

CHAPTER 5

The Doctrine of the High Priest's Infallibility

Nichiu's tenure as the ninth high priest spanned some forty-eight years until he retired and transferred the office to

Protecting a Child High Priest

Nichijo in 1467. Nichiu moved to Sugiyama in Kai province where he had a temple built. In 1470, Nichijo transferred the office to Nittei. However, both Nichijo and

Nittei died in 1472, and Nichiu came out of retirement to assume the office of high priest once again.

According to *The Chronology of the Fuji School*, Nichiu transferred the lineage to thirteen-year-old Nitchin, the twelfth high priest, in 1482, but the exact date is unknown (vol. 1, p. 87). In 1526, Nitchin, known as the "child high priest," appointed eight-year-old Nichiin as his successor. The following year Nitchin died, and Nichiin became the thirteenth high priest at nine.

In fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Japan, feudal lords often inherited their family estates when they were very young, and family stewards were entrusted with their education and care until they were old enough to assume the administrative responsibilities. Following this secular custom,

the priesthood at Taiseki-ji began appointing the children of powerful feudal lords as successors to the office of high priest. This indicates both the shortage of capable candidates and the influence of family lineage.

Many priests and members of the head temple's parish expressed deep concern about the ability of these children, especially in their understanding of Buddhist doctrine. When Nitchin became high priest at thirteen, his patron priest, Sakyo Nikkyo, propounded a new doctrine to silence this criticism—the infallibility of the high priest. Sakyo Nikkyo writes: “To have an audience with the high priest, who is a reincarnation of the Sage [Nichiren], is to meet and form a relationship with the living Sage [Nichiren]” (*Essential Writings of the Fuji School*, vol. 2, p. 309); “When those who embrace the [Lotus] Sutra have an audience with the current high priest, they meet with the original Buddha” (*ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 329); and “Each successive high priest who received the transmission of the heritage of the Law is the Gohonzon as Sage Nichiren” (*ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 29).

Sakyo Nikkyo equated the Daishonin with the current high priest by linking the two through the erroneous notion of the transmission of the heritage of the Law. Simply put, Sakyo Nikkyo invoked the Daishonin's name to deify the high priest, but he cites no doctrinal basis from the Daishonin's writings. In the history of the Fuji School, the concept of the high priest's infallibility was put forth only when his ability and authority were in question and needed support.

According to records kept by Nichiji, the sixth high priest, Nikko Shonin is said to have stated that if he grows old and senile and starts invoking the name of Amida Buddha, he must be abandoned (*The Record of Taiseki-ji*). Nikko Shonin also states: “Do not follow even the high priest if he

goes against the Buddha's Law and propounds his own views" (GZ, 1618). It was with full awareness of the possibility of an aberrant high priest that Nikko Shonin made these statements. He clearly did not espouse the doctrine of the high priest's infallibility. Furthermore, the host of misguided high priests in the history of the Fuji School refutes such an idea.

Some of the most important transfer documents that the Daishonin wrote to Nikko Shonin were lost in the late six-

***Transfer Documents
Lost in Feud***

teenth century due to a feud between two offshoot branches of the Fuji School: the Kitayama Honmon-ji school and the Nishiyama Honmon-ji school.

Both temples used the name *Honmon-ji*—"temple of the true teaching"—the name that was said to be assumed by the temple upholding the Daishonin's teachings at the time of kosen-rufu.

Kitayama Honmon-ji derived from Omosu Seminary, which was founded by Nikko Shonin. Nichidai had been appointed as the chief priest of the seminary, but he was later rejected by the seminary priests and forced to leave his post. After Nichidai left, Nichimyo became the chief priest of Omosu Seminary, which gradually distanced itself from Taiseki-ji and renamed itself Kitayama Honmon-ji.

After his ouster, Nichidai eventually moved to Nishiyama and had a temple built there. In reaction to Omosu Seminary taking on the name Honmon-ji, Nichidai named his temple Nishiyama Honmon-ji and continued to assert its orthodoxy over Kitayama Honmon-ji through Nichidai's connection to Nikko Shonin.

These two branches of the Fuji School, which evolved out of Nikko Shonin's Omosu Seminary, carried on an intense rivalry. The Nishiyama school even filed suit against the Kitayama school to reclaim control of the seminary and the Daishonin's statue that was kept there.

On March 17, 1581, some priests from Nishiyama, escorted by some one hundred soldiers, went to Kitayama and took its "treasure box." This box was said to contain many Gohonzon inscribed by the Daishonin, some originals of the Daishonin's writings such as "On the Three Great Secret Laws" as well as some transfer documents, including the two transfer documents in which Nichiren Daishonin entrusted Nikko Shonin as his successor. Other works believed to have been in the treasure box include: "On the Birth of the Original Buddha"; "Seven Articles on the Object of Worship"; "One-hundred-and-six Comparisons"; and "On the Buddhism of the True Cause."

According to one record, Nisshun, the chief priest of Nishiyama Honmon-ji, lodged a suit with Takeda Katsuyori and obtained permission to search Kitayama. Nisshun went to Kitayama and demanded to inspect the contents of its treasure box, claiming that some important treasures had recently been lost from Kuon-ji, a temple at Mount Minobu. When Nichiden, Kitayama chief priest, reluctantly brought out the box, Nisshun took it back to the estate of the Takeda clan in Kai province, claiming that the contents would need further investigation (*Essential Writings of the Fuji School*, vol. 9, p. 22).

Nichiden immediately went to Kofu, the seat of the Kai provincial government, and demanded that the Takeda clan return Kitayama's property. His appeal, however, fell on deaf ears. In protest Nichiden went on a hunger strike and died in

February 1582. The following month, however, the forces of the neighboring lord, Oda Nobunaga, defeated Takeda Katsuyori's army. During the confusion surrounding Takeda's defeat, many of the items in Kitayama's treasure box were lost.

Honda Sakuzaemon, a retainer of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the founder of the Tokugawa shogunate government, later recovered some of the lost items and donated them to Nishiyama. Nisshutsu, the chief priest of Kitayama, lodged a complaint with Tokugawa Ieyasu to reclaim its lost property. Acknowledging the merit of Nisshutsu's complaint, Tokugawa Ieyasu ordered the return of the remaining sixty-four items to Kitayama.

Due to this incident, many important documents and Gohonzon inscribed by the Daishonin were lost. Some scholars later denied the Daishonin's transfer of his lineage to Nikko Shonin, claiming that the two transfer documents and "On the Three Great Secret Laws" were forged. But copies that had been made before the loss of the originals still existed, and the background of the incident, which resulted in the loss of the originals, was documented. Thus their refutation of Nikko Shonin's legitimacy could not be substantiated.