Nichiren Lineage

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The Six Senior Disciples of Nichiren Shonin

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On October 8, 1282 at the house of Munenaka Ikegami, Nichiren Shonin designated the Six Senior Disciples (Roku Roso) to carry on his work after his death. These six were: Nissho (1221-1323), Nichiro (1245-1320), Nikko (1246-1333), Niko (1253-1314), Nitcho (1252-1317), and Nichiji (1250-1305?).

Nissho

Nissho (1221-1323) had once been a fellow student with Nichiren Shonin at Mt. Hiei. Though he was one year older, he was so impressed with Nichiren Shonin that he joined him in Kamakura when Nichiren Shonin first began preaching there in 1253. It is said that Nissho had been adopted by Konoye Kanetsune, the third head of the Konoye family of the Kyoto nobility. This connection would become important later on in the propagation of Nichiren Buddhism.

After the Tatsunokuchi Incident, Nissho took up residence in Hama, Kamakura. In 1284, the Hamado hermitage became the Hokkeji Temple. Because Nissho's lineage was first based at Hama, it is known as the Hama Lineage. In 1317, Nissho transferred Hokkeji Temple to his disciple Nichiyu. The Hokkeji Temple was moved to Tamazawa, Izu in 1621 and renamed Myohokkeji Temple.

Nissho and his nephew Nichiro had a very difficult time in Kamakura after the death of Nichiren Shonin. In 1284, Nissho submitted a revised version of the Rissho Ankoku-ron to the Kamakuran Shogunate. The new version extended Nichiren's criticism of slander to Shingon and Tendai esotericism. Just as with Nichiren Shonin's original submission, this one also brought out a mob which tried to burn down the Hamado hermitage. Nissho calmed them down by telling them that he was a loyal Tendai priest who simply wanted to reform Tendai Buddhism. Nissho and Nichiro also used the argument that they were simply Tendai reformers and were not trying to establish an illegal sect when the War Minister Yoritsuna again tried to suppress Nichiren Buddhism in 1285. War Minister Yoritsuna demanded that they join the other sects in praying for the peace of the Hojo family (who controlled the Kamakuran Shogunate). In order to protect the fledgeling Nichiren Buddhist community in Kamakura, Nissho and Nichiro relented and participated in the prayers, though they did petition for a debate with the other schools.

Nissho and his disciples probably did see themselves as Tendai reformers. The Hama Lineage maintained good relations with the Tendai school for a long time, and even sent students to Mt. Hiei to study Tendai philosophy and even to receive their ordinations.

Nissho also founded the Myohoji Temple in Nase, Sagami in 1306. This temple was transferred to Nissho's disciple Nichijo in 1307. Myohoji Temple was moved to Murata, Echigo when it's main patron, Nobuaki Kazama, moved back there.

Nichiro

Nichiro (1245-1320) was Nissho's nephew, and he became a disciple of Nichiren Shonin in 1254. Nichiro was extremely devoted to Nichiren Shonin and is often called the "beloved disciple." When Nichiren Shonin was being taken away to Izu, Nichiro charged into the water in an attempt to accompany him. The samurai beat him away with oars which permanently crippled his hand. Nichiro was also arrested at the time of the Tatsunokuchi Incident. He was thrown into a dungeon in Kamakura where he received a famous letter of encouragement from Nichiren Shonin. He later became a favorite of the jailer, who actually allowed him to leave in order to visit Nichiren Shonin on Sado Island. Nichiren Shonin was very touched but also very upset that Nichiro had possibly endangered the jailer and so sent him back. Finally, Nichiren Shonin was pardoned and Nichiro was sent to bring the news. His eagerness, however, almost got him killed. Because he did not stop to rest in the frigid winter weather, he collapsed in the snow and almost died of frost bite. Fortunately, he was found and was able to complete his mission.

Upon returning to Kamakura in 1274, Nichiren Shonin put Nichiro in charge of a new temple at Hikigayatsu, Kamakura. This was the Myohonji Temple. Because it was Nichiro's main base of operations in Kamakura, Nichiro's lineage is also known as the Hikigayatsu Lineage.

Nichiro also started a practice hall at the home of Munenaka Ikegami after Nichiren died there in 1282. In 1288, this became the Honmonji Temple. The adminstrative headquarters of the Nichiren Shu are now located there. For this reason, the lineage of Nichiro is also called the Ikegami Lineage.

Nichiro designated Nine Senior Disciples (Kurosu) to continue his propagation efforts. The nine were: Nichizo, Nichirin, Nichizen, Nichiden, Nichihan, Nichiin, Nitcho, Nichigyo, and Rokei. Of these nine, Nichizo was especially noteworthy for bringing Nichiren Buddhism to Kyoto and gaining it official recognition from the imperial family. He will be discussed later. Nichirin later took over Myohonji Temple and Honmonji Temple. Nichiden co-founded the Hondoji Temple in Hiraga, Shimofusa with Nichiro.

Nikko

Nikko (1246-1333) met Nichiren Shonin at Jissoji Temple in 1257. Nichiren Shonin was there doing research and writing the Rissho Ankoku-ron. Later, Nikko had many followers in the provinces of Suruga, Kai, and Izu. Nichiji, another of the Six Senior Disciples, was originally Nikko's disciple before becoming Nichiren Shonin's

disciple. The Atsuwara Persection in 1279 was directed against Nikko's followers in Suruga Province. After Nichiren's death, the Six Senior Disciples and twelve junior priests were to take responsibility for tending his grave at Mount Minobu by using a rotation system (the Rinban). Of the twelve junior disciples, eight of them were the direct disciples of Nikko.

In September 1285 Nikko took up permanent residence on Mount Minobu because the rotation system had broken down. The other senior disciples lived further away and were having difficulties maintaining their communities in the face of government persecution. Nanbu Sanenaga, the Lord of Hakii, recognized Nikko as the chief priest of Kuonji Temple at Mount Minobu. Later in 1285, Niko came to Mount Minobu to assist Nikko. Unfortunately, relations between them all broke down soon afterwards due to Nikko's uncompromising nature and Niko's flexibility. The first problem occurred when Lord Hakii commissioned a statue of Shakyamuni Buddha for his home shrine. Nikko objected that the statue should be accompanied by the Four Great Bodhisattvas of the essential section of the Lotus Sutra if it was to represent the Eternal Shakyamuni Buddha. Niko, however, said that putting a copy of the Lotus Sutra in front of it would suffice. Another time, Lord Hakii made offerings at the Mishima Shrine. Nikko objected to this because according to the Rissho Ankoku-ron, the Shinto gods had abandoned the country because of it's slander of the Lotus Sutra. Niko, however, argued that the gods would surely protect the votary of the Lotus Sutra, and that Nichiren Shonin himself had prayed to them. Finally, he supposedly offered a horse and lumber to a stupa of the Pure Land sect at Mt. Fuji, but he argued that he had merely made a donation out of charity and did not know that it was going to support the Pure Land sect. In each case, Niko supported Lord Hakii while Nikko admonished him. In the end, Nikko no longer felt welcome and decided to leave for his mother's old home in Fuji, Ueno on December 5, 1288.

In 1290, the Lord of Ueno, Nanjo Tokimtsu, built the Taisekiji Temple at Oishigahara for Nikko. Nanjo Tokimitsu, the Lord of Ueno, was the uncle of Nikko's disciple Nichimoku.

In 1291, Nikko moved to the town of Omosu in Kitayama where he founded the Honmonji Temple in February 1298 with the help of Nitcho. He spent the rest of his life at this temple. His lineage is referred to as the Fuji Lineage.

Nikko appointed two sets of six senior disciples to take over for him after his passing. The first set consisted of: Nikke, Nichimoku, Nisshu, Nichizen, Nissen, and Nichijo. The second set consisted of: Nichidai, Nitcho, Nichido, Nichimyo, Nichigo, and Nichijo.

Niko

Niko (1253-1314) was the son of a samurai from Mobara, Kazusa. He was a novice priest at Mt. Hiei at the time his father met Nichiren Shonin in 1265. His father was so impressed that he had Niko brought back from Mt. Hiei in order to become a disciple of Nichiren Shonin. Niko taught the Lotus Sutra in his home town Mobara, but when he found out about Nichiren Shonin's exile he joined him on Sado Island. For this reason, he is known as the Sado Master.

After Nichiren Shonin's death, Niko founded the Myokoji Temple in Mobara. In 1285, he left Mobara to help Nikko at Mount Minobu. Unfortunately, he and Nikko were not able to reconcile their differences regarding the conduct of Lord Hakii, and so Nikko left in 1288. Niko was then solely in charge of Mount Minobu, but he continued to make trips back to Mobara. For this reason, Niko is considered the founder of two lineages: the Mobara Lineage and the Minobu Lineage.

Niko left his disciple Nisshin in charge of Mount Minobu, and his disciple Nisshu in charge of the Myokoji Temple in Mobara. The Myokoji Temple is now known as Sogenji Temple.

Nitcho

Nitcho (1252-1317) was the step-son of Nichiren Shonin's important lay disciple, Toki Jonin (1214-1299). He was a novice priest at a Tendai temple called Guboji in Mama, Shimofusa. Upon the recommendation of his step-father, Toki Jonin, he became the disciple of Nichiren Shonin in 1267. He also joined Nichiren Shonin in exile on Sado Island.

In 1278, Nitcho won a debate with the chief priest of Guboji Temple and shortly after took over the temple. At the time, Nichiren Buddhism was not a recognized sect, so Guboji Temple remained a Tendai temple, at least nominally. Unfortunately, relations between Nitcho and Toki Jonin broke down. In 1292, Nitcho left for Omosu, Kitayana where he had been born. At Omosu, he joined Nikko and helped him to establish Honmonji Temple.

After Nitcho left, Toki Jonin ordained himself and took the name Nichijo. He founded the Hokkeji Temple at his home in Wakamiya. The Hokkeji was next to the residence of Ota Jomyo, another important lay follower of Nichiren Shonin. Ota Jomyo's son, became a disciple of Nichijo and was given the name Nichiko. When Nichijo died, Nichiko made the residence of his father at Nakayama into a temple named Hommyoji. In 1545 the Hokkeji and the Hommyoji were united as the Nakayama Hokekyoji. Today, Nakayama Hokekyoji is well known as the location of the 100 day ascetic practice known as Aragyo. Nichijo is also noted for collecting and cataloging the writings of Nichiren Shonin. The lineage begun by Nichijo is known as the Nakayama Lineage.

Nichiji

Nichiji (1250-1305) was also the son of a samurai. He became a novice at Jissoji Temple, where Nikko met Nichiren Shonin. In 1270, he met Nikko and became his disciple. Nikko then took Nichiji to see Nichiren Shonin in Kamakura, and allowed him to become Nichiren Shonin's direct disciple. In 1280 he founded a practice hall in Mimatsu, his home town. This would later become the Reneiji Temple. After Nichiren Shonin's death, he decided to go overseas to fulfill his master's dream of restoring the true teaching of the Buddha to China and India. On October 13, 1294 he attended Nichiren Shonin's memorial service at Kuonji for the last time. On January 1, 1295 he began his jouney to China. He is believed to have passed away in Senka, China. Nichiji did not found a lineage, but he is considered the patron saint of foreign missionaries by the Nichiren Shu.

Nichiren Shu

The school is often referred to as the Minobu Sect due to their prominence within the Mount Minobu area. The school's head temple, Kuon-ji, is located on Mount Minobu where Nichiren lived in seclusion and where he asked to be buried.[5][6] Another significant temple of sect is the Ikegami Honmon-ji where Nichiren died. Accordingly, many of Nichiren's most important personal artifacts and writings preserved, also considered to be National Treasures of Japan are within their safekeeping.

The sect is also known for its more open and tolerant views of other Buddhist traditions, even mixing or incorporating various mixed Buddhist beliefs and Shinto practices into their own Nichiren Buddhist aesthetics, most notably the use of various religious statues, the red stamping practice of Shuin for novelty, esoteric combinations of Buddhist fortune-telling folk practices and Shinto magic rituals, as well as the tolerant photography and lax distribution of the calligraphic Gohonzon. ***Nichiren Shū*** does not believe Nichiren designated a single successor, as taught for instance by ***Nichiren Shōshū***, instead they maintain that he designated ***six senior*** disciples of equal ranking to succeed him.

The ***Six Senior Disciples*** designated by Nichiren were:

1. Nissho (1221–1323)
2. Nichiro (1245–1320)
3. Nikkō (1246–1333)
4. Mimbu Nikō (1253–1314)
5. Nitchō (1252–1317)
6. Nichiji (1250–unknown)

Nichiren Shū designates the Shakyamuni Buddha of Chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra as the Eternal Buddha while Nichiren is regarded as the Jogyo Bodhisattva possesses the mission in Chapter 21 as the "votary messenger" to uphold the true Dharma in the Latter Day of the Law.

A common Nichiren Shu altar flanked by various statues including a physical representation of Nichiren himself. In other countries of acculturation, a mixture of other religious figures may also be permitted. Kuon-ji temple, Mount Minobu.

The sect designates Shakyamuni as the "Original Buddha" and he alone occupies the central role in Nichiren Shū; Nichiren—referred to as Nichiren Shōnin ("Saint Nichiren")—is the saint who refocused attention on Shakyamuni by rebuking other Buddhist schools for solely emphasizing other buddhas or esoteric practices or for neglecting or deriding the Lotus Sutra.

Nichiren Shu regards Nichiren's own writings—called Gosho or Goibun (御 遺 文) as commentaries or guides to the doctrines of Buddhism. They include the Five Major

Writings of Nichiren in which he establishes doctrine, belief, and practice, as well as many pastoral letters he wrote to his followers.

The sect is highly selective about which Gosho writings it deems authentic. Many Gosho writings accepted by Nichiren Shōshū are not accepted as genuine by Nichiren Shū on grounds that scholars have not verified their authenticity. This dispute arises over the veracity of various disputed writings to be truly authored by Nichiren. The sect does not reject the alleged oral transmissions (including the Ongi Kuden) citing "pastoral value" but cannot be definitively asserted as Nichiren's own teachings.

There are many aspects of Nichiren Shu that make perfect sense to me and accord with the writings of Nichiren, however, their lack of rigor in practice contradicts their insistence on their demands of authenticity of the Gosho. For instance, they freely distribute language of religious traditions from ***Christianity*** *to many others as translated from Nichiren using words like* ***faith***, ***worship***, *and* ***devotion***. *Even going so far as to contradict Shakyamuni himself when repeatedly referring to our "****soul****", a painfully exhaustive teaching of* ***impermanence***, *sunyata or emptiness, and insubstantiality, non-self, etc..., will make abundantly clear. As far as we know, Nichiren was not converted to Western religious doctrines. This religious rhetoric is flagrantly confusing to those pursuing the Buddha Way. They also adopt the critically physical interpretation of Gohonzon as a scroll created by Nichiren. Nichiren would shake in six directions to learn of this sectarian avarice for ownership that completely contradicts the axiom of innate Buddha nature, the awakening of which is in the sentient mind of the individual and certainly, inconceivably captured on paper! Of course Shoshu is not much different in this regard.*

Nichiren Shoshu

Following the death of Nichiren, centuries of doctrinal divisions arose among various schools of Nichiren's followers. During the Meiji Restoration, numerous Nichiren sects were consolidated by the imperial government into several major schools: Nichiren Shu in 1874, Fuju-fuse and Fuju-fuse Komon in 1876, and in 1891 the five interrelated schools of Kempon Hokkeshu, Honmon Hokkeshu, Honmyo Hokkeshu, Hokkeshu, and Honmonshu.

In 1900, the Taiseki-ji temple split away from Honmonshu and renamed itself Nichirenshu Fuji-ha, or the Nichiren Shu (School) of the Fuji area, the branch of Taisekiji Temple, indicating the general naming of sects at the time. In 1913, the sect's name was changed to its current “Nichiren Shoshu.” This changed was purportedly made by Emperor Taisho in reference to the sect's orthodox claims. The sect is also sometimes called Nichiren Masamune, based on the local Japanese dialect in Shizuoka.

Overview

Portrait of Nichiren Shonin by Japanese artisan Kano Tsunenobu (1636–1713), now preserved at Nichiren Shoshu Honmonji Temple in Mitoyo, Kagawa prefecture. Measuring approximately 40 inches by 22 inches on silk, Edo period.

Its head temple Taiseki-ji is located on the lower slopes of Mount Fuji in Japan. Taiseki-ji is visited regularly by Nichiren Shōshū believers from around the world who come to chant to the (Dai, ?) Gohonzon, which they claim to physically embody the spirit of Nichiren in both wooden form and sumi ink.

Unlike other Mahayana Buddhist practices, Nichiren championed the Lotus Sutra as the only valid Buddhist practice and chanting ***Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo*** as the only valid path for anyone to obtain Buddhahood regardless of one's position in life, condition of circumstances, gender and occupational role as well as not necessarily waiting to be reborn into another future life existence.

Nichiren Shōshū claims to operate over 700 temples and temple-like facilities (lay propagation centers) in Japan, as well as 24 temples outside Japan, and a membership of over 800,000 global adherents.

Nichiren Shōshū claims a direct lineage (yuiju ichinin kechimyaku sojo) of successive High Priests from Nikko Shonin, who they say was originally chosen by Nichiren to carry on the propagation of his Buddhist practice in the Three Ages of Buddhism, a claim that other Nichiren Buddhist sects assert as well, such as ***Nichiren-shū*** but rejected by others. Nichiren Shōshū claims this lineage is accorded to them through the following documents (copies existing, the original

documents were stored in a treasure box at Omosu Honmon-ji, but were stolen (?) during a raid by the soldiers of Takeda Katsuyori in 1581):
(*suspicious lineage since many documents and accounts has it that Nichiren spent a great deal of time bringing his chosen SIX Senior Monks up to speed in order to continue and lead propagation from his adopted home at mount Minobu. This question even brings the Ongi Kuden into great suspicion as a later fabrication.)*

- "Document Entrusting the Dharma that Nichiren propagated throughout his Life" (Nichiren ichigo guho fuzokusho)
- "Document Entrusting Minobu-san" (Minobu-san fuzokusho)
- The "One Hundred and Six Articles" (Hyaku rokka-sho)

*A careful reading of the extant writings of Nichiren – **Gosho** – makes it quite plain that the **lineage** is in the student themselves by our resolve and individual commitment to awaken our independent **Buddha eye** through the **GoHonzon-mind** of enlightenment using the Daimoku and the unique mandala of the **Ceremony in the Air** that he provided to enjoin with Buddha.*

The current leader of the sect is the 68th High Priest, Nichinyo Shōnin (1935–). Nichiren Shōshū priests distinguish themselves from those of most other schools by wearing only white and gray vestment robes and a white surplice, as they believe Nichiren did.

By the imperial Daijō-kan Decree #133 of the Emperor Meiji since 1872, Nichiren Shōshū priests, like other Japanese Buddhist sects as well as other former traditionalist "celibate" lifestyles such as artisans and Geisha et cetera, have been permitted to marry.

Accordingly, the sect does not impose any regulations of Buddhist morality on gender or marital relationships, poverty or wealthy lifestyles, ranging from personal habits or vices, divorce, abortion, sartorial or dietary choices including the consumption of vegetables versus meat, dairy or alcohol, et cetera.

The sect also vehemently rejects monetary and material donations from non-members who are not registered or affiliated with a local branch temple, citing claims of "karmic impurity" from non-believers and those who belong to other religions. This position of not accepting alms from non-believers is taught by Nichiren in his "Letter to Ni'ike" ("Ni'ike gosho"), and by Nikko Shonin in his "Twenty-six Admonitions" ("Nikko yuikai okimon"). Accordingly, the offertory fee to register as a new member is strongly forbidden to be paid for by a fellow Hokkeko believer, except under rare circumstances of extreme poverty or dire homelessness.

The sect categorizes three forms of donations for its registered believers:

1. The pro-active sharing of its *religious* practice to non-believers through chanting Nam Myoho Renge Kyo and Shakubuku.
    1. (*a violation of Nichiren's own teachings by removing an essential character of the Daimoku. Nichiren taught the essential practice as the chanting of*

*the 7 characters of **Na-Mu-Myo-Ho-Ren-Ge-Kyo**. 7 carachters, 7 jewels, 7 beats, as well as both **Shoju** and **Shakubuku** when **appropriate**. It is as though the Shoshu "priesthood" has never read the Gosho.*)

2. The offertory of food and monetary donations to sustain the local temple and its priests.
3. The ancient Asian practice of gaining Buddhist merit (Japanese: 廻向, Eko) by providing free labor services (cleaning, volunteer work) for the temple.

The lay member organization of the sect, "***Hokkeko–Rengo–Kai***" is headquartered at the Grand Hodo-in Temple in Toshima, Tokyo.

Development of the major lineages

Several denominations comprise the umbrella term "Nichiren Buddhism" which was known at the time as the Hokkeshū (Lotus School) or Nichirenshū (Nichiren School). The splintering of Nichiren's teachings into different schools began several years after Nichiren's passing. Despite their differences, however, the Nichiren groups shared commonalities: asserting the primacy of the Lotus Sutra, tracing Nichiren as their founder, centering religious practice on chanting Namu-myoho-renge-kyo, using the Gohonzon in meditative practice, insisting on the need for propagation, and participating in remonstrations with the authorities.

The movement was supported financially by local warlords or stewards (jitō) who often founded tightly organized clan temples (ujidera) that were frequently led by sons who became priests. Most Nichiren schools point to the founding date of their respective head or main temple (for example, ***Nichiren Shū*** the year 1281, ***Nichiren Shōshū*** the year 1288, and ***Kempon Hokke Shu*** the year 1384) although they did not legally incorporate as religious bodies until the late 19th and early 20th century. A last wave of temple mergers took place in the 1950s.

The roots of this splintering can be traced to the organization of the Nichiren community during his life. In 1282, one year before his death, Nichiren named "six senior priests" (rokurōsō) disciple to lead his community: Nikkō Shonin, Nisshō, Nichirō, Nikō, Nitchō, and Nichiji. Each had led communities of followers in different parts of the Kanto region of Japan and these groups, after Nichiren's death, ultimately morphed into lineages of schools.

Nikkō Shonin, Nichirō, and Nisshō were the core of the Minobu (also known as the Nikō or Kuon-ji) monryu or school. Nikō became the second chief abbot of Minobu (Nichiren is considered by this school to be the first). Nichirō's direct lineage was called the Nichirō or Hikigayatsu monryu. Nisshō's lineage became the Nisshō or Hama monryu. Nitchō formed the Nakayama lineage but later returned to become a follower of Nikkō. Nichiji, originally another follower of Nikkō, eventually traveled to the Asian continent (ca. 1295) on a missionary journey and some scholarship

suggests he reached northern China, Manchuria, and possibly Mongolia. Kuon-ji Temple in Mount Minobu eventually became the head temple of today's Nichiren Shū, the largest branch among traditional schools, encompassing the schools and temples tracing their origins to Nikō, Nichirō, Nisshō, Nitchō, and Nichiji. The lay and/or new religious movements Reiyūkai, Risshō Kōsei Kai, and Nipponzan-Myōhōji-Daisanga stem from this lineage.

Nikkō left Kuon-ji in 1289 and became the founder of what was to be called the Nikkō monryu or lineage. He founded a center at the foot of Mount Fuji which would later be known as the Taisekiji temple of Nichiren Shōshū. Soka Gakkai is the largest independent lay organization that shares roots with this lineage.

Fault lines between the various Nichiren groups crystallized over several issues:

1. ***Local gods***. A deeply embedded and ritualized part of Japanese village life, Nichiren schools clashed over the practice of honoring local gods (kami) by lay disciples of Nichiren. Some argued that this practice was a necessary accommodation. The group led by the monk Nikkō objected to such syncretism.
2. Content of Lotus Sūtra. Some schools (called ***Itchi***) argued that all chapters of the sūtra should be equally valued and others (called ***Shōretsu***) claimed that the latter half was superior to the former half. (See below for more details.)
3. ***Identity of Nichiren***. Some of his later disciples identified him with Visistacaritra, the leader of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth who were entrusted in Chapter Twenty-Two to propagate the Lotus Sūtra. The Nikkō group identified Nichiren as the original and eternal Buddha (a ridiculous assertion to claim political superiority over all other groups).
4. ***Identification with Tiantai school***. The Nisshō group began to identify itself as a Tiantai school, having no objections to its esoteric practices, perhaps as an expedient means to avoid persecution from Tiantai, Pure Land, and Shingon followers. This deepened the rift with Nikkō.
5. ***The Three Gems***. All schools of Buddhism speak of the concept of The Three Gems (the **Buddha**, the **Dharma**, and the **Sangha**) but define it differently. Over the centuries the Nichiren schools have come to understand it differently as well. The ***Minobu*** school has come to identify the Buddha as Shakyamuni (the human embodiment of Buddha experienced) whereas the Nikkō school identifies it as Nichiren (as a cult of personality). For Minobu the Dharma is Namu-myoho-renge-kyo, the Nikkō school identifies it as the Namu-myoho-renge-kyo that is hidden in the 16th "Lifespan" Chapter of the Lotus Sutra (the Gohonzon). Currently, Nichiren Shoshu claims this specifically refers to the (Dai, ?) Gohonzon (again laying claim to the one and only physical object – very Samsaric), whereas Soka Gakkai holds it represents all Gohonzon (still physical interpretation but more universal). The Sangha, sometimes translated as

"the priest", is also interpreted differently. Minobu defines it as Nichiren and his students; Nichiren Shoshu as Nikkō representing its priesthood (as a sort of re-incarnation of Nichiren throughout the lineage of “priests”); and the Soka Gakkai as Nikkō representing the harmonious community of practitioners (?).

The cleavage between Nichiren groups has also been classified by the so-called Itchi (meaning unity or harmony) and Shoretsu (a contraction of two words meaning superior/inferior) lineages.

The Itchi lineage

today comprises most of the traditional schools within Nichiren Buddhism, of which the ***Nichiren Shū*** is the biggest representative, although it also includes some Nikkō temples. In this lineage the whole of the Lotus Sutra, both the so-called theoretical (shakumon or "Imprinted Gate") and essential (honmon or "Original Gate") chapters, are venerated.[79]:192 While great attention is given to the 2nd and 16th chapter of the Lotus Sutra, other parts of the sutra are recited.

The Shoretsu lineage

comprises most temples and lay groups following the Nikkō monryu. The Shoretsu group values the supremacy of the essential over the theoretical part of the Lotus Sutra. Therefore, solely the 2nd and 16th chapters of the Lotus Sutra are recited. There are additional subdivisions in the Shoretsu group which splintered over whether the entire second half was of equal importance, the eight chapters of the second half when the assembly participates in "The Ceremony of the Air," or specifically Chapter Sixteen (*Lifespan of the Tathāgata*).

Origin of the Fuji School

Although there were rivalries and unique interpretations among the early Hokkeshū lineages, none were as deep and distinct as the divide between the Nikkō or Fuji school and the rest of the tradition. Animosity and discord among the six senior disciples started after the second death anniversary of Nichiren's 100th Day Memorial ceremony (23 January 1283) when the rotation system as agreed upon the "Shuso Gosenge Kiroku" (English: Record document of founder's demise) and Rimbo Cho (English: Rotation Wheel System) to clean and maintain Nichiren's grave. [citation needed] By the third anniversary of Nichiren's passing (13 October 1284), these arrangements seemed to have broken down. Nikkō claimed that the other five senior priests no longer returned to Nichiren's tomb in Mount Minobu, citing signs of neglect at the gravesite. He took up residency and overall responsibility for Kuonji temple while Nikō served as its doctrinal instructor. Before long tensions grew

between the two concerning the behavior of Hakii Nanbu Rokurō Sanenaga, the steward of the Minobu district and the temple's patron.

Nikkō accused Sanenaga of unorthodox practices deemed to be heretical such as crafting a standing statue of Shakyamuni Buddha as an object of worship, providing funding for the construction of a Pure Land stupa in Fuji, and visiting and worshiping at the Mishima Taisha Shinto shrine which was an honorary shrine of the Hōjō clan shogunate. Nikkō regarded the latter as a violation of Nichiren's Rissho ankoku ron.

In addition, Nikkō made accusatory charges that after Nichiren's death, other disciples slowly began to gradually deviate from what Nikkō viewed as Nichiren's orthodox teachings. Chief among these complaints was the syncretic practices of some of the disciples to worship images of Shakyamuni Buddha. Nikkō admonished other disciple priests for signing their names "Tendai Shamon" (of the Tendai Buddhist school) in documents they sent to the Kamakura government. Furthermore, Nikkō alleged that the other disciples disregarded some of Nichiren's writings written in Katakana rather than in Classical Chinese syllabary.[citation needed]

Sanenaga defended his actions, claiming that it was customary for his political family to provide monetary donations and make homage to the Shinto shrine of the Kamakura shogunate. Nikō tolerated Sanenaga's acts, claiming that similar incidents occurred previously with the knowledge of Nichiren. Sanenaga sided with Nikō and Nikkō departed in 1289 from Minobu. He returned to his home in Suruga Province and established two temples: Taiseki-ji in the Fuji district and Honmonji in Omosu district. He spent most of his life at the latter, where he trained his followers.

According to Stone, it is not absolutely clear that Nikkō intended to completely break from the other senior disciples and start his own school. However, his followers claimed that he was the only one of the six senior disciples who maintained the purity of Nichiren's legacy. Two documents appeared, first mentioned and discovered by Taiseki-ji High Priest Nikkyo Shonin in 1488, claiming Nichiren transferred his teaching exclusively to Nikkō but their authenticity has been questioned. Taiseki-ji does not dispute that the original documents are missing but holds that certified copies are preserved in their repositories. In contrast, other Nichiren sects vehemently claim them as forgeries since they are not in the original handwriting of Nichiren or Nikkō, holding they were copied down by Nikkō's disciples after his death."

In addition to using the letters to defend its claim to orthodoxy, the documents may have served to justify Taiseki-ji's claimed superiority over other Nikkō temples, especially Ikegami Honmon-ji, the site of Nichiren's tomb. Even though there had been efforts by temples of the Nikkō lineage in the late 19th century to unify into one single separate Nichiren school the Kommon-ha, today's Nichiren Shōshū comprises only the Taiseki-ji temple and its dependent temples. It is not identical to the historical Nikkō or Fuji lineage. Parts of the Kommon-ha, the Honmon-Shu, eventually became part of Nichiren Shu in the 1950s. Japanese new religious

movements such as the Sōka Gakkai, Shōshinkai, and Kenshōkai trace their origins to the Nichiren Shōshū school and they all eventually branched from it.

15th century through the early 19th century

In the early 14th century Hokkeshū followers spread the teachings westward and established congregations (Jpn. shū) into the imperial capital of Kyoto and as far as Bizen and Bitchu. During this time there is documentation of face-to-face public debates between Hokkeshū and Nembutsu adherents. By the end of the century Hokkeshū temples had been founded all over Kyoto, only being outnumbered by Zen temples. The demographic base of support in Kyoto were members of the merchant class (Jpn. machishū), some of whom had acquired great wealth. Tanabe hypothesizes they were drawn to this faith because of Nichiren's emphasis on the "third realm" (Jpn. daisan hōmon) of the Lotus Sutra, staked out in chapters 10–22, which emphasize practice in the mundane world.

In the 15th century, the political and social order began to collapse and Hokkeshū followers armed themselves. The Hokke-ikki was an uprising in 1532 of Hokke followers against the followers of the Pure Land school in 1532. Initially successful it became the most powerful religious group in Kyoto but its fortunes were reversed in 1536 when Mt. Hiei armed forces destroyed twenty-one Hokkeshū temples and killed some 58,000 of its followers. In 1542 permission was granted by the government to rebuild the destroyed temples and the Hokke machishū played a crucial role in rebuilding the commerce, industry, and arts in Kyoto. Their influence in the arts and literature continued through the Momoyama (1568–1615) and Edo (1615–1868) periods and many of the most famous artists and literati were drawn from their ranks.

Although the various sects of Nichiren Buddhism were administratively independent, there is evidence of cooperation between them. For example, in 1466 the major Hokke temples in Kyoto signed the Kanshō-era accord (Kanshō meiyaku) to protect themselves against threats from Mt. Hiei. Despite strong sectarian differences, there is also evidence of interactions between Hokkeshū and Tendai scholar-monks.

During the Edo period, with the consolidation of power by the Tokugawa shogunate, increased pressure was placed major Buddhist schools and Nichiren temples to conform to governmental policies. Some Hokkeshū adherents, the followers of the so-called Fuju-fuse lineage, adamantly bucked this policy based on their readings of Nichiren's teachings to neither take (fuju) nor give (fuse) offerings from non-believers. Suppressed, adherents often held their meetings clandestinely which led to the Fuju-fuse persecution and numerous executions of believers in 1668. During this time of persecution, most likely to prevent young priests from adopting a passion for propagation, Nichiren seminaries emphasized Tendai studies with only a few top-ranking students permitted to study some of Nichiren's writings.

During the Edo period the majority of Hokkeshū temples were subsumed into the shogunate's Danka system, an imposed nationwide parish system designed to ensure religious peace and root out Christianity. In this system Buddhist temples, in addition to their ceremonial duties, were forced to carry out state administrative functions. Thereby they became agents of the government and were prohibited to engage in any missionary activities. Hokkeshū temples were now obligated, just like those of other Buddhist schools, to focus on funeral and memorial services (Sōshiki bukkyō) as their main activity. Stagnation was often the price for the protected status.

19th century: From Tokugawa to Meiji periods

Nichiren Buddhism was deeply influenced by the transition from the Tokugawa (1600–1868) to Meiji (1868–1912) periods in nineteenth-century Japan. The changeover from early modern (kinsei) to modern (kindai) was marked by the transformation of late-feudal institutions into modern ones as well as the political transition from shogunal to imperial rule and the economic shift from national isolation to integration in the world economy. This entailed creating a centralized state, stitching together some 260 feudal domains ruled by hereditary leaders (daimyō), and moving from a caste social system to a meritocracy based on educational achievement. Although commonly perceived as a singular event called the Meiji Restoration, the transition was full of twists and turns that began in the later Tokugawa years and continued decades after the 1867–1868 demise of the shogunate and launch of imperial rule.

By this time Japanese Buddhism was often characterized by syncretism in which local nativistic worship was incorporated into Buddhist practice. For example, Tendai, Shingon, Jodō, and Nichiren temples often had chapels within them dedicated to Inari Shinto worship. Within Nichiren Buddhism there was a phenomenon of Hokke Shintō (Lotus Shinto), closely influenced by Yoshida Shintō.

Anti-Buddhist sentiment had been building throughout the latter part of the Tokugawa period (1603–1868). Scholars such as Tominaga Nakamoto and Hirata Atsutane attacked the theoretical roots of Buddhism. Critics included promoters of Confucianism, nativism, Shinto-inspired Restorationists, and modernizers. Buddhism was critiqued as a needless drain on public resources and also as an insidious foreign influence that had obscured the indigenous Japanese spirit.

Under attack by two policies of the day, shinbutsu bunri (Separation of Shinto Deities and Buddhas) and haibutsu kishaku (Eradication of Buddhism), Japanese Buddhism during the Tokugawa-to-Meiji transition proved to be a crisis of survival. The new government promoted policies that reduced the material resources available to Buddhist temples and downgraded their role in the religious, political, and social life of the nation.

The policies of shibutsu bunri were implemented at the local level throughout Japan but were particularly intense in three domains that were the most active in the Restoration: Satsuma, Choshii, and Tosa. In Satsuma, for example, by 1872 all of its 1000+ Buddhist temples had been abolished, their monks laicized, and their landholdings confiscated. Throughout the country thousands of Buddhist temples and, at a minimum, tens of thousands of Buddhist sutras, paintings, statues, temple bells and other ritual objects were destroyed, stolen, lost, or sold during the early years of the restoration.

Starting in the second decade of the restoration, pushback against these policies came from Western powers interested in providing a safe harbor for Christianity and Buddhist leaders who proposed an alliance of Shinto and Buddhism to resist Christianity. As part of this accommodation, Buddhist priests were forced to promote key teachings of Shinto and provide support for national policies.

Nichiren Buddhism, like the other Buddhist schools, struggled between accommodation and confrontation. The Nichiren scholar Udana-in Nichiki (1800–1859) argued for a policy of co-existence with other schools of Buddhism, Confucianism, Nativism, and European religions. His disciple Arai Nissatsu (1830–1888) forged an alliance of several Nichiren branches and became the first superintendent of the present Nichiren Shū which was incorporated in 1876. Nissatsu was active in Buddhist intersect cooperation to resist the government's hostile policies, adopted the government's "Great Teaching" policy that was Shinto-derived, and promoted intersectarian understanding. In the process, however, he reinterpreted some of Nichiren's important teachings. Among those arguing against accommodation were Nichiren scholar and lay believer Ogawa Taidō (1814–1878) and the cleric Honda Nisshō (1867–1931) of the Kempon Hokke denomination.

After the above events and centuries of splintering based on dogma and institutional histories, the following major Nichiren temple schools, according to Matsunaga, were officially recognized in the Meiji era:

- 1874: Nichiren-shū (formerly Minobu monryū). This school's headquarters was at Kuon-ji temple and held the Itchi perspective that advocated the equal treatment of all sections of the Lotus Sutra. However, it also included five schools that maintained the Shoretsu perspective which emphasized the latter half of the Lotus Sutra: Myōmanji, Happon, Honjōji, Honryūji, and Fuji-ha

- 1876: The Fuju-fuse-ha was recognized by the government after years of clandestine operation following episodes of persecution. In 1882 a second Fuju-fuse sect was recognized, the Fuju-Fuse Kōmon-ha.

- 1891: The five Shoretsu schools changed their names

    - Myōmanji-ha became Kempon Hokke based at Myōmanji, Kyoto
    - Happon-ha became Honmon Hokkeshū based in Honjōji, Niigata
    - Honjōji-ha became Hokkeshū based in Honryūji, Kyoto

    - Honryūji-ha became Honmyō Hokkeshū, also based in Honryūji, Kyoto
    - Fuji-ha became Honmonshū in Monmonji, Shizuoka

- 1900: The Taisekiji temple of Shizuoka broke off from the Honmonshū and became Nichirenshū Fuji-ha. In 1913, this group was renamed Nichiren Shōshū which was popularized by the Soka Gakkai lay organization. Although the latter has a sizeable membership and it is one of the important Japanese new religions (shinshūkyō), it is not included in many treatments of Nichiren lineages.

Development in modern Japanese history

Nichiren Buddhism went through many reforms in the Meiji Period during a time of persecution, Haibutsu kishaku (廃仏毀釈), when the government attempted to eradicate mainstream Japanese Buddhism. As a part of the Meiji Restoration, the interdependent Danka system between the state and Buddhist temples was dismantled which left the latter without its funding. Buddhist institutions had to align themselves to the new nationalistic agenda or perish. Many of these reform efforts were led by lay people.

The trend toward lay centrality was prominent in Nichiren Buddhism as well, predating the Meiji period. Some Nichiren reformers in the Meiji period attempted to inject a nationalistic interpretation of Nichiren's teachings; others called for globalist perspectives. According to Japanese researcher Yoshiro Tamura, the term "Nichirenism" applies broadly to the following three categories:

1. The ultranationalistic preoccupation with Nichiren that contributed to Japan's militaristic effort before World War II.
2. Socialist activists and writers during the prewar and postwar eras who promoted a vision of an ideal world society inspired by the Lotus Sutra and according to their own views of Nichiren.
3. Organized religious bodies that were inspired by Nichiren's teachings.

As a form of nationalism

See also: Nichirenism

Both Nichiren and his followers have been associated with fervent Japanese nationalism specifically identified as Nichirenism between the Meiji period and the conclusion of World War II. The nationalistic interpretation of Nichiren's teachings were inspired by lay Buddhist movements like Kokuchūkai and resulted in violent historical events such as the May 15 Incident and the League of Blood Incident. Among the key proponents of this interpretation are Chigaku Tanaka who founded the Kokuchūkai (English: Nation's Pillar Society). Tanaka was charismatic and through his writings and lecturers attracted many followers such as Kanji Ishiwara. Nisshō Honda advocated the unification of Japanese Buddhists to support the

imperial state. Other ultra-nationalist activists who based their ideas on Nichiren were Ikki Kita and Nisshō Inoue.

As a form of socialism

Nichirenism

also includes several intellectuals and activists who reacted against the prewar ultranationalistic interpretations and argued for an egalitarian and socialist vision of society based on Nichiren's teachings and the Lotus Sutra. These figures ran against the growing tide of Japanese militarism and were subjected to political harassment and persecution. A leading figure in this group was Girō Seno who formed the ***New Buddhist Youth League*** (Shinkō Bukkyō Seinen Dōmei).

Originally influenced by the ideals of Tanaka and Honda, Giro Seno came to reject ultra-nationalism and argued for humanism, socialism, pacifism, and democracy as a new interpretation of Nichiren's beliefs. He was imprisoned for two years under the National Security Act. The same fate was also endured by Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, who refused the religious dictum of ***Shinto*** display accepted by *Nichiren Shoshu* for the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai, his lay organization composed of primarily secretaries and teachers until it grew to become Soka Gakkai after World War II.

Several Nichiren-inspired religious movements arose and appealed primarily to this segment of society with a message of alleviating suffering salvation for many poor urban workers.: ***Honmon Butsuryū-shū***, an early example of lay-based religious movements of the modern period inspired by Nichiren, was founded several years before the Meiji Restoration. ***Reiyukai, Rissho Koseikai*** stemming from ***Nichiren Shu*** while ***Kenshokai*** and ***Soka Gakkai*** once affiliated with ***Nichiren Shoshu*** and the Japanese principle Shin(信), Gyo (行), Gaku (学)" as "Faith, Practices, Study", are more recent examples of lay-inspired movements drawing from Nichiren's teachings and life.:

In culture and literature

Nichiren Buddhism has had a major impact on Japan's literary and cultural life. Japanese literary figure Takayama Chogyū and children's author Kenji Miyazawa praised Nichiren's teachings. A prominent researcher, Masaharu Anesaki, was encouraged to study Nichiren which led to the work Nichiren: The Buddhist Prophet which introduced Nichiren to the West.: Non-Buddhist Japanese individuals such as Uchimura Kanzō listed Nichiren as one of five historical figures who best represented Japan, while Tadao Yanaihara described Nichiren as one of the four historical figures he most admired.:
Globalization

While various sects and organizations have had a presence in nations outside Japan for over a century, the genuine expansion of Nichiren Buddhism overseas started in 1960 when Soka Gakkai president Daisaku Ikeda initiated his group's worldwide

propagation efforts stemming from a few hundred transplanted Japanese to over 3500 families by 1962.

Nichiren Buddhism

is now practiced in many countries outside of Japan. In the United States, religious studies scholar Charles S. Prebish coined the typology of "two Buddhisms" to delineate the divide between forms of Buddhism that appealed either primarily to people of the Asian diaspora or to Euro-American converts. Nattier, on the other hand, proposes a three-way typology. "Import" or "elite" Buddhism refers to a class of people who have the time and means to seek Buddhist teachers to appropriate certain Buddhist techniques such as meditation. "Export or evangelical" Buddhism refers to groups that actively proselytize for new members in their local organizations. "Baggage" or "ethnic" Buddhism refers to diaspora Buddhists, usually of a single ethnic group, who have relocated more for social and economic advancement than for evangelical purposes. Another taxonomy divides Western Buddhist groups into three different categories: evangelical, church-like, and meditational.

Nichiren Shu

has been classified into the church-like category. One of several Japanese Buddhist schools that followed in the wake of Japanese military conquest and colonization, Nichiren Shu opened a temple in Pusan, Korea in 1881. Its fortunes rose and diminished with the political tides but eventually failed. It also established missions in Sakhalin, Manchuria, and Taiwan. A Nichiren Shu mission was established in Hawaii in 1900. By 1920 it established temples at Pahala, Honolulu, Wailuku and Maui. In 1955, it officially started a mission in Brazil. In 1991, it established the Nichiren Buddhist International Center in 1991 and in 2002 built a center in Hayward, California, to help overseas missions. However, Nichiren Shu does not widely propagate in the West.

Soka Gakkai

Some have characterized the Soka Gakkai as evangelical or cult but others claim that it broke out of the "Two Buddhisms" paradigm. It is quite multi-ethnic and it has taken hold among native populations in locations including Korea, Malaysia, Brazil, Europe, parts of Africa, India, and North America. The growth of the Soka Gakkai was sparked by repeated missionary trips beginning in the early 1960s by Daisaku Ikeda, its third president. In 1975 the Soka Gakkai International was launched in Guam. In the United States it has attracted a diverse membership including a significant demographic of African Americans. Since the 1970s, it has created institutions, publications and exhibitions to support its overall theme of "peace, culture, and education." There is academic research on various national organizations affiliated with this movement the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy, Canada, Brazil, Scotland, Southeast Asia, Germany, and Thailand.

Rissho Kosei Kai

focuses on using its teachings to promote a culture of religiosity through inter-religious dialogue. In 1967, it launched the "Faith to All Men Movement" to awaken a globalized religiosity. It has over 2 million members and 300 Dharma centers in 20 countries throughout the world including Frankfurt and Moorslede. It is active in interfaith organizations, including the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) and Religions for Peace (WCRP). It has consultative states with the United Nations and since 1983 issues an annual Peace Prize to individuals or organizations worldwide that work for peace and development and promote interreligious cooperation.:

Reiyukai

conducts more typical missionary activities in the West. It has a membership of between five hundred and one thousand members in Europe, concentrated in Italy, Spain, England and France. The approximately 1,500 members of the Nihonzan Myohoji have built peace pagodas, conducted parades beating the drum while chanting the daimoku, and encouraged themselves and others to create world peace.

Nichiren Shoshu

has six temples in the United States led by Japanese priests and supported by lay Asians and non-Asians. There is one temple in Brazil and the residing priest serves as a "circuit rider" to attend to other locations