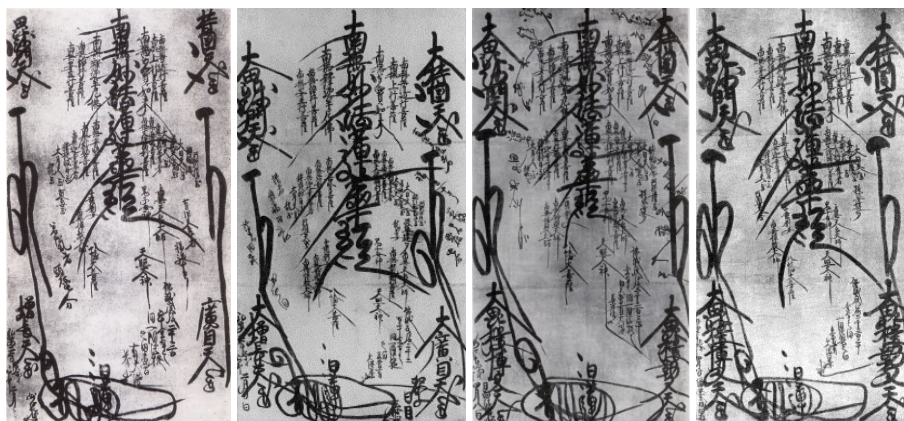
<sup>13</sup> For the “Curse and Benefit” inscriptions, please refer to “The Mandala in Nichiren Tradition, Part three”.

It is also supposed that Nanjō Nichiu produced another plank mandala, said to be a copy of the *Dai-Gohonzon*, in case it became lost or destroyed. The duplicate however is allegedly signed by Nichiu and apparently stored at Kitayama Honmon-ji. However, under the tenure of Nichiu the *Shishinden* mandala (catalogue Nr. 82) has also been reproduced in wood, thus it is not completely clear if the said copy actually refers to this wooden Gohonzon. It can be assumed that the practice of commissioning wooden copies of original Nichiren mandalas came into use under Nanjō Nichiu as Taiseki-ji was expanding, particularly in the northern Tōhoku regions where there are several old temples affiliated with Nichiren Shōshū.

In his book, Kimbara also points out at practical problems such as lack of space. Nichiren often mentions in his writings about the small size of his dwelling at Minobu. Enshrining such a large object there would have been impractical. Even if it was preserved at Minobu, there is no mention on any document. Another disputed aspect is that the plank seems to have been processed with a planer, a tool that was not in use during Nichiren's lifetime, but at least 140 years later. For example, a wooden version of the *Shinshinden* mandala stored at Iwaki Myōhō-ji in Akita was produced in 1420 with a planer. The area is related to Ishikawa *Nyūdō* and the mandala was bestowed upon or sponsored by a believer named Ōtomo Jōren (大伴浄蓮).

As for the calligraphy and overall proportion of Nichiren's mandalas during the second year of Kōan, the plank is not consistent with any Gohonzon inscribed in 1279. The distinctive pattern, such as a shorter central inscription (50%~60% of the overall length) with spiked and elongated tips becomes immediately evident. The only other certified Gohonzon inscribed in October 1279 was bestowed upon Sumida Gorō Tokimitsu and is housed at Myōken-ji in Niizo. It is known to have been originally stored at Shimojō Myōren-ji, but does not show many similarities with the *Dai-Gohonzon*. The argument that the differences are due to its uniqueness is hard to sustain. Those variations are not in substance, which would make this Gohonzon special, but rather in comparatively insignificant details such as the calligraphy. The next page shows all mandalas inscribed in the second year of Kōan and again the *Dai-Gohonzon* placed in the supposed time-frame.

The Nichiren mandalas inscribed in the second year of Kōan (1279) are shown below.



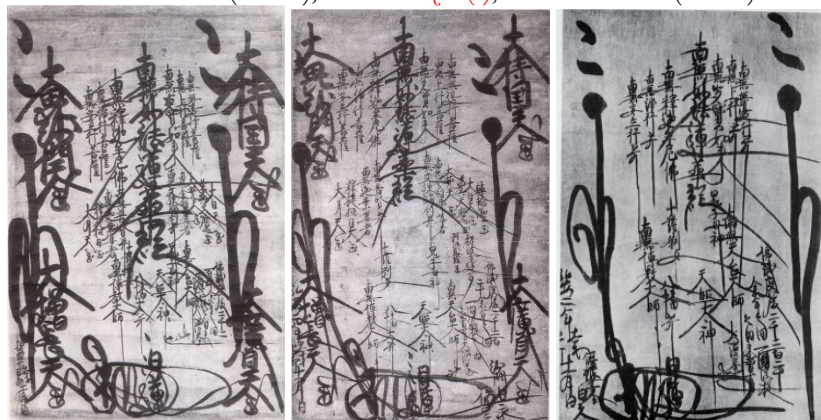
Second month (Nr. 59), (Nr. 60) and fourth month (Nr. 61)



fourth month (Nr. 62), (Nr. 63); sixth (Nr. 64) seventh (Nr. 65) and ninth month (Nr. 66)



Tenth month (Nr. 67), *Dai-Gobonzon* (?), eleventh month (Nr. 68)



Eleventh month (Nr. 68/2), (Nr. 69) and (Nr. 70)

## The theoretical basis for the *Dai-Gohonzon*

This particular mandala is dedicated to an individual of the *Hokekō* confraternity known as Yashirō Kunishige. However he does not appear on any related document and there are no extant or known letters from Nichiren addressed to him. He is believed to be one of the pheasants involved in the Atsuhara incident and most probably illiterate. Kunishige however is not registered among Nikko's disciples, while the Fuji area was under his supervision. There is virtually not a single proof that he ever existed, while according to Fukuoka Junō<sup>14</sup>, Minamoto Jinshirō Kunishige of Atsuhara was the father<sup>15</sup> of Nichiben (越後阿闍梨日弁 1239~1311), Shimono-bō Nichinin (下野房日忍 n.d.), Myōjō (妙常 ?~1303) the wife of Toki Jōnin and another woman believed to be the mother of Mino Ajari Tenmoku (美濃阿闍梨天目 1245~1337).

A reference to the beheading of a certain Yashirō, which basically indicates the fourth male in a family < 弥四郎男ノ之頸を切ラ令ム > is found on a document known as the *Ryūsen-ji Petition*<sup>16</sup> housed at Nakayama Hokekyō-ji. It was jointly authored by Nichiren, Nikkō and Shimono-bō Nisshū (下野房日秀 ?~1329). This person named Kunishige however, could have been virtually anybody. Hosoi Nittatsu, the 66<sup>th</sup> Abbot of Taiseki-ji stated < We can come across several Yashirōs among the believers of the Daishōnin's time >. Before him, Hori Nichikō<sup>17</sup> wrote that < I do not know the basis for the matter of Yashirō Kunishige >.

From what is known, in 1279 a group of farmers was arrested by *Hei-no-Saemon* whose name was *Taira-no-Yoritsuna* (平頼綱) on the 21<sup>st</sup> day of the ninth month, following a dispute with a certain Gyochi (行智); he was a layman acting as deputy chief priest of Ryūsen-ji, a Tendai temple in Atsuhara. 20 farmers were taken to Kamakura on bogus charges. Among those who filed the complaint, there was also Yatōji (弥藤次), the elder brother of Jinshirō, Yagorō and Yarokurō, who were later beheaded. It can be assumed that Yatōji was lured by promises of a reward from Gyōchi and that a beheading was not part of the initial plan.

This incident was probably merely the result of an escalation involving several other disputes. Nikkō had been expelled from Jissō-ji temple for converting other acolytes, among them Renge Ajari Nichiji, Nisshū, Nichiben and Nichizen also in trouble with Ryūsen-ji due to their affiliation with Nichiren. A technique used by this group was to coerce temples into a debate in order to seize them. Several had been already been won over. Naturally, complaints reached the government and somebody finally decided to act. Especially *Hei-no-Saemon* Yoritsuna was a long-time personal foe of Nichiren, thus the attack on his group was intentional. It is however generally understood that this particular event (the Atsuhara persecution) is very significant since it inspired the following generations of disciples in all lineages to spread the teaching widely without "begrudging one's life", especially those who were active in Kyoto to remonstrate with the Emperor or the Shogunate.

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<sup>14</sup> Please see the article of Fukuoka Junō titled *Nichiben Shōnin no shiteki kōsatsu* (日辨聖人の史的考察), Keirin Gakusō journal 8:1, Keirin Gakusō, Tokyo 1974.

<sup>15</sup> According to the *Tōke shōmonryū keizū no koto* (当家諸門流繼図之事 NSZ18), Nichiben was the first son of Jinshirō Kunishige < 駿州富士郡之人父姓者源氏熱原甚四郎国重長男也 >.

<sup>16</sup> (瀧泉寺申状 STN2:1677, WND2:822) the document consists of ten sheets, although the contents of the eleventh sheet have been written on the backside of the tenth and the concluding three lines on the backside of the eighth sheet. From the first to the seventh sheet is not Nichiren's handwriting. Sheets eight, nine and the first seven lines of the tenth, have been written by Nikkō. The rest is the work of Nisshū. Only the final portion, after the sixth line on the ninth sheet and the date is assumed to be Nichiren's handwriting. The scroll is kept at Nakayama Hokekyō-ji and measures mm 322 × 4370. Nisshū in fact sought refuge at the residence of Toki Jōnin during the Atsuhara persecution, which indicates that he took the document with him.

<sup>17</sup> Source: „Essential Teachings of the Fuji School“ (*Fuji Shūgaku Yōshū*).



One theory suggests that, based on the invocatory caption mentioning “and others”, this mandala was dedicated to all humanity and Kunishige therefore represents an *ideal believer*. The *Hokkekō* confraternities however appeared only later in the Muromachi era, way after Nichiren’s passing. In addition, carved mandalas on wood came into use exactly during the said period. It is alleged that this particular mandala was inscribed for the whole mankind following the Atsuhara persecution, as three innocent pheasants were beheaded for not abjuring their faith in Nichiren’s teaching. As with the inscriptions on the *Daigobonzon* (traced from two mandalas) it could be assumed that the significance attached to this special Gohonzon may also be a combination of historical truth, legends and pious fabrication of data in order to cope with the need of materializing the concept of spreading the Lotus teachings with the same resolution as Nichiren. An example of a fervent spirit of propagation at the cost of harsh persecutions can be found in the deeds of the well-known preacher Kuonjō’in Nisshin (久遠成院日親 1407~1488).

According to proponents of the *Kunishige theory*, Nichiren decided to inscribe this special mandala since persecution had not befallen on him, but on his followers. It is however documented in several extant writings, that his disciples had been persecuted and killed even as early as the Komatsubara incident in the first year of Bun’ei (1264). It is widely known that Nichiren’s follower Kyonin-bō (鏡忍坊) was killed during the ambush, while his host Kudō Yoshitaka<sup>18</sup> (工藤吉隆) died from the inflicted wounds. As stated in the Ryūsen-ji Petition, disciples < *were shot to death with arrows, cut down with swords, killed otherwise...in several persecutions too numerous to describe* >. The Atsuhara incident was hence not the first time that Nichiren’s followers suffered direct persecutions. It was perhaps the first structured frontal attack by the authorities.

Nevertheless Nichiren could hardly receive notice of the Atsuhara incident from his retreat at Minobu in less than 48 hours. Prof. Em. Nakao Takashi from Risshō University, mentioned during a lecture in 2007, that the 13<sup>th</sup> century trail used to reach Minobu from Kamakura has been traced and that the journey would require approximately two days or at least 36 hours. It must be added however that the distance from the Ueno Fuji area to Nichiren’s dwelling might be covered in one day with a good horse. The Atsuhara brothers were apparently executed on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the tenth month, thus Nichiren would have been informed on the 17<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> at the earliest. Unfortunately there are no clear photos of the dedication to Yashirō Kunishige on the *Dai-Gobonzon*, but only transcripts. Additionally, the dating is not written on the side, but added at the bottom which is rather unseen.

Nichiren does not mention this particular mandala in any of his extant letters. It is not even quoted in his disputed writings. Supporters of the authenticity of the *Dai-Gobonzon* argue that the passage in his letter to Shijō Yoritomō<sup>19</sup> “*On the persecution befalling the sage*”: < *The Buddha fulfilled the purpose of his advent in a little over forty years; T’ien-t’ai took about thirty years, and Dengyo, some twenty years. I have repeatedly spoken of the indescribable persecutions they suffered during those years. For me it took twenty-seven years...* > actually refers to the *Dai-Gobonzon*. There is however, nothing in this writing, which clarifies what Nichiren was actually referring to and there is certainly no direct mention of a special kind of mandala.

Extant correspondence of September~October 1279 includes not only Nichiren’s letters, but also other documents such as the “Ryūsen-ji Petition”. During the weeks preceding the execution of the brothers Jinshirō, Yagorō and Yarokurō, there was a frequent correspondence exchange between Minobu and Kamakura. Nichiren and Nikkō were extremely busy at this time, thus the inscription of a special mandala during those days is rather unthinkable.

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<sup>18</sup> Yoshitaka was the father of Gyobu Ajari Nichiryū (刑部阿闍梨日隆), a disciple of Nichiren. In 1281 he founded a temple at the Komatsubara persecution site, named Kyonin-ji (鏡忍寺) after Kyonin-bō. Traditionally it is believed that Yoshitaka’s wife was pregnant at the time and his dying wish was that - if male - his offspring would become a priest. The last character of Yoshitaka’s name can also be read as “ryū”, thus his son became Nichiryū later on.

<sup>19</sup> (聖人御難事 STN2:1672, WND1:996) eight lines (or nine depending on the reading) from the original letter are extant

In reply to a previous report, Nichiren sent a letter dated 12.10 with instructions to Nikkō, Nissshū and Nichiben, as they were directly involved in the Atsuhara incident. This writing<sup>20</sup> is named “Reply to Lord Hoki and others”, although also known as „a Letter to Reverend Nikkō and Others”. Nichiren writes < *but if the Atsuhara farmers are released without injury, there is no need for Nussbū and the others to submit the petition* >. From this passage and the fact that their elder brother was involved in their imprisonment, it becomes evident that a dramatic outcome such as the beheading of Jinshirō, Yagorō and Yarokurō was not expected. In fact, there is no mention about the *Dai-Gohonzon* being inscribed on this particular day. This relatively short writing is rather the cover letter for a separate paper with corrections on the “Ryūsen-ji Petition” draft. If a release was expected, the premise that Nichiren inscribed a special mandala on that particular day because the farmers were unwilling to recant their faith at the cost of their lives cannot be substantiated. The situation with the farmers somehow escalated, apparently due to the temper of *Hei-no-Saemon*. Judging from the tone of the various letters, such an ending was not anticipated.

Another letter was sent out on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of the tenth month. It is a reply to a report received from Kamakura sent on the 15<sup>th</sup>, regarding the ongoing events. As explicitly stated, both letters were written in the evening. In this writing known as “*Reply to the Sages*”, Nichiren advises Nikkō and his peers to take legal action, but there is no mention about the execution or the inscription of a special mandala. The beheading might have taken place after the letter was sent out, so that Nichiren could not be informed even on the 17<sup>th</sup>. On the 20<sup>th</sup>, Nichiren writes to Nichirō and Ikegami Munenaka about recycling construction material for a building, without mentioning either the Atsuhara incident or the mandala. Other letters sent to Shijō Kingō on the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of the tenth month and on the sixth day of the eleventh month (“*The strategy of the Lotus Sutra*” and “*The Dragon Gate*” respectively) do not contain any reference to the above facts. The latter however mentions the Mongol invasion and rampant epidemics which were pressing matters.



The memorial mandala inscribed by Nikkō

As shown above Nikkō inscribed a special memorial Gohonzon for Jinshirō on the eight day of the forth month, third Year of Tokuji or 1308, indicating that Yoritsuna encountered the same fate some 14 years after Jinshirō’s execution.

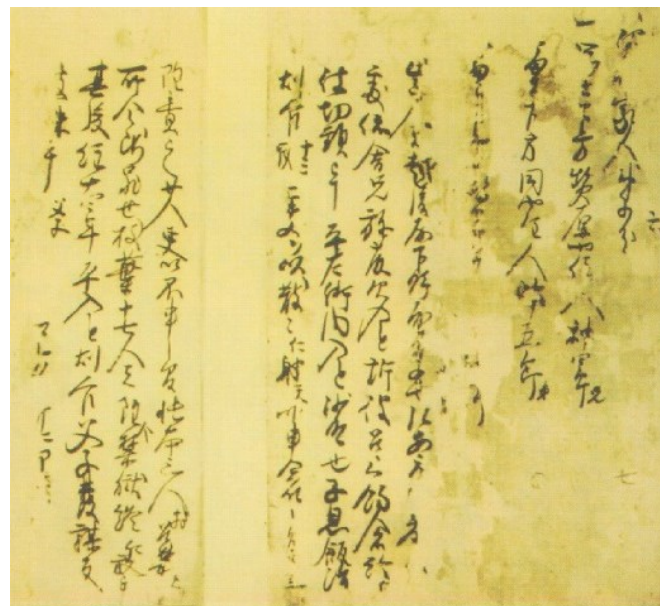
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<sup>20</sup> (伯耆殿御書 STN2:1671)

The laudatory inscription on the Jinshirō memorial Gohonzon reads < To Jinshirō of Hokke community, resident of Suruga province, Fuji area, Atsuhara Village, one of three persons beheaded by Lord Hei-no-Saemon. Fourteen years after *Saemon* beheaded the Lay Priest of the Hokke community; he plotted a rebellion and was killed. His descendants were erased completely without trace >

駿河國富士方熱原郷住人神四郎号法華衆為平左衛門尉被切頸三人之内也 左衛門入道切法華衆頸之後經十四年企謀反間被誅畢 其子孫無跡形滅亡畢

*Hei-no-Saemon* is known to have died on 4.22.1293, during the so-called Heizen Gate incident (平禪門の乱). Yoritsuna and 90 of his followers were killed by the warriors of Hojō Sadatoki (北条貞時 1271~1311), the ninth regent of the Kamakura Shogunate. *Hei-no-Saemon* has been Sadatoki's guardian at the time when the latter became the regent at 14. Since in Japan the counting starts with one, 14 years earlier would actually mean 1280. Furthermore the Buddha's birthday is celebrated on eight day of the fourth month, thus it is not certain if Jinshirō was really beheaded on this particular day. Other extant letters in the said period do not contain references to Jinshirō being executed in 1280 rather than 1279, while it is certain that the Atsuhara incident took place during the tenth month of the second year of Kōan, or 1279.



There had been several deaths among Nichiren's followers due to persecution, as individuals or as groups. The fact that Nikkō inscribed a memorial mandala for Jinshiro however denotes that this particular incident had a deeper significance for him. Certainly, *Hei-no-Saemon*'s violent death - seen as a direct retribution for his actions - was above all relevant for Nikkō, since Yoritsuna had been persecuting his master Nichiren for a long time, including the execution attempt at Tatsunokuchi and the consequent banishment on Sado Island.

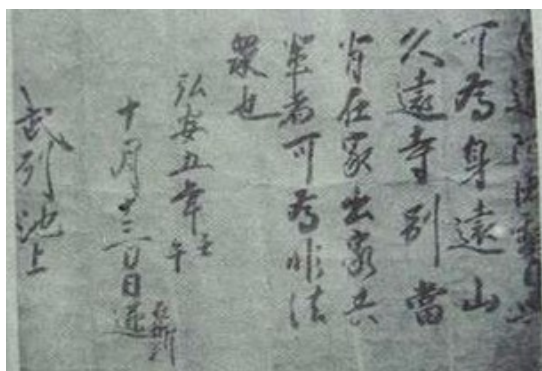
The picture above shows Nikkō's register of disciples listing the Atsuhara believers:

- 富士下方熱原郷の住人神四郎 (Jinshirō)
- 富士下方同郷の住人弥五郎 (Yagorō)
- 富士下方熱原郷の住人弥次郎 (Yajirō\*)

\* The third Atsuhara Martyr *Yarokurō* is not listed as such.)

## The so-called *Transfer Documents*

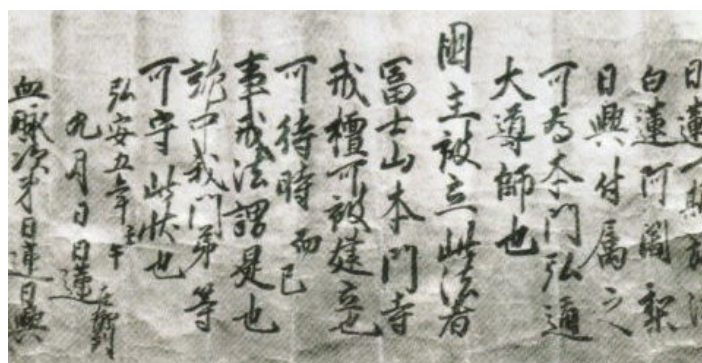
There is no original extant document which mentions the *Dai-Gobonzon* mandala. The originals of the so-called “transfer documents” were lost and there is no documentary proof that they ever existed, as scholars generally label the existing copies as later forgeries. Even if it is assumed that Nikkō was de facto Nichiren’s closest disciple, the *transfer documents* represent pious forgeries by later disciples.



Alleged copy of the Ikegami Transmission document

釈尊五十年の説法、白蓮阿闍梨日興に相承す、身延山久遠寺の別当為るべし、背く在家出家共の輩は非法の衆為るべきなり  
弘安五年壬午十月十三日、日蓮御判、武州池上

Śākyamuni’s teachings of fifty years are transferred to Byakuren Ajari Nikkō. He shall be Chief Priest of Minobusan Kuon-ji. Those priests and lay believers who disregard this will be guilty of slandering the Law. Nichiren, 13<sup>th</sup> day, tenth month, fifth year of Kōan at Ikegami, Musashi.



Alleged copy of the Minobu Transmission document

日蓮一期の弘法、白蓮阿闍梨日興に之を付嘱す、本門弘通の大導師たるべきなり、国主此の法を立てらるれば富士山に本門寺の戒壇を建立せらるべきなり、時を待つべきのみ、事の戒法と云うは是なり、就中我が門弟等此の状を守るべきなり。  
弘安五年壬午九月 日 日蓮在御判 血脈の次第 日蓮日興

I Nichiren transfer this Law, which I have propagated throughout my life to Byakuren Ajari Nikkō. He is to be the supreme leader for the propagation of Honmon. When the sovereign accepts faith in this Law, the *Kaidan* (platform) of Honmonji Temple must be established at Mount Fuji. Wait for the time to come. This is the Actual Precept of the Law. Above all, my disciples must uphold this document.

Ninth month, fifth year of Koan. Nichiren. Order of the heritage of the Law: Nichiren, Nikkō



According to the *Essential Teachings of the Fuji School*<sup>21</sup>, the original documents were plundered by Takeda Katsuyori (武田 勝頼 1546~1582), head of the Takeda Clan during a local war around 1581. Apparently a dispute arose with someone related to *Omosu* Kitayama Honmon-ji, where the documents are said to have been stored. The loss of these papers has been recorded by Nichiga, the 14<sup>th</sup> Abbot of Hota Myōhon-ji and Fujisam Kuon-ji. In addition to copies made by disciples, these *Transfer Documents* are also mentioned in other writings:

| Date               | Years after | Document author  |
|--------------------|-------------|--|
| 1308               | 27          | Iyo Ajari Nicchō(伊予阿闍梨日頂 1252~1317)  |
| 1380               | 99          | Nichigen <sup>22</sup> , fifth Abbot of Shimojō Myōren-ji (日眼 ?~1384)          |
| 1468               | 187         | Jūhon-ji tenth Abbot Nikkō (日廣 n.d.)   |
| 1488               | 207         | Zaikyō Ajari Nikkyō <sup>23</sup> (在京阿闍梨日教 1428~1489)                          |
| 1489               | 208         | Zaikyō Ajari Nikkyō  |
| 1514 <sup>24</sup> | 231         | Honjō -ji eight Abbot Jijō Ajari Nichigen (侍從阿闍梨日現 1459~1514)                  |
| 1545               | 264         | Myōhon-ji 14 <sup>th</sup> Abbot Shintayū Ajari Nichiga (進大夫阿闍梨日我 1508~1586)   |
| 1547               | 266         | Kyoto Yōhō-ji 12 <sup>th</sup> Abbot Saikyō Ajari Nichizai (西京阿闍梨日在 1476~1548) |
| 1556               | 275         | Kyoto Yōhō-ji 13 <sup>th</sup> Abbot Kōzō'in Nisshin (要法寺広蔵院日辰 1508~1576)      |
| 1559               | 278         | Kitayama Honmon-ji ninth Abbot Nisshutsu (重須日出 1495~1587)                      |
| 1573               | 292         | Taiseki-ji 14 <sup>th</sup> Abbot Nisshū <sup>25</sup> (日主 1555~1617)          |

Other references were made in 1611 and 1617. The copies show differences in the wording and moreover, Nichiren could not have authored the “Minobu Transmission Document” on the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the ninth month, since he was already en route to Ikegami. According to the *Genso Kedoki* (元祖化導記) authored by Nicchō (日朝 1422~1500), the eleventh Abbot at Kuon-ji in 1478, Nichiren left Minobu already on the eighth day. He spent the night at the residence of a believer named Shimoyama *hyōe* Shirō (下山兵衛四郎) and stopped at the house of Oii Shoji *nyūdō* (大井庄司入道) the following day. On the tenth Nichiren visited Sone-no-Jirō (曾禰ノ次郎) and so on, until he finally had to change his plans and rest at the Ikegami residence, where he passed away. Although the discourse about the transmission documents started indeed early on, the available evidence alone does not support the claim that these writings ever existed.

Furthermore there are other references of succession lines according to different records. Sanmi Nichijun (三位日順) the second head of study at *Omosu*, considered by many the actual source of Taiseki-ji's distinctive doctrines, records a succession line from Nichiren to Nikkō and Iyo-bō Nitchō and Jakusen-bō Nitcho (蓮 - 興 - 頂 - 澄). While this can be considered a transmission line intended for *Omosu* Kitayama Honmon-ji, Taiseki-ji considers the well-known succession line Nichiren, Nikkō, Nichimoku and Nichidō (蓮 - 興 - 目 - 道). This may signify that such lineages were actually relative to one specific temple and not for the whole community.

<sup>21</sup> *Fuji shūgaku yōshū* (富士宗学要集), Hori Nichikō, Sōkagakkai 1974-1979

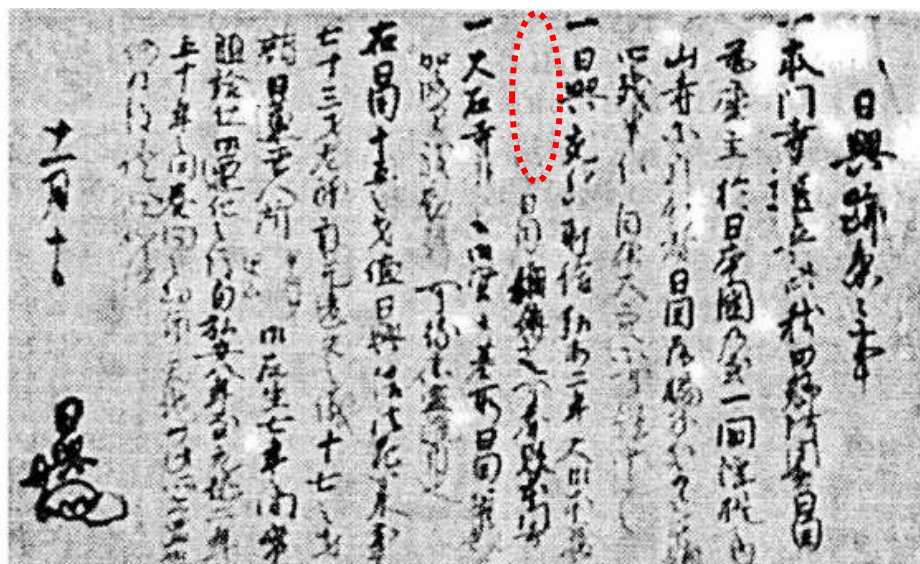
<sup>22</sup> Nichigen was a child of Nanjō Tokimitsu and a disciple of Jakunichi-bō Nikke

<sup>23</sup> Nikkyō was previously a disciple of Nichizon named Hontei-bō Nichijū (本是坊日叶). Around 1481~82 he converted to the Taiseki-ji School under the fourth Abbot Nichiyū. However in 1483, he entered in a dispute and changed affiliation to the School of Nikō. In the last period of his life, during the Entoku era he went back to Taiseki-ji, although the relationship was not harmonious. Finally, Nikkyō settled at *Omosu* Kitayama Honmon-ji.

<sup>24</sup> Several books erroneously date the document as being produced in 1516. This however is impossible as Nichigen passed in 1514. The Japanese date is eleventh year of Eijō (永正十一年) which corresponds to the year 1514 of the western calendar.

<sup>25</sup> It was actually during the tenure of Nisshū when the two transmission documents were stolen by Takeda Katsuyori.

Along with the two transmission documents, Taiseki-ji validates the authenticity of the *Dai-Gohonzon* with the transfer deed from Nikkō to Nichimoku, known as “*Matters to be Observed after Nikkō*” (日興跡条条事). This writing refers to a “*Dai-Gohonzon* of the second year of Kōan” (intended as a large mandala). However right after this statement, four characters are missing or cancelled (red dotted circle). There are adjunctions and cancellations, so the text is not completely clear. Furthermore the year is not mentioned, while the dating of 1332 (正慶元年) is merely suggested by Taiseki-ji. The document is stored at Nishiyama Honmon-ji temple established by Nikkō’s disciple Nichidai.



The original document signed by Nikkō

#### 日興跡条条事

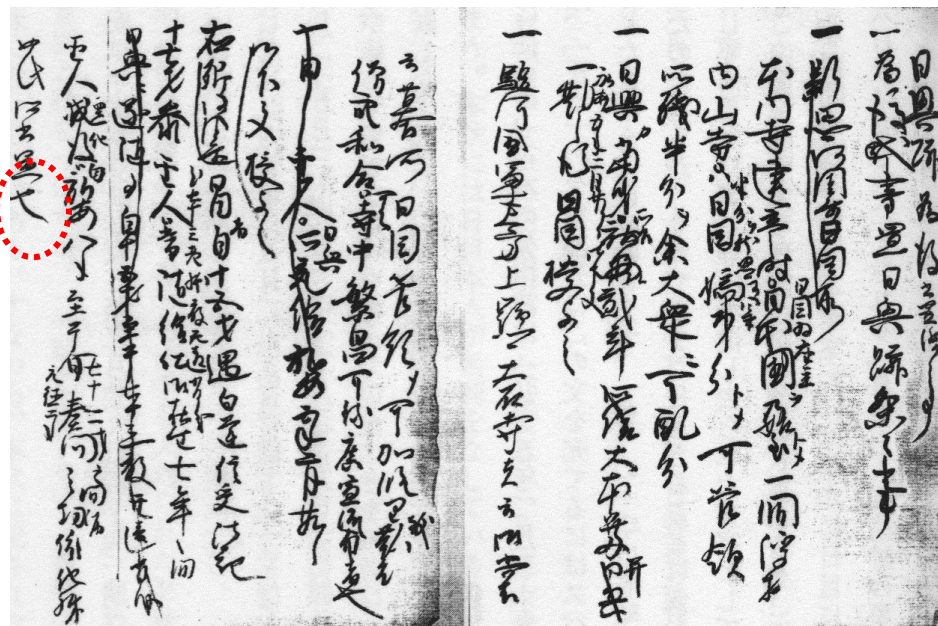
一 本門寺建立の時は新田卿阿闍梨日目を座主と爲し、日本国乃至 一閭浮提の内、山寺等に於て、半分は日目嫡子分として管領せしむべし 残るところの半分は自余の大衆等之を領掌すべし  
 一 日興が身に宛て給はる所の弘安二年の大御本尊●●●●は日目に之を相伝す 本門寺に懸け奉るべし 一 大石寺は御堂と云ひ墓所と云ひ日目之を管領し修理を加へ勤行を致して広宣流布を待つべきなり。十一月十日 日興 (花押)

#### Matters to be observed after Nikkō

When Honmon-ji is erected, Lord Nitta Ajari Nichimoku shall be the chief priest. Not only in Japan, but in whole *Jambudvīpa* temples shall be erected. Half shall be managed by Nichimoku’s relatives (disciples), the remaining half by believers (Buddhist assembly), this is to be acknowledged. Nikkō transfers to Nichimoku the second year of Koan ●●●● *Dai-Gohonzon*, which has been conferred to me. It is to be enshrined at Honmon-ji. As for Taiseki-ji, Nichimoku must look after its halls and tombs, keep them in good condition, carry out the *Gongyō* practice and await the time of kosen-rufu. Eleventh month, tenth day, Nikkō

Tomitani Nisshin (富谷日震) stated that “*Matters to be Observed after Nikkō’s Death*” is an apocryphal document. This assertion, according to Tomitani, is found in an extant writing from Nichidai (日代置文), a disciple of Nikkō and founder of Nishiyama Honmon-ji. The passage affirm < this document is a later person’s brush, not Nikkō’s > (後人ノ筆ニシテ興師ノ御筆ニアラス). More recently, Prof. Miyazaki Eishuū has also expressed serious doubts of the authenticity of this document.

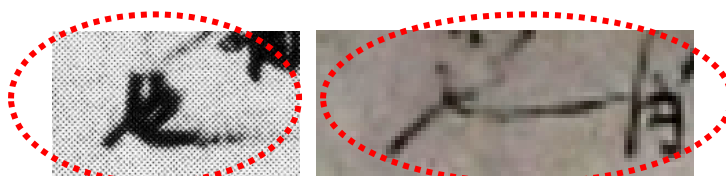
One draft copy of “Matters to be Observed after Nikko’s Death” (日興跡為後書置条々事) housed at Taiseki-ji, clearly mentions the date of Koan fifth year, second month, 29<sup>th</sup> day (in red) when a Gohonzon was bestowed to Nichimoku, but not the *Dai-Gohonzon* of 12.10.1279.



(The text below is an exact transcript of the document, including cancellations and side-notes)

日興跡為後書置條之事  
 一 為後代書置日興跡条々事  
 一 新田郷阿闍梨日目所  
 日目為座主ヲ始トシテ  
 本門寺建立之時●日本国乃至一間浮提内山寺●八日目嫡弟分トシテ令管領  
 所殘半分、余大衆、可配領  
 所給 並 弘安五年二月二十九日御下文  
 日興力当身●弘安貳年所給大本尊日興一期之後日目授与之  
 一 駿河国富士上方上野郷大石寺者云御堂  
 云墓所日目管領シテ加修理、勤行  
 可令  
 僧衆和合●寺中繁冒冒可待廣宣流布也  
 日興  
 一日聖人●所宛給弘安五年二月廿九日  
 御下文授与之  
 右郷阿闍梨日目自十五才遇白蓮信受法花  
 十七才參聖人常隨給仕御在世七年之間  
 日興、遂隨事自十五才至于七十三敢無違背義  
 通化自 七十二才之間口  
 聖人滅後●弘安八年至于日奉間之功依他殊  
 如此所書置也

Moreover it has been theorized that the calligraphy might not even be of Nikkō. For example, it can be observed how the last character “NARP” does not match with Nikkō’s handwriting on his extant mandalas (e.g. below, red dotted circles).



More than one Scholar has also pointed out that both the “Matters to be known for believers of the Fuji School” (富士一跡門徒存知之事) and “Refuting the Five Priests” (五人所破抄) are of dubious origin. A brief informative summary about the discussion relevant to the authenticity of Nikkō’s writings (日興の著作と真偽論) is available at the website of [Saikakudoppo](http://Saikakudoppo.com).

Set aside the question of authenticity of Nikkō’s documents, the mandala of the second year of Kōan which Nikkō is referring to, should be analyzed within context. As shown in the following table, Nichiren inscribed 18 mandalas in 1279 (among these five are not extant anymore):

| Month    | Catalogue Number       | Recipient                 | Location                           |
|----------|------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Second   | <i>Copy by Nichikō</i> | <i>Ubasoku Nittai</i>     | Kuon-ji archives (the copy)        |
| Second   | 59                     | Myōshin                   | Nakayama Jōkō’in                   |
| Second   | 60                     | <i>Shakushi</i> Nichimoku | Kuwana Jūryō-ji                    |
| Fourth   | <i>Copy by Nichikō</i> | <i>Unknown</i>            | Kuon-ji archives (the copy)        |
| Fourth   | 61                     | <i>Hōshi</i> Nikkō        | Mobara Sōgen-ji                    |
| Fourth   | 62                     | <i>Ubasoku</i> Nichiden   | Tamazawa Myōhokke-ji               |
| Fourth   | 63                     | <i>Biku</i> Nichiben      | Mine, Myōkō-ji                     |
| Sixth    | 64                     | <i>Bikuni</i> Nippu       | Nakayama Hōsen’in                  |
| Sixth    | <i>Copy by Nito</i>    | <i>Nike</i>               | Nakayama                           |
| Seventh  | <i>Copy by Nichikō</i> | <i>Shamon</i> Nissun      | Kuon-ji archives (the copy)        |
| Ninth    | 65                     | <i>Shamon</i> Nippō       | Okamiya Kōchō-ji                   |
| Ninth    | 66                     | <i>Ubasoku</i> Nichi’ō    | <i>Lost at Wakayama Renshin-ji</i> |
| Tenth    | 67                     | <i>Shami</i> Nittoku      | Niizo Myōken-ji                    |
| Eleventh | 68                     | <i>Ubasoku</i> Nichian    | Kawabara Myōkai-ji                 |
| Eleventh | 68/2                   | Kasamatsuri Ōno-no-suke   | Shiroyama Jōei-ji                  |
| Eleventh | 69                     | <i>Shamon</i> Nichiei     | Gusokuzan Ryūhon-ji                |
| Eleventh | 70                     | <i>Ubasoku</i> Nichiku    | Risshō Ankoku Kai                  |

Nichiren bestowed a Gohonzon (Nr. 60) to Nichimoku in the second month of 1279. On the lower right corner, Nikkō had originally inscribed additional notes, which were later erased. As Nikkō did not consider the bestowed mandalas to be of exclusive possession of the recipient, it is possible that Nikkō was actually referring to Nichimoku’s Gohonzon in his “*Matters to be observed after Nikkō’s death*”. With a size of mm 949 × 527, this was commonly considered a *Dai-Honzon* for propagation purposes and, as Nikkō often annotated on the mandalas, < to be enshrined at Honmon-ji as an important treasure >. In addition, Nikkō inscribed an additional mandala for Nichimoku later on. This Gohonzon known as *Ozagakawari Honzōn* (御座替本尊) or *Transmission Gohonzōn* was bestowed upon Renzo-bō Nichimoku in 1290.

It should also be considered that in Taiseki-ji’s tradition a mandala Gohonzon is not considered full private property of the recipient. It can be of course passed on to offspring, but as a sort of “unlimited lease”. The final owner is still the temple. For example, a Gohonzon inscribed by Nikkō on the first day of the fifth month in 1333, has been re-conferred three times. The first inscription by Nikkō (●= illegible) bestows the mandala to the child of Gorō Taifū, a relative of Shintaifū in Kii province < きしんたいふの●●●五郎大夫の●子にさづけたぶほんぞんなり >. Few months later another person confers the mandala to Nichigyō of Kagano < 土州幡太吉奈法華堂住侶●●●四事の功以て授与●●月十三日加賀野宮内卿日(行)に下し与ふ>. The character “GYO” is almost illegible. Successively, the mandala is passed to Nichizen < ●●●日善に之を授与す > and finally to Nikkyō < ●●●日教に之を授与す>. The scroll is now housed at Taiseki-ji.



In his *Fuji Shūgaku Yōshū* (Essential Teachings of the Fuji School), Hori Nichikō states that the “Excerpts from the Kanjin Honzon-sho” (観心本尊抄抜書) by Hota Nichiga does mention a < wooden mandala made during the *Daishōnin* lifetime which was previously stored at Kuon-ji, is now housed at Taiseki-ji > (久遠寺の板本尊今大石寺にあり大聖御存日の時ノ造立也).

The “Matters of our Clan” authored by Nissei<sup>26</sup> (日精 1600~1683), the 17<sup>th</sup> Abbot of Taiseki-ji lists among other relics < a wooden Gohonzon transmitted to Nikkō > (日興宛身所給等、者は板本尊、事、于、今当山有、之). This is cited by Hori Nichikō as a *possibility* that the abovementioned quotes *may* refer to the *Dai-Gohonzon*. However, in his original manuscript “*Kechū-shō*” (家中抄) Nissei mentions that < the *Mannen Kugo Daibonzon* given to Nikkō, is now at Myōhon-ji in Awa > (日興宛身所給等、者は万年救護御本尊、事也、今当山有、房州妙本寺、也). However, the four characters for *Mannen Kugo* (万年救護) were deleted and replaced by the one for “plank” (板). Similarly Awa Myōhon-ji (房州妙本寺) was substituted by “this temple” (当山). Hori Nichikō annotated that this may have been the work of 31<sup>st</sup> Abbot Nichi’in.

Based on etymological analysis, Kinbara argues that the mandala passed from Nikkō to Nichimoku was not actually *inscribed* in the second year of Koan. Since *Daigohonzon* and not *mandala* is specifically mentioned, this should refer to the Gohonzon inscribed in the eleventh year of Bun’ei that is Nr. 16 of the mandala catalogue. Nichigō, the supposed successor of Nichimoku has taken this particular mandala to Hota on 16.04.1344. This is mentioned in the “Historical Records of Miyazaki Prefecture” (宮崎県史) quoting Nichigō’s own handwritten “Sacred Honzon transmission document” (本尊聖教譲状) authored in 1353:

安房国北郡吉浜村中谷二籠キ奉ル本尊聖教ノ事

一、日蓮聖人御自筆本尊一鋪文永十一年甲戌十二月日 (...) 文和二年癸巳卯月八日  
< Sacred Honzon inscribed by the Great Saint on the twelfth month, eleventh year of Bun’ei is enshrined at Nakatani, Yoshihama village North district of Awa (...) eighth day, fourth month, second year of Bunna >.

Therefore, it can be argued that the *Mannen Kyūgo Daibonzon* was actually transmitted from Nikkō to Nichimoku and later taken by Nichigō. In fact the Fuji School yearbook of Taiseki-ji even mentions that this mandala was given to Nikkō in the second year of Kōan. Kimbara suggests that the < Daihonzon of the second year of Kōan > stated in Nikkō’s will, essentially signifies the < Daihonzon **received** in the second year of Kōan >. Right after the passing of Nichimoku, several important treasures of Taiseki-ji were taken away either by Nichigō to Myōhon-ji or by the other disciple Nichidai to Nishiyama Honmon-ji. Although many other mandalas still remain at Taiseki-ji, if the *Mannen Kyūgo Daibonzon* is the actual mandala transmitted from Nichiren to Nikkō and Nichimoku, this may shed light on why a special *Dai-Gohonzon* was needed after it disappeared.

Another theory is that *Jinshirō* was exactly the very person Nichiren meant by Kunishige Yashirō. This would be contradicted by the fact that Nikkō inscribed a memorial mandala for Jinshirō several years later, explicitly mentioning him by name.

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<sup>26</sup> Together with ninth Abbot Nichiu, Nissei is considered one of the restorers of Taiseki-ji doctrines prior to Nichikan. His mother was Kinoe Sakiko (近衛前子 1575~1630) a high-ranked courtesan at the service of Emperor Goyozei (後陽成 1571~1617) said to be an adopted child of Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Her biological father, Nissei’s maternal grandfather, Kinoe Sakihisa (近衛前久), was involved in the infamous “incident at Honnō-ji”, where Oda Nobunaga was ambushed and killed.

### *Ita-Honzon*: plank mandalas

Plank mandalas, commonly known as *Ita-honzon* are enshrined at temples in the main altar or on beams on top of a group of statues, as well as outside prayer halls. These planks can be subdivided in four categories, namely concave and convex carving, painted and simply inscribed on a natural wooden board with black ink. Those carved concavely, generally on a black lacquered plank with golden gilded letters, are mostly – albeit not only - used in the Fuji tradition. In this group Nichiren mandalas as well as those of Nikkō or the Abbot in charge are duplicated on wood. In other schools depending on the lineage, mandalas of Nichirō, Nichizō or Nikō are found at various temples, although there is no single specific rule. The plank mandalas below are enshrined for actual worship and not as a decorative element.



Left: Nichiren plank (Nr. 32/2) at Nishiyama Honmon-ji; right: Nikkō plank mandala at Shimojō Myōren-ji



Left: Nikkō plank Gohonzon; right: wooden mandala made out of a matrix by Taiseki-ji 60<sup>th</sup> Abbot

## Conclusion

Considering the available evidence it can be concluded that the plank mandala known as *Daigohonzon* is a later reproduction, perhaps a pious forgery, carved around the tenure of Nanjō Nichiu. The *Daigohonzon* has been very important for Fuji Taiseki-ji and its affiliates as a symbol of cohesion. It has also served to the legitimization of its Abbots within the fragmented reality of Nichiren lineages.

During the nearly 800 years of history of the Nichiren *sangha* many such *bona fide* artefacts have been produced, as in any other religious congregation. However this phenomenon as such (why sacred relics are important), is more relevant to sociological and psychological studies than the analysis of Nichiren's mandalas.

Divisions and sectarian debate among all Nichiren groups has surely done more damage than what each perceive as a threat to their own orthodoxy. The mandalas and its rites were conceived by Nichiren to unite and not to divide people. For daily worship, copies either in print or in carving, are an excellent proxy and have always been used. The human mind is very subtle. Some feel more comfortable with a three-dimensional representation of the mandala, made with a group of statues. Others would like to pray to a mandala personally inscribed for them, while some need to think that their *Honzon* is special.

Between the 1972 and 1991 alone, the *Daigohonzon* has been worshipped by more than 10,000 people on a daily basis, including believers travelling from all over the world. The spread of Nichiren's Buddhism has seen an unprecedented growth that it is difficult to negate that the plank has served its purpose of being a powerful symbol of aggregation.

While it is not feasible to allow constant public worship of original Nichiren's mandalas, a carved plank Gohonzon has proved to be an excellent (and easily replaceable) substitute.