

Nichiren Shu News

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Itcho Hanabusa – Painter of the Mid-Edo Period

By Sandra Seki

Itcho Hanabusa (1652-1724), whose original name was Taga Choko, was born in Kyoto as the son of a doctor who served the feudal lord. He did not follow in his father's footsteps and showed great skill in art. He entered the famous Kano School of Painting at the age of 15.

Shogun. Because of his attitude and daring artwork, Itcho was exiled to Miyake Island, one of the Izu Islands, and lived there for 12 years.

There he got married and had two sons. To support his family, he drew paintings for the common folk; scenes of the four seasons, life in Edo, and the Shinto Gods that the common folk

worshiped. After Shogun Tsunayoshi died, he was finally allowed to return to Edo after 12 years. On the day he was leaving, he saw a butterfly resting on a chrysanthemum hedge. This was when he decided to change his name to Itcho Hanabusa, meaning "one butterfly, many flowers."

He returned to Edo in 1709 and started to make a living by painting and getting financial help from many of his former friends. He was also an ardent believer of the Fuju-Fuse (不受不施) subset of Nichiren Shu, which was founded by Nichio but was outlawed by the government in 1669. This sect was persecuted for more than two centuries since it refused obedience to authorities. Originally the Fuju-Fuse sect was a doctrine Nichiren Shonin started, saying that "nothing could be received (Fuju) or given (Fuse) to those of other religions."

With a strong belief in Buddhism, Itcho started making Buddhist paintings.

One of the most famous is "Shaka Nyorai Zo," which is presently enshrined at Jokyoji Temple in Tokyo. It depicts Shakyamuni Buddha standing on a lotus, surrounded by a golden screen with heavenly clouds and lotus flowers. The folds of his robe are intricately drawn. The color of the robe is a simple brown. However, the golden screen in the background and the crimson stand which holds the Buddha, catch the viewers eye with their vivid colors.

When he completed this masterpiece, he said that it was not for any Shogun or Daimyo but it was for Shakyamuni Buddha's World and for the common people to worship.

He passed away on January 13, 1724 at the age of 73 and was buried on the premises of Jokyoji Temple. He was not



Scroll painting of Shakyamuni Buddha by Itcho Hanabusa, enshrined at Jokyoji Temple.



Replica of one of the "Festivals of the Twelve Months" screens painted by Itcho Hanabusa. The original screen is at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, Massachusetts.

He studied under Yasunobu Kano, who had been painting screens and backgrounds for the Tokugawa Shoguns and Daimyos, the feudal lords. After a while, he could no longer work in the style of the Kano School and started his own style, which was more like Ukiyo-e.

He drew sketches and pictures of the daily lives of the common folk, and he often visited the 'red-light district' of Edo called Yoshiwara and enjoyed mingling with the wealthy merchants and lords who were constant customers there. He would often draw paintings of the women at Yoshiwara, and led such a worldly life that it got on the nerves of Shogun Tsunayoshi, the fifth Tokugawa



Detail from woodblock print depicting New Year's activities during the Edo Period.

really recognized during his lifetime, but he became a subject of study after he was portrayed in a Japanese television series a decade ago.

In his lifetime, Itcho drew only a few Buddhist paintings. One is exhibited at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and another is at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. "Shaka Nyorai Zo," which is enshrined in Jokyoji Temple, is his only Buddhist painting known to be in Japan. It was donated to the temple in 1940, and it officially became a cultural asset in 1988.

During cultural week in November, Jokyoji Temple displays this beautiful painting and shares it with its members.

THE FINAL HARVEST OF THE RISSHO ANKOKU ODAIMOKU KECHIEN CAMPAIGN

By Rev. Kanjo Bassett

2021 marks the last year of the Rishso Ankoku Odaimoku Kechien Campaign. This important campaign never had an official English title and has been translated in many different ungainly ways along the lines of "increasing our connection with the Odaimoku to establish the Pure Land."

Translating a campaign slogan is challenging, and especially so with Nichiren Shu, because the Japanese Buddhist cultural context that is so deftly packaged in kanji characters is missing outside of the country. Try to unpack that in English, and suddenly you have a mess. It's the realization that the beautiful Christmas morning scene with perfectly wrapped presents under the tree has transformed into wads of crumpled paper and cardboard scattered everywhere.

The Odaimoku Kechien Campaign started in 2007 with Four stages using agriculture metaphors for planting

(2007-2014), nurturing (2011-2014), flowering (2015-2018), and harvesting (2019-2021). Everything culminates in

the last year of the Odaimoku Kechien harvest, with the 800th Anniversary of Nichiren Shonin's birth.

On the face of it, this was not a good harvest. With COVID-19 taking a terrible toll around the world, events were scaled back, put online, or canceled altogether. The Archbishop and Chief Administrator politely declined all but the most important ceremonies. Nichiren Shonin's life was full of calamities and chaos that were far beyond what we experienced in 2020 and 2021. In the immediate moment of his time, it looked like a bad harvest.

The true abundant harvest of Nichiren Shonin's life and teachings came much later and continues in our lives up to this day. It will greet us tomorrow. This is the real harvest of the Odaimoku Kechien Campaign, one that gives us strength and courage no matter what troubles we face in the years to come.





Those who dislike the world seeking the way of the Buddha by clinging to expedient teachings are like those who try to cut a tree by trimming the leaves and branches instead of chopping the trunk. They are similar to a dog who befriends a servant instead of its master, and to those who revere a monkey as Indra, or take pieces of tile or pebbles for gems. They are unreasonable. How can we discuss the Buddhist way with them?

—T'ien-t'ai, *Great Concentration and Insight*

Nichiren quotes this passage from T'ien-t'ai's *Great Concentration and Insight* in his *Shugo Kokka-Ron, Treatise on Protecting the Nation*. These similes challenge our own tendencies to settle for expedient teachings and remind us of the superiority of the Lotus Sutra, which revealed the Ever-Present Buddha Shakyamuni and the capacity for awakening shared by all beings. The question at the end of this passage reminds us that, even as we see people clinging to expedient teachings, we need to consider how to engage them and awaken their true natures. Using the guidance provided by Nichiren Shonin and our realizations as Bodhisattvas in this life to benefit all beings, we continue our Founder's work to spread the Lotus Sutra to all worlds.

—Rev. Shinkyō Warner



PAINTING OF SADDHARMA PUNDARIKA SUTRA: Japanese artist Yoshitaka Amano created a painting entitled "Saddharma Pundarika Sutra" (190cm x 151cm) from the Lotus Sutra. It re-imagines Nichiren Shonin's Gohonzon Mandala as a painting. The painting was commissioned by Nichiren Shu for the 800th Anniversary of Nichiren Shonin's Birth. Amano is a world-renowned artist and illustrator who has created artwork for well-known animation and game franchises, such as Final Fantasy, mixing western and Asian imagery. He was born in 1952 in Shizuoka.

Unknown Histories of Nichiren Shu Temples in Sado (1) – Myokyoji Temple

By Rev. Sensho Komukai

A devout follower of Nichiren Shonin, lay-monk Nakaoki, who was a village head in Sado, established a sutra-chanting hall in his residence in 1272 upon the seventh year memorial of

the death of his granddaughter. This is the origin of Myokyoji Temple. On her 13th year memorial, Nichiren Shonin explained to the Nakaoki family the importance of setting up a stupa as part of a memorial service: "You should write the seven characters of Na-mu



When writing *Kanjin Honzon-sho*, Nichiren Shonin used holy water drawn from this well to make the ink.



Our Founder emphasized how important it was to set up a stupa for the deceased.

Myo-ho Ren-ge Kyo at the top of a stupa sixteen feet in height. When a north wind brought into contact with the stupa goes to the southern sea, fishes that have touched the wind can avoid suffering from strong tidal currents in the vast ocean. When a wind from the east goes up to a mountain in the west, deer or birds will be able to be reborn in the Tusita Heaven. If you offer a stupa for the deceased, the Pure Land of Mt. Sacred Eagle they reside in will surely be lit up brightly. In your next life, you will certainly meet your deceased family members in the Pure Land. Thus the merits of Odaimoku are so wonderful that it is important to write the seven characters of Namu Myōho Renge Kyo on the surface of a stupa."

Lay-monk Nakaoki often invited Nichiren Shonin to his residence to give lectures on the Dharma. One day,

the waters of a spring appeared on his land. As a favorable omen, a well was constructed to keep the holy water gushing out. In 1273, Nichiren Shonin drew water from the well, used it to make ink, and wrote one of his three greatest treatises, *Kanjin Honzon-sho, A Treatise Revealing the Spiritual Contemplation and the Most Venerable One*. Myokyoji Temple had to move due to a fire, but the miraculous well and Nakaoki's tomb still remain in the same place.

Some Nichiren Shu priests who live on Sado Island, when they decide to enter the 100-day Aragyō ascetic practice, take some of the precious well water with them so that they can use the water during Aragyō practice to make ink to copy the Lotus Sutra for a special kito prayer and to create a Mandala Gohonzon. How miraculously effective those prayers must become!



Myokyoji Temple.

The History and Teachings of Nichiren Buddhism Hits the Virtual Bookstore Shelf

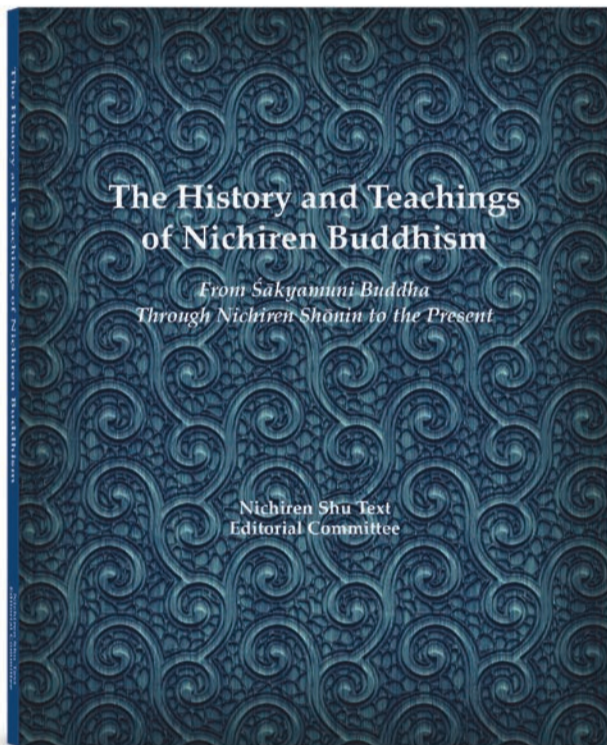
International Section,
Head Office of Nichiren Shu

The Nichiren Buddhist International Center (NBIC) published a new title on April 15: *The History and Teachings of Nichiren Buddhism: From Shakyamuni Buddha Through Nichiren Shonin to the Present*. This is the English-language translation of a Japanese textbook used by Shami taking written and oral tests before entering Shingyo Dojo and also by priests studying for the advanced level exam required for higher priest ranks.

The project was started by Rev. Chishin Hirai while he was NBIC Director and

was completed by Rev. Eisei Ikenaga in 2017 after he took over NBIC. The book had an initial small trial print for international Shami taking the written and oral exam at the NBIC in 2019. Rev. Tetsudo Takasaki, the current NBIC director had the book prepared for on-demand print and e-book editions. The on-demand print edition is currently available on Amazon. The e-book edition will be available on the Kindle and iBook stores on June 1.

We congratulate all the Minobusan University professors who developed the original Japanese textbook chapters, and the translators who adapted this difficult and scholarly Japanese text into English. Rev. Shinkyō Warner edited both editions, revising the text and adapting it for the e-book format. Alan Rowe of Mindful Planet designed the book and created the many charts that are used throughout the book. This same team is also working on revising the *Writings of Nichiren Shonin* series for the digital age. The series has seven volumes, and they are planning to release volume one in the series, 'Doctrine 1,' this fall.



Nichiren Shu News Online Survey Results

We thank our readers and deeply appreciate the time that everyone took to participate and answer the online survey from Nichiren Shu News last fall. We received some incredibly helpful feedback and ideas that we would like to share with you.

For us, the most interesting point was that, despite the digital age we live in, many people still prefer to pick up the latest issue of Nichiren Shu News at their local temple and like the paper's large format. This is particularly encouraging to hear during the COVID-19 crisis with lockdowns keeping people at home. We all look forward to the time when we can gather at temples as we did before the pandemic.

Readers also told us that they appreciate the online PDF version for printing out at home and look forward to the unique content on the Nichiren Shu News blog. The blog is still a new project for us, but we plan to deliver more original and timely content. The blog will also allow us to share information that wouldn't fit into the paper.

One of the big consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic is that airmail services remains severely restricted. As such, we have had to send Nichiren Shu News by surface mail. This has caused some major delays between the date of publication for an issue and when it actually arrives. Then, if a temple isn't open or no one is there to receive the Nichiren Shu News package, it gets returned by the local post office.

Other important lessons we learned: (1) Nichiren Shu News is important to our readership, (2) most readers



regularly read every article, and (3) shared teachings, news from overseas temples, and pieces on Nichiren Shu faith and practice are topics of particular interest to our readers.

Finally, there were some wonderful ideas for publications in other languages, such as Spanish, and for a manga series covering the life and teachings of Nichiren Shonin. We hope to bring these ideas to life and look forward to more reader feedback. Please contact us at: editor-nichirensnews@nichiren.or.jp

The Sculptor Who Carved the Statue of Our Founder

By Rev. Kosei Uchida

Buddhism was introduced to Japan in the middle of the 6th century CE. Sculptors who made Buddhist statues came to Japan by way of the Korean Peninsula from the Chinese Continent. Since then, those sculptors have been called "busshi" in Japan.

Yasutsugu Tomoyoshi, who began to carve Buddhist statues when he was 16, took on repair work in 1973 of our Founder's statue in the Butsuden, a Buddhist shrine between the Founder's Ossuary Hall and Reception Hall of Minobusan Kuonji Temple. Just before starting the repair work, he was diagnosed as having cancer. His physical condition became so poor that he was often confined to bed. He miraculously completed the restoration work. "Nichiren Shonin saved my life. My earnest hope of completing the mission may have reached him," Tomoyoshi recalled.

About a decade later, he was commissioned to make a statue of Nichiren Shonin in the Main Hall of Minobusan Kuonji Temple. Tomoyoshi carved over 5,000 statues of Nichiren Shonin over the course of more than 30 years, but he decided to put everything he had into making this statue — because he knew that people who had deep faith

in Nichiren Shu Buddhism would come to Minobusan with reverence and pray with hands together toward the statue.

The statue of Nichiren Shonin was to be placed on the altar, at about 4.5 meters, or 15 feet, above eye level. With a chisel in his hand, he went to temples such as Ikegami Honmonji Temple to sit face to face with other statues. He tried carving in the air as if cutting the eyes and nose. According to Tomoyoshi, the most difficult task is when you insert the soul dwelling eyes into the statue. You have to pay closest attention to keep both eyes the same size and position, and to choose the best color of black ink. Tomoyoshi said, "I am profoundly grateful for this wonderful opportunity. Wide-open eyes are characteristic of Nichiren Shonin. You can look him in the eye directly from public worship area in the main hall. I tried to make a statue of our Founder full of compassion and reliability so that we can make wishes or unburden any worries to him." The statue of Nichiren Shonin is around 2.6 meters, more than 8 feet, tall. It was placed in the main hall of Minobusan Kuonji Temple on September 10, 1983, when Tomoyoshi, a great busshi, was 72.





Honolulu Myohoji Temple

Rev. Josho Yamamura

Development of Honolulu Myohoji

The pandemic year has brought about various hardships. There are still many people suffering from its side effects. I am praying daily for their quick recovery.

Because of the pandemic, we have been broadcasting our worship services on Facebook every Sunday. It is being viewed more by people around the world than those in Hawaii. We are becoming the Honolulu Myohoji of the world.

Some people still think that our Buddhist practice at Honolulu Myohoji is a cultural religion for the people of Japan. The cause of this misunderstanding is our lack of effort as propagators. There is also the problem of language and communication.



Nevertheless, I believe that from now it is necessary to make it even clearer that Nichiren Shu, the religion of Honolulu Myohoji, is a global religion.

Honolulu Myohoji Temple is located in a particularly blessed environment. It seems that, because our members at present have relatively few hardships in their daily lives, their faith is not as strong as those in developing countries like Sri Lanka, where the number of followers is greatly increasing. In predominantly Catholic countries like Italy, young people are chanting Namu Myoho Renge Kyo with the hope of improving their lives.

Our present happiness and our stable daily lives are the result of the religious endeavors of our ancestors. Nonetheless, human life is being formed through the influence of such things as the karma of our ancestors and the karma of our past lives. For the sake of our descendants, our faith in the present is important. For those who do not have children, religious faith becomes important for their future life. This may not sound scientific, yet some

scientists say that what has been proven by science is no more than five percent of phenomena.

From now, Honolulu Myohoji Temple will unfold as a Buddhist training center that can respond to the 5G world. Some marketing experts are saying that the age of face-to-face religious services will end. We are promptly installing a high quality wi-fi system in our main hall.

Religious faith also means to think about one's final moments. What kind of death do you desire? There is no mistake in the faith of Namu Myoho Renge Kyo. The pandemic is coming to an end. However, Honolulu Myohoji Temple cannot simply return to pre-pandemic times and pre-pandemic ways. Learning from the pandemic, Honolulu Myohoji Temple is moving forward to realize its mission.

Nichiren Mission of Hawaii

Rev. Shokai Kanai

Hana-Matsuri at the Betsuin

We held our annual Hana-Matsuri (Flower Festival) Service on April 11th. This festival is referred to as the birthday celebration of Shakyamuni Buddha. The *omido*, a small altar enshrining the baby Buddha, was decorated with fresh flowers and ferns. Those with newborns brought their babies with them so that Rev. Kanai and the congregation could bless them together.

Due to state law, only 40 people were able to attend.

Services Resume

Sunday services and memorial services will be held at the temple with a maximum capacity of 40 people in accordance with Tier-3 protocols. We will continue to observe six feet social distancing in the main hall. A bottle of rubbing alcohol, hand sanitizer gel, and a digital thermometer will be placed on the table at the entrance of the main hall. Please wear face masks and come into the main hall only through the front entrance.



Seattle Enkyoji Temple

Mamiko Cederman

Lay Leaders' Course

We have been conducting the online Lay Leader's beginner course since June 2020. This course is designed to educate members to become Lay Leaders as they work through our original textbook, the Enkyoji Lay Leader's Manual.

We gather online at noon PST every Saturday and have participants from all over the U.S. and Europe. Rev. Cederman and his Shami take turns teaching on different topics to study from the manual. The course lasts over a year.

Anyone who wants to become a lay leader in your area, commits to study, participates in meetings and events, works with a mentor, and is an Enkyoji Temple member is welcome to join.

Several members who have taken the course are now teaching and spreading Buddhism to people in their own ways and parts of the world, sharing and developing their spiritual gifts.

One example is Lay leaders, Krista and Chris de Fejiter from Saskatchewan, Canada, who have been holding online meditation classes every Thursday since last fall. They successfully finished the first winter session in March.

Lay leaders David Endo Byden-Oakes from England, Margaret Myosho Cram-Howie from Saskatchewan, Canada, and Shami Kan-e Rosman, just started the Enkyoji Buddhist Network Recovery Group on March 27 which meets every Saturday. This group supports people through Buddhism with sangha and education.

All these programs and efforts will help support practitioners in deepening their study and practice of Nichiren Shu Buddhism.

Kannon Temple of Nevada

Rev. Shoda Kanai

Why Is There a Large Taiko Drum at the Temple?

Before the pandemic, everyone participated in the chanting of the Odaimoku accompanied with the large drum, *oh-daiko*, and the little handheld drum, *uchiwa-taiko*.

Why do we use drums? Going back in history, early humans created various instruments from wood, bone, and stone to make music and communicate. Then someone got the idea of pulling tanned animal hide over a cylinder, which was the beginning of the modern drum.

Drums were mainly used for ritual purposes. There is a hypnotic effect from the sound and feeling of the beat. Maybe this is like feeling our own heartbeat, reinforcing the idea that we are alive.

Later, with advancements in drumheads, the sound could carry further, and drums became a communication tool. The sound of drums can reach faraway places. Could this also mean places that we cannot see such as *Higan*, "the other shore?" Yes, the drums we use at the temple are a way for us to reach those who are not here in this realm. Our chanting voices ride on the beat to reach our ancestors. The beat also helps those who are lost in this realm to find the temple so that they can hear the True Dharma and be saved. It is a beacon of light that attracts those who seek salvation.

Even during these trying times, when people cannot come to the temple to beat the *taiko*, let us find other ways to communicate, such as clapping our hands. In this way, our chanting can be amplified so that we can reach our ancestors and save all those who are not in this realm.



Calendar for June–July 2021

JUNE 15-17 Minobusan Kaibyaku-e, Commemoration Day of Nichiren Shonin Entering Minobusan

JUNE 25 Nitcho Shonin Memorial Day

JULY 13-16 Obon (Western Calendar)

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