

NICHIJI SHONIN
AND
THE RELICS OF SENKA

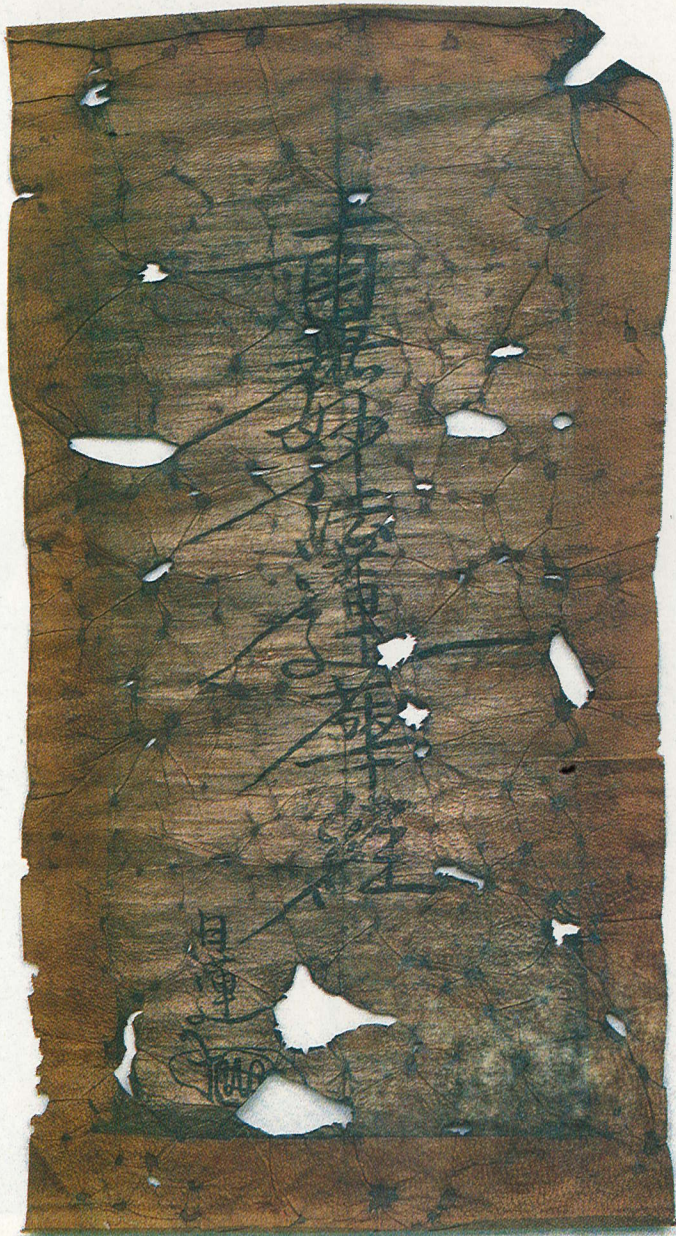
In Commemorating
His 700th Memorial Year

皆歸妙法
一天口海

NICHIREN PROPAGATION CENTER



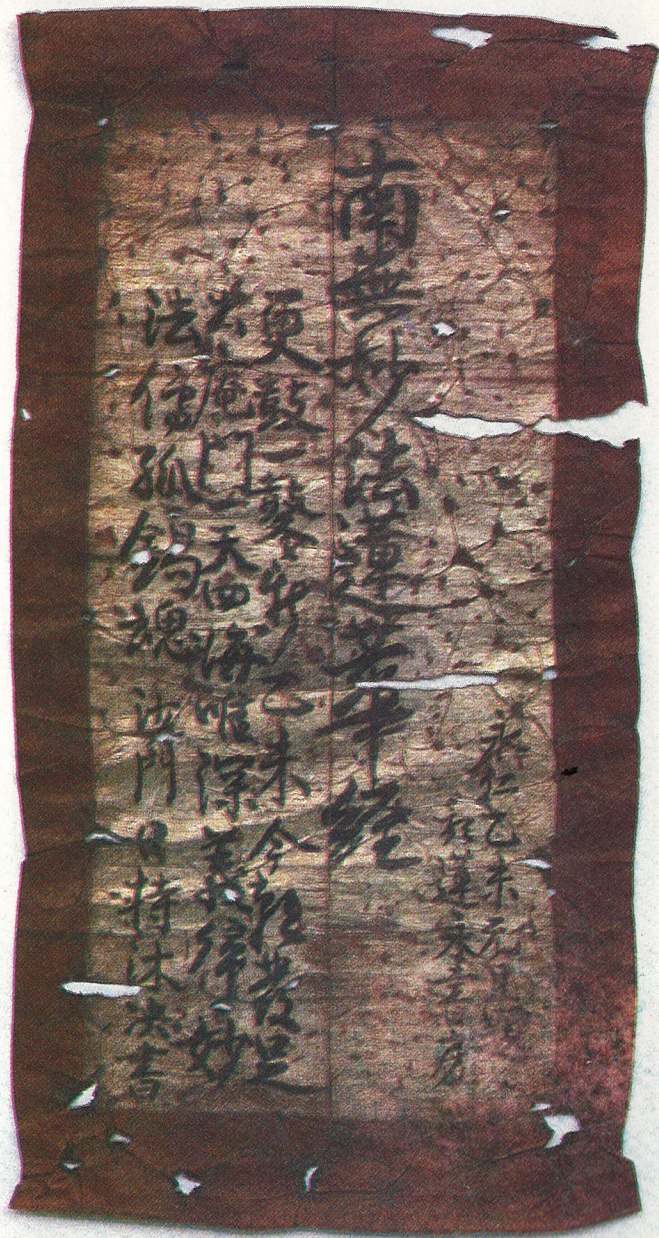
Nichiji Shonin's Statue enshrined in Eishoji Temple



(1) Mandala written by Nichiren Shonin



(2) An image of Nichiren Shonin



(3) Odaimoku written by Nichiji Shonin



(4) A cup made of silver



(Right half)



(Left half)

(5) Kegon Sutra (The Garland Sutra)



(6) A container of incense



(7) A pill case



(8) An incense case



(9) A crape wrapper



Rikkaji Temple in Senka, China
where Nichiji Shonin's relics were found.

NICHIJI SHONIN
- A GREAT MISSIONARY -

*Seven years of travel seems
but one night's dream,
Endless missionary journeys
East and West and East
Against the Moon, a bird - please!
fly one thousand leagues,
Speak my heart to my master
loving to his grave.*

<Annotation>

It has been 7 years since I left Japan. Wishing that all people receive salvation of the Buddha, through Nichiren Shonin's teachings, I have walked to the West and to the East, but it seems to me as though it has been only one night's dream.

Tonight, the Moon is beautiful. Look! Birds are screaming against the Moon and are flying away. Please fly 1,000 leagues and make a report to Nichiren Shonin at his grave in Mt. Minobu that I am working very hard at my missionary work with good health.

This poem is believed to be written by Nichiji Shonin, one of Nichiren Shonin's Six Senior Disciples. On October, 1282, at his death-bed, Nichiren Shonin chose the Six Senior Disciples to take care of the Nichiren Sangha after his death. They were Nissho Shonin, Nichiro Shonin, Nikko

Shonin, Niko Shonin, Niccho Shonin and Nichiji Shonin.

In order to carry out Nichiren Shonin's wish, "May all convert themselves to the Lotus Sutra under the heavens and within the four seas", Nichiji Shonin left Shizuoka at the age of 46 in 1295 and traveled to the countries of Manchuria and China. However, we were not sure about his footsteps until a half century ago when some curios that were believed to be Nichiji Shonin's belongings, were found at Senka in China. These objects were named "(Nichiji Shonin's) relics from Senka, China."

This poem was among the objects that were donated to Mt. Minobu Kuonji Temple in 1987.

The objects are:

1. A scroll of Mandala written by Nichiren Shonin
2. An image of Nichiren Shonin
3. Odaimoku written by Nichiji Shonin
4. A cup made of silver
5. Kegon Sutra
6. A container of Incense
7. A pill case
8. An incense case
9. A crape wrapper

Although there are still some questions on the several objects whether they really were his belongings, many objects are good proofs that Nichiji Shonin spent the second half of his life in China as a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra.

When we read this poem, we are able to see that

his mind was always facing toward Mt. Minobu and his longing to be with his master, Nichiren Shonin. Whenever he faced difficulties in the west or the east, he would appeal to his master on his sufferings and asked for a good guidance. To remember his master was a good encouragement and it made him continue his vigorous missionary travels. We could imagine such a figure of him in this poem.

When Nichiji Shonin attended the 13th year memorial service of Nichiren Shonin on October 13, 1294, he made a report at his master's grave site, of his determination to go to foreign countries and to spread the Lotus Sutra.

On January 1st, 1295, after finishing the New Year's prayer, he gathered his disciples and followers and expressed his resolution. At that time, some people told him that it was reckless plan, while others wished to go with him. Responding to them, he said, "I wish to save other countries and I want to devote myself to Buddha and my master. Nothing will stop me. I won't regret travels even if I become a bait of a big fish in China."

So he started off on his missionary tour by himself, carrying only one umbrella hat, a Buddhist walking stick, prayer beads, and his belief in Buddha's protection. He traveled to Hokkaido in June and arrived at the Asian Continent by crossing the Sea of Japan.

We are not sure which routes he took. According to the old Chinese book, "Tennei kakuji" it says,

"An Eastern priest called Nichiji crossed the Great Wall and arrived at the Capital of Koheifu. He preaches the Lotus sutra and his incense fragrant name is heard in a long distance." So, we believe that he came from Manchuria to China by crossing the Great Wall. Another record at Ryukoji Temple in China shows that he received an invitation by a Chinese Emperor along with another famous Chinese priest and he preached a great sermon in the palace.

Also he cooperated with the emperor to chase out Lamaism which was corrupting the palace. At this time, he was almost assassinated by his opponents. Then he left that palace and decided to go to Mongolia, still a great power in the Asia and Eastern Europe during this era.

Mongolia is far away. After crossing the great desert Gobi, he arrived at the Capital Karakorum near Ulan Bator and established the Hokke Temples of Summer and of Winter, according to the "Waneiro Soran". He was successful on this missionary, but he still was not satisfied with this success and headed out for the West. However, we do not know his travels after that.

On November 14, 1987, Bishop Shingaku Oikawa, who was then the president of Nichiren-Shu Overseas Propagation Promotion Association, mediated to donate the belongings of Nichiji Shonin to Mt. Minobu. He said, "now both Nichiren Shonin and Nichiji Shonin are finally able to meet. Nichiren Shonin would acknowledge his efforts by

saying 'Well done! Well done!' When I have the honor of seeing the old fragile, partly torn papers and some faded characters on the old objects, I feel as though he is still hard at missionary work even today. Today, the belongings of this great saint will be stored at Mt. Minobu forever. I think that Nichiji Shonin would be happy to know that his belongings are placed in the Mt. Minobu Treasure House, where all people have the opportunity to see these objects. By looking at them, we, the Nichiren Buddhists of the modern age, will receive a feeling of great power and joy, for our daily efforts to propagate the Lotus Sutra."

Nichiji Shonin was a great saint. We admire him for his great efforts. Because we do not know the date of his death, the Nichiren-Shu set January 1, 1295, the day of his departure from Shizuoka as his memorial day. Therefore, the Nichiren-Shu observes Nichiji Shonin's 700th memorial year in 1994 and pays our homage to this great priest who kept on walking to spread the Lotus Sutra by devoting his life.