

The Untold History of the Fuji School: The Origins of the Temple Issue (3)

This series is based on The Dark History of the Fuji School: Revealing the Origin of the Nikken Sect (Ankoku no Fuji Shumonshi: Nikken Shu no Engen o Kiru) by Hajime Kawai, a vice senior advisor of the Soka Gakkai Study Department.

Chapter 3: The Schism After the Death of Nichimoku

(1) The seventy-two-year land dispute over Taiseki-ji

ON May 22, 1333, several months after Nikko Shonin's passing, the army of Nitta Yoshisada defeated the ruling Hojo clan, bringing an end to the Kamakura shogunate government. When Emperor Godaigo reestablished the imperial government in Kyoto, Nikko's successor, Nichimoku, felt that it was an opportune time to remonstrate with the sovereign and proclaim the validity of the Daishonin's Buddhism. So, at the beginning of November of the same year, Nichimoku, accompanied by two of his disciples—Nichizon and Nichigo—went to Kyoto to remonstrate with the imperial court.

On his way to the nation's new political center, however, Nichimoku collapsed—probably due to both exhaustion from cold weather and old age—at Tarui, Mino Province¹. On November 15, he died at 74, bringing closure to a life dedicated to the spread of the Daishonin's Buddhism.

Nichigo returned to Fuji with Nichimoku's ashes. Nichizon went on to Kyoto and waited for an opportunity to remonstrate with the government. Regarding Nichimoku's lifelong commitment to Buddhism, SGI President Ikeda states:

Not content to live quietly at Taiseki-ji, Nichimoku decided to go to Kyoto to remonstrate with the emperor of Japan.... Nichimoku carried with him the Daishonin's "Rissho Ankoku Ron" (a treatise titled "On the Pacification of the Land through the Propagation of True Buddhism) and a letter of petition that had been written by his teacher, the second high priest and founder of Taiseki-ji, Nikko Shonin.

Following the spirit of his teacher, Nichimoku refused to stay idly in a temple. As long as he lived, he actively devoted himself to propagating the Daishonin's teachings, journeying far and wide to do so.

Who today has inherited the dedicated commitment to realize the ideal of *rissho ankoku* as demonstrated by the Daishonin, Nikko Shonin and Nichimoku? Who are their heirs? When we consider this question from a historical and objective standpoint, they are none other than our first and second presidents, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda, respectively, and the SGI as a whole—all of whom have emerged in the recent past. (*Seikyo Times*, February 1994, p. 9)

Before his passing, Nichimoku designated Nichigo as the chief priest of Renzobo, a lodging temple on the grounds of Taiseki-ji. But later Nichigo had a dispute over doctrine with Nichido, the fourth high priest (*Essential Writings of the Fuji*

Title: The Untold History of the Fuji School

Subject: Living Buddhism 05/98 v.2 n.5 p.40 LB9805p40

Author: Hajime Kawai

Keywords: after Chap. Fuji History Issue Nichimoku Origins Schism School Story Temple Untold

School, vol. 9, p. 36). Eventually his arguments were rejected by the majority of priests at Taiseki-ji and he was forced to leave for Awa Province where he had once been sent to propagate the Daishonin's teaching.

Nichigo felt a strong sense of rivalry with Nichido. It is said that when Nichimoku left for Kyoto to remonstrate with the imperial government, he unofficially designated Nichido as his successor (*Detailed Accounts of Nikko Shonin of the Fuji School*, p. 478). Since Nichimoku had to retain his position as high priest to represent the Fuji school in remonstrating with the imperial government, his transfer of the office of high priest to Nichido was conducted privately. After the private appointment, Nichido moved into Dai-bo, the lodging temple for the high priest, and assumed administrative responsibilities for Taiseki-ji.

To attain superiority over Nichido, Nichigo schemed to obtain the right to the property around Renzo-bo of Taiseki-ji from Nanjo Tokitsuna, the steward of the area and head of the Nanjo family. Tokitsuna had great influence over the management of Taiseki-ji as the fifth son of Nanjo Tokimitsu, the donor of Taiseki-ji's property. Concerned with status and wealth, Nichigo asserted his property right against Nichido and, in so doing, violated the intent of Nikko Shonin, who declared: "Those of insufficient learning who are bent on obtaining fame and fortune are not qualified to call themselves my followers" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1618).

All the property of Taiseki-ji had been already donated by Nanjo Tokimitsu to Nikko Shonin. Nanjo Tokitsuna, however, wrote up a new deed for the east side of Taiseki-ji's property and transferred it to Nichigo on the condition that Tokitsuna's second son, Go'omaru, who was still a young child at that time, become Nichigo's successor. The son would later be known as Nichiden.

Based on the deed he obtained from Nanjo Tokitsuna, Nichigo lodged a complaint with the governor of Suruga Province. The provincial government acknowledged Nichigo's right for the time being, and he returned to Renzo-bo at Taiseki-ji and built a hall nearby to enshrine the Daishonin's image. Nichigo also schemed to gain the support of the priests at the Omosu Seminary, vigorously asserting his authority over Nichido.

Nichigo, however, met with strong resistance from many priests and was once again forced to leave Taiseki-ji. When Nichigo left, he took a statue of the Daishonin and a Gohonzon inscribed by the Daishonin. He moved to Awa Province and established Myohon-ji at Hota². He also built a seminary at Koizumi near Ueno³ where Taiseki-ji was located. This seminary later became known as Kuon-ji.

Nichigo died in 1353, but his followers continued to claim their right over the eastern part of Taiseki-ji. This land dispute went on for more than seventy years. Nanjo Tokitsuna's son Nichiden, who succeeded Nichigo, filed a suit with the Imagawa family, the ruling clan of Suruga Province, and regained the property claim.

Taiseki-ji, headed by Nichiji, the sixth high priest, appealed the case to the more powerful Uesugi family of the Kanto region, which included Suruga

Province, in order to reclaim its property. At last, the governor of the Kanto region ordered the governor of Suruga Province to transfer the deed of the eastern part of Taiseki-ji to its original owner. Later when Nichiden, the second chief priest of Myohon-ji, died in 1416 at 77, this long dispute effectively ended. Nichiden's entire life was spent on this land dispute.

The seventy-two-yearlong land dispute, born out of Nichigo's greed for status and wealth, resulted in Taiseki-ji's considerable decline and prevented the further spread of the Daishonin's Buddhism.

(2) Nichizon establishes Shakyamuni's statue as an object of worship

AFTER Nichimoku's passing in 1333, Nichizon continued his trip to Kyoto. It is said that in the following year, he had an interview with the imperial government and received a piece of property in the nation's capital where he established the temple Jogyo-in. Nichizon is known for having been expelled from Omosu Seminary by Nikko Shonin for vacantly staring at falling leaves during a sermon. Nichizon took faith in the Daishonin's Buddhism under the tutelage of Nichimoku. Once a Tendai priest, however, he could not correctly grasp the Daishonin's teaching that people's disregard of the Lotus Sutra and their faith in lesser teachings cause the Buddhist gods (the positive workings of life and the universe) to abandon the land, thus inviting disasters. There are reports that he performed an "eye-opening ceremony" on a statue of Amida Buddha as well as of Bodhisattva Jizo (Skt. Kshitigarbha). Nichizon also enshrined Shakyamuni's statue and the statues of his ten major disciples as objects of worship. This demonstrates that Nichizon misunderstood the Daishonin's Buddhism and went against the intent of Nikko Shonin. Because the branch school derived from Nichizon advocated the recitation of the entire Lotus Sutra and the worship of Shakyamuni's statue, it gradually distanced itself from Taiseki-ji.

Nichidai, one of Nichizon's disciples, founded Juhon-ji in Kyoto. When Juhon-ji and Jogyo-in were burned down by the priests of Enryaku-ji in 1550, chief priest Nisshin of Juhon-ji, combined the two temples and established Yobo-ji (also pronounced as Yoho-ji).

Nichigo and Nichizon, who accompanied Nichimoku on his last trip to remonstrate with the government, went astray from the Daishonin's Buddhism because of their desire for status and wealth and their shallow knowledge of Buddhism. Soon after the deaths of Nikko Shonin and Nichimoku in 1333, little more than fifty years after the Daishonin's death, the Fuji school already gave rise to two unorthodox offshoots—one from Nichigo and another from Nichizon. Because of their distortion of the Daishonin's Buddhism, the Fuji school declined significantly and lost its momentum in spreading the Daishonin's Buddhism.

Furthermore, on January 7, 1334, at Joren-bo (also known as Hyakkan-bo) on the grounds of Taiseki-ji, Nissen, one of Nikko Shonin's six main disciples, and Nichidai, one of Nikko Shonin's six new disciples, had a debate over whether or not a practitioner should recite the "Expedient Means" or second chapter of the

Title: The Untold History of the Fuji School

Subject: Living Buddhism 05/98 v.2 n.5 p.40 LB9805p40

Author: Hajime Kawai

Keywords: after Chap. Fuji History Issue Nichimoku Origins Schism School Story Temple Untold

Lotus Sutra as a part of the Buddhist practice.

Nichidai, who was a nephew of Nikko Shonin, studied at Omosu Seminary. Nikko Shonin appointed him chief priest of the seminary although he was young. In his debate with Nissen, Nichidai asserted that one could benefit from the “Expedient Means” chapter, which is from the theoretical first half of the Lotus Sutra. But the priests at the seminary criticized Nichidai for his position, and the steward of the area also did not support him. So, although he was the chief priest, he was forced to leave Omosu Seminary (which later became known as Kitayama Honmon-ji) and move to Nishiyama⁴. There he established Hokkedo (which later became known as Nishiyama Honmon-ji). With the expulsion of Nichidai, Nishiyama Honmon-ji and Kitayama Honmon-ji vigorously fought each other over the orthodoxy inherited from Nikko Shonin.

To be continued

1. Present-day Tarui-cho, Fuwa County, Gifu Prefecture.
2. Present-day Hota, Kyonan-machi, Awa County, Chiba Prefecture.
3. Present-day Koizumi, Fujinomiya City, Shizuoka Prefecture.
4. Present-day Nishiyama, Shibakawa-cho, Fuji County, Shizuoka Prefecture.

Title: The Untold History of the Fuji School

Subject: Living Buddhism 05/98 v.2 n.5 p.40 LB9805p40

Author: Hajime Kawai

Keywords: after Chap. Fuji History Issue Nichimoku Origins Schism School Story Temple Untold