

A Critique of the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation of Soka Gakkai* from the Perspective of Buddhist History:

In Light of Nichiren Buddhism as the Global Religion Taught by SGI

President Daisaku Ikeda

Haruo Suda

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Preface

In November 2023, the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation of Soka Gakkai* (in Japanese: *Soka Gakkai Kyōgaku Yōkō*) was published, presenting the official interpretation of the doctrines upheld by the Soka Gakkai at that time.

Since joining the Soka Gakkai in 1963, I have practiced Nichiren Buddhism as a member of the organization. However, upon reading the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, I experienced a strong sense of discomfort due to significant discrepancies between its content and the doctrines I have learned and practiced over the years. This prompted me to write this book in order to identify the core issues and to contemplate what the correct doctrines of Nichiren Buddhism should be.

In compiling this work, I have drawn upon my previous publications, such as *A New Edition: The Thought and Life of Nichiren* (*Nichiren no Shisō to Shōgai*), *The Nikkō School and the Soka Gakkai* (*Nikkō Monryū to Soka Gakkai*), and *A New Edition: The Philosophy of Life Transformation* (*Seimei Henkaku no Tetsugaku*). By doing so, I have sought to confirm the historical trajectory of Buddhism from Shakyamuni to the Soka Gakkai, providing an overview while examining these issues.

It is not my intention to critique the official stance of the organization. However, the matter at hand pertains to the foundational doctrines of faith. Over the years, Soka Gakkai members have practiced Nichiren Buddhism through the organization, overcoming life's challenges and achieving transformations in their personal karma. These experiences have instilled confidence that the correct Buddhist teachings exist within the Soka Gakkai.

However, if errors in doctrine were to arise henceforth and remain unaddressed, such neglect could potentially close the path to happiness for future generations and even lead to the destruction of the Buddhist Law.

The Soka Gakkai, founded in 1930, has achieved remarkable success in widely propagating Nichiren Buddhism in Japan and around the world. However, as an organization formed by humans, it is by no means infallible. Its history inevitably includes points of reflection and areas requiring improvement. For example, in 1970, the organization apologized for its actions suppressing free speech during the so-called 'Freedom of Speech Issue' and declared that it would no longer use the term 'National Ordination Platform,' which had previously been emphasized in its teachings. These are just a few instances.

For any human collective, trial and error is natural. When errors become evident, they must be corrected. Since faith is directly tied to each individual's life, it is insufficient to blindly adhere to official interpretations simply because they are officially endorsed. Instead, it is crucial to engage in critical thinking and verification.

The Soka Gakkai has declared in its *Soka Gakkai Charter* that 'The Soka Gakkai will safeguard and promote human rights.' In light of this declaration, I hope that this book, written in the spirit of 'freedom of speech,' will be regarded as one perspective, regardless of whether the organization agrees with its content. It is my sincere wish that this book contributes, even in a small way, to the healthy development of the Soka Gakkai.

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Written by the Author

Editorial Notes

1. Citations from Nichiren's writings (*Gosho*) are based on the Japanese-language Soka Gakkai edition *Nichiren Daishōnin Gosho Zenshū, New Edition* (『日蓮大聖人御書全集 新版』, 2021). All page numbers for the *Gosho* refer to that Japanese edition, not to existing English translations. When only a page number is given without specifying the source, it refers to this edition. Some expressions have been modified for readability. This volume is cited in English as *The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*; for writings by Nikkō and his lineage included in its appendix, the Japanese title is used.
2. Citations from the Lotus Sutra are based on the Japanese-language Soka Gakkai edition *Myōhō-renge-kyō narabini Kaiketsu* (『妙法蓮華經並開結』). All page numbers for the Lotus Sutra refer to that Japanese edition, not to existing English translations. Some passages have been rephrased for clarity.

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(1) Was Nichiren a “Messenger of Shakyamuni Buddha”?

One of the core assertions of the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation of Soka Gakkai* is its consistent characterization of Nichiren as the ‘Messenger of Shakyamuni Buddha’ and the ‘Reincarnation of Bodhisattva Superior Practices (*Jōgyō*).’ For instance, when discussing the persecutions Nichiren faced at Tatsunokuchi and during his exile to Sado, the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* states:

“Overcoming these two greatest persecutions, the Daishonin underwent a profound transformation in his life-condition. [...] What new position did the Daishonin assume? He took on the role of Bodhisattva Superior Practices, the foremost among the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, entrusted by Shakyamuni Buddha to propagate the Law in the evil age after his passing” (*Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, p. 43).

Similarly, the following passages express the same perspective:

“Prompted by the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, the Daishonin ultimately realized that he himself had assumed the very mission of Bodhisattva Superior Practices, the one to whom Shakyamuni Buddha had entrusted *Nam-myōhō-rengē-kyō*, and that he had awakened to the essence of *Nam-myōhō-rengē-kyō* within his own life” (*Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, p. 76).

“The Daishonin concretized *Nam-myōhō-rengē-kyō* as the Three Great Secret Laws and established the practice for the enlightenment of all people in the Latter Day of the Law. This accomplishment can be interpreted as fulfilling his mission as the leader of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, Bodhisattva Superior Practices” (*Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, p. 92).

“Nichiren Daishonin [...] declared himself to be a ‘Messenger of the Thus Come One’ entrusted with the propagation of the *Lotus Sutra* in the age after Shakyamuni’s passing” (*Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, p. 93).

“The Daishonin, as a practitioner of the *Lotus Sutra*, identified himself as a Bodhisattva of the Earth, entrusted with *Nam-myōhō-rengē-kyō*, the essence of the *Lotus Sutra*, and established the Three Great Secret Laws to enable all people to attain buddhahood in the Latter Day of the Law” (*Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, p. 94).

While Nichiren does not explicitly identify himself as Bodhisattva Superior Practices in his general writings, he often emphasizes his and his followers' roles as Bodhisattvas of the Earth using expressions of humility. For instance, he states:

“I, Nichiren, alone have preceded the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. It may be that I am counted among their number. If Nichiren is indeed among the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, then how could it be that Nichiren’s disciples and lay supporters are not likewise of their lineage?” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 1790). “If you share the same mind as Nichiren, you too are one of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Being such a Bodhisattva, how could you not be a disciple of the *Kuon-Jitsujō* Shakyamuni Buddha?” (*ibid.*).

Through such expressions, Nichiren humbly associates both himself and his followers with the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, thereby encouraging and guiding his disciples.

The concept that the *Kuon-Jitsujō* Shakyamuni Buddha, who attained buddhahood in the inconceivably remote past of five hundred dust-particle kalpas ago (*gohyaku jintengō*), entrusted the essence of the *Lotus Sutra* to Bodhisattva Superior Practices, the leader of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, for propagation after the Buddha’s passing is described in the *Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One* chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*. Furthermore, as stated in the *Emerging from the Earth* chapter, “From the time long past, I have taught and guided these bodhisattvas” (*Lotus Sutra*, p. 467), Shakyamuni Buddha is portrayed as the teacher who has been instructing the Bodhisattvas of the Earth since the remote past.

Based on these passages, the various Nichiren sects outside the Nikkō school regard Nichiren as Bodhisattva Superior Practices and the *Kuon-Jitsujo* Shakyamuni Buddha as the original Buddha (this is also the basis for the title ‘Nichiren Daibosatsu,’ or Great Bodhisattva Nichiren). For instance, in the doctrinal text of the Minobu school, *A Comprehensive Outline of the Doctrines (Shūgi Taikō Dokuhon)*, it states, “Nichiren Shonin who endured continuous persecutions such as exile and threats of violence established his self-awareness as Bodhisattva Superior Practices as prophesied in the *Lotus Sutra*” (*A Comprehensive Outline of the Doctrines*, p. 8).

While both the various Nichiren sects and the Nikkō school agree on identifying Nichiren as Bodhisattva Superior Practices, their interpretations differ significantly. The former views Nichiren as the ‘Messenger of Shakyamuni’ or the ‘Entrusted One of Shakyamuni,’ consistent with the surface (literal) meaning of the *Lotus Sutra*. In contrast, as discussed later, the Nikkō school does not stop at identifying Nichiren as Bodhisattva Superior Practices. Instead, it holds that Nichiren being identified as Superior Practices is a provisional means for guidance, while Nichiren’s inner realization is that of the fundamental Buddha (the Original Eternal Self-Enjoyment Body) surpassing the *Kuon-Jitsujo* Shakyamuni Buddha. This constitutes the fundamental difference between the Nikkō school and other schools such as the Minobu school.

Meanwhile, the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation of Soka Gakkai* adopts a position similar to that of the various Nichiren sects, firmly situating Nichiren as the ‘Messenger of Shakyamuni.’ Since Bodhisattva Superior Practices is a disciple of Shakyamuni according to the sutra, Nichiren is naturally positioned as subordinate to Shakyamuni. This reflects an attitude that regards Shakyamuni as fundamental, aligning closely with the Minobu school’s view of Shakyamuni as the original Buddha. Although the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* does not explicitly state that Shakyamuni is the original Buddha, as long as Nichiren is limited to the role of Bodhisattva Superior Practices, the position could be interpreted as a ‘surreptitious Shakyamuni-as-original-Buddha doctrine.’

The Nikkō school, beginning with Nichiren’s successor Nikkō, regards Nichiren as the fundamental Buddha, inherently one with the fundamental Law of *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* (the Original Eternal Self-Enjoyment Body). However, the ‘original Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law’ mentioned in the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* differs fundamentally in substance from the “Original Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law” as understood in the Nikkō school, despite using the same terminology. According to the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, Nichiren is a bodhisattva who fulfilled the role of Bodhisattva Superior Practices and a ‘Messenger of the Buddha,’ not a Buddha. The statement in the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* that Nichiren possesses “the same authority as the Buddha” (*Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, p. 91) implies that he is not acknowledged as a Buddha, as there would be no reason to emphasize his having ‘the same authority as the Buddha’ if he were already recognized as one. This suggests that the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* adopts a position that confines Nichiren to the role of a bodhisattva rather than acknowledging him as a Buddha.

(2) Even the *Kuon-Jitsujo* Shakyamuni Buddha Is a Provisional Buddha

In the *Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One* chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, it is the *Kuon-Jitsujo* Shakyamuni Buddha—who is said to have attained buddhahood in the inconceivably remote past of five hundred dust-particle kalpas ago (gohyaku jintengō)—who entrusts Bodhisattva Superior Practices with the propagation of the Buddha’s teachings after his passing. In the *Life Span of the Thus Come One* chapter, Shakyamuni rejects the position of the pre-Lotus teachings and the provisional teaching of the *Lotus Sutra*, according to which he attained buddhahood for the first time in his present lifetime. Instead, he declares: “In all the immeasurable, boundless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of kalpas since I attained buddhahood” (*Lotus Sutra*, p. 478), thus establishing his attainment of buddhahood five hundred dust-particle kalpas ago. While his attainment of buddhahood in this lifetime is regarded as the provisional effect, his attainment five hundred dust-particle kalpas ago is regarded as the true effect.

Where there is an effect, there must necessarily be a cause that brought it about. In the *Life Span of the Thus Come One* chapter, Shakyamuni states, “I originally practiced the bodhisattva way” (*Lotus Sutra*, p. 482), indicating that he engaged in bodhisattva practices prior to attaining buddhahood. Based on this, the Great Teacher Tiantai (Tendai) asserted in his *Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra* (*Hokke Gengi*) that Shakyamuni’s practice of the bodhisattva way was the true cause that brought about the true effect of his attainment of buddhahood. Shakyamuni thus attained buddhahood for the first time five hundred dust-particle kalpas ago through his practice of the bodhisattva way.

The assertion that Shakyamuni practiced the bodhisattva way implies that there must have been a fundamental Law to guide that practice. Shakyamuni attained buddhahood by practicing the fundamental Law that makes buddhahood possible. That fundamental Law—the Mystic Law—is the generative source, the teacher that gives rise to Shakyamuni Buddha; Shakyamuni, in turn, is the being generated by that Law and enabled through it to attain buddhahood. Nichiren clarifies this relationship in *Questions and Answers on the Object of Devotion*, stating:

“The *Lotus Sutra* is the parent of Shakyamuni Buddha and the eyes of all Buddhas. Shakyamuni, Dainichi, and all the Buddhas of the ten directions were born from the *Lotus Sutra*. Therefore, I now take that which gives rise to the Buddhas as the Object of Devotion” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 304).

This fundamental Law is the teacher not only of Shakyamuni Buddha but of all Buddhas. Nichiren calls it “the teacher of all Buddhas of the three existences” (*Earthly Desires Are Enlightenment*, p. 1520). He further states:

“What is the entity of that Law? It is none other than *Nam-myoho-enge-kyo*” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 1521).

Although *Nam-myoho-enge-kyo* is not explicitly revealed in the surface (literal) meaning of the *Life Span of the Thus Come One* chapter, this chapter, through its account of Shakyamuni’s attainment of buddhahood five hundred dust-particle kalpas ago, tacitly points to *Nam-myoho-enge-kyo* in the meaning hidden in the depths of the phrase “I originally practiced the bodhisattva way.”

The *Kuon-Jitsujo* Shakyamuni Buddha is a Buddha who attained buddhahood through *Nam-myoho-enge-kyo* and is therefore not the original Buddha. Moreover, as a Buddha who first attained buddhahood at the specific temporal point of five hundred dust-particle kalpas ago, he is not a being without beginning. Furthermore, as the *Distinctions in Benefits* and *Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One* chapters describe ‘the passing of the Thus Come One’ (*Lotus Sutra*, pp. 507, 572), Shakyamuni cannot be considered a being without end, as a truly eternal Buddha would not have a ‘passing.’ Shakyamuni Buddha is a Buddha with both a beginning and an end, temporally limited in nature.

Therefore, the assertion in the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation of Soka Gakkai* that “the essential and true nature of Shakyamuni Buddha is the eternal Buddha who exists constantly from the infinite past to the infinite future” (*Book*

on *Doctrinal Foundation*, p. 38) fundamentally contradicts the content of the *Lotus Sutra*. Ignoring the explicit teachings of the sutra to forcibly depict Shakyamuni as the eternal Buddha constitutes a form of deception and suggests an intention within the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* to direct believers toward the doctrine of Shakyamuni as the original Buddha.

Moreover, the fact that the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* consistently uses honorific expressions such as ‘—され ば (—sareta)’ in reference to Shakyamuni is itself remarkably unusual for a Soka Gakkai doctrinal text. From this, too, one can discern a clear inclination toward recognizing Shakyamuni as the original Buddha.

In the *Lotus Sutra*, Shakyamuni Buddha is not portrayed as an eternal Buddha, and consequently, his teachings are destined to lose their salvific power over time, leading to the arrival of the “Latter Day of the Law.” This is explicitly acknowledged in the *Distinctions in Benefits* chapter, which refers to the “evil age of the Latter Day of the Law” (*Lotus Sutra*, p. 513). Since the surface (literal) meaning of the *Lotus Sutra* is incapable of saving all sentient beings in the Latter Day of the Law, it becomes necessary to expound the fundamental Law (*Nam-myoho-enge-kyo*), which enables all beings to attain buddhahood. Thus, Nichiren states, “Now that we have entered the Latter Day of the Law, neither the other sutras nor the Lotus Sutra are of any use. Only Nam-myoho-enge-kyo will suffice” (*Reply to Lord Ueno, The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 1874). Similarly, Nichiren states, “Now that we have entered the Latter Day of the Law, all people are afflicted with severe illness. The mild medicine of Amida, Dainichi, and Shakyamuni cannot cure them” (*Letter to Myomitsu Shonin, The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 1708).

Ultimately, Shakyamuni Buddha cannot save the people of the Latter Day of the Law. Therefore, a new lord of teachings must appear to propagate Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, the entity of the Law that gives rise to Buddhas. Since no one other than Nichiren actually propagated Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, it follows inevitably that Nichiren himself is to be understood as the fundamental Buddha, one in essence with Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. Even the *Kuon-Jitsujō* Shakyamuni Buddha, who attained buddhahood in the remote past, is regarded as a provisional Buddha (that is, a response Buddha, *ōbutsu*) who appeared in accordance with the capacities of sentient beings. Accordingly, Nichiren’s original intent—and the fundamental doctrine of the Nikkō school—is to assert that Shakyamuni is inferior to the Nam-myoho-enge-kyo Thus Come One, the teacher that gives rise to all Buddhas.

From a historical perspective, the *Lotus Sutra* is an early Mahayana text that was compiled between the first and second centuries CE. The *Kuon-Jitsujō* Shakyamuni Buddha described in the *Life Span* chapter as having attained buddhahood in the remote past is not a real, historical figure but an abstract, conceptual creation by the authors of the *Lotus Sutra*. As previously mentioned, the *Kuon-Jitsujō* Shakyamuni Buddha was crafted by the authors to convey the idea of ‘the generative and the generated’—that all Buddhas, including Shakyamuni, attained buddhahood based on the fundamental Law (Mystic Law). Like Amida Buddha and Dainichi Nyorai, who are similarly described in sutras, the *Kuon-Jitsujō* Shakyamuni is an imaginary being, never having existed in a tangible form at any specific time or place.

The depiction of the *Kuon-Jitsujō* Shakyamuni Buddha as a Buddha adorned with the thirty-two distinguishing marks, such as a golden body and a white tuft of hair emitting light from his forehead, further underscores his fictional nature. These descriptions were intended to captivate the imaginations of ancient peoples steeped in mythological thinking. In reality, such a being, akin to a mythical Ultraman, could not possibly exist.

Nichiren, in his treatise *The True Aspect of All Phenomena*, states, “Shakyamuni and Many Treasures are Buddhas in terms of function. [...] Ordinary people are the three bodies in terms of entity and are original Buddhas, while the Buddhas are the three bodies in terms of function and are provisional Buddhas. We had thought that Shakyamuni Buddha possessed the three virtues of sovereign, teacher, and parent for us ordinary people, but this is not so. Rather, it is ordinary people who endow the Buddha with the three virtues. The reason is that the term Thus Come One, as Tiantai explains, is a general designation for the Buddhas of the ten directions and the three existences, including the two Buddhas, the three Buddhas, original Buddhas, and provisional Buddhas. In this explanation, ‘original

Buddha’ means ordinary people, and ‘provisional Buddha’ means the Buddhas” (p. 1789). This passage makes clear that the Buddhas described in the scriptures are provisional Buddhas expounded to represent the function of buddhahood, whereas the Buddhas who actually exist—the original Buddhas—are none other than ordinary people who uphold the Mystic Law. In light of this passage from *The True Aspect of All Phenomena*, the claim that Nichiren’s writings contain no interpretation identifying the *Kuon-Jitsujo* Shakyamuni Buddha as a provisional Buddha is plainly erroneous.

However, the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation of Soka Gakkai* includes a perplexing statement in Footnote 108 regarding the Soka Gakkai’s identification of Nichiren as the original Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law. It states:

“In the teachings of Nichiren Shoshu, the expression ‘Original Buddha’ implies that Nichiren Daishonin is the fundamental Buddha and that even the *Kuon-Jitsujo* Shakyamuni Buddha is merely a provisional manifestation (trace Buddha). In contrast, in the Soka Gakkai, this title refers to Nichiren Daishonin as the Buddha who, in the present time of the Latter Day, expounded teachings that could practically save people. In this sense, he is respected as the ‘original Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law.’” (*Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, p. 187).

This statement appears to criticize Nichiren Shoshu’s teaching that Nichiren is the Original Buddha and Shakyamuni is a provisional Buddha. However, Nichiren himself explicitly states in writings such as *Letter to Myomitsu Shonin*, *The True Aspect of All Phenomena*, and *On Reprimanding Hachiman* that Shakyamuni cannot save the people of the Latter Day. Far from being a target of criticism, the doctrine of “Nichiren as the Original Buddha, Shakyamuni as a provisional Buddha” is itself the orthodox teaching of Nichiren and Nikkō.

The *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* asserts that Nichiren is both the ‘Messenger of Shakyamuni’ and the ‘original Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law,’ but these two positions are logically irreconcilable. The concepts of original and provisional Buddhas are inherently binary opposites: one cannot exist without the other. If Nichiren is the original Buddha of the Latter Day, there must necessarily be a provisional Buddha corresponding to that era. This role can only be fulfilled by Shakyamuni Buddha, the Buddha of the true effect (hon-ga-myo), corresponding to Nichiren as the Buddha of the true cause (hon-in-myo). Therefore, if Nichiren is regarded as the original Buddha, Shakyamuni must be designated as the provisional Buddha of the Latter Day.

Conversely, if Nichiren is merely the ‘Messenger of Shakyamuni,’ then the original Buddha (substance) is subordinated to a provisional Buddha (trace), resulting in a logical contradiction. If Nichiren is the original Buddha of the Latter Day, he cannot be the messenger of Shakyamuni. If Nichiren is Shakyamuni’s messenger, he cannot be the original Buddha of the Latter Day.

In conclusion, the position of the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* is logically inconsistent. If Nichiren is to be considered merely the “Messenger of Shakyamuni,” doctrinal consistency would require adopting the Minobu school’s position that Shakyamuni remains the original Buddha even in the Latter Day of the Law and that Nichiren is not a Buddha but merely Bodhisattva Superior Practices entrusted by Shakyamuni. As the footnote quoted above indicates, the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* uses “original Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law” only in the sense of a “propagator in the Latter Day entrusted by Shakyamuni”; it does not retain the original meaning of “fundamental Buddha” inherent in the term “Original Buddha.” Therefore, the doctrine of Nichiren as the original Buddha presented in the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* is merely a verbal disguise—a “disguised doctrine of Nichiren as the original Buddha.”

(3) The Significance of the Formation of the Lotus Sutra

① Historical Background Leading to the Formation of the Lotus Sutra

What was the purpose behind the creation of the *Lotus Sutra*? To answer this, it is necessary to review the outline of Buddhist history.

As is well known, Shakyamuni (Gautama Siddhartha) was born as a prince of a royal family in Lumbini, located in what is now southwestern Nepal. The dates of his birth and death remain uncertain, with various theories suggesting ranges such as 566–486 BCE or 463–383 BCE. Despite marrying and fathering a son, he abandoned his princely status at the age of 19 or 29 to become a mendicant, seeking to resolve the fundamental issues of life, such as birth, aging, sickness, and death.

At that time, India was dominated by Brahmanism (the predecessor of Hinduism), which was rooted in the Vedas, hymns dedicated to gods. This system upheld strict gender discrimination and a caste hierarchy (the Varna system, later the caste system). As a mendicant, Shakyamuni devoted himself to rigorous ascetic practices and is said to have attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree in Bodhgaya at the age of 30 or 35. The *Samyukta Āgama* states, “I have realized this Law” (Taishō Tripiṭaka, vol. 2, p. 322). It is therefore believed that at this time Shakyamuni awakened to the fundamental Law (Mystic Law) that permeates the universe. Thereafter, he continued his missionary efforts until his passing at the age of 80.

The teachings of Shakyamuni sharply criticized the doctrines of Brahmanism and the contemporary free-thinkers known as the ‘Six Non-Buddhist Teachers.’ The distinctive features of Buddhism, not found in other religions, are symbolically represented by the *marks of the Law* (法印, *Hōin*), such as *all phenomena are non-self* (*Anātman*) and *all conditioned phenomena are impermanent* (*Anitya*).

The principle that all phenomena are non-self (*Anātman*) means that no immutable entity—such as the *Ātman* or a soul taught in Brahmanism—exists in any phenomenon. Therefore, Buddhism rejects the idea of a god who creates the universe and intervenes in the human world. Only the Law (*Dharma*), including the law of causality, exists. In this sense, Buddhism has been thoroughly atheistic from its inception. The principle that all conditioned phenomena are impermanent (*Anitya*) means that all things arise, cease, and change, and that no eternally unchanging entity exists.

These foundational Buddhist principles, summarized as the theory of *dependent origination* (*Pratītyasamutpāda*), emphasize that nothing exists independently or permanently. All things arise and cease due to relationships (conditions) with others that activate causes. As Nāgārjuna (circa 150–250 CE) explains in his *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (*Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way*), “Whatever arises through dependent origination, that is emptiness. That is dependent designation, and that is the Middle Way.” Thus, dependent origination is synonymous with *emptiness* (*Śūnyatā*) and the *Middle Way*.

Shakyamuni also inherited the Indian ideas of *karma*, *causality*, and the cycle of *samsara* spanning past, present, and future lives. Therefore, the fundamental characteristics of Buddhism can be summarized as *dependent origination*, *causality*, *karma*, and *samsara*. Without these elements, a system cannot be considered Buddhist.

The earliest Buddhist scriptures were compiled sometime after Shakyamuni’s passing and were not his direct words. However, texts such as the *Sutta Nipāta*, considered one of the earliest Buddhist scriptures created before the reign of Emperor Ashoka (268–232 BCE), provide some insight into Shakyamuni’s original teachings. These early scriptures do not elaborate on theoretical doctrines like the Four Noble Truths but present a simple way of life for human beings. At that time, such simple teachings were sufficient to save people.

As people’s capacity to grasp the teachings (機根, *kikon*) declined over time, more potent doctrines became necessary. Nichiren reflects on this in his treatise *On Repaying Debts of Gratitude*:

“Though their inner realization is the same, their ability to spread the teachings differed. Mahākāśyapa and Ānanda were surpassed by Asvaghōṣa and Nāgārjuna, who were in turn surpassed by Tiantai Zhiyi. And Tiantai was surpassed by Dengyō. In these latter times, people’s wisdom becomes shallow while the teachings of Buddhism become deeper. For example, ordinary medicines suffice for mild illnesses, but for grave illnesses, exceptional remedies are needed. Similarly, for weak people, strong helpers are necessary” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 206).

Although Shakyamuni’s teachings were simple, their affirmation of the absolute equality of all human beings appealed to people dissatisfied with the authoritarian and discriminatory Brahmanism and with the morality-denying tendencies of the Six Non-Buddhist Teachers. His teachings formed an early Buddhist community comprising people of every social class and occupation, including kings, merchants, farmers, courtesans, thieves, slaves, and outcasts. Brahmins and wealthy individuals who had formerly followed Brahmanism also joined, as did boys, girls, and elderly people. No discrimination based on occupation, gender, or age was recognized within the Buddhist community. Although nuns were subject to stricter precepts than monks, there was no distinction between men and women either in the content of practice or in the enlightenment attained through practice.

Shakyamuni’s teachings, which were universal and accessible to all, allowed everyone to embody the Law through their own efforts. Consequently, there was no differentiation between clergy and laypeople in the nature of enlightenment. This egalitarian philosophy faced opposition and persecution from established forces like Brahmanism, but the Buddhist community continued to grow during Shakyamuni’s lifetime.

After Shakyamuni’s passing, Mahākāśyapa, one of his ten principal disciples, took charge of the community. Concerned about the potential loss of the teachings, Mahākāśyapa convened the first Buddhist council shortly after Shakyamuni’s death to compile his teachings orally. This became the foundation of the future *Sūtra Piṭaka* and *Vinaya Piṭaka*.

As the community grew and established itself as a social force, it began prioritizing institutional maintenance over inclusivity, excluding criminals, the sick, and even children. Influenced by Indian societal discrimination, the community increasingly subordinated women, placed monks above laypeople, and began deifying Shakyamuni.

Initially practiced only in parts of India, Buddhism spread throughout the country following the conversion of Emperor Ashoka, who is believed to have lived 100–200 years after Shakyamuni’s passing. This early phase is referred to as ‘primitive Buddhism.’

After the reign of Emperor Ashoka, the Buddhist community split into numerous schools. Across India, there were approximately twenty major factions. This period of Buddhism, characterized by its division into factions, is referred to as ‘sectarian Buddhism’ (Hinayana [lesser vehicle] Buddhism in a critical sense by later Mahayana [great vehicle] Buddhism). Sectarian Buddhism was marked by a monastic orientation that placed monastics above lay practitioners.

It held that the only Buddha present in this world was Shakyamuni, and the practice of becoming a Buddha was limited to ‘Bodhisattvas,’ with Shakyamuni being the only recognized bodhisattva (‘Shakyamuni Bodhisattva’). Ordinary human beings were considered to lack the inherent capacity to attain buddhahood. The highest spiritual state that humans could reach was the stage of *arhatship*, the supreme rank of the Śrāvaka path. Even reaching the state of an arhat required the eradication of all delusions and earthly desires, a goal deemed nearly impossible for ordinary people to achieve.

The sectarian Buddhist communities flourished economically due to immense donations from kings and wealthy merchants. However, this prosperity led to corruption within the monastic order, with individuals joining the clergy merely for livelihood and even engaging in moneylending despite being monks. Monks, shielded by their privileges, often secluded themselves within monasteries, devoting their time to organizing and systematizing Shakyamuni’s teachings through meticulous academic research.

The doctrinal framework of sectarian Buddhism became known as ‘Abhidharma,’ which refers to the study and analysis of the Dharma (teachings). Collections of these Abhidharma treatises were compiled into what is called the ‘Abhidharma Pitaka,’ which, alongside the ‘Sutra Pitaka’ and ‘Vinaya Pitaka’—compiled during the early Buddhist period—forms the ‘Three Baskets’ (*Tripitaka*).

The monks of sectarian Buddhism focused obsessively on their own practices and academic debates aimed at achieving personal enlightenment, paying little attention to the salvation of others. This self-centered attitude naturally provoked criticism, as it was seen as a deviation from the original spirit of Buddhism. Consequently, around the turn of the Common Era, a Buddhist reform movement arose, criticizing sectarian Buddhism as having lost Shakyamuni’s essence and labeling it Hinayana (lesser vehicle). Out of this movement emerged Mahayana (great vehicle) Buddhism, which can be characterized by the following points:

i. Equality of Monastics and Laypeople

Mahayana Buddhism rejected discrimination between monastics and laypeople, advocating the equality of both groups.

ii. Buddhism Aiming at Buddhahood

It taught that buddhahood should be the ultimate goal for all people and that anyone has the potential to become a bodhisattva.

iii. Emphasis on Altruistic Practices

The distinguishing feature of a bodhisattva is altruistic practice. In this respect, Mahayana Buddhism starkly contrasts with sectarian (Hinayana) Buddhism, whose practitioners (*Śrāvakas*) focused solely on their own spiritual progress, neglecting others. Thus, Hinayana Buddhism was referred to as the Vehicle of *Śrāvakas*, while Mahayana was known as the Vehicle of Bodhisattvas.

iv. Belief in Multiple Buddhas

Mahayana Buddhism posited the simultaneous existence of many Buddhas, in contrast to Hinayana Buddhism, which recognized only Shakyamuni as Buddha.

v. Acceptance of Earthly Desires (Kleshas)

While Hinayana Buddhism regarded the eradication of earthly desires (*kleshas*) as a prerequisite for enlightenment, Mahayana Buddhism viewed these desires as integral opportunities for spiritual growth and awakening. This concept is succinctly expressed in the phrase “Earthly desires are themselves enlightenment” (*bonnō soku bodai*).

vi. Respect for Art and Contemporary Culture

Hinayana Buddhism prohibited engagement with music, dance, and theater, whereas Mahayana Buddhism embraced these as offerings to stupas and scriptures. This attitude reflects Mahayana’s greater openness to lay practices. Additionally, unlike Hinayana Buddhism, which remained insular, Mahayana actively absorbed and engaged with the contemporary cultural and intellectual milieu.

vii. Aspiration for Social Transformation

Rejecting inward-looking attitudes, Mahayana Buddhism sought to realize the spirit of Buddhist compassion within individuals’ lives and society as a whole. This sharply contrasts with Hinayana Buddhism, which leaned toward monasticism and indifference to societal and popular concerns.

The groups that initiated the Mahayana Buddhist movement composed Mahayana sutras to express their ideas. Among the earliest Mahayana scriptures are the *Prajnaparamita Sutra* and the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, the latter being heavily influenced by the former. These early texts, dating to the turn of the Common Era, harshly criticized sectarian Buddhism, to the point of rejecting the possibility of *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas* attaining buddhahood

(a doctrine known as *Two Vehicles Cannot Attain Buddhahood*). However, this stance constituted a form of reverse discrimination, contradicting Buddhism's fundamental spirit of universal salvation.

In response, the *Lotus Sutra* was created to rectify the errors of both sectarian and Mahayana Buddhism and to revive Buddhism's original ideal of universal enlightenment for all.

The *Lotus Sutra* is thought to have been composed in the northwestern regions of India, such as Gandhara and Kashmir, around the 1st or 2nd century CE. While earlier theories suggested that the sutra was compiled over two to three centuries, recent scholarship, such as Shinjō Suguro's *The Formation and Thought of the Lotus Sutra*, indicates that the 27 chapters (excluding the *Devadatta* chapter) were composed within a relatively short period, spanning several decades. Buddhist scriptures were initially transmitted orally, but as writing became more common around the turn of the Common Era, the *Lotus Sutra* is believed to have been compiled in written form from the beginning.

The *Lotus Sutra* was composed by a group of individuals who believed they had attained an understanding of the fundamental Law (Mystic Law) akin to Shakyamuni's enlightenment. Motivated by their conviction that 'this teaching represents Shakyamuni's true intention,' they crafted the *Lotus Sutra* with Shakyamuni Buddha as its central figure (lord of teachings).

② The Purpose of Composing the Lotus Sutra

Since the time of Tiantai Zhiyi, it has been customary to divide the *Lotus Sutra* into the provisional teaching (shakumon) in the first half and the essential teaching (*honmon*) in the latter half. In its provisional teaching, the *Lotus Sutra* grants future predictions of enlightenment to śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, who were previously denied the possibility of buddhahood. Furthermore, it grants predictions of enlightenment even to Devadatta, a malicious person who had attempted to destroy the Buddhist community, and affirms the attainment of enlightenment in one's present form (*sokushin jobutsu*) for the Dragon King's daughter, who was neither human nor male, thereby affirming that evil people and women can attain buddhahood. In doing so, the *Lotus Sutra* establishes that without exception, all beings can attain buddhahood equally.

Shakyamuni's ideal of making all people embodiments of the fundamental Law was, in the history of Buddhist scriptures, first fully realized with the formation of the *Lotus Sutra*.

The *Lotus Sutra* not only elucidates the principle of universal enlightenment but also, in its latter half known as the Essential Teaching (*honmon*), opens the practical path for attaining buddhahood. Traditionally, earlier sutras tended to depict the Buddha land as a realm separate from the real world in which humans dwell (the *Sahā* world). In contrast, the *Lotus Sutra*, in the *Life Span of the Thus Come One* chapter, reveals that Shakyamuni Buddha teaches and guides in the *Sahā* world, emphasizing that the Buddha land exists nowhere but in the real world. By making this point, the sutra clarifies that the essence of Buddhism is to establish happiness upon the realities of life, no matter how fraught with suffering the world may be. It rejects escapism and the longing for some other idealized land, firmly grounding its teaching in the here and now.

Building on this foundation, the *Lotus Sutra* discloses when and how Shakyamuni attained buddhahood, offering a path for all people to follow in his footsteps toward enlightenment. In the *Life Span of the Thus Come One* chapter, it is revealed that Shakyamuni's attainment of buddhahood did not occur in his present lifetime but in the unimaginably remote past of five hundred dust-particle kalpas ago (*gohyaku jintengō*): "Since I attained buddhahood, an unimaginably long time has passed" (*Lotus Sutra*, p. 478). The sutra further explains that this attainment was the result of practicing the bodhisattva path in prior lifetimes: "I originally practiced the bodhisattva way" (*Lotus Sutra*, p. 482).

Historically, Shakyamuni's enlightenment at the age of 30 or 35 is attributed to the meditative and ascetic practices he undertook after renouncing the world. However, the *Life Span of the Thus Come One* chapter reveals that such

meditative practices are merely superficial causes, while the true cause of buddhahood lies in the bodhisattva practice performed in past lifetimes. As previously mentioned, the practice of the bodhisattva way inherently presupposes a Law to guide that practice. It becomes clear that Shakyamuni attained buddhahood by relying on this Law as his teacher.

The *Lotus Sutra* hints at the existence of a Law that enabled Shakyamuni's attainment of buddhahood—a fundamental Law not only for Shakyamuni but for enabling the enlightenment of all beings. This is implicitly conveyed through the meaning hidden in the depths of the phrase “I originally practiced the bodhisattva way.” The sutra's superiority over all other Buddhist texts lies precisely in its suggestion of the existence of this fundamental Law.

At the time of its compilation, people were able to become aware of and awaken to the existence of this Mystic Law through the teachings of the *Life Span of the Thus Come One* chapter. In this sense, the *Lotus Sutra* can be seen as a scripture with exceptional salvific power for the people of that era.

The purpose of compiling the *Lotus Sutra* was, on one level, to open the path of enlightenment to all people of that time. However, its greater and more profound objective was to contribute to the future happiness of humanity. Starting with the *Teacher of the Law* chapter, the sutra shifts its primary focus to the propagation of its teachings after the Buddha's passing. This chapter contains the following passages:

“If there are those who can uphold this sutra in the evil age after my passing, they should be venerated, respected, and worshipped just as the World-Honored One is” (*Lotus Sutra*, p. 360, modern translation).

“Even while the Thus Come One is present, this sutra meets with much hostility and jealousy. How much more so after the Thus Come One's passing, when such hostility and jealousy will be even greater” (*Lotus Sutra*, p. 362, modern translation).

“If good men and good women, after the passing of the Thus Come One, wish to preach this *Lotus Sutra* for the sake of the four kinds of believers, how should they preach it? These good men and good women should enter the room of the Thus Come One, wear the robe of the Thus Come One, sit in the seat of the Thus Come One, and then preach this sutra for the sake of the four kinds of believers” (*Lotus Sutra*, p. 366, modern translation).

The *Lotus Sutra* predicts the arrival of the Latter Day of the Law, during which the salvific power of Shakyamuni's teachings will be lost. This is expressed in passages such as “In the latter age after the *Thus Come One*'s extinction” (*Peaceful Practices* chapter, p. 431) and “If in the evil age of the Latter Day one is able to embrace this sutra” (*Distinctions in Benefits* chapter, p. 513). To address the propagation of the Buddhist Law after the Buddha's passing, the *Lotus Sutra* describes how Shakyamuni calls forth from beneath the earth the Bodhisattvas of the Earth equal in number to the sands of sixty thousand Ganges Rivers, whom he has guided since the remotest past (*Emerging from the Earth* chapter). It also introduces Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, who demonstrates the post-Buddha practice of continuing his reverential practice amid persecution and propagating the Law through the resulting reverse relationship (gyakuen), thus illustrating the ideal conduct for propagation after the Buddha's passing (*Bodhisattva Never Disparaging* chapter).

In the following chapter, *Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One*, Shakyamuni entrusts the role of propagation after his extinction to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, particularly to their leader, Bodhisattva Superior Practices. While the text refers to the Buddha's extinction, its deeper intent likely pertains to the Latter Day of the Law, when Shakyamuni's teachings lose their salvific power. As long as Shakyamuni's Law retains its efficacy, there would be no need for a substitute propagator. Thus, the Law propagated by Superior Practices is not the *Lotus Sutra* in its surface (literal) meaning, which loses its power in the Latter Day of the Law.

This point is clarified in the *Supernatural Powers* chapter, which states:

“To put it briefly, all the laws possessed by the Thus Come One, all the supernatural powers of the Thus Come One, all the secret storehouses of the Thus Come One, and all the profound matters of the Thus Come One are all revealed and expounded in this sutra” (*Lotus Sutra*, p. 572).

Tiantai Zhiyi referred to this passage as the ‘Essential Entrustment’ and explained in his *Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra* (*Fahua Wenju*):

“In summation, the entirety of the sutra is encompassed in just these four. The essence of the teachings is extracted and bestowed” (*Taishō Tripitaka*, vol. 34, p. 142).

This implies that the Law entrusted to Bodhisattva Superior Practices is not the *Lotus Sutra* in its surface meaning, but the core essence of the *Lotus Sutra*, the hidden, fundamental Law (Mystic Law) beneath the surface. The *Supernatural Powers* chapter further states:

“The secret Law obtained at the place of enlightenment of the Buddhas can, by embracing this sutra, quickly and surely be obtained” (*Lotus Sutra*, p. 575).

In other words, through upholding the *Lotus Sutra*, one attains the hidden ‘secret Law’ residing in its depths. Just as the *Life Span of the Thus Come One* chapter reveals the fundamental Law in the depths of the phrase, “I originally practiced the bodhisattva way,” the *Supernatural Powers* chapter suggests a dual structure within the *Lotus Sutra*—the surface (literal) meaning and the meaning hidden in the depths.

This dual structure applies to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth as well. In the *Emerging from the Earth* chapter, Shakyamuni states, “I have taught and guided these bodhisattvas since the remotest past” (*Lotus Sutra*, p. 467), portraying them as disciples whom he has trained since time immemorial. However, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, adorned with the thirty-two marks of a Buddha, appear so magnificent that even though Shakyamuni describes them as his disciples, it is akin to a twenty-five-year-old man claiming a hundred-year-old elder as his child—something that defies belief.

Ordinarily, bodhisattvas are beings in training toward buddhahood. If the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are disciples guided by Shakyamuni, how could they also appear as elders far surpassing Shakyamuni in age and stature? Herein lies the intent hidden in the depths of the sutra, beyond its surface (literal) meaning. As Tiantai Zhiyi notes in *Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*, “They are all ancient Buddhas” (*Taishō Tripitaka*, vol. 34, p. 125). While the Bodhisattvas of the Earth appear as bodhisattvas guided by Shakyamuni in the surface (literal) meaning of the sutra, their true identity is that of Buddhas from the remotest past, surpassing Shakyamuni himself. Their possession of the thirty-two marks of a Buddha reflects this reality.

The fact that the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are described as residing in the ‘lower regions’ of the *Sahā* world is interpreted by Tiantai Zhiyi as indicating the “deepest depths of the Dharma-nature” and the “ultimate realm of profound principle” (*Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*, *Taishō Tripitaka*, vol. 34, p. 125). This can be understood as a metaphor for the ninth consciousness, the fundamental essence of life, signifying that the Bodhisattvas of the Earth dwell in the Buddha realm of the fundamental Mystic Law.

A similar dual structure can be identified in the case of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. On the surface, he is presented as a name for Shakyamuni during his bodhisattva practice prior to attaining enlightenment. However, as Nichiren notes, “Shakyamuni included his acts during his causal stage of practice in his narrative to encourage those at the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, New Edition, p. 1810). This implies that Bodhisattva Never Disparaging symbolizes the propagator in the Latter Day of the Law.

Additionally, whereas Shakyamuni taught those with favorable conditions to accept his teachings, as seen in the *Simile and Parable* chapter, “Do not expound this sutra among the ignorant” (*Lotus Sutra*, p. 204), Bodhisattva Never Disparaging spreads the Law even while enduring persecution such as being attacked with sticks and stones.

This positions him as the antithesis of Shakyamuni. Tiantai Zhiyi comments on this contrast in *Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*:

“When the roots of goodness have already been established, Shakyamuni uses small means to guide and protect. When the roots of goodness have not yet been established, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging uses great means to sternly arouse them” (*Taishō Tripitaka*, vol. 34, p. 141).

According to Tiantai Zhiyi, the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha were aimed at guiding those with superior faculties who possessed inherent good roots, by nurturing their good roots and expounding the provisional teachings. In contrast, the teachings of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging were directed at saving those with inferior faculties who lacked inherent good roots, proclaiming the great teachings despite opposition from others. Here, Tiantai Zhiyi regarded the teachings propagated by Never Disparaging as surpassing those of Shakyamuni Buddha. In the age when the limitations of Shakyamuni’s teachings became apparent (the Latter Day of the Law), Bodhisattva Never Disparaging (as a representative of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth) would propagate a teaching that transcended Shakyamuni’s doctrines. Since Bodhisattva Never Disparaging is considered to correspond to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, Tiantai Zhiyi’s interpretation can be understood as a shift of the lord of teachings from Shakyamuni, who expounded provisional (lesser) teachings, to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, who propagate the supreme teachings, marking a transition of eras.

Nichiren discusses this point in the *Gosho to Lord Soya Nyudo*, stating:

“There are three periods following the Buddha’s passing. In the more than 2,000 years of the Former and Middle Days, there were still those who had received the seeds (of enlightenment) in the past, just as there were in the Buddha’s lifetime. Without understanding people’s capacities, one cannot indiscriminately entrust them with the true sutra. Now, in the Latter Day of the Law, the people who formed karmic ties during the Buddha’s lifetime are gradually declining, and those capable of receiving either the provisional or true teaching are exhausted. This is the time when Bodhisattva Never Disparaging will appear and strike the drum of the teaching of the poison drum relationship” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 1393).

Nichiren thus asserts that, while the people of the Former and Middle Days of the Law had already received the seed of buddhahood, those in the Latter Day of the Law had not received this seed. Hence, it became the era in which Bodhisattva Never Disparaging would appear to guide through adversity.

This perspective on the transition of the lord of teachings also holds critical significance in understanding the essence of the entrustment in the *Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One* chapter. On the surface level of the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Kuon-Jitsujō* Shakyamuni Buddha entrusts the mission of propagating the Buddha’s teachings after his passing to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, particularly Bodhisattva Superior Practices, who had been trained by him. However, as discussed earlier, the true identity of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth is not merely that of disciples of Shakyamuni but of Buddhas from the remotest past. Therefore, the entrustment from Shakyamuni to Bodhisattva Superior Practices signifies not merely the granting of authority or delegation of a role from a Buddha to a disciple bodhisattva but, in essence, the transition of the lord of teachings from Shakyamuni to Superior Practices.

Furthermore, Shakyamuni Buddha is described as the Buddha of the true effect, who attained buddhahood through the fundamental Mystic Law. In contrast, Bodhisattva Superior Practices is the Buddha of the true cause, who possesses and propagates the fundamental Mystic Law itself, which serves as the cause of enlightenment. On this point, Daisaku Ikeda writes in *The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra*:

“The entrustment ceremony in the *Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One* chapter, simply put, represents a handoff from the ‘lord of teachings of the true effect’ to the ‘lord of teachings of the true cause.’ It signifies a profound shift from a Buddhism centered on the radiant ideal of the ‘Buddha’s effects,’ embodied by the 32 marks of perfection, to a Buddhism focused on the ‘Buddha’s causes,’ accessible to ordinary people” (*The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra*, vol. 5, p. 190).

Since the lord of teachings transitions, the Latter Day of the Law is not a time for Shakyamuni Buddha to take center stage; rather, he becomes a Buddha of the past. In this era, Bodhisattva Superior Practices emerges as the lord of teachings propagating the fundamental Law. The message of the *Supernatural Powers* chapter is that people should follow the guidance of Superior Practices in the Latter Day of the Law.

The *Lotus Sutra*, in the meaning hidden in the depths of the *Life Span of the Thus Come One* chapter, reveals the existence of the fundamental Mystic Law, which serves as the cause for universal enlightenment, not only of Shakyamuni Buddha but of all beings. In the *Never Disparaging* chapter, it discusses the mode of practice in the Latter Day of the Law, and in the *Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One* chapter, it predicts the appearance of Bodhisattva Superior Practices as the lord of teachings who will propagate the Mystic Law in the Latter Day. While the *Lotus Sutra* itself no longer directly possesses the power to save in the Latter Day, it serves a role in supporting the propagation of the Buddha of the Mystic Law by predicting the advent of the lord of teachings in the Latter Day.

Regarding the question of for whom the *Lotus Sutra* was expounded, Nichiren writes in *Choosing the Heart of the Lotus Sutra* (*Hokke shuyō shō*):

“The one chapter and two half-chapters centered on the *Life Span* chapter, from beginning to end, were specifically taught for the people who would live after the Buddha’s passing. Among them, it is for those of us living now in the Latter Day of the Law” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 154).

He further elaborates:

“One might ask, for whose sake were the verification by Many Treasures Buddha, the assistance of the Buddhas of the ten directions, and the emergence of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth? [...] The sutra states, ‘How much more so after the Buddha’s passing’ and ‘To ensure that this Law will long endure.’ Considering these passages, it is clear that all these events occurred solely for our sake” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 155).

Nichiren asserts that while the *Lotus Sutra* itself cannot directly save the people of the Latter Day of the Law, it plays a significant role as a supplementary aid, assisting the guidance of the lord of teachings for the Latter Day.

Daisaku Ikeda, in the preface to the older Soka Gakkai edition of the *Lotus Sutra*, states:

“The 28 chapters are used as the introductory and dissemination parts of the Buddhism of the Three Great Secret Laws.”

This statement is based on the fifth of the five successive applications of the threefold division (*gojū sandan*) set forth in *The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind* (*Kanjin no Honzon-shō*)—namely, the “threefold division of sowing based on the meaning hidden in the depths” (*montei geshu sandan*, p. 138). In Nichiren Buddhism, *Nam-myōhō-rengē-kyō* (the essence hidden in the depths of the *Life Span* chapter) constitutes the main exposition (*shōshū-bun*), while the myriad sutras of the Buddhas of the ten directions and three existences, including the *Lotus Sutra* in its surface (literal) meaning, serve as the introductory and dissemination parts.

In the Latter Day of the Law, the object of propagation is solely the Three Great Secret Laws of *Nam-myōhō-rengē-kyō*, and the *Lotus Sutra* serves as a means to propagate them. This is a crucial distinction. From this perspective, the statement in the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* that “Nichiren Daishonin designated the *Lotus Sutra*—one of the representative scriptures of Mahayana Buddhism that originated in India—as his fundamental scripture and established a new practice to save all people” (*Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, p. 19) is fundamentally incorrect.

For Nichiren, the *Lotus Sutra* was not the fundamental scripture on which he relied. Nichiren did not awaken to the Mystic Law through the *Lotus Sutra*; rather, he awakened to the Buddha vehicle through his own understanding (*jige butsujō*), as stated in *The Letter to Jakunichi-bō* (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*,

p. 1269). For Nichiren, the *Lotus Sutra* was merely a tool for propagating the Mystic Law. Understanding this point is essential to grasping the true significance of Nichiren's propagation of the *Lotus Sutra* and Shakyamuni Buddha.

However, sects outside the Nikkō school, such as the Minobu school, while acknowledging Nichiren as Bodhisattva Superior Practices, fail to clarify the fundamental cause of Shakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment. They regard Superior Practices merely as a messenger entrusted by Shakyamuni to propagate the teachings after his passing, remaining confined to the surface (literal) meaning of the Lotus Sutra.

For example, the Minobu school, following Tiantai Zhiyi's Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra (*Fa Hua Xuan Yi*), attributes Shakyamuni's enlightenment to his practice of the bodhisattva path in the remote past before the era of five hundred dust-particle kalpas. However, they fail to specify the law that he practiced. These sects do not recognize the fundamental Mystic Law (*Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*) as the cause enabling Shakyamuni's enlightenment.

Similarly, the Book on Doctrinal Foundation mentions Shakyamuni's true effect—his attainment of buddhahood in the remote past (*Kuon-Jitsujō*)—but completely neglects the true cause that enabled it. Regarding Bodhisattva Superior Practices, it limits him to being a disciple guided by Shakyamuni, entrusted with the role of propagating the teachings in the Latter Day of the Law. It does not acknowledge Superior Practices as the Buddha of the true cause.

This indicates that the Book on Doctrinal Foundation remains confined to the surface (literal) meaning of the Lotus Sutra and fails to grasp the meaning hidden in the depths of the Lotus Sutra. This places it on the same level as the Minobu school and other similar sects.

(4) The Intent Behind Nichiren's Propagation of Shakyamuni Buddha and the Lotus Sutra

Nichiren consistently exalted Shakyamuni Buddha as the 'Lord of Teachings Shakyamuni' and emphasized that the *Lotus Sutra* was the supreme scripture in his teachings to his disciples. At the time, traditional Buddhist schools such as the Tendai school and the Six Nara Schools had uniformly assimilated esoteric Buddhism, while the exclusive practice of chanting the name of Amida Buddha (*nenbutsu*), initiated by Hōnen, was rapidly spreading, leading to the broad societal penetration of Pure Land Buddhism.

In this context, Nichiren needed to redirect the faith of people who were devoted to Vairocana Buddha, Amida Buddha, and the esoteric sutras or the *Three Pure Land Sutras* back toward Shakyamuni Buddha and the *Lotus Sutra* to propagate his teachings. As a prerequisite for spreading the Three Great Secret Laws, it was essential for Nichiren to rigorously refute other practices such as *nenbutsu* and *shingon* that were based on sutras other than the *Lotus Sutra*. This necessity is evident from the fact that when Nichiren declared his establishment of the teaching and began propagating *Nam-myoho-enge-kyo* at the age of 32, he also engaged in refuting the practices of *nenbutsu* and Zen Buddhism. Thus, Nichiren's propagation of Shakyamuni Buddha and the *Lotus Sutra* can be understood as a skillful means (*hōben*) to guide people toward the Three Great Secret Laws.

For example, Nanjō Hyōe Shichirō, the steward of Ueno in Fuji District, Suruga Province, became Nichiren's disciple around 1264 (Bun'ei 1). Since Hyōe Shichirō had been a devoted *nenbutsu* practitioner for many years, Nichiren taught him:

"Shakyamuni Buddha is our parent, teacher, and sovereign. For us, Amida Buddha, Yakushi Buddha, and others may serve as sovereigns, but they are neither our parent nor our teacher. The only Buddha who embodies all three virtues and shows the deepest compassion is Shakyamuni Buddha alone" (*Gosho Addressed to Nanjō Hyōe Shichirō*, p. 1825).

This guidance aimed to sever Hyōe Shichirō's attachment to Amida Buddha. Similarly, in *Choosing the Heart of the Lotus Sutra*, Nichiren states:

"The Lord of Teachings Shakyamuni has been the Buddha who attained perfect enlightenment since five hundred dust-particle kalpas ago. Vairocana, Amida, Yakushi, and all the Buddhas of the ten directions are subordinates of our original teacher, the Lord of Teachings Shakyamuni. This is akin to the moon in the sky reflecting on countless bodies of water" (*Choosing the Heart of the Lotus Sutra*, p. 151).

Such teachings, widely found in many of Nichiren's writings, demonstrate that Nichiren's exaltation of Shakyamuni Buddha as the Lord of Teachings was a means of rejecting other Buddhas such as Vairocana and Amida and guiding people toward the correct path.

When Nichiren's disciples Toki Jōnin, Shijō Kingo, and Shijō Kingo's wife reported the construction of an image of Shakyamuni Buddha, Nichiren approved and praised their actions. However, this was merely a consideration for the spiritual capacities of his disciples, who at the time were still inclined toward the worship of Shakyamuni Buddha. Notably, Nichiren himself never actively encouraged his disciples to create images of Shakyamuni Buddha.

Nichiren never treated Shakyamuni Buddha as the object of devotion. For example, during his exile to Izu, Nichiren received a statue of Shakyamuni Buddha as a gift from the local steward, which he kept as his personal image. However, he instructed that after his death, it should be placed near his grave. Thus, he did not regard the statue as the object of devotion. The only object of devotion that Nichiren conferred upon his disciples for worship was the inscribed *Mandala* with the central inscription 'Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, Nichiren (*Kaō*: Nichiren's seal).' Nichiren's true intent can be discerned from such concrete actions.

Nichiren accepted Tiantai Zhiyi's judgment, based on the classification of the five periods and eight teachings, that the *Lotus Sutra* is the supreme scripture, and regarded it as the highest and foremost sutra that most accurately expresses the Buddha's enlightenment. For example, in *The Opening of the Eyes*, Nichiren states:

"In the more than fifty years during which the Buddha expounded his teachings, he set forth numerous sutras amounting to eighty thousand teachings. Among these, there are teachings for the Hinayana and Mahayana, provisional sutras and true sutras, exoteric teachings and esoteric teachings, soft words and harsh words, true words and false words, correct views and heretical views. Among all these, only the *Lotus Sutra* represents the true words of the lord of teachings, Shakyamuni Buddha, and the true words of all the Buddhas of the three existences and ten directions" (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 54).

This teaching clearly served the purpose of refuting the various schools of Nichiren's time, such as Shingon Esotericism, Pure Land Buddhism, and Zen, which each asserted their respective sutras as foundational. The central theoretical contention between Nichiren and these schools lay in the superiority of the *Lotus Sutra* over other sutras. Therefore, as a premise for propagating *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, which is revealed in the meaning hidden in the depths of the *Lotus Sutra*, Nichiren emphasized the superiority of the *Lotus Sutra* over other sutras. In essence, he used the twenty-eight chapters of the *Lotus Sutra* as a means to guide people to *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*.

Of course, Nichiren repeatedly emphasized that he was a 'practitioner of the *Lotus Sutra*.' This designation may suggest that the *Lotus Sutra* was fundamental and that Nichiren was a subordinate figure practicing what was taught in the *Lotus Sutra*. This is, in fact, the understanding held by schools such as the Minobu lineage and those that follow the Five Senior Priests. However, this term must be understood from the perspective that Nichiren utilized the *Lotus Sutra* as a means for propagating the Mystic Law.

Nichiren personally endured the intense persecutions predicted in the *Lotus Sutra* and 'read with his body' the text of the sutra. This bodily reading (*shindoku*) served to demonstrate the validity of his teachings through the *Lotus Sutra* and to make his doctrines more acceptable to people. The fact that Nichiren suffered the great persecutions foretold in the *Lotus Sutra* is an undeniable historical truth. Encountering this reality, people could not help but think, 'Nichiren is no ordinary person. At the very least, his claims must be taken seriously.' In this way, Nichiren prepared people's capacity to accept *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* through the objective fact of his bodily reading of the *Lotus Sutra*.

In summary, Nichiren was not a figure defined by the surface (literal) meaning of the *Lotus Sutra*. He was the lord of teachings who, for the first time in history, propagated the fundamental Mystic Law, which even the *Lotus Sutra* could not explicitly reveal. Understanding this is the essence of Nichiren Buddhism.

Nichiren propagated Shakyamuni Buddha and the *Lotus Sutra* as means to guide the people of his time, but he also clearly pointed out their limitations. As mentioned earlier, in the *Letter to Myomitsu Shonin*, Nichiren states:

"Now we have entered the Latter Day of the Law. Each person is afflicted with severe illness, and it is difficult to cure them with the mild medicines of Amida, Dainichi, or Shakyamuni" (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 1708).

This asserts that Shakyamuni Buddha is incapable of saving the people of the Latter Day of the Law. Regarding the *Lotus Sutra*, Nichiren declares in the *Reply to Lord Ueno*:

"Now that we have entered the Latter Day of the Law, the other sutras and even the *Lotus Sutra* have no power to help. Only *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* can be relied upon" (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 1874).

This makes it clear that the *Lotus Sutra* is powerless to save the people of the Latter Day.

Nichiren's ultimate intent is clearly expressed in the form of the *Gohonzon*, the Object of Devotion inscribed with characters. While his writings to individual disciples considered their specific capacities, the *Gohonzon* represents the core of doctrine and transcends the individual capacities of practitioners, revealing Nichiren's true intent. At the center of the character-inscribed *Gohonzon* is written 'Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Nichiren (Kaō)', with Shakyamuni Buddha and Many Treasures Buddha positioned to either side as supporting figures. Several of Nichiren's handwritten *Gohonzons*—including his first character-inscribed Mandala, the 'Willow Branch *Gohonzon*,' inscribed the day before his exile to Sado—do not even include Shakyamuni Buddha or Many Treasures Buddha.

This fact demonstrates that Shakyamuni Buddha is a secondary figure on the *Gohonzon*, sometimes omitted entirely. In contrast, there is no *Gohonzon* where 'Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Nichiren (Kaō)' is omitted. In *The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon*, Nichiren writes:

"All these Buddhas, bodhisattvas, great sages, and so forth—without exception, the assembled multitude described in the 'Introduction' chapter, representing the two realms and the eight groups—dwell within this *Gohonzon*, illuminated by the light of the five characters of the Mystic Law, and manifest their inherent dignified forms. This is what is called the Object of Devotion" (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 2087).

This passage underscores that 'Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Nichiren (Kaō)' is the central, active force that enables the ten worlds of all living beings to manifest their inherent enlightened nature. Thus, 'Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Nichiren (Kaō)' is the essential element of Nichiren's *Gohonzon*.

In particular, the fact that 'Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Nichiren (Kaō)' is inscribed as a unified entity on the *Gohonzons* created during the Kōan period, the final stage of Nichiren's *Mandala* inscriptions, demonstrates that Nichiren is inherently one and indivisible with *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*. This signifies that Nichiren embodies the *fundamental Buddha* who is intrinsically unified with the Law (Oneness of the Person and the Law).

The *Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, however, does not address the significance of the *Gohonzon's* form, which lies at the heart of Nichiren Buddhism. This is because its position, which frames Nichiren as merely a 'messenger' of Shakyamuni Buddha, cannot explain the meaning of a *Gohonzon* where Shakyamuni is relegated to a secondary role. Furthermore, Nichiren states in the *Letter to Shimoyama*:

"I am a practitioner more important than the lord of teachings, Shakyamuni Buddha" (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 299).

Why does Nichiren declare himself to be "more important than the lord of teachings, Shakyamuni"? This is because Nichiren is the lord of teachings who propagated the fundamental Law (*Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*), the true cause that even Shakyamuni did not expound, which enables the universal enlightenment of all beings.

If Nichiren were merely a 'messenger' or 'representative' of Shakyamuni, it would not make sense for him to be described as 'more important than the lord of teachings, Shakyamuni.' This statement clearly reveals Nichiren's true and profound intent.

(5) The Establishment of the Buddhism of Sowing by Nichiren

The communities that upheld the *Lotus Sutra* in India were small and faced persecution from established Hinayana and Mahayana communities. However, as the *Lotus Sutra* spread to China via Central Asia, it gradually gained recognition as a preeminent Mahayana scripture. A key turning point was the Chinese translation of the *Lotus Sutra* by Kumārajīva in 406 CE, titled *Myōhō-renge-kyō*. Kumārajīva's translation accurately and accessibly conveyed the meanings of the *Lotus Sutra*, enabling the Chinese people to grasp its content for the first time. The earliest Chinese translation of the *Lotus Sutra* had been completed in 286 CE, but it was Kumārajīva's version that truly established the text's significance in China.

Following the introduction of Buddhism to China around the turn of the Common Era, various systems of doctrinal classification (kyōhan) were developed to determine the relative superiority and relationships of the numerous sutras. In the sixth century, Tiantai Zhiyi (538–597) introduced the doctrinal system of 'Five Periods and Eight Teachings,' which overturned earlier classifications and established the *Lotus Sutra* as the supreme scripture among the entirety of the Buddhist canon.

From the *Lotus Sutra*, Tiantai extracted the doctrine of 'three thousand realms in a single moment of life' (*ichinen sanzen*), which posits that a single moment of life (*ichinen*) contains the potential for all phenomena: the ten worlds, mutual possession of the ten worlds, the ten factors, and the three realms of existence, collectively amounting to three thousand realms. He made this principle the cornerstone of practice, emphasizing meditative contemplation of one's own life. However, because Tiantai's practice did not clearly reveal the fundamental Law that underpins enlightenment, it was extraordinarily difficult and could only be accomplished by a select few highly capable monks. For lay practitioners with jobs and daily responsibilities, Tiantai Buddhism was practically impossible to practice, leading some to argue that it was fundamentally flawed as a system of practice from the outset.

Furthermore, after the fall of the Tang dynasty in 907 CE, Chinese Buddhism entered a period of decline. By the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127), corruption in Buddhist institutions had deepened, with ordination certificates, imperial purple robes, and honorary titles for monks being bought and sold. The Pure Land and Zen schools, which lacked the doctrinal substance of Buddhism, gained popularity among the populace, while Tiantai Buddhism waned in influence. After the Northern Song's fall to the Jurchen (a Tungusic people) in 1127, Buddhism in China virtually lost its substance. Nichiren comments on this in *On the Buddha's Prophecy*:

“During the reign of Emperor Gaozong of China, the northern barbarians [Jurchens] took control of Dongjing [Kaifeng, the capital of the Northern Song], and it has been more than 150 years since then. The Buddhist and imperial laws alike have both come to an end” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 610).

In Japan, Dengyō Daishi Saichō (767–822), who introduced Tiantai Buddhism, also encountered limitations in Tiantai practice. Additionally, Saichō brought esoteric Buddhism (*mikkyō*) to Japan alongside Tiantai teachings. After Saichō's death, his disciples, such as Jikaku (794–864), rapidly embraced esoteric practices, leading Japanese Tiantai Buddhism as a whole to become heavily influenced by esotericism. Ritual prayers and esoteric incantations took precedence over the study of Tiantai doctrine.

By the late Heian period, an era of continual conflict began, starting with the Hōgen (1156) and Heiji (1159) disturbances. Enryakuji, the headquarters of the Tiantai school, amassed large numbers of warrior monks, transforming into a formidable military force. This situation aligned with the prophecy in the *Great Collection Sutra* of 'white dharma concealed and disputes arising.'

The idea that Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings would lose their ability to save sentient beings—known as the 'thought of the Latter Day of the Law'—is a shared concept found in many Buddhist sutras, including the *Lotus Sutra*. In Japan, this notion is exemplified in works like *The Record of the Lamp of the Latter Day of the Law*,

attributed to Saichō, and it became common to consider 1052 CE (the seventh year of the Eishō era) as the first year of the Latter Day of the Law.

Nichiren, observing the state of Buddhism in Japan and globally, concluded that his era corresponded to the ‘Latter Day of the Law,’ during which Shakyamuni Buddha’s teachings had lost their effectiveness. He resolved to establish a new form of Buddhism that transcended the previous teachings. It is believed that Nichiren realized the fundamental Law shortly after becoming a monk at Seichō-ji in his hometown around the age of sixteen. Regarding this religious awakening, Nichiren writes in the *Tripitaka Master Shan-wu-wei*:

“I, Nichiren, am a resident of Mount Seichō in Tōjō Village, Awa Province. From a young age, I prayed to Bodhisattva Kokuzo, saying, ‘Grant that I may become the wisest person in Japan.’ [...] Bodhisattva Kokuzo appeared before me in person, in the form of a high priest, and bestowed upon me a jewel of wisdom, as brilliant as the morning star. Perhaps as a sign of this, I have come to grasp the main doctrines of Japan’s eight schools as well as the essentials of the Zen and Nembutsu schools” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 1192).

Additionally, in the *Letter to the Priests of Seichō-ji*, he writes:

“I once received great wisdom from the living Bodhisattva Kokuzo. Out of compassion for my plea to ‘Grant that I may become the wisest person in Japan,’ he bestowed upon me a great jewel of wisdom as brilliant as the morning star, which I received in my right sleeve. From then on, I studied all the sutras and came to know the superiority and inferiority of Japan’s eight schools and their scriptures” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 1206).

To discern the superiority and inferiority of the eight schools and all the sutras implies that Nichiren grasped the fundamental truth upon which such judgments could be based. In other words, it is understood that Nichiren realized at this time the Mystic Law, the fundamental principle of the universe. On this point, Josei Toda wrote:

“Our Original Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin, awakened to the great vow of saving humanity and also comprehended the philosophy of the universe at the age of sixteen” (*The Collected Works of Josei Toda*, vol. 3, p. 292).

The Soka Gakkai has also maintained the position that Nichiren realized the Mystic Law at the age of sixteen (*The Basics of Doctrine*, 2002, and *An Introduction to Doctrine*, 2015, both compiled by the Soka Gakkai Study Department). However, the current *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* entirely ignores this awakening at the age of sixteen.

If Nichiren is to be regarded as the Original Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, the question of when he realized the Mystic Law is of critical importance. It is inappropriate for the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* to obscure this matter. For instance, it states:

“The Daishonin, seizing upon the Tatsunokuchi Persecution as a turning point, awakened to the ultimate realization that he had been entrusted by Shakyamuni with the mission of Bodhisattva Superior Practices to propagate *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, and he came to recognize *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* as the essence of enlightenment” (*Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, p. 76).

This implies that Nichiren realized *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* during the Tatsunokuchi Persecution. However, if that were the case, it would mean that Nichiren propagated *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* without having realized it himself during the years between his declaration of the establishment of his teaching and the Tatsunokuchi Persecution. Ignoring the awakening at the age of sixteen requires clear justification, and failing to provide any explanation amounts to a dereliction of responsibility, inviting criticism of irresponsibility and insincerity.

After realizing the Mystic Law, Nichiren traveled to various locations such as Kamakura, Kyoto, and Nara, studying and verifying the doctrines of different schools while thoroughly reading the sutras. This period of study can be regarded as preparation for propagating the Mystic Law.

During this period, Nichiren confirmed the following points:

- ① Among all sutras, the *Lotus Sutra* is the supreme scripture.
- ② The various Buddhist schools of his time were committing the error of slandering the true Law.
- ③ The era had already entered the Latter Day of the Law.
- ④ Nichiren himself corresponded to Bodhisattva Superior Practices, the lord of teachings for the Latter Day.

(A similar perspective is presented in the Soka Gakkai Study Department's *The Basics of Doctrine*.)

After sixteen years of preparation, Nichiren began propagating the Mystic Law by teaching the practice of chanting *Nam-myoho-enge-kyo* to people at Seichō-ji in his hometown when he was thirty-two years old, formally declaring the establishment of his teaching.

Prior to Nichiren, the phrase *Nam-myoho-enge-kyo* did exist, but its meaning differed significantly from Nichiren's interpretation. Traditionally, it meant devotion (*namu*, or 'homage') to the *Lotus Sutra* as a scripture (*Myoho-enge-kyo*), taken literally. However, for Nichiren, as he wrote in the *Reply to Lord Soya Nyudo*:

"People of this time think that the five characters of Myoho-enge-kyo are merely a name. But this is not so; they are the entity itself. That entity is the mind." (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 1438).

Thus, *Myoho-enge-kyo* is not merely the name of a sutra but the fundamental law implied in the meaning hidden in the depths of the *Lotus Sutra*.

Moreover, before Nichiren, chanting *Nam-myoho-enge-kyo* was a practice performed for oneself alone and was not propagated to others. In contrast, Nichiren proclaimed in *On the Receiving of the Three Great Secret Laws*:

"In the Latter Day of the Law, the *Nam-myoho-enge-kyo* that I, Nichiren, now chant is different from that of earlier times. It encompasses both practice for oneself and the teaching of others" (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 1387).

The chanting practice advocated by Nichiren was not confined to self-practice but was meant to be widely propagated to others. It was a practice accessible to all, regardless of their abilities, opening the path to enlightenment equally to all people. In this sense, the Buddha's enlightenment became universally accessible for the first time through Nichiren's establishment of the chanting of *Nam-myoho-enge-kyo*.

As mentioned earlier, the *Life Span of the Thus Come One* chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* hints at the existence of a fundamental law that served as the true cause enabling Shakyamuni and all Buddhas to attain buddhahood. This was implied in the meaning hidden in the phrase 'I originally practiced the bodhisattva way.' However, this law had no specific name. Nichiren clarified this in *The Entity of the Mystic Law*:

"The ultimate truth has no name. When a sage contemplates this truth and assigns a name to it, it becomes the One Law that is the simultaneous cause and effect of inconceivable phenomena. This is named *Myoho-enge*. This single law, *Myoho-enge*, encompasses all phenomena of the three thousand realms of the ten worlds, with nothing lacking. Those who practice it simultaneously acquire both the cause and the effect of buddhahood" (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 618).

Nichiren thus revealed that the fundamental law is named *Myoho-enge-kyo*, and by chanting this name, individuals can manifest the fundamental law in their lives. As Nichiren wrote, "The five or seven characters of *Myoho-enge-kyo*" (*The True Aspect of All Phenomena*, p. 1792), the terms *Myoho-enge-kyo* and *Nam-myoho-enge-kyo* are

synonymous as expressions of the fundamental law. However, as a practice, chanting must take the form of *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*.

Nichiren's establishment of the practice of chanting *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, encompassing both self-practice and the teaching of others, was an unprecedented event in human history. It clearly articulated the fundamental Mystic Law as *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, thereby opening the path to enlightenment for all people. This was an extraordinary achievement, surpassing even what Shakyamuni, Tiantai Zhiyi, or Dengyō Daishi had accomplished.

It is reasonable to conclude that Nichiren's unprecedented act of establishing the practice of chanting *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* for both oneself and others was founded on his self-awareness as Bodhisattva Superior Practices, as prophesied in the *Lotus Sutra*. Without the conviction that he was qualified to perform such a practice, it would have been impossible to undertake an action that even Tiantai or Dengyō had not achieved.

After declaring the establishment of his teaching, Nichiren moved to Kamakura and began propagation activities from his hermitage in Matsubagayatsu. In response to the great earthquake of the Shōka era and other natural disasters, Nichiren, at the age of 39, submitted the *Rissho Ankoku Ron (On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land)* to the highest authority, Hōjō Tokiyori, admonishing the ruler. His criticism of Hōnen's exclusive nembutsu practice and his admonishment of the ruling authorities invited severe persecution, including the Matsubagayatsu Persecution, exile to Izu, and the Komatsubara Persecution—several life-threatening hardships that are well known.

These actions were practices that demonstrated the legitimacy of his propagation, as prophesied in the *Lotus Sutra*, by enduring the persecutions it described.

A major turning point in Nichiren's life was the Tatsunokuchi Persecution and his subsequent exile to Sado at the age of fifty. The Tatsunokuchi Persecution, in which Nichiren narrowly escaped execution by beheading, was the greatest crisis of his life. According to traditional Soka Gakkai teachings, it was during this persecution that Nichiren manifested the state of the Original Eternal Self-Enjoyment Body as the fundamental Buddha and achieved 'casting off the transient and revealing the true' (*hosshaku kempon*) (Soka Gakkai Study Department, *The Basics of Doctrine and An Introduction to Doctrine*).

However, in the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation of Soka Gakkai*, there is no mention of Nichiren casting off the transient and revealing the true, nor are terms such as *Kuon-Ganjo* (the beginningless origin) or Self-Enjoyment Body used at all. These concepts, particularly *Kuon-Ganjo*, are central keywords in Soka Gakkai's doctrinal framework. The absence of these terms in the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* raises questions, yet no explanation is provided for this omission. This lack of accountability could be criticized as a failure to address an important doctrinal issue sincerely.

Instead of discussing 'casting off the transient and revealing the true,' the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* states that during the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, Nichiren assumed 'the role of Bodhisattva Superior Practices' (*Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, p. 43). As noted earlier, this interpretation aligns with the doctrinal stance of the Minobu school. However, such an understanding implies that before the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, Nichiren was propagating *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* without the awareness of having been entrusted as Bodhisattva Superior Practices. This contradicts the fundamental Buddhist principle that propagation of the Dharma without an entrustment is impossible.

This principle is explicitly addressed in *The True Aspect of All Phenomena*, where Nichiren writes:

"Though Tiantai, Miaole, and Dengyō knew it in their hearts, they did not expound it in words, keeping it in their hearts. This was only natural, for they had not been entrusted with it" (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 1788).

Thus, the recognition found in the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* and the Minobu school's doctrines appears to be a clear error when evaluated against Buddhist principles. As previously mentioned, by the time Nichiren made his declaration of establishing his teaching and began propagating *Nam-myoho-rence-kyo*, he must have already been fully aware of his role as Bodhisattva Superior Practices.

After the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, Nichiren transitioned from his position as the reincarnation of Bodhisattva Superior Practices and began acting as the Original Buddha (lord of teachings) of the Latter Day of the Law. This transformation is evident in his actions following the persecution, notably his creation of the *Mandala Gohonzon*. The *Mandala Gohonzon*, inscribed with '*Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, Nichiren (Kaō)*,' is described in *The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon* as follows:

“What a wondrous thing it is that Nichiren, in the more than 200 years since the Latter Day of the Law began, has for the first time unveiled the Great *Mandala* as the banner of propagation of the *Lotus Sutra*, which even Nāgārjuna, Vasubandhu, Tiantai, and Miaole were unable to reveal” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 2086).

The *Mandala Gohonzon* is a unique Object of Devotion unprecedented in the history of Buddhism. Only the lord of teachings of the era can reveal the object of devotion for worship. By inscribing the *Gohonzon*, Nichiren manifested the complete framework of the Three Great Secret Laws: the *Daimoku*, the *Gohonzon*, and the Sanctuary (ordination platform, *kaidan*). The Sanctuary is where practitioners embrace the *Mandala Gohonzon* and dedicate themselves to chanting the *Daimoku* for their own practice and the benefit of others. Through the inscription of the *Gohonzon*, the full scope of the Buddhism of the Three Great Secret Laws was revealed for the first time.

(6) The Nichiren Community after Nichiren's Passing: Differences between the Nikkō Lineage and Other Schools

In October 1282, five days before his passing at the residence of Ikegami Munenaka, Nichiren appointed six senior disciples (in order of initiation: Nisshō (日昭), Nichirō (日朗), Nikkō (日興), Nikō (日向), Nitchō (日頂), and Nichiji (日持)) as the ‘Six Senior Disciples’ (*roku roso*), according to the *Record of the Founder's Passing*. This designation reflected Nichiren's wish for these influential disciples, who were actively spreading the teachings in regions such as Kamakura, Fuji, and Shimousa, to unite and maintain the community after his passing. Nichiren's will directed that his burial site be protected in rotation by the Six Senior Disciples (*Regarding the Grave Custodian Register*).

However, the community soon fractured after Nichiren's passing, with the most significant conflict arising between Nikkō and the other five senior disciples, collectively referred to as the ‘Five Senior Priests’ (*go roso*). This schism is known as the ‘Conflict Between the Five and One’ (*go-ichi sōtai*), which I have detailed in my previous work, *The Nikkō School and the Soka Gakkai*. Initially, Nikkō oversaw the administration of Minobu, where Nichiren's grave was located. However, after the hundred-day memorial service for Nichiren, none of the Five Senior Priests returned to Minobu, nor did they fulfill their responsibility for rotating guardianship of Nichiren's tomb.

The key differences between Nikkō and the Five Senior Priests are as follows:

- ① Nikkō identified himself as a disciple of Nichiren, while the Five Senior Priests called themselves “Tendai monks,” aligning themselves with the lineage of Dengyō Daishi.
- ② Nikkō rejected prayers for national peace in collaboration with other sects, as Nichiren had done, while the Five Senior Priests engaged in such practices with other schools.
- ③ Nikkō adhered strictly to the “Teachings of the Deities' Departure” and prohibited visits to Shinto shrines, while the Five Senior Priests allowed shrine visits.
- ④ Nikkō respected Nichiren's writings (*Gosho*), focusing on their collection and study, while the Five Senior Priests disparaged the *Gosho* written in kana, going so far as to discard and undervalue them.
- ⑤ Nikkō upheld the *Gohonzon* of the inscription of the Mystic Law as the Object of Devotion, while the Five Senior Priests emphasized statues of Shakyamuni Buddha, devaluing the *Gohonzon*.
- ⑥ Nikkō forbade the copying and partial recitation of sutras, focusing solely on chanting the *Daimoku* and propagation. The Five Senior Priests, however, allowed sutra copying and partial recitation.

These differences came to the forefront in 1285, when Nikō arrived at Minobu and was appointed head instructor (*gakutō*). Influenced by Nikō, the local steward of Minobu, Hakiri Sanenaga, began engaging in practices that Nikkō had strictly prohibited, such as shrine visits and the construction of statues of Shakyamuni Buddha. Realizing that remaining at Minobu would endanger the preservation of Nichiren's orthodox teachings, Nikkō decided to leave the site in 1289 with his disciples.

Nikkō relocated to Ueno in Suruga Province (modern-day Fujinomiya City, Shizuoka Prefecture), the domain of his follower Nanjō Tokimitsu, who was the local steward. There, Nikkō established Taisekiji temple, which subsequently became the center of the Nikkō School.

Regarding his decision to leave Minobu, Nikkō expressed his sentiments in *The reply to the Lord Hara*:

“Departing from Mount Minobu is a matter of utmost regret and sorrow, and words cannot fully express my feelings. However, upon reflection, the most important task is to preserve and uphold the teachings of the saint (Daishonin) wherever I may be, and to establish them in the world. That being said, all of the disciples have committed treachery against the mentor. Only I, Nikkō, have inherited the true intent of my mentor and am resolved to fulfill his will. Therefore, I will never forget my mission” (*Nichiren Daishōnin Gosho Zenshū, New Edition*, p. 2171).

Here, Nikkō strongly refuted the Five Senior Priests as committing treachery against the mentor and expressed his conviction that only he had correctly inherited and propagated Nichiren's teachings. After the establishment of Taisekiji temple, Nikkō moved to the Omosu Seminary in 1298 to focus on nurturing his disciples, continuing his criticism of the Five Senior Priests. For instance, in 1309, he instructed Jakusenbō Nitchō (日澄; 1262–1310), the first head lecturer of the Omosu Seminary and the younger brother of Nitchō (日頂; one of the Five Senior Priests, who had at that time submitted to Nikkō), to refute the slanderous acts of the Five Senior Priests. Jakusenbō Nitchō wrote a document, which Nikkō approved and augmented with an additional eight articles at the end, resulting in the work known as Guidelines for Believers of the Fuji School (*Nichiren Daishōnin Gosho Zenshū, New Edition*, p. 2174).

After Jakusenbō Nitchō's death, Nikkō instructed the second head lecturer, Sanmi Nichijun (1294–1356), to expand upon this work, leading to the completion of *On Refuting the Five Priests* (*Nichiren Daishōnin Gosho Zenshū, New Edition*, p. 2185). Nikkō rigorously pursued the refutation of the Five Senior Priests, emphasizing the differences between their doctrines and Nichiren's true intent. One month before his death in 1333 at the age of 88, Nikkō left the Twenty-six Admonitions of Nikkō (*Nichiren Daishōnin Gosho Zenshū, New Edition*, p. 2195), a document meant to guide future generations of disciples. The first two articles explicitly state:

- “The doctrines established by the Fuji School must never differ in the least from the teachings of the late master [Nichiren].”
- “The doctrines established by the Five Senior Priests differ in every regard from the teachings of the late master.”

This highlights Nikkō's strong emphasis on the deviation of the Five Senior Priests' teachings from Nichiren's doctrines.

Throughout his life, Nikkō consistently refuted the Five Senior Priests, asserting that they failed to grasp Nichiren's true intent and instead promulgated erroneous doctrines. This demonstrates Nikkō's unwavering commitment to distinguishing correct teachings from false ones. His decisive departure from Mount Minobu, prompted by his refusal to tolerate the slander of Hakiri Sanenaga, reflects the rigor of his doctrinal stance. The hallmark of the Nikkō school is that it emphasizes the differences between Nikkō and the Five Senior Priests (go-ichi sōtai) and draws a strict line between correct and erroneous teachings, whereas other schools, such as the Minobu school, tend to avoid the issue of go-ichi sōtai as much as possible.

In contrast, the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation of Soka Gakkai* acknowledges that “after the passing of the Daishonin, it was Nikkō Shonin who correctly inherited and transmitted the Daishonin's Buddhism” (*Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, p. 159). However, it fails to provide any substantive explanation of the basis for this assertion or address the differences between Nikkō and the Five Senior Priests. As a result, it does not adequately demonstrate Nikkō's legitimacy and instead aligns more closely with the perspective of the Five Senior Priests.

As described above, the differences between Nikkō and the Five Senior Priests, as outlined in *Guidelines for Believers of the Fuji School* and *On Refuting the Five Priests*, include six key points. In addition, a significant difference lies in the way the inscribed *Mandala* was created. In the case of Nikkō, the central inscription on the *Mandala* reads:

‘*Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Nichiren (Zaigohan: presence of verification seal).*’

Nikkō did not permit his disciples to use any other format. Nichiren himself inscribed his *Mandalas* with his name, accompanied by his *Kaō* (personal seal). However, as only Nichiren himself could inscribe his *Kaō*, Nikkō substituted this with the phrase ‘*Zaigohan*’ (indicating the presence of the verification seal). This practice reflects Nikkō’s adherence to Nichiren’s original style of inscribing the *Gohonzon*, which included ‘*Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Nichiren (Kaō: Nichiren's seal).*’

In contrast, the Five Senior Priests commonly inscribed their own names beneath ‘*Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*’ on their *mandalas*. For example, Nichirō would inscribe, ‘*Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Nichirō (Kaō: Nichirō's seal).*’ It appears that the Five Senior Priests, observing that Nichiren inscribed his name and *Kaō* beneath ‘*Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*,’ misunderstood this as indicating that the inscriber’s name should be written there.

Nikkō, however, consistently inscribed ‘*Nichiren (Zaigohan)*’ beneath ‘*Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*,’ because he regarded Nichiren as the fundamental Buddha, inherently one with the Mystic Law. On the other hand, the Five Senior Priests’ practice of inscribing their own names beneath ‘*Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*’ suggests that they viewed Nichiren as being on the same level as themselves. This reflects their lack of recognition that Nichiren was the Original Buddha, one with the Mystic Law.

Nikkō did not place himself on the same level as Nichiren. When transcribing the *Gohonzon*, he referred to the act as *shosha* (transcribing) and signed his name as ‘*Transcribed by Nikkō (Kaō)*’ to clarify that he was responsible for transcribing the respective *Gohonzon*. Of course, ‘*shosha*’ does not mean simply copying a specific *Gohonzon* as it appeared but is understood as faithfully inheriting the style of the *Mandala Gohonzon* as revealed by Nichiren.

The meticulous manner in which Nikkō standardized the style of transcribing the *Mandala Gohonzon* among his disciples is particularly notable. This suggests that Nichiren provided Nikkō with specific instructions regarding the transcription of the *Gohonzon*. Given Nikkō’s strict adherence to doctrine, it is unlikely that he would establish such an important practice based solely on his own judgment without any substantiation. Among the documents said to contain instructions from Nichiren to Nikkō regarding the transcription of the *Gohonzon* are the *Transmission of Seven Teachings on the Gohonzon* and the *Three Transmissions on the Gohonzon (Honzon Sando Sōden)*. For instance, the *Transmission of Seven Teachings on the Gohonzon* states:

“Regarding the transcription of the *Gohonzon*, it should follow the way I have revealed it. If the notation does not include the signature ‘*Nichiren (Zaigohan)*’ the deities of heaven and earth will not lend their protection” (*Essential Works of the Fuji School*, vol. 1, p. 32).

This passage clearly indicates that the *Gohonzon* should include ‘*Nichiren (Zaigohan)*’ inscribed below *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* in the same form as Nichiren wrote it. The *Mandala Gohonzons* of the Nikkō school largely follow the content of these transmission documents, supporting the assertion that instructions from Nichiren to Nikkō indeed existed.

The differences in the approach to the transcription of the *Gohonzon* between Nikkō and the Five Senior Priests are significant. Why did these differences arise? The most straightforward explanation is that they stemmed from the differences in the instructions each received from Nichiren. Nikkō was one of Nichiren’s closest disciples, serving him throughout the major periods of his life—from the Izu exile to the Sado exile, and from Minobu to Nichiren’s passing. In contrast, the representative figures among the Five Senior Priests, such as Nisshō and Nichirō, were primarily influenced by Nichiren’s teachings during the Kamakura period before the Sado exile. There is no record of either Nisshō or Nichirō visiting Nichiren during his time on Sado or at Minobu.

Nikkō and Nichirō were in contact with Nichiren during his time on Sado and at Minobu, but their periods of receiving guidance were limited, as their activities were primarily concentrated in Kazusa and Shimousa provinces, respectively. Nichiji may have been in contact with Nichiren during his time on Sado and at Minobu, but there is no definitive record to confirm this. In contrast, Nikkō was in a position to closely observe Nichiren’s intellectual

developments over the entire period from the Izu exile to his passing, which afforded him the opportunity to gain insight into Nichiren's profound teachings.

It is worth noting that the differences between Nikkō and the Five Senior Priests were also attributed by Josei Toda to the fact that the Five Senior Priests had "limited time to hear the true teachings directly from Nichiren," as he explained in response to a member's question (*The Collected Works of Josei Toda*, vol. 2, p. 156).

Nichiren began systematically revealing the *Gohonzon* during his time on Sado, and his teachings on the Three Great Secret Laws, including the ordination platform, were developed during the Minobu period. Therefore, those who only received guidance during the Kamakura period would naturally lack understanding of doctrines related to the *Gohonzon* and the ordination platform. For example, Nikō's doctrinal text *Kinkōshū* addresses only the practice of chanting *Nam-myōhō-rengē-kyō*. Similarly, the writings of Nisshō and Nichirō focus solely on the practice of chanting and make no mention of the *Gohonzon* or the ordination platform.

(7) The Doctrine of Nichiren as the Original Buddha in the Nikkō School

The teachings that Nichiren transmitted to Nikkō are preserved in the form of transmission documents, including *The Transmission of the Heritage of the Law in the Hokke Hommon School (Hon-in-myo-sho)*, *One Hundred and Six Articles (Hyakurokka-sho)*, *Transmission of Seven Teachings on the Gohonzon (Gohonzon Shichika Sōjō)*, and *Three Transmissions on the Gohonzon (Honzon Sando Sōden)*. These documents, along with the *Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings (Ongi Kuden)*, which is treated as equivalent to a transmission document, have been passed down in the Nikkō school.

The various other Nichiren sects, such as the Minobu school, dismiss these transmission documents as forgeries created in later generations and entirely deny the transmission from Nichiren to Nikkō. While there is no definitive bibliographical evidence to confirm that Nichiren handed these documents to Nikkō, neither is there conclusive evidence to categorically rule out this possibility. It cannot be denied that Nichiren may indeed have entrusted these documents to Nikkō. From a doctrinal perspective, the ideas and actions of Nikkō and his disciples align closely with the content of the transmission documents, which increases the likelihood that such documents genuinely existed.

In general, when there is no bibliographical evidence to determine the authenticity of a document, it must be considered inconclusive. Declaring it a forgery based solely on this lack of evidence is logically flawed, as subsequent discoveries may later confirm its authenticity. For example, in the case of Nichiren's writings, documents are generally regarded as authentic only if at least part of Nichiren's original manuscript exists, if records of its existence can be verified, or if there are ancient copies made by direct disciples or their successors. The Minobu school and other researchers often exclude documents of uncertain authenticity from discussion, treating them as forgeries by default. However, this approach excessively prioritizes bibliographical evidence and is not appropriate. There have been instances where writings previously considered inconclusive were later confirmed to be authentic due to new discoveries of original manuscripts or ancient copies.

An example is *On the Receiving of the Three Great Secret Laws (Sandai Hihō-sho)*, which was once widely suspected of being a forgery but has recently been analyzed using computational methods based on quantitative bibliographical studies. These analyses have suggested a high probability of authenticity (refer to Zuiei Ito's *Why the Three Great Secret Laws Matter Now*). Therefore, instead of absolutizing bibliographical studies, it is more appropriate to consider writings of uncertain authenticity—if their content is doctrinally sound—as resources for examining Nichiren's teachings.

The *Book on Doctrinal Foundation of Soka Gakkai* follows an approach similar to that of the Minobu school, generally avoiding the use of writings without original manuscripts or ancient copies. It entirely ignores the transmission documents of the Nikkō school, even their names. While the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* does not explicitly label the Nikkō school's transmission documents as forgeries, it adopts a deliberately ambiguous stance by neither affirming nor denying them, effectively ignoring them altogether. This approach can be regarded as essentially identical to that of the Minobu school.

Among the transmission documents, *The Transmission of the Heritage of the Law in the Hokke Hommon School (Hon-in-myo-sho)* has been passed down in several forms. These include a copy reportedly transcribed by Nichizon (1265–1345), a disciple of Nikkō, which was copied by Nisshin (1508–1576), the 19th chief priest of Yōbōji temple, and another copy attributed to Nichiji (日時; ?–1406), the 6th chief priest of Taisekiji temple. Additionally, a copy transcribed by Nichiga (1508–1586), the 14th chief priest of Hota Myōhonji temple, exists. Furthermore, there is a commentary on the text titled *The Oral Record of the Transmission of the Heritage of the Law (Hon-in-myo Kuketsu)* by Nichijun, the second chief lecturer of the Omosu Seminary and a prominent disciple of Nikkō. While some have argued that *Hon-in-myo Kuketsu* is a later forgery, there is insufficient evidence to substantiate such claims.

There is no evidence to refute Nisshin's assertion that his copy was based on Nichizon's manuscript. Additionally, the existence of Nichijun's *Hon-in-myo Kuketsu* further supports the idea that *The Transmission of the Heritage of the Law in the Hokke Hommon School* existed during Nikkō's lifetime. This makes it nearly certain that the document originated during that period.

Regarding the *One Hundred and Six Articles*, manuscripts exist by Nisshin of Yōbōji temple and Nichiga of Hota Myōhonji temple. Furthermore, Nisshin states in *The Biography of the Founder* that Nikkō transmitted the *One Hundred and Six Articles* to Nichizon (*Essential Works of the Fuji School*, vol. 5, p. 42). Additionally, the 17th head priest of Taisekiji temple, Nissei, in his *Record of Family Matters*, claims that Nichiren entrusted the *One Hundred and Six Articles* to Nikkō in 1280 (Kōan 3). He further asserts that in 1312, Nikkō transmitted both *The Transmission of the Heritage of the Law in the Hokke Hommon School* and *One Hundred and Six Articles* to Nichizon, Nichimoku, Nichidai, and Nichijun (*ibid.*, pp. 154, 170). Since there is no objective evidence to refute *The Biography of the Founder* or *Record of Family Matters*, it can be concluded that the *One Hundred and Six Articles* existed during Nikkō's lifetime.

If *The Transmission of the Heritage of the Law in the Hokke Hommon School* and the *One Hundred and Six Articles* (collectively referred to as The Two-Fascicle Treatise (Ryōkan-shō)) were forgeries, the question arises as to who might have forged them. However, if these writings existed during Nikkō's lifetime, the alleged forger would necessarily be Nikkō himself. Fabricating doctrinal texts that represent the fundamental tenets of faith would constitute a grave and criminal distortion of Buddhist teachings. Given Nikkō's strict adherence to doctrinal integrity, it is implausible that he would commit such a transgression.

While it cannot be definitively proven through textual criticism that *The Transmission of the Heritage of the Law in the Hokke Hommon School* and the *One Hundred and Six Articles* were conferred upon Nikkō by Nichiren, it is highly credible that these writings were doctrinal texts from the earliest period of the Nikkō lineage. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the doctrines contained within these texts reflect the teachings Nichiren imparted to Nikkō.

The ideas presented in *The Transmission of the Heritage of the Law in the Hokke Hommon School* and *One Hundred and Six Articles* are extensive. First, they clearly distinguish between the surface (literal) meaning of the *Lotus Sutra* (*monjo*) and the meaning hidden in the depths (*montei*), asserting the superiority of the Mystic Law of the depths (*geshu*, sowing) over the surface-based teachings (*datsu*, harvesting). This concept of relative superiority between sowing and harvesting was already discussed in earlier works such as *The Opening of the Eyes* (*Kaimoku-shō*) and *The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind* (*Kanjin no Honzon-shō*). However, in *The Two-Fascicle Treatise*, a passage from Miaole's commentary is cited: "Although the harvesting is revealed in the present, it entirely depends on the original sowing" (*Sui-datsu zai gen gu tō-hon-shu*). It states:

"The doctrine in the depths of the Life Span chapter concerns the true fundamental teachings of the Thus Come One of the self-enjoyment body, which is the *Nam-myoho-rence-kyo* of the single moment of life in the eternal past. This is the distinction in superiority expressed in the words, 'Although the harvesting is revealed in the present, it entirely depends on the original sowing.'" (*The Transmission of the Heritage of the Law in the Hokke Hommon School in The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 2221).

The distinguishing feature of *The Transmission of the Heritage of the Law in the Hokke Hommon School* (*Hon-in-myo-sho*) and the *One Hundred and Six Articles* lies in their emphasis on the so-called *true cause* (*hon-in-myo*) doctrine. This doctrine regards the enlightenment attained by Shakyamuni Buddha five hundred dust-particle kalpas ago, as described in the *Life Span of the Thus Come One* chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, as the *true effect* (*hon-ga-myo*), and identifies the fundamental cause enabling Shakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment as the *true cause* (*hon-in-myo*).

Tiantai Zhiyi, in the *Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra (Hokke Gengi)*, taught that Shakyamuni Buddha, before attaining buddhahood, practiced the bodhisattva way, as indicated in the phrase, “I originally practiced the bodhisattva way” (*The Life Span of the Thus Come One* chapter). Tiantai termed this the “true cause” (*hon-in-myo*).

The One Hundred and Six Articles states:

“The true cause (*hon-in-myo*) is taken as the essential teaching, while the benefit of harvesting in the present Life Span of the Thus Come One chapter is taken as the provisional teaching” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 2211).

It further states:

“Nichiren establishes the true cause as the essential teachings and all else as the provisional teachings. This is the doctrine of the true cause and true effect” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 2216).

Here, Nichiren makes clear that the attainment of buddhahood in the inconceivably remote past (*hon-ga-myo*), or ‘true effect,’ belongs to the provisional teachings, while the ‘true cause’ (*hon-in-myo*) constitutes the essential teachings.

The doctrine that prioritizes the true cause over the true effect and regards the true cause as the essential teachings is not an arbitrary assertion made exclusively by the Nikkō lineage. Evidence of this perspective can be found in *Recorded Lectures (Okō-kikigaki)*, a work believed to have been compiled outside the Nikkō lineage, with authorship attributed to Nikō. This text states:

“The essential teaching for Nichiren’s disciples and lay supporters is to regard the true cause as supreme over the true effect” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 1122).

This indicates that the doctrine of the true cause existed within Nichiren’s own teachings. It serves as further evidence that the idea of the true cause was not a later development but rather a principle intrinsic to Nichiren’s thought.

The concept of the ‘True Cause’ (*hon-in-myo*) is clearly articulated in the writings of Nikkō. For instance, in his doctrinal work *The Fivefold View of the Perfect Circle (Goju-enki)*, authored in 1330, he states:

“Our school establishes its original intention based on observing the mind. This intention lies in the Mystic Law entrusted to Superior Practices, the essential self-practice of the essential teachings. A commentary explains, ‘This *Myoho-renge-kyo* is the profound treasury of the original ground.’ The original ground is identical to the original intention. Is it not the great Law of the original intention, existing before even a single Buddha appears, that serves as the teacher of all Thus Come Ones of the three existences? Thus, the original intention is the Law-body of the Mystic Law of the true cause” (*Collected Writings on Nichiren School Doctrine*, vol. 2, p. 91).

This indicates that the Mystic Law (*Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*), entrusted to Bodhisattva Superior Practices, is the teacher of the Buddhas of the three existences and the Law-body that Shakyamuni Buddha practiced as the true cause of his attainment of buddhahood. Additionally, *The Fivefold View of the Perfect Circle* uses the phrase “*Myoho-renge-kyo* practiced as reality,” also found in *The Transmission of the Heritage of the Law in the Hokke Hommon School (Hon-in-myo-sho)*, suggesting that Nikkō received *Hon-in-myo-sho* as part of his transmission.

The fundamental Law that Shakyamuni Buddha practiced as a bodhisattva prior to his attainment of enlightenment was the Mystic Law, the enabling Law that allowed him to become a Buddha. Nichiren clarifies this in *Earthly Desires Are Enlightenment*, stating:

“What is the entity of that Law? It is none other than *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 1521).

Moreover, *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* is not an impersonal, abstract principle. An abstract principle divorced from a personal aspect cannot engage with the real world or fulfill the role of a ‘teacher’ to guide people to enlightenment. The fact that *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* is referred to as the ‘teacher of all Buddhas of the three existences’ indicates that it possesses a personal nature. As the One Hundred and Six Articles states:

“The Law does not spread by itself; people propagate the Law. Hence, both the Law and the people are worthy of respect” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 2200).

Only when the Mystic Law is accompanied by a personal aspect does it manifest its power to save people. This personal nature is intrinsic to *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*. As Nichiren states in the *Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings (ongi-kuden)*:

“The uncreated three bodies are the practitioners of the *Lotus Sutra* in the Latter Day of the Law. The treasure name of the uncreated three bodies is *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 1048).

This demonstrates that *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* is not only the name of the fundamental Law but also the honorific title (sacred name) of the fundamental Buddha who embodies this Law. Since *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* is the name of the fundamental Buddha, this Buddha is expressed as the *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One*. It embodies both the aspects of the Law and the Person, representing the Oneness of the Person and the Law.

The *Lotus Sutra* states:

“Wherever the sutra scrolls are enshrined, there you will find the entire body of the Thus Come One” (the *Teacher of the Law* chapter, modern translation, p. 363).

“If one embraces this sutra, that person will possess the Buddha’s body” (the *Treasure Tower* chapter, modern translation, p. 393).

These passages illustrate the mutual identity and inseparability of the Person and the Law: the Law is one with the person and cannot exist apart from the person. This idea is already present in the *Lotus Sutra*. Tiantai Zhiyi explains this as:

“To uphold the Law is to possess the body of the Buddha” (*Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra, Taishō Tripiṭaka* vol. 34, p. 142).

Dengyō also teaches:

“Dengyō Daishi states: ‘Three thousand realms in a single thought moment constitute the self-enjoyment body. The self-enjoyment body is the Buddha that transcends all external appearances of majesty’” (*The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon*, p. 2087).

The doctrine of the Oneness of the Person and the Law can be discussed from various perspectives. Although this document does not delve deeply into the topic, one example is found in the inscription on the *Mandala Gohonzon*, ‘*Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Nichiren (Kao)*.’ This inscription represents the manifestation of the Oneness of the Person and the Law on the *Mandala Gohonzon*. Moreover, since Nichiren awakened to *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* and taught this fundamental Law to humanity, the life of Nichiren embodies *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, thus establishing the Oneness of the Person and the Law in him.

Additionally, Nichiren writes in the *Reply to Kyō’ō*:

“I have written this by infusing the ink with Nichiren’s very soul. Believe in it.” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 1633).

This indicates that the *Mandala Gohonzon* visually represents Nichiren's very life and that Nichiren and the *Gohonzon* are intrinsically one and indivisible. This is another profound meaning of the Oneness of the Person and the Law. While the Oneness of the Person and the Law is an essential doctrinal concept in Nichiren Buddhism, the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation of Soka Gakkai* fails to even mention this principle, let alone explain its importance. The omission of this key concept is one of the significant issues with the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation*.

The fundamental Law that enabled the enlightenment of all Buddhas, including Shakyamuni, is *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*. The fundamental Buddha, who inherently embodies *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* (the Thus Come One with the uncreated three bodies or the *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One*), is referred to in *The Transmission of the Heritage of the Law in the Hokke Hommon School* and the *One Hundred and Six Articles* as "the Original Eternal Self-Enjoyment Body" (*Kuon-Ganjo Jijuyūshin*). The term "Self-Enjoyment Body" signifies a Buddha who enjoys the realization of enlightenment attained through past practice, a concept also seen in Indian Yogācāra texts such as the *Cheng Wei Shi Lun (Treatise on the Establishment of Consciousness-Only)*. This term was widely adopted in Japan's Tendai Original-Enlightenment (hongaku) Thought and appears in Nichiren's works such as *On the Relative Superiority of the True Word* and *Tendai Schools and Reply to Shijō Kingo* (Jiju Hōraku Goshō).

The term *Kuon-Ganjo* (the beginningless origin) indicates a dimension beyond the five hundred dust-particle kalpas described in the surface (literal) teaching of the *Life Span of the Thus Come One*. It does not refer to a point in time before the five hundred dust-particle kalpas but rather signifies 'the origin,' or 'without beginning or end.' If it were a specific point in time, one could further trace back to an earlier point, which would contradict its meaning as the origin. Therefore, understanding the Original Eternal Self-Enjoyment Body as existing at some specific point in time prior to the *Kuon-Jitsujo* Shakyamuni Buddha is a fundamental error.

Although the term *Kuon-Ganjo* does not appear in Nichiren's general writings, similar phrases such as "the origin of the five hundred dust-particle kalpas" or "the origin of the *Kuon-Jitsujo*" are found in works like *The Entity of the Mystic Law*, *The Unanimous Declaration by the Buddhas of the Three Existences Regarding the Classification of the Teachings and Which Are to Be Abandoned and Which Upheld*, and *On the Receiving of the Three Great Secret Laws*. Hence, the term the Original Eternal Self-Enjoyment Body (*Kuon-Ganjo Jijuyūshin*) is a natural extension of concepts present in Nichiren's general writings and is not an unusual idea. Since the Original Eternal Self-Enjoyment Body embodies *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, it is synonymous with the uncreated three bodies or the *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One*.

Furthermore, *The Transmission of the Heritage of the Law in the Hokke Hommon School* and the *One Hundred and Six Articles* teach that all Buddhas expounded in Shakyamuni's lifetime teachings are response Buddhas (ichidai ōbutsu) who appear in accordance with the capacities of sentient beings. For example, *The Transmission of the Heritage* states:

"From the standpoint confined to the domain of the response Buddha's lifetime teachings, the doctrinal aspect is merely theoretical. Thus, the entirety of the *Lotus Sutra*, including both its essential and provisional teachings, represents the theoretical three thousand realms in a single moment of life. Within this framework, the Life Span chapter of the essential teaching is situated within the provisional teachings. This is called the doctrine of harvesting (liberation) on the surface (literal) level" (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 2227)

Similarly, *One Hundred and Six Articles* establishes a section titled "The Essential and Provisional Teachings of the Response Buddha's Lifetime" and states:

“In order to benefit the sentient beings who received the seed of buddhahood in the remote past, attained liberation at Eagle Peak, and connected to the Mystic Law, the uncreated three bodies observe the nine worlds with the three kinds of eyes and three kinds of wisdom from the pure land of tranquil light and manifest as a response Buddha to carry out provisional teachings. Because the Mystic teaching is expounded later, today, both the essential and provisional teachings of the Lotus Sutra must be understood as provisional” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 2198).

This passage explicitly affirms that even the *Kuon-Jitsujō* Shakyamuni Buddha, who attained enlightenment in the remote past of five hundred dust-particle kalpas ago, is a response Buddha who appeared in accordance with the capacities of sentient beings. This position unequivocally rejects the doctrine of Shakyamuni as the original Buddha.

Furthermore, *One Hundred and Six Articles* states:

“The *Life Span of the Thus Come One* chapter that I have realized within myself refers to the true cause hidden in the depths of the sutra. The lord of teachings of this doctrine is none other than myself.”

“The pronouncement made in the remotest beginning of time, ‘Throughout heaven and earth, I alone am worthy of honor,’ refers to Nichiren” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 2210).

This clearly reveals the doctrine of Nichiren as the Original Buddha, identifying him as the *fundamental Buddha* from the remotest beginning (*Kuon-Ganjo*).

However, it must be emphasized that this doctrine was not an arbitrary invention of the Nikkō school but was explicitly taught by Nichiren himself in numerous *Gosho*. (I have provided a detailed examination of this point in my work *A Consideration of the Doctrine of Nichiren as the Original Buddha: Questions Regarding the Miyata Thesis*.)

For instance, in *The Selection of the Time*, Nichiren states:

“Nichiren is the father and mother of the present emperor, the teacher of the Nembutsu followers, Zen practitioners, and Shingon masters, and also their sovereign” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 173).

This passage explicitly establishes that Nichiren possesses the three virtues of teacher, sovereign, and parent, thereby identifying him as the Original Buddha. Similarly, in *The Royal Palace*, he states:

“I say this because I am the father and mother of the ruler of the nation and the teacher of all living beings.” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 1548).

In the *Letter to Hōren*, he writes:

“One should understand that a great sage exists in this country” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 1431).

The term ‘great sage’ (*daishonin*) is another title for a Buddha. Thus, this passage is also an explicit declaration of the doctrine of Nichiren as the Original Buddha.

During Nikkō’s lifetime, the prevailing assumption in the Japanese Buddhist world was that Shakyamuni Buddha was the lord of teachings. As such, the doctrine of Nichiren as the Original Buddha was a revolutionary and shocking idea, not easily accepted. Consequently, Nikkō, as the head of the religious order, appears to have refrained from publicly asserting this doctrine in written treatises. The secret transmissions (*sōden-shō*) of the Nikkō school, as well as *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, were regarded as confidential texts, and their contents were not to be revealed even through citations.

However, in actual practice, Nikkō's faith clearly demonstrated a rejection of the doctrine of Shakyamuni as the original Buddha and an affirmation of Nichiren as the Original Buddha. Nikkō consistently referred to Nichiren as 'Buddha' or 'the sage.' As seen in his writings, he states:

"I humbly make this offering before the precious image of the Sage" (*The Complete Writings of Nikkō Shōnin*, p. 155).

Nikkō always offered the contributions he received before the image of Nichiren. There is no record of him ever making offerings before an image of Shakyamuni Buddha.

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, when transcribing the *Mandala Gohonzon*, Nikkō always inscribed 'Nam-myoho-renge-kyo' with the signature 'Nichiren (Zaigohan: presence of verification seal).' He also ensured that this style of inscription was strictly maintained throughout the Nikkō school. This format reflects Nikkō's faith in Nichiren as the fundamental Buddha who is one with *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*.

Moreover, even during Nikkō's lifetime, his prominent disciples explicitly affirmed the doctrine of Nichiren as the Original Buddha (*Nichiren Honbutsu-ron*) in their writings. One of the most representative figures was Sanmi Nichijun (1294–1356), who served as the second head instructor at the Omosu Seminary. In *The Oral Record of the Transmission of the Heritage of the Law (Hon-in-myō Kuketsu)*, Nichijun states:

"The Original Eternal Self-Enjoyment Body (*Kuon-Ganjo Jijuyūshin*) is to be identified as Nichiren Daishonin, the Buddha of the true cause embodied in the phrase 'I originally practiced the bodhisattva way.'" (*Essential Works of the Fuji School*, vol. 2, p. 83).

This clearly establishes the doctrine of Nichiren as the fundamental Buddha (*Kuon-Ganjo Jijuyūshin*). Furthermore, in Nichijun's *Oath Document (Seimon)*, he states, "Nichiren Shonin is the entirety of the Gohonzon" (*Essential Works of the Fuji School*, vol. 2, p. 28), affirming the doctrine of Oneness of the Person and the Law, in which Nichiren is the total embodiment of the *Mandala Gohonzon*.

Additionally, Nichigen (日眼), the fifth head priest of Fuji Myōrenji temple and the son of Nanjō Tokimitsu, states in *Recorded Teachings on the Treatise On Refuting the Five Priests (Gonin Shoha Shō Kikigaki)*:

"Awesome Sound King and Shakyamuni are provisional Buddhas. Never Disparaging and Nichiren are the Original Buddhas. Awesome Sound King and Shakyamuni are transient Buddhas with the 32 marks and 80 characteristics, subject to impermanence. In contrast, Never Disparaging and Superior Practices are the Original Buddhas of eternal existence, who manifest only in name and with initial faith" (*Essential Works of the Fuji School*, vol. 4, p. 1).

Here, Nichigen explicitly articulates the superiority of Nichiren over Shakyamuni, affirming the doctrine of Nichiren as the Original Buddha while positioning Shakyamuni as a provisional Buddha.

Beyond these figures, the doctrine of Nichiren as the Original Buddha can also be found in the writings and actions of other notable disciples of Nikkō, including Nissen (one of Nikkō's six direct disciples, known as *Honroku*), the founder of Sanuki Honmonji temple; Nichidō, the fourth head priest of Taisekiji temple; and Nichiman, a great-grandson of Abutsu-bō.

Given that many of Nikkō's leading disciples clearly proclaimed the doctrine of Nichiren as the Original Buddha, it is undeniable that the teaching of Nichiren as the fundamental Buddha existed within the Nikkō school from the very beginning.

The doctrine of Nichiren as the Original Buddha continued as a fundamental teaching of the Nikkō school and was transmitted to later generations. Nichiu (1402–1482), the ninth head priest of Taisekiji temple, is recognized as the

first to formally declare this doctrine publicly in his capacity as the chief priest of Taisekiji temple. In *On the Formalities (Kegishō)*, Nichiu states:

“Regarding the Object of Devotion (*Gohonzon*) of our school, it is solely Nichiren Shonin” (*Essential Works of the Fuji School*, vol. 1, p. 65).

Here, he affirms that only Nichiren is the Person Object of Devotion, rejecting Shakyamuni as an object of worship. He further declares:

“In Shakyamuni’s lifetime, there were disciples who had eliminated delusions and realized the truth. However, our school does not enshrine Shakyamuni, who taught those disciples, as the *Gohonzon*” (*Essential Works of the Fuji School*, vol. 1, p. 78).

By making this statement, Nichiu unequivocally rejects the doctrine of Shakyamuni as the original Buddha and affirms the exclusive devotion to Nichiren.

Even within the Nikkō lineage, the doctrine of Nichiren as the Original Buddha remains an unshakable principle in the lineage of Hota Myōhonji temple, which separated from the Fuji School (Taisekiji temple lineage). Myōhonji temple was founded by Nichigō, a disciple of both Nikkō and Nichimoku. For example, Nichiyō (1436–1514), the 11th head priest of Myōhonji temple, clearly affirms the significance of the *Mandala Gohonzon* and the doctrine of the Oneness of the Person and the Law in his work *Draft on the Principles Established by Six Priests*. He states:

“The unprecedented Great *Mandala* is the Object of Devotion for the Latter Day of the Law. That Object of Devotion is none other than the Sage himself. The fundamental meaning of the *Gohonzon* is revealed in the inscription ‘*Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, Nichiren (Kaō)*,’ while Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, the Four Bodhisattvas, Brahmā, and Indra all emerge as subordinate manifestations of the original Object of Devotion. Thus, the act of inscribing the signature is of crucial significance” (*Essential Works of the Fuji School*, vol. 4, p. 71).

This passage explicitly states that the core entity of the *Gohonzon* is ‘*Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, Nichiren (Kaō)*,’ while Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and other figures are mere subsidiary entities derived from it.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that *Draft on the Principles Established by Six Priests* cites *One Hundred and Six Articles*. Specifically, it references the passage:

“In the conclusive judgment, ‘I alone am honored throughout heaven and earth since the remotest beginning of time’ refers to Nichiren. However, in terms of *Kuon* (eternal), this is the original; in terms of the present, it is provisional. Nichiren is the Object of Devotion who eternally carries out the benefit of leading all beings to enlightenment throughout the three existences” (*Essential Works of the Fuji School*, vol. 4, p. 67, citing *One Hundred and Six Articles*, p. 2210).

One Hundred and Six Articles was transmitted by Nikkō to Nichimoku, Nichizon, Nichijun, and others. The fact that Nichiyō quotes from *One Hundred and Six Articles* confirms that this text had been transmitted within Hota Myōhonji temple, which was founded by Nichigō, a disciple of Nichimoku.

Nichiyō’s disciple, Nichiga (1508–1586), the 14th head priest of Myōhonji temple, also strongly emphasized both the doctrine of Nichiren as the Original Buddha and the principle of Oneness of the Person and the Law. In *Observations on Official Statements*, he states:

“The Sage Nichiren is the Object of Devotion within the propagation of the Latter Day of the Law and the Three Great Secret Laws. One must deeply contemplate the teaching of the Oneness of the Person and the Law” (*Essential Works of the Fuji School*, vol. 4, p. 92).

Furthermore, in *Extracts from The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind*, Nichiga asserts:

“The Object of Devotion is ‘*Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Nichiren.*’ To believe that both this *Daimoku* and the Grand Master [Nichiren] are the fundamental Buddha of the true cause (*hon'in-myō*) and the true identity of all Buddhas throughout the ten directions and three existences, and to understand this, is of the utmost importance” (*Essential Works of the Fuji School*, vol. 4, p. 179).

Additionally, in *Extracts from The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind*, Nichiga states:

“From the remote past of five hundred dust-particle kalpas to the present, the entire teaching activity of the response Buddha throughout his lifetime belongs to the provisional teaching (*shakumon*)” (*Essential Works of the Fuji School*, vol. 4, p. 171).

Here, Nichiga explicitly affirms the teaching that the entire teaching activity of the response Buddha throughout his lifetime is provisional, as taught in *The Transmission of the Heritage of the Law in the Hokke Hommon School and One Hundred and Six Articles*.

The doctrine of Nichiren as the Original Buddha is not only the fundamental teaching of the Taiseikiji temple lineage but also of the entire Nikkō school, with the exception of the Nichizon lineage (Kyoto Yōbōji temple school), which created an image of Shakyamuni Buddha. However, this doctrine does not promote an exclusive or authoritarian idea that only Nichiren is the fundamental Buddha. As Nichiren himself states in *The Entity of the Mystic Law*:

“The Buddha who is the entity of the lotus of the *Life Span* chapter of the essential teachings, embodying the uncreated three bodies—who is both the subject and the object, the land and the body, form and mind, both entity and function—is found among my disciples and lay supporters” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 617).

This expresses the idea that all who embrace the Mystic Law manifest themselves as the fundamental Buddha possessing the uncreated three bodies. Furthermore, as stated in *The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life*:

“The *Kuon-Jitsujō* Shakyamuni Buddha, the *Lotus Sutra*, which enables all people to attain enlightenment, and we, the sentient beings—all three are completely without distinction. Understanding this and chanting *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* is what is meant by *the heritage of the ultimate law of life*” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 1774).

This affirms that the Buddha, the Law, and sentient beings are fundamentally one and equal. The concept of an exalted being adorned with extraordinary physical characteristics, as described in sutras, is merely a conceptual construct and does not represent an actual Buddha. Instead, the true Buddha is the ordinary person who embraces the Mystic Law. This philosophy, known as ‘the immediate attainment of buddhahood by ordinary people (*bonpu-sokugoku*)’, is the core of Nichiren Buddhism. The Buddha is not to be sought outside oneself; buddhahood is inherent within one’s own life. Nichiren emphasizes this point in *The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon*, stating:

“You must never seek this *Gohonzon* outside yourself. The *Gohonzon* exists only within the fleshly heart of us ordinary people who embrace the *Lotus Sutra* and chant *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*. This is what is meant by ‘the true aspect of the mind, the king of the ninth consciousness, and the realm of true reality’” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 2088).

Later, Nikkō’s lineage, through its doctrinal systematization, was further refined by the 26th head priest of Taiseikiji temple, Nichikan. In *Commentaries on The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind*, Nichikan writes:

“The very body of us ordinary people, as we enter the path of the Buddha of the remotest beginning, is in its entirety the Original Eternal Self-Enjoyment Body from the remotest beginning of time” (*Collected Writings of Nichikan Shonin*, p. 488).

“If even for a moment we embrace the *Gohonzon*, our very existence becomes in its entirety the ultimate fulfillment of the uncreated three bodies” (ibid., p. 489).

Nichikan further states in *Commentaries on The Entity of the Mystic Law*:

“Empowered by the Mystic Law, we manifest as none other than Nichiren Daishonin, the Founder.” (ibid., p. 676).

This clearly declares that all who embrace the Mystic Law reveal the same life condition as Nichiren, the fundamental Buddha.

Thus, the doctrine of Nichiren as the Original Buddha is not a discriminatory belief that places Nichiren in an exclusive or privileged position of authority. Rather, it is a declaration of the dignity and equality of all people, asserting that everyone inherently possesses the Original Eternal Self-Enjoyment Body and can attain the same life state as Nichiren. (While all people are equal in essence, from the perspective of roles and positions, it is natural that Nichiren, as the first to propagate *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, is the mentor, while others are disciples.)

However, the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* completely ignores key doctrinal sources such as *The Transmission of the Heritage of the Law in the Hokke Hommon School* and *One Hundred and Six Articles*, failing even to mention them. It does not use the term Original Eternal Self-Enjoyment Body at all. Although it nominally refers to Nichiren as the original Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, it lacks the perspective of recognizing him as the fundamental Buddha. Furthermore, it does not adopt the stance that sees the physically adorned Shakyamuni Buddha as a provisional Buddha. Instead, it positions Nichiren merely as the ‘messenger’ of Shakyamuni, placing Shakyamuni above him.

This approach, in effect, negates the traditional doctrine of the Nikkō school and suggests a tendency to separate from the lineage of Nikkō altogether.

(8) The Degeneration of the Fuji School

① Corruption and Decline of the Clergy

After the passing of Nikkō and Nichimoku in 1333, the Nikkō school became organizationally fragmented, with temples such as Hota Myōhonji, Kyoto Yōbōji, Nishiyama Honmonji, Kitayama Honmonji, and Koizumi Kuonji splitting off from Taisekiji temple. Within the Fuji School (the Taisekiji temple lineage), which remained the central branch, corruption among the clergy progressed as the management of the religious order stabilized, deviating from the spirit of Nichiren and Nikkō. A striking example of this is an incident involving the ninth head priest, Nichiu. While he was away on missionary travels, three high-ranking priests who had been left in charge unilaterally sold Taisekiji temple itself, causing the temple to become a land of slander against the Law for six years. Upon his return, Nichiu managed to repurchase it for twenty kan of gold (*Ushi Monogatari Chōmonshō Kaseki-Jō, Essential Works of the Fuji School*, vol. 1, p. 185).

During the Edo period, under the seventeenth head priest Nissei, it was reported that many of Taisekiji's head priests sold off temple treasures for personal gain (*Essential Works of the Fuji School*, vol. 8, p. 59). According to the fifty-ninth head priest, Nichikō, during the early Meiji period, when the fifty-fifth head priest, Nippu, was in office, a high-ranking priest sold off the copper roof tiles of the five-storied pagoda, replacing them with tin roofing, while other monks indulged in pleasure-seeking within the temple grounds. The situation had deteriorated to the point where even some of the temple's branch lodges lacked abbots (*Daiyakurenge*, December 1956 issue).

In more recent times, the reckless indulgence of the sixty-seventh head priest, Nikken—who forcibly expelled Soka Gakkai—became widely known, including reports of extravagant luxury vacations at high-end inns and excessive entertainment. These incidents illustrate that many of Taisekiji temple's clergy had lost their sincere faith and instead viewed Buddhism as a means for fulfilling their selfish desires.

Additionally, factional disputes were rampant at Taisekiji temple. In 1926 (Taishō 15), during the election of a new head priest, a legal complaint was filed alleging threats against the previous head priest. This resulted in many priests being subjected to police investigations. Engulfed in corruption and internal strife, the Taisekiji temple lineage lost its missionary zeal and eventually transformed into a sect focused solely on funeral Buddhism. Consequently, compared to other branches, its religious influence remained stagnant. According to a 1904 (Meiji 37) survey by the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Fuji School had only 87 temples, 47 resident priests, and fewer than 30,000 followers, making it a minor religious organization with little growth.

② Formation of the Doctrine of Absolute Authority of the Head Priest

Another significant deviation that arose within the Fuji School was the development of a doctrine that regarded the head priest of Taisekiji temple as an absolute authority, equating the head priest with the *Gohonzon*. This doctrine, which could be described as 'faith in the head priest,' was first advocated by Sakyo Nikkyō (日教; 1428–unknown), a disciple of the ninth head priest, Nichiu, who had originally belonged to the Nichizon lineage (Kyoto Yōbōji temple branch) before transferring to the Fuji School. Nikkyō stated:

“The entity of the *Gohonzon* exists in the person of the present head priest. Encountering this head priest is equivalent to encountering the reincarnation of the saint (Nichiren) who has reappeared in the world” (*Essential Works of the Fuji School*, vol. 2, p. 309). He further declared:

“When one meets the head priest of the present era, one meets the Original Buddha” (*ibid.*, p. 329).

No one before Nikkyō had ever put forward such a doctrine of faith in the head priest. The background to Nikkyō's formulation of this unusual doctrine lies in the circumstances following the tenure of Nichiu. In 1482, the twelfth head priest, Nicchin, ascended to the position of head priest of Taisekiji temple at the age of only thirteen. He was,

in other words, a *chigo kanzu*—a child head priest. This marked the beginning of a period of approximately one hundred years during which boys, rather than fully trained monks, were appointed as head priests at Taisekiji temple.

At the age of thirteen, a child had not yet formally undergone ordination and was still in the stage of *chigo* (a pre-novice). Naturally, he could not yet have mastered advanced Buddhist doctrine, nor could he possess the capabilities necessary to manage a religious order that extended from the Tohoku region to Kyushu on a national scale. To strengthen the cohesion of the religious community, Nikkyō constructed a doctrine asserting that, regardless of whether the head priest was a child, it was the duty of believers to follow his directives unconditionally. He thus developed the doctrine of absolute faith in the head priest, asserting that the head priest himself was equivalent to the *Gohonzon*.

Needless to say, such a doctrine of absolute authority for the head priest represents a major deviation from the teachings of Nikkō. In *Twenty-six Admonitions of Nikkō*, Nikkō clearly states:

“Even if one is the head priest of the time, if he contrives doctrines contrary to Buddhism, he must not be followed”
(*Nichiren Daishōnin Goshō Zenshū*, New Edition, p. 2196).

This teaching by Nikkō is the complete opposite of faith in the head priest. However, in the history of the Taisekiji temple lineage, the doctrine of faith in the head priest, which Nikkyō arbitrarily fabricated to justify the authority of the head priest, has often been used as a tool for enforcing obedience. In recent years, when Nichiren Shoshu excommunicated the Soka Gakkai, the sect employed this doctrine of absolute authority of the head priest to justify its actions, asserting that it was unacceptable for the Soka Gakkai to disobey the instructions of the head priest. Without even providing an opportunity for dialogue or hearing the Soka Gakkai’s explanations, the excommunication was carried out unilaterally, demonstrating the authoritarian nature of the doctrine.

③ The Fiction of the *Dai-Gohonzon* of the Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching

One of the core doctrines of the Fuji School (Taisekiji temple lineage) is the belief in the so-called *Dai-Gohonzon* of the Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching as the fundamental object of worship. This *Dai-Gohonzon* is said to have been inscribed by Nichiren on October 12, 1279 (Kōan 2) and is currently enshrined at Taisekiji temple. It is a large wooden *Mandala Gohonzon*. However, recent research has revealed that this *Dai-Gohonzon* was not directly inscribed by Nichiren himself. Rather, it has been almost conclusively established that it was modeled after the *Gohonzon* that Nichiren originally depicted on May 9, 1280 (Kōan 3) and bestowed upon Nichizen, a disciple of Nikkō and one of his six principal disciples (Honroku). This copy was subsequently created and enshrined at Taisekiji temple through the patronage of lay believers (Hokkekō) during the tenure of either the sixth head priest Nichiji (日時) or the eighth head priest Nichiei (Akihiko Kinbara, Nichiren and the Transmission of the *Gohonzon*). The fact that the *Dai-Gohonzon* and the *Gohonzon* given to Nichizen share identical script and proportions in the inscription of “Nam-myōhō-rengē-kyō” strongly supports this conclusion.

There is no mention of the *Dai-Gohonzon* in any writings by Nichiren, nor in the records of the six senior priests, Nikkō’s direct disciples, or even in the recorded oral transmissions of the ninth head priest Nichiu. The first known reference to it appears in 1561, during the tenure of the thirteenth head priest, Nichiin. Initially, it was recognized as having been created by lay believers. Over time, however, a tradition emerged claiming that Nichiren himself had personally inscribed it, and this belief gradually took root throughout the entire Fuji School. From that point onward, the *Dai-Gohonzon* began to be emphasized as the foundation for asserting the superiority of the Fuji School over other Nichiren sects. The doctrine that Nichiren personally inscribed the *Dai-Gohonzon* of the Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching became widely accepted among both priests and lay believers of the Fuji School. However, from a historical perspective, it is a fiction constructed to assert the superiority of the Fuji School.

④ Misuse of Ritual Practices and Discrimination between Clergy and Laypeople

During the Edo period, when the Tokugawa shogunate implemented the temple registration system (*terauke-seido*), it became illegal to propagate Buddhism freely. As a result, the entire Japanese Buddhist community lost its dynamism and gradually transformed into a religion centered around funerary practices. The temples of the Taisekiji lineage were no exception to this trend. Within this environment, they placed increasing emphasis on funeral rites and other ceremonial practices (*kegi*), leading to a growing authoritarian stance among the clergy and reinforcing discrimination between priests and lay followers.

Ritual practices such as having a priest serve as the officiant (*dōshi*) at lay believers' funerals, assigning posthumous Buddhist names (*kaimyō*), and using wooden memorial stupas (*tōba*) inscribed by priests for memorial offerings all became common only after the Edo period. None of these practices existed during the time of Nichiren or Nikkō. However, the Taisekiji lineage falsely claimed that such rituals were intrinsic to Nichiren Buddhism, misleading followers and using these ceremonial practices as tools for controlling the laity.

⑤ Conformity to Political Power

One aspect of the Fuji School's transformation compared to the time of Nikkō was its increasing tendency to conform to political authority. After Nichiren's passing, the Kamakura shogunate ordered Nichiren-related religious groups, along with other Buddhist sects, to perform prayers for the subjugation of the Mongols and the safety of the state. This order came with the threat that refusal would result in the destruction of their temples. The Five Senior Priests obediently complied with this command. However, Nikkō refused to conduct prayers for the safety of the state alongside other sects.

Nikkō did not conform to political power; rather, he continuously admonished the shogunate and the imperial court. Needless to say, this followed the practice of national remonstrance (*kokushu kangyō*) that Nichiren himself carried out from the time he submitted *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land* until his final years. However, the practice of national remonstrance by the head priests of Taisekiji temple ended with the ninth head priest, Nichiu. After Nichiu, the attitude of maintaining tension in opposition to political power faded, and during the turmoil of the Sengoku period, a tendency emerged to accommodate political power in order to sustain the religious order.

During the Edo period, Taisekiji temple strengthened its ties with the Tokugawa shogunate. It received protection from Tokugawa Ieyasu's adopted daughter, Keidai-in, as well as from the official consort of the sixth shogun, Tokugawa Ienobu, Ten'ei-in. This inclination toward political conformity grew even stronger in the Meiji era and beyond. Taisekiji temple actively cooperated with the government's wars of expansion. For example, during the Russo-Japanese War, the 56th head priest, Nichiō, held a *Grand Prayer Ceremony for Victory in the War against Russia to Glorify the Imperial Authority*. The offerings collected at this event were then donated to the government as military funds.

During the Shōwa era, this trend continued. When the Pacific War broke out, the 62nd head priest, Nikkyō (日恭), issued an *Instruction* to the priesthood, declaring, "Today, His Majesty has solemnly issued the Imperial Proclamation of War against the United States and Great Britain. I am filled with awe, reverence, and deep emotion." Through this statement, he sought to boost the war spirit. Furthermore, throughout the war, Taisekiji temple actively contributed to the war effort by providing its buildings and temple bells to the military. In this way, it continued to support the war. It is worth noting that the Taisekiji School formally adopted the name Nichiren Shoshu in 1912 (Meiji 45).

(9) The Systematization of Doctrines by Nichikan

As mentioned earlier, after the passing of Nikkō, many deviations emerged within the Fuji school that strayed from the spirit of Nichiren and Nikkō. However, the fundamental doctrine that regards Nichiren as the fundamental Buddha (the Original Eternal Self-Enjoyment Body), inherently one with *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, remained unchanged. It was Nichikan (1665–1726), the 26th head priest of Taisekiji temple in the mid-Edo period, who organized and systematized this fundamental doctrine.

Nichikan authored the *Commentaries* on important *Gosho* called the *Mondan* and compiled a systematic doctrinal work known as the *Six-Volume Writings* (*Rokkan-shō*), which includes *The Threefold Secret Teaching*, *The Meanings Hidden in the Depths*, *The Interpreting the Text Based upon Its Essential Meaning*, *The Teaching for the Latter Day*, *The Practices of This School*, and *The Three Robes of This School*. He not only organized the teachings transmitted within the Fuji School up to that point—including the *Gosho*, the secret transmission texts such as *The Transmission of the Heritage of the Law in the Hokke Hommon School* and *One Hundred and Six Articles*, and the teachings of Nikkō and his direct disciples such as Sanmi Nichijun, as well as the doctrines of the ninth Head Priest Nichiu and those of Nichiyō and Nichiga of Hota Myōhonji temple—but also thoroughly structured the Fuji School's doctrinal framework.

As supporting evidence for his claims, Nichikan actively referenced transmission texts and *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*. These transmission texts and *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* had traditionally not been disclosed outside the lineage. However, *The Transmission of the Heritage of the Law in the Hokke Hommon School* and *One Hundred and Six Articles* had already been cited by Sakyo Nikkyō in the *Mukasa-shō* (1484), and *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* had been referenced by Enmyō-in Nitchō (日澄) of the Rokujō lineage (which held the doctrine of the unity of the provisional and essential teachings) in the *Hokke Keiun-shō* (1492). Thus, by the latter half of the 15th century, the contents of the transmissions within the Nikkō lineage were becoming increasingly known both within and outside the school. By Nichikan's time, there was no longer a need to keep these transmission texts secret. Instead, he took an active approach in disclosing them and using them as doctrinal evidence to substantiate the teachings of the Nikkō lineage.

Nichikan's thought encompasses a broad range of subjects, but one of its defining features is his emphasis on the distinction between the surface (literal) meaning and the meaning hidden in the depths of the *Lotus Sutra*, as well as the differentiation between the harvesting and the sowing (*shudatsu-sōtai*). Citing *The Six-Volume Writings*, Nichikan states:

“Shakyamuni is the lord of teachings for the harvesting, whereas Nichiren, the Founder, is the lord of teachings for the sowing. Therefore, he is called the lord of teachings of the true cause” (*The Six-Volume Writings*, p. 89).

Regarding the Three Great Secret Laws, Nichikan established a doctrinal distinction within the essential teaching's Object of Devotion (*Honmon no Honzon*), categorizing it into two aspects: the Dharma Object of Devotion (*Hō-Honzon*) and the Person Object of Devotion (*Nin-Honzon*). He defined the *Gohonzon*, depicted as a calligraphic mandala inscribed with *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, as the Dharma Object of Devotion, while identifying Nichiren, who revealed the *Gohonzon*, as the Person Object of Devotion. Furthermore, he emphasized the principle of Oneness of the Person and the Law (*Ninpō-ikka*), stating:

“The very body of Nichiren, the Founder, is entirely the Great *Mandala* embodying the mutual possession of the ten worlds” (*The Six-Volume Writings*, p. 177).

By doing so, Nichikan highlighted the unity of the Dharma Object of Devotion and the Person Object of Devotion, underscoring that the essence of the Object of Devotion in Nichiren Buddhism lies in the oneness of the *Gohonzon* and Nichiren himself.

Regarding the positioning of Nichiren as the Person Object of Devotion (*Nin-Honzon*), the idea that he is the reincarnation of Bodhisattva Superior Practices is merely an expedient and superficial role for guiding people, while his true inner realization is that of the Original Eternal Self-Enjoyment Body (*Kuon-Ganjo Jijuyūshin*) (The Six-Volume Writings, p. 86). The identification of Nichiren as Bodhisattva Superior Practices is simply a skillful means for leading people, whereas his true and ultimate inner state is that of the fundamental Buddha, inherently one with *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, the fundamental Law that enabled Shakyamuni to attain buddhahood. From this standpoint, Nichikan states:

“If we conform to the meaning hidden in the depths, the *true effect* is still the self-enjoyment body attained through the elevation of a response Buddha within the provisional teaching for instructing others (*keta*). However, this is not the Original Eternal Self-Enjoyment Body of the original state and self-practice (*jigyō*). [...] The *true effect* is still the attainment of buddhahood by a provisional Buddha for instructing others” (The Six-Volume Writings, p. 97).

Thus, he concludes that even the Kuon-Jitsujo Shakyamuni Buddha is a response Buddha expounded in accordance with the capacities of sentient beings and therefore a provisional Buddha.

Regarding the Dharma Object of Devotion, Nichikan maintains the doctrinal stance established by Nikkō that the Great *Mandala* is the Dharma Object of Devotion, stating:

“The Great *Mandala* is, indeed, the Dharma Object of Devotion” (The Six-Volume Writings, p. 173),

while firmly rejecting the enshrinement of statues of Shakyamuni Buddha.

Concerning the invocation of the *Daimoku* of the Essential Teaching (*Honmon no Daimoku*), Nichikan states:

“To believe in the Object of Devotion of the Essential Teaching (*Honmon no Honzon*) and chant *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*—this is called the *Daimoku* of the Essential Teaching (*Honmon no Daimoku*)” (The Six-Volume Writings, p. 107).

This means that simply chanting *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* toward erroneous objects such as a statue of Shakyamuni or the deity Kishimojin, as seen in the Minobu school, does not constitute the *Daimoku* of the Essential Teaching. The *Daimoku* of the Essential Teaching cannot be established independently of the Object of Devotion of the Essential Teaching; having correct faith in the true Object of Devotion is a prerequisite. Moreover, the place where one upholds faith in the Object of Devotion and practices the *Daimoku* of the Essential Teaching is the Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching (*Honmon no Kaidan*). Therefore, the Object of Devotion of the Essential Teaching is the foundation of the entire Three Great Secret Laws. The unifying principle of the Three Great Secret Laws is the One Great Secret Law (*Ichī-dai-hihō*), and Nichikan states:

“The One Great Secret Law is none other than the Object of Devotion of the Essential Teaching” (The Six-Volume Writings, p. 118).

Thus, he establishes the Object of Devotion as the root from which the Three Great Secret Laws derive their meaning.

Regarding the Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching, Nichikan defines it in two aspects: the ‘Sanctuary of Principle’ (*Gi no Kaidan*) and the ‘Sanctuary of Actuality’ (*Ji no Kaidan*). He explains that any place where the Great *Mandala* is enshrined becomes the Sanctuary of Principle (The Six-Volume Writings, p. 98). Additionally, he states that the Sanctuary of Actuality refers to the Sanctuary that will be established upon the fulfillment of the *Kosen-rufu* (the worldwide propagation of *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*), as indicated in On the Receiving of the Three Great Secret Laws.

In Nichiren Buddhism, the Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching is not a place where priests administer precepts as in conventional Buddhist ordination platforms. Instead, it signifies a place where all people can practice Buddhism.

Thus, any location where the Great *Mandala* is enshrined and where practitioners devote themselves to chanting *Daimoku* embodies the essence of the Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching.

Furthermore, in *On the Receiving of the Three Great Secret Laws*, Nichiren states:

“The Sanctuary is established when the nation and Buddhism are in harmony, when Buddhism aligns with the nation, and when the sovereign and his subjects together uphold the Three Great Secret Laws of the essential teaching. This should follow the precedent of King Possessor of Virtue and the monk Realization of Virtue, adapting that precedent to the evil and impure future age of the Latter Day. When the imperial decree and governmental proclamation are issued, a Sanctuary should be established on the most exalted and pure land, resembling the Pure Land of Sacred Eagle Peak. We must wait for the appropriate time. This is what is meant by the Sanctuary of Actuality” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 1387).

Here, Nichiren sets forth the establishment of the Sanctuary as a future goal, distinct from the ordinary concept of an ordination platform. Nichikan’s doctrine of the Sanctuary of Actuality is entirely consistent with this statement by Nichiren.

Furthermore, in *The Teaching for the Latter Day*, Nichikan refuted the doctrine of reciting the entire twenty-eight chapters of the *Lotus Sutra* (the doctrine of full sutra recitation) and the doctrine advocating the construction of statues of Shakyamuni Buddha (the doctrine of image worship), both of which were established by Nisshin (1508–1576), the 19th head priest of Yōbōji temple. The reason for this refutation was that, from the tenure of the 15th head priest, Nisshō (日昌), to the 23rd head priest, Nikkei, individuals from the Nichizon lineage of Kyoto Yōbōji temple served as the chief priests of Taisekiji temple (from 1596 to 1692). While the fundamental doctrines of the Fuji school were generally upheld during this period, elements of the Yōbōji lineage’s doctrines occasionally influenced Fuji school teachings. The appointment of Yōbōji-affiliated priests as head priests of Taisekiji temple was largely driven by economic considerations, as Yōbōji temple was flourishing at the time and its resources were used to sustain Taisekiji temple.

Among these priests, the 17th head priest, Nissei, leaned toward the doctrine of image worship, even going so far as to enshrine statues of Shakyamuni Buddha in Taisekiji’s branch temples. After Nissei’s passing, his successors made efforts to correct these deviations by removing the enshrined statues from the temples. Nichikan’s refutation of both the doctrine of full sutra recitation and the doctrine of image worship was part of this broader effort to restore orthodoxy.

As part of this corrective work, Nichikan clarified the contrast between the *Kuon-Jitsujō* Shakyamuni Buddha and Nichiren based on the transmission documents, as well as the teachings of Sanmi Nichijun and Nichiu. This contrast can be illustrated as follows:

Shakyamuni——True Effect——Magnificently Adorned Physical Attributes——Provisional Manifestation——Teaching Others by Adapting to Their Capacity——Self-Enjoyment Body Attained through the Elevation of a Response Buddha——Relative Superiority of Person and Law——Benefits of Harvesting

Nichiren——True Cause——Ordinary Person at the Stage of Name——Original State——Self-Practice——Original Eternal Self-Enjoyment Body——Oneness of the Person and the Law——Benefits of Sowing

Furthermore, in *The Practices of This School*, Nichikan emphasizes the superiority of Nichiren over Shakyamuni by referring to *On Reprimanding Hachiman*, where Nichiren states:

“The country of India is called the Moon Clan Country, the name signifying a place where the Buddha was to appear. The land of Fusō is called Japan; how could a sage not emerge here? The moon moves from west to east. The flow of Buddhist teachings from India to the east is a sign of this. The sun rises in the east. The return of Japanese Buddhism to India is an auspicious sign. The moon is not as radiant; during the Buddha’s lifetime, the Lotus Sutra was expounded for only eight years. The sun, however, surpasses the moon in brightness. It is an omen that Buddhism will illuminate the long darkness of the five five-hundred-year periods. The Buddha did not save those who slandered the *Lotus Sutra*—such people did not exist during his lifetime. But in the Latter Day of the Law, there will be countless opponents of the one vehicle. This is why the benefit of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging is needed” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 747).

Nichikan cites this passage to highlight how Nichiren demonstrated superiority over Shakyamuni by saving even those who slander the *Lotus Sutra*, whereas Shakyamuni did not. He further elaborates on this idea in *The Six-Volume Writings* (p. 210), reinforcing the notion of *Nichiren’s superiority and Shakyamuni’s inferiority*. This doctrine of *Nichiren’s superiority over Shakyamuni* is a fundamental principle of the Nikkō school, and Nichikan affirms that it is not an arbitrary claim of the Nikkō lineage but a doctrine that originates in Nichiren’s own thought.

Subsequently, Nichikan, in *The Practices of This School*, discusses the Three Treasures that appear in the Latter Day of the Law, defining the Buddha Treasure as Nichiren, the Dharma Treasure as the Object of Devotion of the Essential Teaching, and the Sangha (Order/Priest) Treasure as Nikkō (*The Six-Volume Writings*, p. 225). This is because Nichiren is the fundamental Buddha (the Original Eternal Self-Enjoyment Body), who bestowed *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* upon all living beings, thereby enabling universal enlightenment. Moreover, the Object of Devotion of the Essential Teaching, the *Gohonzon* as a scriptural mandala, represents the visualization of *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, and Nikkō is the sole disciple who transmitted Nichiren’s profound teachings correctly through the Oneness of Mentor and Disciple.

However, the content of the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation of Soka Gakkai* diverges significantly from Nichikan’s doctrinal teachings in many respects. The *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* introduces a perspective from the Soka Gakkai’s Department of Doctrinal Studies, which was presented when the organization revised its doctrinal provisions in the 2014 amendment of the Soka Gakkai Rules:

“The teachings of Nichikan Shonin, which had a major influence on the doctrinal interpretation of Nichiren Shoshu, contain both universally valid elements that clarify the correct doctrine of Nichiren Daishonin and elements shaped by historical constraints: in response to the need to preserve a weakened school during a succession of head priests from Yōbōji Temple, Nichikan emphasized the school’s exclusive orthodoxy. Going forward, it is necessary to distinguish between these two elements” (*Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, p. 2).

However, the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* does not explicitly delineate which aspects of Nichikan’s teachings are ‘universally valid’ and which are constrained by ‘historical circumstances.’ There is no in-depth analysis identifying which parts of Nichikan’s doctrine should be classified under either category. Furthermore, the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* entirely avoids using essential doctrinal concepts such as ‘Dharma Object of Devotion’ (*Hō-Honzon*), ‘Person Object of Devotion’ (*Nin-Honzon*), ‘Oneness of the Person and the Law’ (*Ninpō-ikka*), and ‘*Kuon-Ganjo*.’

Although the text verbally acknowledges Nichiren as the ‘original Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law,’ it nonetheless positions him solely as Shakyamuni’s representative, messenger, and designated inheritor. The *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* keeps Nichiren confined to the level of Bodhisattva Superior Practices, situating Shakyamuni above him as a superior figure. This fundamental stance makes it clear that, despite its superficial terminology, the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* essentially rejects the doctrinal position of the Nikkō school, which upholds the superiority of Nichiren over Shakyamuni.

The reason why the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* deliberately avoids using the term ‘Oneness of the Person and the Law’ lies in this fundamental stance. If this concept were adopted, then the ‘Law’ (*Hō*) would unquestionably be *Nam-myoho-rence-kyo*, and the ‘Person’ (*Nin*) would inevitably have to be Nichiren, as he was the first to expound *Nam-myoho-rence-kyo*. Since Shakyamuni never expounded *Nam-myoho-rence-kyo*, he cannot be regarded as the Buddha who is one with *Nam-myoho-rence-kyo*. This would make it impossible to place Shakyamuni above Nichiren. For this reason, the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* consistently avoids and ignores the concept of ‘Oneness of the Person and the Law.’

If one follows Nichikan’s teachings, this approach reflects an attachment to the provisional and external aspects of Buddhism, which serve only to guide sentient beings at a superficial level. By doing so, it completely disregards the true and profound inner realization of Nichiren.

Regarding the One Great Secret Law, while Nichikan identified it as the Object of Devotion of the Essential Teaching, the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation of Soka Gakkai* designates it as *Nam-myoho-rence-kyo* (pp. 158, 161). Until now, the Soka Gakkai has defined the One Great Secret Law as the Object of Devotion of the Essential Teaching (*The Basics of Doctrine*, p. 55). However, the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* changes the fundamental One Great Secret Law of the Three Great Secret Laws from the Object of Devotion to the *Daimoku*. This constitutes a significant doctrinal shift.

In fact, defining the One Great Secret Law as *Nam-myoho-rence-kyo* is precisely the doctrine of the Minobu school. The Minobu school’s *Comprehensive Outline of the Doctrines of Nichiren Buddhism* states:

“The Three Great Secret Laws were expounded based on the One Great Secret Law of *Nam-myoho-rence-kyo*, which the lord of teachings Shakyamuni of the Essential Teaching entrusted to the Bodhisattvas of the Original Doctrine (Bodhisattvas of the Earth) for the sake of the people in the Latter Day of the Law” (*Comprehensive Outline of the Doctrines*, p. 76).

Thus, it is evident that the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* has explicitly shifted the concept of the One Great Secret Law from the interpretation of the Nikkō school to that of the Minobu school.

Nichiren, following his *casting off the transient and revealing the true* during the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, began inscribing the *Mandala Gohonzon*. However, sects such as the Minobu school do not comprehend the significance of the *Mandala Gohonzon*. As a result, they treat the *Mandala Gohonzon* as merely one of many objects of worship, alongside images of Shakyamuni and other miscellaneous deities. Consequently, they lack a consistent definition of the Object of Devotion, and its form varies among different temples, leading to doctrinal confusion.

Because of this, these sects are unable to establish the Object of Devotion as the fundamental basis of the Three Great Secret Laws. Instead, they must rely on the *pre-casting off the transient and revealing the true* teachings that center around the *Daimoku* as their core doctrine. In the Minobu school’s system, making the *Daimoku* the central element of the Three Great Secret Laws results in the *Daimoku* being detached from the Object of Devotion. Consequently, this allows for chanting the *Daimoku* before various objects such as Buddha statues or the deity Kishimojin, which they still regard as the *Daimoku* of the Essential Teaching.

However, Nichiren himself explicitly states in the *Letter to Misawa*:

“The doctrines that I taught before my exile to Sado should be regarded as no different from the provisional teachings expounded by the Buddha prior to the *Lotus Sutra*” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 2013).

This statement clearly demonstrates that Nichiren’s position fundamentally changed after his *casting off the transient and revealing the true* and the subsequent commencement of the inscription of the *Mandala Gohonzon*.

Furthermore, in *The Opening of the Eyes*, Nichiren declares:

“The person named Nichiren was beheaded at the hour of the Rat on the twelfth day of the ninth month last year”
(*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 102).

Thus, Nichiren’s position before the Tatsunokuchi Persecution came to an end at that moment, and a new stage of his enlightenment emerged after that event. In other words, Nichiren’s identity transformed from that of Bodhisattva Superior Practices, entrusted by Shakyamuni, into that of the *fundamental Buddha*, who is one with *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, and before whom even Shakyamuni and Many Treasures stand as attendants. Recognizing this shift is essential.

Therefore, the approach taken by the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* and the Minobu school—defining the *Daimoku* as the One Great Secret Law and treating it as the core of Nichiren’s teachings—is a fundamental misinterpretation of Nichiren Buddhism. The *Mandala Gohonzon* is, without question, the *supreme purpose of Nichiren’s advent in the world* (*Reply to Abutsu-bō*, p. 1377). It is essential to understand the Three Great Secret Laws with the *Mandala Gohonzon*, which embodies Nichiren’s inner realization, as their foundation.

Regarding the Three Treasures, Soka Gakkai has traditionally followed the teachings of Nichikan, identifying the Treasure of the Buddha as Nichiren Daishonin, the Treasure of the Law (Dharma or Buddha’s teachings) as the *Gohonzon* of *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, and the Treasure of the Order (Sangha/Priest) as Nikkō Shonin (*An Introduction to Doctrine*, p. 273). However, the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation of Soka Gakkai* changes these definitions: it defines the Treasure of the Law as *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* itself, rather than the *Gohonzon* of *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, and replaces Nikkō as the Treasure of the Priest with Soka Gakkai (*Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, pp. 158–159). This means that, similar to its treatment of the ‘One Great Secret Law,’ it replaces the *Gohonzon* with the *Daimoku*.

It is worth noting that the Minobu school also regards the Treasure of the Law as the *Lotus Sutra*, and particularly *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* (Nichiren Buddhist Studies Institute of Rissho University, *Dictionary of the Writings of Nichiren Shōnin: Doctrinal Section*, p. 417). Thus, the stance of the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, which defines the Treasure of the Law as the *Daimoku* of *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, is identical to that of the Minobu school. The alteration of the Three Treasures is a major doctrinal revision, yet the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* provides neither an explanation of the changes nor the reasons for them.

Furthermore, regarding the Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching (*Honmon no Kaidan*), the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* not only completely disregards the ‘Sanctuary of Actuality’ (*Ji no Kaidan*) that Nichikan clearly identified based on the treatise *On the Receiving of the Three Great Secret Laws*, but also fails to provide any justification for doing so. Since no autograph manuscript of *On the Receiving of the Three Great Secret Laws* exists today, the Minobu school, which dismisses as forgeries all texts without an extant original or historical record of their existence, treats this work as a forgery. It is possible that the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* follows this Minobu school stance. However, as mentioned earlier, recent research using computational analysis has concluded that this text is more likely to be authentic. Since *On the Receiving of the Three Great Secret Laws* cannot simply be dismissed as a forgery, the fact that the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* completely ignores its reference to the Sanctuary of Actuality constitutes a fundamental deviation from the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin.

Of course, since Nichikan was the head priest of Taiseikiji temple, he naturally had an institutional obligation to assert the legitimacy and superiority of the Fuji school over other branches. For example, his emphasis on the *Dai-Gohonzon* as the central object of faith—based on the Taiseikiji temple tradition that Nichiren himself directly inscribed it—reflects his role as a leader of the religious order. However, Nichikan was not merely following sectarian interests; he grounded his doctrinal claims on his profound scholarship in Tiantai Buddhist studies, his analysis of the *Gosho* and orally transmitted teachings, and the philosophical tradition handed down through the Fuji school. His doctrinal interpretations were by no means arbitrary.

Although the modern emphasis on the *Dai-Gohonzon* as the doctrinal foundation is no longer applicable, and Nichikan introduced some unique terminologies, such as the ‘Six Great Secret Laws,’ his teachings as a whole do not deviate from the Fuji school doctrine transmitted since Nikkō.

The *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* states:

“Among Nichikan’s teachings, those interpretations that align with ‘the *Gosho* as the foundation’ and ‘direct connection to the Daishonin’—as well as those that contribute to the faith and practice of Soka Gakkai members in advancing *Kosen-rufu*—will naturally continue to be valued” (*Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, p. 159).

However, in reality, there are no citations from Nichikan in the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, and its treatment of essential doctrines—such as the One Great Secret Law, the Three Treasures, and the Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching—directly contradicts his teachings. Despite its claim that Nichikan’s ideas will ‘continue to be valued,’ the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* effectively denies and entirely ignores Nichikan’s doctrinal framework. This approach demonstrates that the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* is moving toward a deliberate departure from the lineage of the Nikkō school.

(10) The History of the Soka Gakkai and Its Excommunication from Nichiren Shoshu

The Soka Gakkai was founded in November 1930 (Shōwa 5) by its first President, Tsunesaburō Makiguchi (1871–1944), and its second President, Jōsei Toda (1900–1958). At the time, it was known as the ‘Soka Kyoiku Gakkai’ (Value-Creation Educational Society). The foundation of this organization was preceded by the fact that, in 1928—two years prior—Makiguchi and Toda became believers of Nichiren Shoshu and converted to Nichiren Buddhism. (The Fuji school had officially adopted the name ‘Nichiren Shoshu’ in 1912.) Of the two, Makiguchi was the first to convert, later guiding Toda to take faith. At that time, Makiguchi was an educator serving as the principal of Shirokane Elementary School in Minato-ku, Tokyo. He was also a geographer who had authored *Jinsei Chirigaku* (*Geography of Life*, 1903), the first systematic work on human geography in Japan. Furthermore, he was an educational theorist who, through his research on value philosophy, developed an original pedagogical approach known as ‘Soka Education.’

Although Makiguchi had not adhered to any particular religion until that point, he had a strong interest in religious thought. He attended Christian church services to listen to sermons by pastors, practiced Zen meditation, and frequently participated in lectures organized by Kokuchūkai, a lay Buddhist organization founded by Chigaku Tanaka, a Nichiren sect Minobu school priest who advocated for nationalism. However, none of these experiences moved him deeply. Regarding this, Makiguchi later wrote:

“None of them had the power to either shift my scientific and philosophical inclinations or harmonize with them”
(*An Outline of the System of Soka Education, The Collected Works of Tsunesaburō Makiguchi*, vol. 8, p. 405).

The decisive factor that led Makiguchi to convert to Nichiren Shoshu was his dialogue with Sokei Mitani (1878–1932), a Nichiren Shoshu lay believer and the principal of a commercial school. According to sources such as the *Chronology of the Three Soka Gakkai Presidents*, Makiguchi was deeply moved after hearing about Nichiren Buddhism from Mitani. He visited Mitani’s home every day for ten consecutive days, engaging in intense discussions. After these ten days of dialogue, Makiguchi came to feel that Nichiren Buddhism was precisely the religion he had been searching for. With firm conviction, he decided to take faith in Nichiren Buddhism and became a lay believer of Nichiren Shoshu.

Makiguchi was not only a seasoned educator but also an intellectual with broad knowledge across multiple disciplines, including the most advanced scholarship of his time. He was well-versed not only in the various Nichiren sects but also in religious studies as a whole. It is highly likely that his discussions with Mitani included the differences between the Nikkō school and other Nichiren schools. Given this, the fact that Makiguchi ultimately chose to become a believer of Nichiren Shoshu suggests that he had concluded that the true orthodoxy of Nichiren Buddhism lay in the Nikkō school rather than in other Nichiren sects.

The Soka Kyoiku Gakkai was originally founded by Makiguchi as an organization dedicated to the promotion and implementation of his educational philosophy. However, as all its members became adherents of Nichiren Shoshu, the organization’s activities gradually took on an increasingly religious character. By around 1936, the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai had transitioned from being a scholarly society for educational studies into a religious organization that focused on the practice and propagation of Nichiren Buddhism. Makiguchi recognized that Nichiren Shoshu had inherited the orthodox doctrine of Nichiren Buddhism, but at the same time, he did not conform to the institutional structure of the sect, which remained confined to funeral Buddhism and exhibited deviations such as discrimination between clergy and lay believers. While Makiguchi respected the doctrines of Nichiren Shoshu, he maintained the independence of the Gakkai, managing its operations and guiding its members’ faith without submitting to clerical authority. However, Makiguchi’s respect for Nichiren Shoshu’s doctrines is evident in the fact that, from around 1936, he, together with Josei Toda and other key leaders, enthusiastically attended lectures given by the 59th head priest Nichikō and the 65th head priest Nichijun (日淳), diligently studying Nichiren Buddhist teachings.

In contrast to Nichiren Shoshu, where faith had become a mere formality and was disconnected from daily life, Makiguchi positioned Nichiren Buddhism as a ‘practical way of living’ that enabled individuals to attain victory in their lives. He utilized the value theory he had developed as a means to guide people to Nichiren Buddhism. On this point, Makiguchi stated the following in his ‘Interrogation Record’ after his arrest:

“The unique value of what I have done lies in incorporating value theory into the faith principles of Nichiren Shoshu within the framework of a lay organization. This is precisely what distinguishes the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai.”
(*The Collected Works of Tsunesaburō Makiguchi*, vol. 10, p. 188)

As these words of Makiguchi indicate, the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai, as a lay believers' organization within Nichiren Shoshu, naturally based its faith on the doctrines of Nikkō's school. However, some of the Nichiren Shoshu priests and traditional lay believers opposed the Gakkai, to which Makiguchi responded with the following admonition:

“Not only the believers of erroneous teachings within the Nichiren sect, but even if one is a believer of Nichiren Shoshu, should they harbor jealousy and resentment toward those who are sincerely practicing the great good of life, they will fall into the condition described in the *Lotus Sutra*, where ‘though they believe in the *Lotus Sutra*, they will receive no benefit but instead invite punishment upon themselves’” (*The Collected Works of Tsunesaburō Makiguchi*, vol. 10, p. 49).

As the Pacific War progressed and government suppression of religion intensified, the differences between the Gakkai and Nichiren Shoshu became increasingly apparent. In June 1943, the Nichiren Shoshu Administrative Office summoned Makiguchi and other leaders of the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai to Taisekiji temple, instructing them to guide members to accept Shinto talismans. However, Makiguchi, adhering strictly to the fundamental principle of Nichiren Buddhism that strictly forbids slander of the Law, immediately refused. While the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood succumbed to government pressure out of fear of persecution, Makiguchi resolved to uphold the purity of his faith, even at the cost of persecution. As a result, in July of the same year, Makiguchi, Toda, and 19 other Soka Kyoiku Gakkai leaders were arrested and imprisoned under charges of lèse-majesté and violations of the Peace Preservation Law. All of the leaders, except for Makiguchi and Toda, abandoned their faith, leading to the near destruction of the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai.

Makiguchi died in November 1944 at the Tokyo Detention House. However, in July of the following year, Toda was released and immediately began rebuilding the organization. Recognizing that the primary reason for the leaders' abandonment of faith was their lack of doctrinal depth, Toda renamed the organization ‘Soka Gakkai’ and revived its structure and activities by delivering lectures on the *Lotus Sutra* and *Gosho* to a small number of followers. Alongside propagation activities, he made doctrinal study a central pillar of Soka Gakkai activities. Upon assuming the presidency as the second Soka Gakkai President in 1951, Toda immediately set forth the goal of publishing a complete collection of *Gosho* and entrusted its compilation to the 59th head priest Nichikō. The Soka Gakkai edition of *The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, completed in April 1952, was distinguished by its inclusion of transmitted writings such as *The Transmission of the Heritage of the Law in the Hokke Hommon School*, *One Hundred and Six Articles*, and *Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, as well as doctrinal texts passed down in the Nikkō lineage, such as *On Refuting the Five Priests*, *Guidelines for Believers of the Fuji School*, and *Twenty-six Admonitions of Nikkō*.

Following this, Toda also initiated the publication of lectures on the ten major *Gosho*, including *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land*, *The Opening of the Eyes*, and *The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind*. His fundamental approach remained faithful to the teachings of the Nikkō lineage and particularly respected the doctrinal expositions of Nichikan, the great systematizer of this lineage. For example, in the preface to his lecture on *The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind*, Toda wrote:

“This *Gosho* represents the very essence of Buddhist philosophy, the highest principle among the highest principles. Throughout history, countless scholars have attempted to interpret this writing, yet none have fully grasped the profound intent of the founder, Nichiren Daishonin. It was solely the 26th head priest, Nichikan Shonin of Taisekiji temple, who elucidated the founder’s profound teachings in their entirety. Indeed, before Nichikan Shonin, there was no one who could do so, and after him, no further philosophical explanation is necessary. I firmly believe this to be true. Thus, this lecture has been composed solely on the basis of Nichikan Shonin’s lectures, without deviation from them.” (*The Collected Works of Josei Toda*, vol. 3, p. 378)

While Toda upheld the teachings of the Nikkō lineage, he also sought to articulate Nichiren Buddhism in contemporary terms. Drawing from his own prison realization that ‘the Buddha is life itself,’ he authored essays such as *On Life Theory*, much as Makiguchi had done with his *Theory of Value*, demonstrating his commitment to explaining Nichiren Buddhism in a way accessible to modern audiences rather than being confined to traditional doctrinal frameworks.

After the publication of *The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Soka Gakkai placed great emphasis on studying the *Gosho* and the *Six-Volume Writings*, conducting annual doctrinal examinations classified by levels of proficiency. The theoretical and ideological confidence gained through this doctrinal study became the driving force behind propagation, leading to an explosive expansion of the movement after Toda assumed the presidency. As a result, the number of Soka Gakkai households, which was approximately 4,000 when Toda became President, exceeded 750,000 by the time of his passing in 1958. In a short period, Toda transformed Soka Gakkai into one of Japan’s leading Buddhist organizations.

Daisaku Ikeda (1928–2023), who succeeded Toda as the third President in 1960, consistently upheld the doctrinal principles of the Nikkō school, following Toda’s path. This commitment was evident in the lectures he gave on texts such as *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* and *One Hundred and Six Articles*. In the preface to the first volume of *Lectures on the Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, published in 1965, Ikeda stated:

“The *Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* embodies the very essence of Nichiren Daishonin’s philosophy and serves as a scripture that conveys the profound transmission of Buddhism. This profound transmission was orally conveyed in the latter years at Minobu, based on key passages of the *Lotus Sutra*, explaining the ultimate principle of the ‘true cause sowing’ and the exclusive, unique essential teaching hidden in the depths of the sutra. This was passed down to Nikkō Shonin, the direct successor, who then recorded it in writing.” Similarly, in the preface to the *Lectures on One Hundred and Six Articles*, published in *Daibyakurenge* magazine in 1977, Ikeda wrote:

“The content of the *One Hundred and Six Articles* thoroughly elucidates the profoundly hidden doctrines in the meaning hidden in the depths of the Daishonin’s Buddhism, exposing in the clear light of day the rigorous contrast between sowing and harvesting benefits in Nichiren Buddhism versus the Buddhism of Shakyamuni, with not even the slightest ambiguity. This is precisely the brilliant, singular, and ultimate teaching of the essential teachings, radiantly illuminating from the heart of Nichiren Daishonin, the Original Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law—a sun of eternity that shines upon the bleak and degenerate future. It deepens our conviction in this reality.”

Although there were occasional frictions between Soka Gakkai and Nichiren Shoshu due to differences in organizational nature, the two fundamentally pursued a harmonious path of cooperation between clergy and laity. Soka Gakkai adhered to the doctrines of Nichiren Shoshu, while Nichiren Shoshu respected Soka Gakkai’s achievements in propagating Buddhism. Since the time of President Toda, Soka Gakkai not only constructed and donated temple buildings to Taisekiji temple but also established numerous branch temples throughout Japan to support the priesthood (the total number of temples built or renovated and donated by Soka Gakkai to Nichiren Shoshu reached 356). Under this cooperative relationship, Soka Gakkai continued to grow, and during Ikeda’s presidency, its membership exceeded 7.5 million households.

However, the 67th head priest Nikken (1922–2019) demanded that Soka Gakkai submit to the authority of the priesthood. In 1990, he suspended Ikeda's position as Chief Lay Representative of the Hokkekō lay society. He refused Soka Gakkai's request for dialogue and, in the following year, forcibly excommunicated Soka Gakkai. The reason for the excommunication was not that Soka Gakkai had committed any doctrinal errors; rather, it was solely based on the assertion of the absolute authority of the head priest and the claim that Soka Gakkai's refusal to obey him was unacceptable. However, as discussed earlier, the doctrine of the absolute authority of the head priest is not part of the original teachings of Nichiren or Nikkō but a later construct, diverging from the true doctrine. In essence, the excommunication itself was an unjustifiable act without any legitimate basis in Buddhism.

Moreover, by excommunicating Soka Gakkai, which had been propagating Nichiren Buddhism in Japan and worldwide, Nichiren Shoshu effectively abandoned Nichiren's most fundamental mandate—*Kosen-rufu*, or the widespread propagation of the teachings. This act constituted a grave violation of Nichiren's intent. Consequently, by enforcing the excommunication, Nichiren Shoshu forfeited its legitimacy as the rightful heir of the Nikkō lineage and, in reality, severed itself from the Nikkō school.

The excommunication of the Soka Gakkai by Nichiren Shoshu ultimately resulted in the organization freeing itself from the constraints of the priesthood. However, this did not bring any fundamental change to its respect for the doctrines of the Nikkō lineage. A clear indication of this is *The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra* (a six-volume series) that Ikeda published starting in 1996. This work, which discusses each of the twenty-eight chapters of the *Lotus Sutra* in a dialogue format, strongly criticizes Nichiren Shoshu's doctrine of the absolute authority of the head priest and its teachings on the superiority of the clergy over the laity. At the same time, it develops its arguments based on the doctrines of the Nikkō lineage.

For example, in Volume Four of *The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra*, Ikeda references passages from *One Hundred and Six Articles* and the concept of *The Transmission of the Heritage of the Law in the Hokke Hommon School*. Additionally, references to and citations from Nichikan appear throughout all six volumes, demonstrating that even after the excommunication by Nichiren Shoshu, Ikeda remained committed to upholding the teachings of the Nikkō lineage, particularly those represented by Nichikan's doctrinal system. Moreover, until just before his passing in 2023, Ikeda continued to publish lectures on key passages from *Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* under the title "The Buddhism of the Sun That Illuminates the World" in the magazine *Daiyakurenge*. This fact further reveals Ikeda's unwavering intent.

In contrast, the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation of Soka Gakkai* completely disregards not only *The Transmission of the Heritage of the Law in the Hokke Hommon School*, *One Hundred and Six Articles*, and *Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* but also the entire doctrinal system of Nichikan. This approach diverges significantly from the spirit of the three successive Presidents of the Soka Gakkai, who recognized the legitimacy of the Nikkō lineage and respected its doctrines.

Although the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* was published immediately after Ikeda's passing and claims to have been supervised by him, its content significantly deviates from Ikeda's ideological framework during his lifetime. Thus, the assertion that the book was under Ikeda's supervision can be seen as an attempt to misuse his name rather than a genuine reflection of his doctrinal stance.

(11) Can Nikkō Be Excluded from the Treasure of the Priest?

The *Book on Doctrinal Foundation of Soka Gakkai* clearly demonstrates a strong tendency to distance itself from the Nikkō lineage, most notably by excluding Nikkō from the Treasure of the Priest (also known as the Treasure of the Sangha or the Treasure of the Order) within the Three Treasures. Traditionally, the Soka Gakkai has regarded Nikkō as the Treasure of the Priest. Additionally, when discussing the Treasure of the Priest in a broader sense, it has considered the Soka Gakkai—an organization that correctly inherits and propagates the Three Treasures through a harmonious sangha—to fall within this broader category (*The Basics of Doctrine*, p. 137; *An Introduction to Doctrine*, p. 274).

However, the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, while it states:

“After the passing of the Daishonin, it was Nikkō Shonin who correctly inherited and transmitted his Buddhism. And in the present age, the Soka Gakkai follows the example of Nikkō Shonin and promotes the worldwide propagation of the Daishonin’s teachings exactly as stated in the *Gosho*” (*Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, p. 159),

it deliberately refrains from defining Nikkō as the Treasure of the Priest. Instead, it asserts:

“In the present age, the Soka Gakkai, as the organization that correctly transmits *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, constitutes the Treasure of the Priest” (ibid.).

The *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* offers no explanation for why Nikkō has been excluded from the Treasure of the Priest. This omission itself is a major issue. Fundamentally, the Three Treasures—Buddha, Dharma (Law), and Priest (Order/Sangha)—are not only principles of Nichiren Buddhism but also foundational to Buddhism as a whole. Nichiren states in *Explaining the Causation of the Ten Worlds*:

“Those who give their allegiance to the three treasures and abide by the five precepts will be born in the world of human beings” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 464).

This indicates that the Three Treasures are the objects of refuge (*Nam*, or taking refuge). The current *Gongyo Liturgy* of the Soka Gakkai includes the recitation:

“I take refuge in Nikkō Shonin and express my profound gratitude.”

This suggests that Nikkō is acknowledged as the Treasure of the Priest, an object of refuge (*Nam*). However, the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* eliminates the distinction between the Treasure of the Priest as an object of refuge and the broader definition of the Treasure of the Priest, immediately asserting that the Soka Gakkai itself is the Treasure of the Priest. If the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* is to be followed, will the *Gongyo Liturgy* be revised to state:

“I take refuge in the Soka Gakkai and express my profound gratitude”?

In Buddhist tradition, the Three Treasures—Buddha, Law, and Priest—are objects of refuge. If the Treasure of the Priest is equated with the Soka Gakkai, then the organization itself risks becoming an object of refuge. This would elevate the organization to an absolute status, effectively making it the object of faith, leading to what can be termed ‘*Organizational Faith*.’ This tendency is reflected in the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, which emphasizes the term ‘Soka Gakkai Buddha.’

This phrase originally came from a statement made by Josei Toda regarding the distant future. The *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* introduces the following statement by Daisaku Ikeda:

“Toda Sensei once made a remark. He said, for instance, that even though there are currently many Soka Gakkai members, at some point in the future—when exactly, we do not know—if a new sutra is expounded by another Buddha, that Buddha might bear the name ‘Soka Gakkai Buddha’” (*Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, p. 194).

As is evident from this statement, Toda was merely suggesting the possibility that, in the distant future, the Soka Gakkai might be praised as a Buddha. He did not assert that the Soka Gakkai as it exists today is already the Buddha itself. However, if this original intent is ignored and the term *Soka Gakkai Buddha* is emphasized in isolation, it could be misinterpreted as asserting that the current Soka Gakkai is already an object of refuge, thereby reinforcing a claim of the organization's absolute and infallible nature.

Regardless of the religious organization in question, it is ultimately a group of human beings. There is no possible historical or social condition under which a human collective's decisions and actions can be deemed absolutely correct and infallible. In fact, in the history of the Soka Gakkai itself, there have been instances where terms previously used were later officially abandoned. For example, at the 1970 Headquarters General Meeting, the Soka Gakkai President publicly declared that the organization would no longer use the term *National Ordination Platform* (*Kokuritsu Kaidan*). This decision was made because continuing to use the term was deemed inappropriate and a misinterpretation of Nichiren Buddhism.

Since infallible human beings do not exist, neither can an infallible human organization. If the religious organization itself were to be made an object of refuge, it would constitute the same error as the *Faith in the Head Priest* (*Hossu Shinkō*) doctrine of Nichiren Shoshu—an erroneous belief in something that should not be the object of refuge.

The *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* identifies the Soka Gakkai as the Treasure of the Order, but it does not explicitly state whether this Treasure of the Order is an object of refuge. The wording is deliberately ambiguous and unclear. If the Soka Gakkai itself were made an object of refuge, it would lead to *Organizational Faith*, analogous to the *Faith in the Head Priest* doctrine. On the other hand, if it is not to be an object of refuge, then the identification of the Soka Gakkai as the Treasure of the Order would remain consistent with the broader, traditional interpretation of the term. In that case, the modifications regarding the Treasure of the Order made in the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* would be unnecessary and inappropriate.

As of 2023, the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation of Soka Gakkai* has altered the concept of the Treasure of the Priest, replacing Nikkō with the Soka Gakkai. This immediately raises the question: What was considered the Treasure of the Priest before the emergence of the Soka Gakkai? If, before the founding of the Soka Gakkai, the Treasure of the Priest was Nikkō, but after its establishment, it became the Gakkai, does this imply that the Treasure of the Priest changes according to historical periods?

At the time of its founding, the Soka Gakkai (then known as the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai) likely had only a few dozen members. Was it already considered the Treasure of the Priest at that stage? Or was it only recognized as such after reaching a certain scale? This point is also left unclear.

Nichiren states in *Examining the True Word School*:

“If one slanders the correct teaching, the consequences will be the ruin of the nation and descent into hell—this is beyond doubt. Slandering the correct teaching means slandering the Buddha and slandering the priesthood. This is because the Three Treasures are inherently one. This is a passage from the *Nirvana Sutra*” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 840).

As Nichiren indicates, the Three Treasures, as the objects of refuge, are inherently indivisible. In Nichiren Buddhism, the Buddha Treasure (Nichiren himself) and the Dharma Treasure (the *Mandala Gohonzon*) are one entity due to the principle of Oneness of the Person and the Law. (The *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* altered the Dharma Treasure from the *Gohonzon* to the *Daimoku*, aligning with the Minobu school, which is inappropriate.) Additionally, Nichiren and the Treasure of the Priest, Nikkō, are one due to the principle of *Oneness of Mentor and Disciple*.

Since the Three Treasures, as objects of refuge, are inherently one, they constitute the fundamental doctrine of every Buddhist school. They are not something that can be casually altered according to changing historical circumstances.

For instance, if a Buddhist sect that had traditionally regarded Shakyamuni as the Buddha Treasure were to suddenly change its Buddha Treasure from Shakyamuni Buddha to Amida Buddha or Dainichi Nyorai, such a sect would no longer be recognized as a legitimate Buddhist school.

Altering the Three Treasures, which form the core of a Buddhist sect, would be equivalent to denying its own fundamental doctrine—it would amount to the sect’s religious suicide. In this sense, the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation*’s recent irresponsible and arbitrary changes to the doctrines of the Treasure of the Law and the Treasure of the Priest, without sufficient explanation, are utterly astounding and must be deemed highly inappropriate. In *The Four Debts of Gratitude*, Nichiren states:

“Speaking of the debt of gratitude to the priesthood, the Treasures of the Buddha and the Dharma always remain only because of the presence of the Treasure of the Priest (Sangha/Order). Just as there can be no fire without fuel or no grass or trees without the earth, even though the Buddhist Law exists, if there were no priests to learn and transmit it, it would not have been passed down through the two thousand years of the Former and Middle Days of the Law into the Latter Day of the Law” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 1217). This passage expresses the fundamental principle that, even if the Treasures of the Buddha and the Dharma exist, Buddhism cannot continue unless there is a proper successor to transmit them correctly to future generations as the Treasure of the Priest.

Nichiren established the great Buddhist Law of the Three Great Secret Laws for the salvation of all humanity. However, the only person who truly grasped Nichiren’s innermost intent and transmitted his orthodox doctrine to later generations was Nikkō alone. Without Nikkō, Nichiren Buddhism would have perished with Nichiren’s passing. No matter how great Nichiren may be, Nichiren Buddhism does not exist solely through him. For this reason, the Nikkō lineage has always regarded Nikkō alone as the sole Treasure of the Priest.

It goes without saying that the existence of the Soka Gakkai today is also due to Nikkō. If Nikkō had not existed, the Soka Gakkai would not exist either. In this sense, the exclusion of Nikkō from the Treasure of the Order in the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation of Soka Gakkai* is not merely an act of ingratitude toward Nikkō but also a failure to recognize the absolute importance of Nikkō in transmitting Nichiren Buddhism to future generations.

The Three Treasures, which are the objects of refuge, are as follows:

- **The Treasure of the Buddha:** Nichiren, the Original Buddha, who was the first to propagate the fundamental Law of *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*.
- **The Treasure of the Law (Dharma):** The *Mandala Gohonzon*, which embodies *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*.
- **The Treasure of the Priest (Order/Sangha):** Nikkō, the successor of Nichiren in *Oneness of Mentor and Disciple*.

There is no rational reason why this understanding should suddenly be changed today (If there is a valid reason, it must be explicitly demonstrated. If one alters the doctrinal foundation of the Three Treasures without providing such justification, it will lead to the destruction of Buddhism itself). Since Soka Gakkai has always upheld and propagated these Three Treasures, it is only natural to continue recognizing it as the broader meaning of the Treasure of the Priest (Order/Sangha), as has been done until now.

(12) Errors and Questionable Points in the Book on Doctrinal Foundation

The *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* claims to respect academic research, stating that it incorporates ‘academic findings’ (*Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, p. 5). However, in reality, it contains numerous elementary academic errors.

For instance, it is commonly stated that Shakyamuni’s first sermon (*First Turning of the Wheel of the Law*) took place at Sarnath (Deer Park) near Varanasi. However, the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* asserts that “the Four Noble Truths were presented in the First Turning of the Wheel of the Law (Shakyamuni’s first sermon)” (*Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, p. 21), which is based on outdated academic theories. According to modern scholarly research, this is incorrect. As Dr. Hajime Nakamura states, “The association of the sermon at Sarnath with the Four Noble Truths emerged considerably later in history” (*Gautama Buddha I*, p. 489). The systematization of the Four Noble Truths occurred much later and was not part of Shakyamuni’s initial teaching immediately after attaining enlightenment.

This example illustrates a broader issue: academic findings from any given period are not absolute and may later be disproven as scholarship advances. Treating a particular moment’s academic consensus as an immutable truth can lead to significant errors.

Additionally, the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* states that “Shakyamuni Buddha’s central teaching is liberation from suffering” (*Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, p. 21). However, the concept of liberation from suffering as an ideal, which is central to the doctrine of nirvana, aligns with the views of Hinayana or sectarian Buddhism and is inaccurate as a description of Mahayana Buddhism.

In Hinayana Buddhism, enlightenment (nirvana) is understood as the cessation of earthly desires, but in reality, as long as people live, suffering cannot be entirely eliminated. The notion of ‘liberation from suffering’ is merely theoretical. Both Shakyamuni and Nichiren faced various forms of suffering, including illness, until the end of their lives. Mahayana Buddhism does not advocate the elimination of earthly desires but instead teaches that suffering serves as a catalyst for progress and growth—this is expressed in the doctrines of *bonnō-soku-bodai* (earthly desires are enlightenment) and *shoji-soku-nehani* (sufferings of birth and death are nirvana).

Nichiren affirms this in *Reply to Shijō Kingo*:

“The *Universal Worthy Sutra* explains the essence of the *Lotus Sutra*: ‘One does not need to sever earthly desires or abandon the five desires’ [...]. Tiantai Zhiyi states in the *Great Concentration and Insight*: ‘Earthly desires are enlightenment, sufferings of birth and death are nirvana’” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 1606).

The idea that attaining nirvana means escaping the cycle of birth and death across past, present, and future, thereby attaining liberation from suffering, was in fact a provisional doctrine adopted by Buddhism to accommodate the religious environment of ancient India. Dr. Hajime Nakamura notes:

“The teaching of nirvana itself was merely a convenient doctrine borrowed from other religious traditions in ancient India and was no more than a provisional teaching for Buddhism” (*Ethics in Early Buddhism*, p. 239).

In this sense, the assertion in the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* that “Shakyamuni Buddha’s central teaching is liberation from suffering” is inappropriate.

Furthermore, the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* states:

“In Indian Buddhism, the concept of the True Dharma and the Semblance Dharma emerged. After the Semblance Dharma period, it was believed that a new Buddha would appear to teach the Dharma. In contrast, in China, the period following the Semblance Dharma was referred to as the Latter Day of the Law, in which the Buddha’s teachings were considered to decline and disappear” (*Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, p. 62).

This passage implies that Indian Buddhism did not have a concept of the Latter Day of the Law as an era in which the Buddha’s teachings would perish. However, whether such a categorical statement can be made without qualification is questionable.

The *Great Collection Sutra*, compiled in the sixth century, explicitly describes the coming of an era in which the Buddha’s teachings will disappear, stating that after two thousand years following Shakyamuni’s passing, there will be a period of the “disappearance of the White Dharma (pure law)” (*Taishō Tripitaka*, vol. 13, p. 363). The term “Latter Day of the Law” (*mappō*) is also mentioned, stating, “Either at the present time, in the future, or at the end of the kalpa, in the era of the Latter Day of the Law” (*ibid.*, p. 267).

Similarly, the *Lotus Sutra* mentions:

“If one wishes to propagate this sutra in the Latter Day of the Law after the Thus Come One’s passing, one must abide by the peaceful practices” (Peaceful Practices chapter, p. 431).

“In the evil age of the Latter Day of the Law, if one can uphold this sutra” (*Distinctions in Benefits* chapter, p. 513).

In addition to the *Lotus Sutra*, other Mahayana sutras such as the *Flower Garland Sutra*, *Accumulated Great Treasures Sutra*, and *Contemplation on the Mind-Ground Sutra* also explicitly introduce the concept of the Latter Day of the Law. Given this evidence, it would be an overstatement to claim that Indian Buddhism lacks the concept of the Latter Day of the Law.

The *Book on Doctrinal Foundation of Soka Gakkai* not only contains several errors regarding Indian Buddhism but also raises many questions about its understanding of the *Lotus Sutra* and Nichiren Buddhism.

For example, regarding the entrustment of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth in the *Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One* chapter, the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* states:

“In the *Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One* chapter 21, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth vow to propagate the *Lotus Sutra* after Shakyamuni’s passing, and in response, Shakyamuni entrusts the *Lotus Sutra* to them” (*Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, p. 30).

Such wording implies that the law entrusted and propagated by the Bodhisattvas of the Earth is the surface (literal) meaning of the *Lotus Sutra*. However, as discussed earlier, what the Bodhisattvas of the Earth propagate is not the surface *Lotus Sutra* but *Nam-myoho-rence-kyo*, the meaning hidden in the depths. This is clearly stated in the *Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*:

“This *Myoho-rence-kyo* is not Shakyamuni’s Mystic Law. This is because, in this chapter, he entrusts it to Bodhisattva Superior Practices” (*The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, p. 1072).

“The entity of ‘able to eradicate’ (*nōmetsu*) is *Nam-myoho-rence-kyo*” (*The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, p. 1074).

The *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* completely ignores the teachings of the *Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, but it is an undeniable fact that what Nichiren propagated was not the surface *Lotus Sutra* but *Nam-myoho-rence-kyo*. Therefore, the wording in the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, which implies that the Bodhisattvas of the Earth propagate the surface *Lotus Sutra*, may mislead readers and is inappropriate.

Additionally, regarding Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* states:

“The practice of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging is presented as a past practice of Shakyamuni himself, and it is revealed that this was the cause of his attainment of buddhahood” (*Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, p. 32).

While the *Never Disparaging* chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* describes Bodhisattva Never Disparaging as Shakyamuni’s past practice before his enlightenment, the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* merely traces the surface meaning of the text without deeper interpretation. However, as Nichiren states in *Reply to Hakiri Saburō*:

“Shakyamuni, by recounting his own causal-stage practices, encourages the beginning of the Latter Day” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 1810).

Thus, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging should not be seen merely as a past identity of Shakyamuni during his causal-stage practice, but rather as an expression of the practice of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth who will emerge in the Latter Day of the Law.

The conduct of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, who propagated the correct Law through opposition, enduring persecution by canes, sticks, tiles, and stones, stands in stark contrast to the propagation of Shakyamuni, which was fundamentally based on guiding people through positive connections. Nichiren emphasizes this in *On the Buddha’s Prophecy*, stating:

“During the Middle Day of the Law of the Buddha Awesome Sound King, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging broadly propagated the twenty-four-character phrase, ‘I deeply respect you,’ throughout that land, inviting great persecutions, including being attacked with canes and sticks by an entire nation. Though his twenty-four-character phrase and these five characters differ in words, their intent is the same. The final stage of the Middle Day of the Law and the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law are completely identical. Bodhisattva Never Disparaging was one who rejoiced upon first hearing the Law, while I, Nichiren, am an ordinary person at the stage of name” (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 609).

This indicates that Nichiren’s propagation aligns with the actions of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. Since the *Never Disparaging* chapter illustrates the mode of Buddhist practice in the Latter Day of the Law, Nichiren further states:

“The essence of the entirety of the Buddha’s teachings is the *Lotus Sutra*, and the essence of practicing the *Lotus Sutra* lies in the *Never Disparaging* chapter” (*The Three Kinds of Treasure, The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 1597).

For this reason, the explanation of the *Never Disparaging* chapter given in the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation of Soka Gakkai*, which remains confined to the surface (literal) meaning of the scripture, is inadequate and inappropriate when examined in light of Nichiren’s own teachings.

The *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* deliberately obscures the distinction between the surface (literal) meaning and the meaning hidden in the depths of the *Lotus Sutra*, giving the impression that the law Nichiren propagated was the *Lotus Sutra* in its surface meaning and that enlightenment is possible through practicing the surface meaning of the *Lotus Sutra*. This confusion appears in multiple passages.

For example, the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* states:

“Before long, the Daishonin traveled to Kamakura, the political center of the military government, and began propagating the *Lotus Sutra*” (*Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, p. 40).

“The Daishonin taught ‘attaining buddhahood in this lifetime’ and developed the Buddha realm within his own life through the faith and practice of the *Lotus Sutra*” (ibid.).

“The Daishonin unequivocally states that those who base themselves on the highest teaching, the *Lotus Sutra*, will inevitably attain buddhahood in this lifetime” (*Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, p. 116).

However, what Nichiren propagated was *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* of the Three Great Secret Laws—not the surface (literal) *Lotus Sutra*. Moreover, as Nichiren clearly states, no matter how much one practices the surface meaning of the *Lotus Sutra*, one cannot attain buddhahood.

Of course, for Nichiren, the term *Lotus Sutra* has multiple meanings. At times, it refers to the surface (literal) *Lotus Sutra*, while at other times, it represents *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* as expounded in the meaning hidden in the depths or the *Gohonzon* in the form of the mandala. However, an approach that exploits this ambiguity to obscure the distinction between the surface (literal) and the meaning hidden in the depths—namely, the relative superiority of sowing and harvesting—is identical to the stance of the Minobu school.

The many elementary errors and questionable points found throughout the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* show that it was produced through closed-door discussions among only a very small number of people, without examination from multiple perspectives. In this sense, the process by which the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* was compiled is itself problematic.

(13) Conclusion

The reason why the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation of Soka Gakkai* nominally refers to Nichiren as the ‘original Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law’ while simultaneously maintaining throughout that he is merely the ‘Messenger of Shakyamuni = Bodhisattva Superior Practices,’ positioning Shakyamuni as superior to Nichiren, seems to stem from being constrained by the historical fact that Buddhism originated with Shakyamuni. Historically speaking, Buddhism began with a single individual—Shakyamuni—and without him, Buddhism itself would not have come into existence. As long as one adheres to this historical fact, it is natural to conclude that the origin of Buddhism lies solely in Shakyamuni and that someone like Nichiren, who appeared later, cannot possibly be considered a fundamental source that surpasses Shakyamuni.

However, such a perspective is merely an attachment to the apparent history observed in front of us. In Buddhism, all things, including the universe itself, undergo cycles of formation, continuance, destruction, and emptiness, meaning that time is cyclical rather than linear. In reality, there is neither a beginning nor an end, neither before nor after, as all phenomena exist in a state of beginningless and endless existence.

The historical Shakyamuni Buddha, who was born in India, may have realized the fundamental Mystic Law in his inner realization, but he never explicitly revealed and expounded the Mystic Law itself to others. According to the *Life Span of the Thus Come One* chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, even the *Kuon-Jitsujo* Shakyamuni Buddha, who attained buddhahood an inconceivably distant time ago, was a Buddha brought into being by the Mystic Law—he is a Buddha of true effect. The fundamental cause that enables all Buddhas to attain buddhahood is *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, which is implied in the meaning hidden in the depths of the *Life Span* chapter.

If Nichiren, who was the first to reveal *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* to all people, is understood as the Buddha inherently possessing this fundamental cause of buddhahood, then it is entirely logical to position Nichiren, as the lord of teachings of the true cause, as the fundamental Buddha surpassing Shakyamuni, who was merely a Buddha of true effect. This is because the status of a person is determined by the profundity and height of the Law (or philosophy) that they expound, given that the person and the Law are one and the same.

Additionally, another reason why the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation of Soka Gakkai* places Shakyamuni above Nichiren is likely a strategic decision based on the assumption that positioning Shakyamuni as superior would make Soka Gakkai more acceptable on the global stage. In reality, Nichiren’s name is still not well known worldwide, whereas the name of Shakyamuni (Gautama Siddhartha), the founder of Buddhism, is widely recognized even among the general public. Thus, for Soka Gakkai to expand internationally, it would likely be more palatable to present Nichiren as Shakyamuni’s messenger, entrusted with his teachings.

The doctrine that Nichiren, an otherwise obscure monk who appeared in 13th-century Japan, is actually the fundamental Buddha who surpasses even Shakyamuni—along with the idea that all people who embrace *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* also partake in this fundamental Buddha nature—is an unprecedented and astonishing doctrine in the history of global religion and academia, including within the Vatican and other religious institutions. Because this doctrine could be perceived as an outrageous, almost fantastical assertion, it is likely that Soka Gakkai determined that boldly emphasizing it on the global stage would not be a strategically wise move.

The doctrine of Nichiren as the Original Buddha, which identifies Nichiren as the fundamental Buddha (the Original Eternal Self-Enjoyment Body; *Kuon-Ganjo Jijuyūshin*), remains a minority view even within Japan’s academic community. Most scholars of Nichiren Buddhism in Japan are affiliated with various sects, including the Minobu school, while very few belong to the lineage of Nikkō. Given this academic landscape, it is only natural that the doctrine of Shakyamuni as the original Buddha dominates over the doctrine of Nichiren as the Original Buddha in scholarly discourse.

The *Book on Doctrinal Foundation of Soka Gakkai* states that it places emphasis on “objectively explaining the doctrines of the Soka Gakkai to society at large” and strives to “incorporate the findings of academic research.” From this statement, it is evident that the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* is highly conscious of its evaluation by the academic community. Its approach of rejecting *Gosho* that lack original manuscripts or ancient transcriptions, adhering to an extreme textual criticism perspective, as well as its decision to alter key doctrinal terms—such as replacing One Great Secret Law and Treasure of the Law from the *Gohonzon* to the *Daimoku*—aligns with the stance of the Minobu school. These tendencies suggest an effort to accommodate the preferences of the academic establishment, which is predominantly composed of monks from the Minobu school and similar sects. This attitude even reflects a sense of inferiority toward academia.

However, modifying one’s fundamental religious doctrines merely for the sake of missionary convenience or external validation is utterly misguided—it is an act of self-sabotage that undermines the very essence of the religion itself. The true nature of a religion is to firmly uphold its own teachings, persistently communicate them to society, and persuade people through their inherent truth, rather than compromising its doctrinal foundation to align with external opinions.

Regarding the positioning of Nichiren, three distinct perspectives must be considered:

- ① **The historical perspective**—Nichiren succeeded and further developed Buddhism’s humanistic principle of universal enlightenment but went beyond the limitations of traditional Buddhism, thereby founding a new Buddhist tradition.
- ② **The scriptural perspective**—Nichiren corresponds to Bodhisattva Superior Practices, who was entrusted by Shakyamuni Buddha to propagate Buddhism in the Latter Day of the Law.
- ③ **The intrinsic perspective**—Nichiren inscribed his own inner realization in the *Gohonzon*, where ‘*Nam-myoho-rence-kyo*, *Nichiren* (*Kaō*: Nichiren’s seal)’ is prominently written at the center, flanked by Shakyamuni Buddha, Many Treasures Buddha, and Bodhisattva Superior Practices, indicating his true identity as the fundamental Buddha.

Nichiren articulated his role within Buddhist orthodoxy in *On the Buddha’s Prophecy*, where he positioned himself within the lineage of “four teachers of the three countries”—Shakyamuni Buddha, Tiantai Zhiyi, Dengyō Daishi, and Nichiren. This corresponds to ‘① The historical perspective’ mentioned above.

At the age of sixteen, Nichiren was ordained at Seichōji Temple, a Tendai monastery in his hometown. He then traveled extensively to Kamakura, Kyoto, and Nara, where he studied Buddhist doctrines deeply, particularly those of the Tendai school, which was the primary Buddhist tradition in Japan at the time. However, at the age of thirty-two, he made his declaration of the establishment of his school, initiating the propagation of *Nam-myoho-rence-kyo*, which even Shakyamuni, Tiantai, and Dengyō had not accomplished. Nichiren inherited the Buddhist tradition, but at the same time, he transcended its limitations and founded a new form of Buddhism.

Nam-myoho-rence-kyo is the fundamental Law that saves the people of the Latter Day of the Law, who cannot attain salvation through Shakyamuni’s teachings. The standing of an individual in Buddhism is determined by the profundity of the Law they uphold. From the historical perspective alone, the relative superiority of Nichiren over Shakyamuni—that is, the superiority of Nichiren and the inferiority of Shakyamuni—is evident.

In the *Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One* chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, the entrustment for propagation after the Buddha’s passing is described, where the *Kuon-Jitsujō* Shakyamuni Buddha entrusts the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, particularly their leader, Bodhisattva Superior Practices, with this mission. Since it was Nichiren who propagated *Nam-myoho-rence-kyo*, which was hinted at in the meaning hidden in the depths of the *Lotus Sutra*, in the Latter Day of the Law, Nichiren corresponds to Bodhisattva Superior Practices. This represents ‘② The scriptural perspective’ categorized above.

In the sutra, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are described as disciples whom Shakyamuni Buddha has been training since the remote past (as stated in the *Emerging from the Earth* chapter). Following this literal interpretation of the sutra, Bodhisattva Superior Practices is merely the messenger of Shakyamuni, the one entrusted by him, and is thus positioned as subordinate to Shakyamuni. This is the understanding upheld by sects outside the Nikkō school, such as the Minobu school and other branches.

Nichiren, in his standard writings, frequently identified himself and his followers as the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, adhering to this doctrinal positioning in the sutra. This was done to assert the legitimacy of his propagation using the *Lotus Sutra*.

However, upon a deeper reading of the *Lotus Sutra*, it becomes evident that the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are not merely disciples or agents entrusted by Shakyamuni. This has been previously pointed out, but it is further emphasized in the *Emerging from the Earth* chapter, where Maitreya Bodhisattva, representing the assembly, expresses doubt when Shakyamuni states that he has been teaching these Bodhisattvas since the remote past. Maitreya compares this to a twenty-five-year-old man claiming that a hundred-year-old elder is his son—an assertion that seems utterly implausible.

As Tiantai Zhiyi states in *Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*, “All of them are ancient Buddhas.” This indicates that while the Bodhisattvas of the Earth appear in the sutra as bodhisattvas, this is merely their outward function (provisional role). In essence (inner realization), they are already Buddhas who possess the Mystic Law. That is, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are Buddhas who outwardly take the form of bodhisattvas—in other words, they are ‘Bodhisattva-Buddhas.’

Conventional Buddhas, including Shakyamuni Buddha as the lord of teachings in the *Lotus Sutra*, take the form of beings adorned with magnificent physical attributes, embodying the ultimate realization of buddhahood—the ‘Buddha of the true effect,’ a perfected being who has attained the goal. In contrast, Bodhisattva Buddhas, who outwardly take on the appearance of bodhisattvas still engaged in practice, are ‘Buddhas of the true cause.’ Therefore, while the *Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One* chapter outwardly describes an entrustment from a Buddha to a disciple, its deeper significance is that of a transition in the lord of teachings—from Shakyamuni, the Buddha of true effect, to Superior Practices, the Buddha of true cause.

The Nikkō school also identifies Nichiren as the reincarnation of Bodhisattva Superior Practices. However, it does not view Superior Practices merely as Shakyamuni’s disciple. Instead, it regards Superior Practices’ original identity as that of the Buddha of the true cause. This marks a fundamental difference from other sects. Thus, the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation of Soka Gakkai*, which, like the Minobu school, consistently positions Nichiren as the “Messenger of Shakyamuni,” remains confined to the surface (literal) meaning of the Lotus Sutra and fails to reach its deeper meaning.

The doctrinal positioning of Nichiren’s inner realization, categorized above as ‘③ The intrinsic perspective,’ is evident in the configuration of the *Gohonzon*, where the inscription ‘*Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Nichiren (Kaō)*’ is prominently placed in the center, with Shakyamuni and Many Treasures positioned as subsidiary figures on either side. Many of Nichiren’s original *Gohonzon* omit Shakyamuni and Many Treasures altogether. This signifies that, in Nichiren’s inner realization, *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* and Nichiren himself are fundamental, while Shakyamuni is a subordinate figure.

Nikkō, when transcribing the *Gohonzon*, always inscribed *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Nichiren (Zaigohan*: presence of verification seal) at the center and rigorously enforced this practice among his disciples. This demonstrates that Nikkō faithfully transmitted the doctrinal positioning of Nichiren’s inner realization as expressed in the *Gohonzon*’s configuration.

In the various letters addressed to his disciples, Nichiren did not reveal his original identity but consistently described himself in terms of his position according to the sutras, referring to himself as the ‘Messenger of

Shakyamuni, the lord of teachings' or the 'forerunner of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.' This was because he took into account the capacities of his disciples, who had not yet fully comprehended the profound depths of Nichiren Buddhism. However, since the *Gohonzon* constitutes the foundation of doctrine, in manifesting the *Mandala Gohonzon*, Nichiren did not adjust its depiction according to the capacities of individual disciples but directly revealed the true Dharma that he had awakened to internally.

Nichiren's statement in *Questions and Answers on the Object of Devotion*, where he describes Shakyamuni as a being generated from *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 304), and his declaration in *The True Aspect of All Phenomena* that Shakyamuni is a 'provisional Buddha' (*The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, New Edition*, p. 1789), both express this dimension of his inner realization.

Similarly, in *Letter to Shimoyama*, Nichiren states that he himself is 'a practitioner more important than the lord of teachings, Shakyamuni' (*ibid.*, p. 299), and in *Petition by the Assembly at Ryūsen-ji*, he explicitly refers to himself as the 'Sage who is Lord of the Law' (*ibid.*, p. 881). These statements affirm his inner realization.

Therefore, when defining Nichiren as the 'Original Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law,' one must do so in accordance with the perspective of the inner realization manifested in the *Mandala Gohonzon*, identifying him as the fundamental Buddha, intrinsically one with the Mystic Law (Oneness of the Person and the Law), with Shakyamuni positioned as an attendant. The *Book on Doctrinal Foundation of Soka Gakkai*, however, completely ignores the depiction of the *Mandala Gohonzon*, and although it verbally identifies Nichiren as the 'original Buddha of the Latter Day,' it ultimately continues to position him as merely the messenger of Shakyamuni. This is a disguised logical contradiction and must be regarded as a form of deception.

The *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* disregards fundamental concepts such as 'Kuon-Ganjo' and 'Oneness of the Person and the Law,' as well as essential doctrinal texts such as *The Transmission of the Heritage of the Law in the Hokke Hommon School, One Hundred and Six Articles*, and *Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*. As a result, it effectively alters the core doctrines that Soka Gakkai has upheld since its founding. While there may be an understandable aspect to the Soka Gakkai's intention to establish its own doctrinal system independent of Nichiren Shoshu following its separation, it cannot be overlooked that, in doing so, it is undermining the very fundamental doctrines of the Nikkō lineage upon which it has historically been based. If the doctrinal revisions outlined in the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* continue, Soka Gakkai risks transforming into an entirely different organization from the one that was shaped by its three successive Presidents.

The *Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, in its rejection of Nichiren Shoshu, also negates the teachings of the Nikkō lineage, particularly the doctrinal system represented by Nichikan. However, even if Soka Gakkai rejects Nichiren Shoshu, it must not deny the doctrines of the Nikkō lineage. This is because correct Nichiren Buddhism cannot exist apart from the lineage of the mentor and disciple relationship between Nichiren and Nikkō.

In reality, there is no need to think along the lines of 'Since Soka Gakkai has become independent from Nichiren Shoshu, it must establish its own distinct doctrine.' The Buddhism founded by Nichiren and inherited by Nikkō was left for all humankind; it is not something that can be monopolized by a single sect such as Nichiren Shoshu. Since Nichiren Shoshu has abandoned *Kosen-rufu*, the greatest mission entrusted by Nichiren, thereby disqualifying itself from the lineage of the Nikkō school, the Soka Gakkai should simply continue to uphold and propagate the fundamental doctrines of Nichiren Buddhism, as it has always done (Of course, while maintaining doctrinal integrity, a modernized and contemporary interpretation of these teachings is necessary for their effective propagation in today's era).

The *Book on Doctrinal Foundation of Soka Gakkai* makes significant changes to key doctrines without openly acknowledging them and offers no explanation for the reasons behind these changes. In short, it is structured in such a way that readers are not made aware of the substantial deviations from traditional doctrine, and for those unfamiliar with prior teachings, it creates the impression that the contents of the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation*

represent the original doctrines of the Soka Gakkai. While it may be said in general that religious doctrines can, to some extent, be modified in response to changing times, such changes must be the subject of open and thorough discussion within the organization. By contrast, the approach of secretly implementing doctrinal revisions in a way that prevents members from noticing them amounts to nothing less than a deceptive act.

If those responsible for the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation* are confident in the legitimacy of its doctrinal changes, a broad study campaign should have been launched within the organization to ensure that those changes were thoroughly understood. Yet no such campaign has been undertaken. This attitude suggests that they lack confidence in the doctrinal changes and instead feel a sense of unease or guilt about them. Seeking to entrench the doctrinal changes by accumulating facts accomplished, without thoroughly informing the membership, so that the changes take root before members notice them, may be described as deceptive.

Another issue lies in the opaque process that led to the publication of the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation*. There is no evidence of any internal discussion within the organization. The actual makeup and internal positioning of the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation Compilation Committee* that edited the volume remain unclear. Article 11 of the Soka Gakkai Rules stipulates: “The President shall determine matters concerning doctrine and formalities. In such cases, the matter shall be referred to the Council of Teachers and the Supreme Leadership Council for consultation.” The term ‘consultation’ (*shimon*) is defined in *Meikyō Kokugo Jiten* as ‘seeking the opinion of experts or specific bodies.’

While a meeting of the Council of Teachers was held in connection with the publication of the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, it remains unknown to what extent meaningful discussion of the content actually took place, or what opinions were expressed. As for the Supreme Leadership Council, no public announcement has been made regarding its convening. If the Council of Teachers was reduced to a mere formality, and the Supreme Leadership Council was not convened at all during the publication of a doctrinally transformative text like the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, then this would constitute a violation of the Soka Gakkai Rules and may be regarded as a procedural defect.

According to the current Soka Gakkai Rules, the President holds the authority to render decisions on doctrinal matters. However, this does not imply an unlimited authority to determine doctrine arbitrarily. The redefinition of Nichiren—previously upheld as the fundamental Buddha (the Original Eternal Self-Enjoyment Body: *Kuon-Ganjo Jijuyūshin*)—to a subordinate ‘messenger of Shakyamuni,’ placing him beneath Shakyamuni Buddha, along with the alterations to the essential content of the Treasure of the Law (Dharma) and Treasure of the Priest (Sangha/Order)—which together with the Buddha comprise the three treasures—constitute fundamental changes that damage the doctrinal identity that any religious organization must preserve. These changes may be considered a serious overreach of doctrinal adjudicatory authority. Combined with procedural flaws, they could even be deemed legally invalid.

Fundamentally, religious doctrine forms the core of each believer’s worldview and system of values. If such foundational doctrines—constituting the very life of one’s faith—are suddenly altered without prior explanation and believers are then required to accept them, might this not, by disturbing their inner peace, give rise to the risk of infringing what may be called their ‘religious personality rights’?

From the various perspectives outlined above, this book has examined the issues surrounding the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation of Soka Gakkai*. In conclusion, this doctrinal text is inappropriate as an official doctrinal statement of the organization for the following reasons:

- ① It fundamentally alters the core doctrines of Soka Gakkai without sufficient explanation—placing Nichiren below Shakyamuni Buddha and modifying the doctrinal contents of the Treasure of the Law (Dharma) and Treasure of the Priest (Order/Sangha).

- ② From both academic and doctrinal standpoints regarding Nichiren Buddhism, the text contains numerous errors and questionable assertions.
- ③ Procedurally and legally, the text presents potential problems.

Therefore, I believe that this text should be promptly withdrawn. Even Confucius, who lived before the emergence of Buddhism, remarked, “If you make a mistake, do not hesitate to correct it” (*The Analects*). No organization is infallible. It is only natural that trial and error occur in the course of any institution’s history. When something inappropriate arises, candidly retracting and correcting it is the mark of sincerity.

As stated in the Preface, members of the Soka Gakkai, including the author, came to know the correct teachings of Nichiren Buddhism through the Soka Gakkai and were thereby able to walk a path toward a fulfilling and happy life. With deep appreciation for the role that the Soka Gakkai has played in propagating Nichiren Buddhism throughout Japan and the world, I have written this book in the hope that it may serve, even in a small way, to help ensure the organization’s continued development without compromising its religious “correctness.” I would be deeply gratified if readers understand this modest intention behind my writing.

Author Profile

Haruo Suda

Born in Tokyo, February 1952

Graduated from the Faculty of Law, The University of Tokyo, March 1977

Retired from his position as a staff member at the Soka Gakkai Headquarters, February 2012

Publications (in Japanese unless otherwise specified)

(1) *A New Edition: The Thought and Life of Nichiren* (Chōeisha, 2016)

(2) *The Nikkō School and the Soka Gakkai* (Chōeisha, 2018)

(3) *Revised Edition: A New Treatise on the Lotus Sutra—Modern Translation and Commentary on Each Chapter* (Amazon Paperback, 2022)

(4) *Modern Translation: A Geography of Human Life*, Vols. I & II (Amazon Paperback, 2022)

(5) *Mythos and Wisdom* (Amazon Paperback, 2023)

(English version of the chapter-by-chapter commentary from the above “A New Treatise on the Lotus Sutra”)

(6) *A Consideration of the Doctrine of Nichiren as the Original Buddha: Questions Regarding the Miyata Thesis* (Amazon Paperback, 2024)

(7) *A New Edition: The Philosophy of Life Transformation—The Potential of Nichiren Buddhism* (Chōeisha, 2024)

A Critique of the Book on Doctrinal Foundation of Soka Gakkai from the Perspective of Buddhist History: In Light of Nichiren Buddhism as the Global Religion Taught by SGI President Daisaku Ikeda

Author: Haruo Suda

Original Japanese edition published: August 2024

Translator's Note

Mr. Haruo Suda formerly served as a Vice President of the Soka Gakkai and as a National Vice Leader of its Study Department. SGI President Daisaku Ikeda personally entrusted him with the development of the Soka Gakkai's doctrinal study. As a co-author of *The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra*, one of President Ikeda's seminal works, Mr. Suda contributed to a text that has been translated into numerous languages and cherished worldwide as a foundational study material for SGI members engaged in deepening their understanding of Nichiren Buddhism. After retiring in 2012 from his position as a staff member at the Soka Gakkai Headquarters, Mr. Suda has continued his scholarly work through writings focused on Buddhist doctrine.

In view of the content of this volume, the literal English translation of its original Japanese title—A Study of the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation of Soka Gakkai* from the Perspective of Buddhist History (『創価学会教学要綱』の考察—仏教史の視点から)—may strike the reader as somewhat modest in tone. Considering Mr. Suda's standing as a key figure in the development of Soka Gakkai doctrine, as well as the depth and purpose of this work—written in the context of his lifelong dedication alongside his mentor, President Ikeda, to the advancement of Nichiren Buddhism as a world religion—the Translator has chosen to render the English title with the subtitle:

A Critique of the Book on Doctrinal Foundation of Soka Gakkai from the Perspective of Buddhist History: In Light of Nichiren Buddhism as the Global Religion Taught by SGI President Daisaku Ikeda.

This phrasing more appropriately conveys the scholarly stance and global vision embedded in the work, helping readers understand its significance. In translating the body of the text, the Translator has sought to convey the meaning of Mr. Suda's Japanese original as accurately and faithfully as possible. The initial English draft was produced with the assistance of machine translation and was subsequently subjected to human review.

Where passages from the *Gosho* or other scriptural works appear, the English renderings do not always rely on previous Soka Gakkai publications. As a result, the phrasing may differ from existing translations, but every effort has been made to render the doctrinal meaning accurately and precisely. Some passages may still require further refinement, and any necessary corrections will be made in future editions.

The first English edition was published on April 2, 2025. For this revised second edition, the English translation was rechecked against the Japanese original. Clear typographical errors and inconsistencies in names, titles, dates, citations, and technical terminology were corrected, and passages in which doctrinal distinctions had not been fully preserved were revised. These editorial and translational revisions do not alter Mr. Suda's arguments. Further refinements may be made in future editions.

Of particular note, the Translator wishes to call the reader's attention to the following statement by Mr. Suda regarding the supervision of the *Book on Doctrinal Foundation*, based on his close working relationship with President Ikeda during his most active years:

“Although the Book on Doctrinal Foundation was published immediately after Ikeda's passing and claims to have been supervised by him, its content significantly deviates from Ikeda's ideological framework during his lifetime. Thus, the assertion that the book was under Ikeda's supervision can be seen as an attempt to misuse his name rather than a genuine reflection of his doctrinal stance.” (p. 54)

Moreover, since the early documents of the Nikkō school have yet to be widely translated into English, this book—featuring Mr. Suda's careful interpretations—represents a meaningful and valuable contribution.

August 2026 — The Translator