

The Meaning in Faith of the Present-day Taiseki-ji School's Transfer of the Heritage of the Law through the Sole Lineage of Its Successive High Priests — A Study of the Disclosure of the Theoretical Basis for the Teaching of the Three Great Secret Laws

(Gendai no Taiseki-ji Monryu ni Okeru Yuiju Ichinin Sojo no Shinkojo no Igi — Sandaihihogi no Rironteki Kokai Katei ni Kansuru Kosatsu o Fumaete)

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Note: This thesis was first published in *The Journal of Oriental Studies* (*Toyo Tetsugaku Kenkyu Sho Kiyo*), the organ magazine of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy, vol. 20 (2004-12). An official standard version of this thesis in Japanese is on the official website of the Association of Youthful Priests for the Reformation of Nichiren Shoshu.

1. A Blind Spot in the Current Dispute over the Heritage of the Law (*Kechimyaku*)

More than thirteen years have already passed since the Soka Gakkai parted from the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood in November 1991. During this time, both organizations have been engaged in various disputes with each other while still insisting on the legitimacy of their respective doctrinal positions. Their disputes cover a wide range of subjects — for example, the object of devotion (*honzon*), the heritage of the Law, the role of the high priest (*hossu*), the idea of slander (*hobo*), and ceremonial matters (*kegi*), such as the validity of the funeral services conducted by lay believers and the Buddhist legitimacy of the *toba* tablet and posthumous name (*kaimo*) for the deceased. The most fundamental issue in the dispute between Nichiren

Shoshu and Soka Gakkai is the heritage of the Law. This is because one's viewpoint of the heritage of the Law determines the righteousness of the object of devotion, the meaning of the role of the high priest, and the definition of slander.

The Fuji Taiseki-ji school regards Nichiren as its founder and Nikko as the one who established its head temple, and the school follows the lineage of Nichimoku, Nichido, and their successors. The Taiseki-ji school boasts that the inner enlightenment of the True Buddha that Nichiren conferred upon Nikko has been transferred and preserved for the past seven hundred years through the transfer of the heritage of the Law from one high priest to another. The Soka Gakkai also boasts that it has actually spread Nichiren Buddhism among more than ten million people in 190 countries and territories by exactly following Nichiren's intent, and they contend that the heritage of faith or direct connection with Nichiren is the basis of the heritage of the Law. In this way, the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood stresses the transfer of the heritage of the Law through the sole lineage of the successive high priests of Taiseki-ji, contending that that the high priest alone possesses the Living Essence of the True Buddha, while the Gakkai emphasizes the heritage of faith (*shinjin no kechimyaku*). It seems to me, however, there is a blind spot in this controversy over the heritage of the Law.

What I mean by this is the fact that the Soka Gakkai's emphasis on the heritage of faith is grounded in Taiseki-ji's 26th High Priest Nichikan's theory about the object of devotion. Let me cite a practical example to explain what this.

In his recent dialogue series, SGI President Ikeda stated, "Nichiren Daishonin used the Ceremony in the Air to show his enlightenment in the form of the Gohonzon."ⁱ "The Daishonin perceives the fundamental Mystic Law within him and employs the Ceremony in the Air to depict the cosmos of his own life. This is the mandala Gohonzon embodying the Ten Worlds of his life."ⁱⁱ

According to these statements by President Ikeda, the inner enlightenment of the True Buddha or the heritage of the Law has already been disclosed in the form of the mandala Gohonzon. Therefore, everybody today can have access to the inner enlightenment the True Buddha through the mandala Gohonzon.

When we base ourselves upon this premise, the heritage of faith becomes most important, as each individual can directly inherit the enlightenment of the True Buddha through his or her faith in the mandala Gohonzon. However, where did the Soka Gakkai draw forth the idea that the mandala Gohonzon embodies the enlightenment of the True Buddha Nichiren? This idea originates in Nichikan's theory, and has become the basis of the doctrine of the Soka Gakkai. In fact, Nichikan states his viewpoint that Nichiren is the True Buddha in "Commentary on 'The Object of Devotion for Observing One's Mind (*Kanjin no Honzon Sho Mondan*)'"': "Showing profound compassion, the Buddha inscribed the entirety of his enlightenment in a scroll of the Gohonzon, with which he then adorned the necks of the ignorant people of the latter age" (*The Collection of Commentaries [Mondan Shu]*, p. 458). Nichikan also states, "The Buddha of time without beginning (*kuon ganjo no jijyu yushin*), arousing great compassion, inscribed in the form of the Gohonzon of the five characters of Myoho-rengé-kyo the appearance of the Buddha of limitless joy (*jijyu yushin*) that is equal to the three thousand realms in a single moment of life (*ichinen sanzen*), with which he then adorned the necks of the ignorant people of the latter age" (*ibid.*, p. 458). The Gakkai refers to the heritage of faith within the context of Nichikan's view of the mandala Gohonzon.

In this context, it seems to me that what is questioned through the heritage of the Law dispute between the Gakkai and the priesthood is which position are we going to take? Are we going to choose to adopt the Gakkai's position where Nichikan's view of the Gohonzon is the ultimate teaching of Nichiren? Or are we choosing to accept the current contention of the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood that only the high priest of Nichiren Shoshu possesses the heritage of the Law? It is therefore necessary to examine how the Nichikan doctrine is related to Taisei-ji's contention, because we are pressed to choose one or the other.

What occurs to me in making this choice is that Nichikan was always serious about and open to revealing the secrecy of Nichiren Shoshu in his efforts to clarify the doctrines of Nichiren Buddhism. In discussing the Taiseki-ji school's particular teachings of Nichiren Buddhism, Nichikan thoughtfully added such disclaimers as "No teaching in our school is so ultimate as this. Therefore, former teachers in our school did not proclaim it conspicuously" "This is a profound transfer teaching that concerns the enlightenment of the founder of our Buddhism" or "This is a secret matter of our school. You should not share it with others." Through these remarks, we can clearly see Nichikan's intention to reveal the theory behind the heritage that Taiseki-ji's successive high priests alone inherited. But it can be said that no efforts have been made to analyze Nichikan's views from the perspective of the theory that is the basis for Nichiren Shoshu's secret transfer teaching.

Therefore, I would like to begin the task of examining Nichikan's perspective from the viewpoint of the theoretical basis for the heritage that the successive high priests of the Taiseki-ji school alone allegedly possess. I will also attempt to examine how, historically speaking, the study of the writings of Nichikan led to the disclosure of the theoretical basis of the heritage of the Law that only the successive high priests of Nichiren Shoshu alone allegedly possess.

Originally, this disclosure was done for some student priests of the Fuji school and Nichikan disclosed only a few transfer documents. For this reason, it was very difficult for ordinary Fuji school priests, lay believers, and non-Fuji school individuals to read Nichikan's works or to get an idea of the basis of the heritage that only the successive high priests of Nichiren Shoshu allegedly possess. It can be said that, to realize Nichikan's intention to disclose the basis of these secret teachings of the Fuji school, we needed to wait for the time where his works and the transfer documents that he quoted would be wholly available to the public. Examining the process of Nichikan's revelation of these secret teachings of the Fuji school will be vital for the modern dispute concerning the heritage of the Law between Nichiren Shoshu and Soka Gakkai.

With the above said, I want to focus in this thesis on analyzing the characteristics of the Nichikan doctrine that concern the theoretical basis of the secret teachings of the Taiseki-ji school. Based upon this analysis, I will examine Nichiren Shoshu's current position in which it claims that the high priest alone possesses the entity of the Law. I will also examine the priesthood's current contention of the treasure of the Priest. Through this process, I will conclude how we should regard the meaning in faith of the heritage of the Law that the successive high priests of Taiseki-ji alone allegedly possess.

Incidentally, however, this thesis is geared to discuss the process of the disclosure of the doctrine that the Taiseki-ji school trusts as the sole heritage of the Law transferred from one high priest to another throughout its history. It is not intended to acknowledge Taiseki-ji's contention that the heritage transferred from one high priest to another in Taiseki-ji school is the only historically legitimate succession or that it is as significant as the transmission between Nichiren and Nikko. With regard to the process of the formation of Taiseki-ji's transfer documents, we need to do further research into historical documents from the viewpoint of the history of Buddhist philosophy in Japan and the viewpoint of the history of the Fuji school. I look forward to the further progress of this research.

ⁱ *The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra*, Vol. 1, p. 107.

ⁱⁱ *The World of Nichiren Daishonin's Writings*, Vol. 2, p. 182.