

The Auspicious Dragon Temple: Kyoto’s “Forgotten” Imperial Buddhist Convent, Zuiryūji

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Zuiryūji has been notably absent from research related to Japan’s imperial convents, despite being founded by Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s sister. One of the reasons the convent has been overlooked is its relocation from Kyoto to Ōmi Hachiman in the 1960s, physically removing it from the public eye. In addition, a male was appointed head following the death of the last abbess, so officially it was no longer functioning as a convent. However, for more than two hundred and fifty years, it was one of the highest ranking and wealthiest (by landholdings) *bikuni gosho* in Kyoto, headed by a succession of abbesses heralding from aristocratic families. The founder, Nisshū, was also an important patron for two major Hokke (Nichiren) sect temples, Honkokuji in Kyoto and Kuonji on Mt. Minobu. Historical documents have purportedly not survived at the convent itself, but I discovered many important objects (including portraits) and documents at Zenshōji, where all of the Zuiryūji abbesses are buried. Bringing together what I have uncovered to date, this article comprises an overview of Zuiryūji’s history, highlighting the founder as well as the tenth-generation abbess who vastly expanded the convent’s network by establishing a women’s association with branches throughout Japan. As the only Hokke sect imperial convent in Kyoto, Zuiryūji has always had a unique status. But faced with unprecedented challenges to survive in the modern era, its abbesses broke through the glass walls traditionally defining “convent culture.”

Keywords: *bikuni gosho*, Hokke sect, Honkokuji, imperial convent, *kyōdōshoku*, Kuonji, Murakumo Fujin Kai, Nichiren sect, Nisshū, Nichiei, Zenshōji, *Zuiun*

Despite having been founded by the elder sister of the powerful warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣秀吉 (1536–1598), the convent Zuiryūji 瑞龍寺 has to date been notably absent from research and exhibitions related to Japan’s imperial convents. The convent has

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been overlooked, in part, due to its relocation from central Kyoto to a mountain in Ōmi Hachiman 近江八幡 (Shiga Prefecture) in the 1960s, which physically removed it from the public eye. I myself was unaware of its existence when I entered this field of research more than two decades ago. After coming across the name of Zuiryūji, I queried abbesses at other Kyoto imperial convents, only to be told by them that it was no longer functioning as a convent. As it turned out, the son of the last abbess, Nitchō 日澄 (1917–2011), was appointed as chief priest in April 2011 after his mother's death. While Zuiryūji may survive as a Buddhist institution, its future as a convent is thus uncertain.

For more than two hundred and fifty years, though, Zuiryūji was one of the highest-ranking and wealthiest (by landholdings) *bikuni gosho* 比丘尼御所 in Kyoto.¹ As we work to build up a comprehensive understanding of these elite institutions, we must not neglect the women who headed Zuiryūji during those centuries. Many of the abbesses were members of aristocratic families with imperial connections. With the sense that I and other scholars had been remiss, I felt compelled to research the convent and its abbesses, to restore them to Japan's religious and cultural history.

On two visits to Zuiryūji I met with the male abbot, Washizu Etoke 鷲津恵得 (?–2019), only to be informed that original documents have not survived. Visits to archives in Kyoto and Tokyo, which have supplied rich sources of material for other Kyoto imperial convents, likewise revealed very little.² At the suggestion of an archivist at the Kyoto Institute, Library and Archives, I also investigated archives in the Ōmi Hachiman area, on the assumption that documents might have been surveyed or deposited there after the relocation of Zuiryūji.³ However, in each case I came up empty handed.

Luckily, I discovered a cache of important objects and documents at the Kyoto temple Zenshōji 善正寺 where all of the Zuiryūji abbesses are buried.⁴ The former chief priest of Zenshōji, Rev. Nishimura Taidō 西村泰道, kindly empathized with my quest and allowed me to study materials in the temple's collection. Without his generosity, my research on this elusive convent would have come to a dead end. Bringing together what I was able to uncover about the lives and activities of the founder and successive abbesses, I have reconstructed an outline of Zuiryūji's history. The outline, which appears below, highlights two figures from the history of the convent: (1) the founder, and (2) the tenth-generation abbess, who vastly expanded the convent's network.

1 Literally “nun's palaces,” *bikuni gosho* were private temple residences of tonsured imperial princesses or elite noblewomen.

2 Kyoto Institute, Library and Archives 京都府立京都学・歴史館 (formerly Kyoto Prefectural Library and Archives 京都府立総合資料館), Kyoto City Library of Historical Documents 京都市歴史資料館, and the Historiographical Institute, The University of Tokyo 東京大学史料編纂所.

3 Ōmi Hachiman Shishihensanshitsu 近江八幡市史編纂室, Ōmi Hachiman Shiritsu Shiryōkan 近江八幡市立資料館, and Shiga-ken Kenmin Katsudō Seikatsuka Kenmin Jōhōshitsu 滋賀県民活動生活課県民情報室.

4 It is common practice for abbesses to be buried at a different temple designated as the *bodaiji* 菩提寺 (mortuary temple) for the convent, a tradition perhaps related to a desire to protect the living from “pollution” caused by death.

The Founder's Early Years and Her Conversion to the Hokke (Nichiren) Sect

The founder of Zuiryūji, a woman named Tomo 智 (1533–1625), was the daughter of Kinoshita Yaemon 木下弥右衛門 (d. 1543) and his wife Naka 仲 (1513–1592).⁵ They lived in the small village of Nakamura 中村, in Owari 尾張 domain (present-day Aichi Prefecture). Tomo's fate was inextricably tied to the rise to power of her brother, Hideyoshi. His meteoric ascent began after he joined the ranks of the warlord Oda Nobunaga 織田信長 (1532–1584) and continued after Nobunaga's death.

Tomo married one of Hideyoshi's vassals, Miyoshi Yoshifusa 三好吉房 (1534–1612), though the precise year of the union is not clear.⁶ She bore three sons—Hidetsugu 秀次 (1568–1595), Hidekatsu 秀勝 (1569–1592), and Hideyasu 秀保 (1579–1595)—all of whom served as vassals under her brother. In 1574–1575, Hideyoshi built Nagahama Castle 長浜城 in the province of Ōmi, on land received from Nobunaga. Tomo and her family may well have moved there. Following Nobunaga's death in 1584, Hideyoshi shifted his residence to Kyoto, where he received court appointments: first as chancellor (*kanpaku* 関白), and later as great minister of state (*daijō daijin* 太政大臣). Tomo's husband, Yoshifusa, was appointed lord of Inuyama Castle 犬山城 around 1590, and later lord of Kiyosu Castle 清洲城, both in Owari.

Hideyoshi's son Tsurumatsu 鶴松 died at the age of three. As a result, Tomo's eldest son Hidetsugu was designated as Hideyoshi's successor, receiving the title of *kanpaku* in 1591. Also in that year, Hideyoshi transferred his Jurakutei 聚楽亭 Palace to Hidetsugu. As the mother of a chancellor, Tomo gained a new status in the aristocratic world. Her residence at this time is not clear, but records of some of her activities suggest that she was spending time in Kyoto.

It was at this point that she became a devotee of the Hokke 法華 or Nichiren 日蓮 sect of Buddhism, which flourished in Kyoto during her lifetime. She received teachings from two notable priests: Nisshin 日禎 (1561–1617) and Nichiken 日乾 (1560–1635).⁷ The Hokke sect was popular with women due to the importance it placed on the *Lotus Sutra* (*Hokkekyō* 法華經), which included passages stating that females were capable of attaining buddhahood. Nichiren (1222–1282) had himself proclaimed that women could achieve salvation in their present life through faith in the *Lotus Sutra*, citing as evidence the well-known parable about the Dragon King's daughter in the “Devadatta” chapter.⁸

Tomo as Major Patron

As Hideyoshi's sister, Tomo no doubt had access to considerable wealth, and she became an important benefactor for two major Hokke temples associated with the priests mentioned above: Honkokujī 本圀寺 in Kyoto and Kuonji 久遠寺 on Mt. Minobu 身延山 in Yamanashi Prefecture. Through her auspices, in 1590 a section of the Azuchi 安土 Palace was

5 Sources with substantial biographical information on Tomo include *Honge betsuazu busso tōki* 本化別頭仏祖統紀 and *Nichirensū jiten* 日蓮宗事典. Naka was later known as Ōmandokoro 大政所.

6 He is also known by the names Kinoshita Yasuke 木下弥助 and Nagao 長尾.

7 Nisshin served at Honkokujī 本圀寺 for nineteen years as the sixteenth abbot, and is credited with playing a major role in its revival and restoration. Nichiken became the eighth abbot of Honmanji 本満寺 in Kyoto in 1588, and in either 1602 or 1603, the twenty-first abbot of Kuonji located on Mt. Minobu in Yamanashi Prefecture.

8 For further information on Nichiren's position on women's salvation, see Kurihara 2003.



Figure 1. Large bell gifted to Honkokuji by Tomo (Nisshū) in 1593. Bronze. H. 240 cm, D. 150 cm.

transferred to Honkokuji where Nisshin was abbot.⁹ She sponsored the reconstruction of Honkokuji's large reception room (*daikyakuden* 大客殿), living quarters (*kuri* 庫裡), gate for imperial envoys (*chokushimon* 勅使門), belfry (*shōrōdō* 鐘樓堂), and sutra library (*issai kyōzō* 一切經藏) buildings. Unfortunately, Honkokuji suffered extensive damage in a fire that scorched much of Kyoto in 1788. All that survives from Tomo's era is the large bell (*daibonshō* 大梵鐘) that she gifted in 1593 (figure 1).¹⁰ The bell is inscribed with the Buddhist names of approximately two hundred Hokke sect devotees, including Tomo's parents and other Kinoshita family members.¹¹

The other major Hokke temple that Tomo patronized was Kuonji, which Nichiren had established on Mt. Minobu. As the site of Nichiren's tomb, it stands as one of the sect's most sacred sites. In 1593 Tomo sponsored the construction of an abbot's hall (*daihōjō* 大方丈), a gate (*karamon* 唐門), and a bathhouse (*yokusho* 浴所).¹² The rebuilding of the abbot's hall (consecrated in 1594) and commissioning of its main imagery were memorials to her son Hidekatsu, who died in 1592 at the age of twenty-seven during Hideyoshi's ill-fated expedition to conquer and annex Korea.¹³ Following the deaths of her remaining two sons in 1595 (see below), Tomo continued her support of Kuonji. She funded the construction of a *hondō* 本堂 at Kuonji in 1599, and commissioned sculptures for it in the following years.¹⁴ An Edo-period painting of the temple compound gives us a glimpse of what these structures may have looked like.¹⁵

9 Information received from Honkokuji. See also *Nichirenshū jiten*, p. 533. Originally located in the vicinity of Rokujō 六条 and Horikawa 堀川 streets, north of present-day Nishi Honganji 西本願寺, Honkokuji was relocated to Yamashina 山科 in 1971.

10 The bell was covered with gold leaf in 1995 when it was reinstalled at Honkokuji.

11 See Kubo 1937 for further details of the bell inscription. Tomo is referred to by her Buddhist name Zuiryūinden Myōshū 瑞龍院殿妙秀, which she presumably adopted or received upon taking vows.

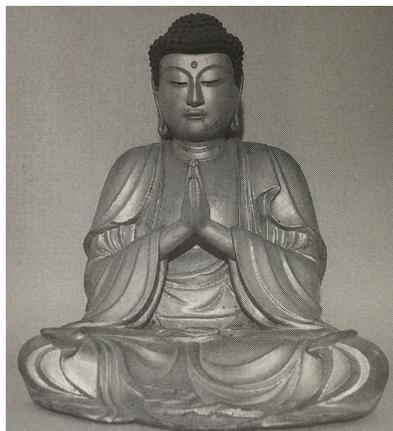
12 Recorded in the *Minobusan shōdō ki*. Reference from Mochizuki 2009, pp. 180–184.

13 Mochizuki 2009, pp. 180–181.

14 Mochizuki 2009, p. 183. The central image, presumably a Daimoku jeweled stupa (*daimoku hōtō* 題目宝塔) bearing the title of the *Lotus Sutra*, had an inscription by priest Nichion 日遠 (1572–1642) dated 1605. This central icon was surrounded by four bodhisattva sculptures.

15 See Mochizuki 2011, p. 57 for a photograph of a painting of Kuonji in the Minobu Bunko.

Figure 2. Seated image of Muhengyō Bosatsu gifted by Tomo to Kuonji. Wood covered with gold lacquer. H. 42.5 cm. Collection of Minobu Bunko. From Mochizuki 2006, p. 149.



All of the buildings at Kuonji were destroyed by a fire in 1824. Fortunately, one of the sculptures commissioned by Tomo has survived. Now housed in the Minobu Bunko 身延文庫, this seated image of Muhengyō Bosatsu 無辺行菩薩 (Sk. Anantacāritra; Bodhisattva of Limitless Practice), was originally installed in the main worship hall (*hondō*) or possibly in the abbot's hall (*daihōjō*).¹⁶ Seated with its palms joined together in prayer, the bodhisattva is made of wood using the joined-block technique (*yosegi zukuri* 寄木造), coated with gold lacquer, and adorned with inlaid crystal eyes (figure 2).

In 1606, as an expression of gratitude for her generous patronage, Kuonji presented Tomo with four pages (two sheets, inscribed recto and verso) of calligraphy in Nichiren's hand.¹⁷ The text, transcribed by Nichiren, is from the *Jōgan seiyō* 貞觀政要 (Important principles of government from the Zhenguan era, Ch. *Zhenguan zhengyao*).¹⁸ It was well known among the nobility and warriors, and repeatedly copied and published from ancient times.¹⁹ This gift of sacred writing by the founder of the Hokke sect indicates the magnanimity of her support.

Tomo's Tonsure and the Founding of Zuiryūji and Zenshōji in Kyoto

Tomo's youngest son Hideyasu died of illness in 1595, at the age of seventeen, leaving her eldest son Hidetsugu. However, Hidetsugu's fortunes began to decline in 1593, the year in

16 Muhengyō Bosatsu is one of the four great bodhisattvas and appears in the fifteenth fascicle of the *Lotus Sutra*. An inscription on the back of the image written by priest Nichiyū 日裕 (d. 1737; thirty-fourth abbot of Kuonji) in 1717, the year that the image was restored, records that it was a gift of the nun Zuiryūin Nisshū 瑞龍院日秀比丘尼. This was Tomo's Buddhist name after her formal tonsure in 1596. But the inscription does not specify the building in which it was placed. It could have been one of the statues in the *daihōjō* or *hondō*; the size (height 42.5 cm) suggests that it may have been the latter (Mochizuki 2009, p. 184). The inscription is transcribed in Minobu-chō Kyōiku Iinkai, p. 148 and Mochizuki 2009, p. 184.

17 Mochizuki 2009, p. 184. Recorded in *Minobusan Kuonji goreihō kiroku* 身延山久遠寺御靈宝記録 (Terao 1997, p. 187). Four scrolls by Nichiren are included in a Meiji-period inventory (*Kyōto-fu jūin jūkiho*) of Zuiryūji, the convent later founded by Tomo, suggesting that each of the pages were mounted as separate hanging scrolls. I have not been able to confirm whether or not these works still exist, although the *Kyōto-fu jūin jūkiho* notes that one scroll was deposited in the Kyoto National Museum.

18 Zhenguan 貞觀 (627–649) was the era name used by Emperor Taizong 唐太宗 (598–649) of Tang China.

19 Photographs of other pages from the *Jōgan seiyō* (collection of Honmonji 本門寺, Shizuoka) are reproduced in Tōkyō Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan 2003, p. 51, with explanation on p. 223.

which Hideyoshi's principal consort Chacha 茶々 (d. 1615, also known by her sobriquet, Yododono 淀殿) gave birth to a son and new heir (Hideyori 秀頼) to Hideyoshi. Out of favor with his uncle, accused of disloyalty, Hidetsugu was forced by Hideyoshi to commit ritual suicide in 1595.²⁰ Nor was Hidetsugu's tragedy individual, for his wives and children were also put to death. Tomo's husband Yoshifusa was implicated as well and exiled to Sanuki 讃岐 in Shikoku.

At the turn of the year 1596, having thus lost all of her sons in the brief span of a few years, the grief-stricken Tomo took the tonsure from the priest Nisshin at Honkokuji, which she had helped to rebuild. When she became an ordained nun, her Buddhist name was changed from Myōshū 妙秀 to Myōe Nisshū 妙慧日秀. The character *nichi* 日 was commonly used by Hokke sect prelates in memory of Nichiren, and the character *hide/shū* 秀 was one used in the personal names of the Toyotomi clan. After her ordination Tomo was commonly referred to by her later Buddhist name Nisshū, so I follow that custom hereafter. Her husband Yoshifusa was pardoned after Hideyoshi's death in 1598 and returned to Kyoto, where he lived out the remainder of his years at a subtemple of Honkokuji, Ichion'in 一音院.²¹

After taking vows, Nisshū moved to the area of Saga Kameyama 嵯峨龜山 in what is now western Kyoto, where she established a small temple near Nison'in 二尊院 in memory of Hidetsugu. Touched by her plight, around 1597 Emperor Goyōzei 後陽成 (r. 1586–1611) granted Nisshū land in the Murakumo 村雲 district in central Kyoto (in the vicinity of the present-day intersection of Horikawa 堀川 and Imadegawa 今出川 streets) to construct a convent. The emperor named the convent Zuiryūji 瑞龍寺 (Auspicious Dragon Temple), utilizing two characters from Nisshū's earlier Buddhist name, Zuiryūin Myōshū.²² The convent survived at that site through the Meiji Restoration. A report written in 1875, after an inspection of the convent's holdings by Kyoto Prefecture, related that the *hondō* and *shoin* had been built by Hideyoshi, and that the convent had also received one thousand *roku* of landholdings from him.²³

Despite its holdings and its receipt of imperial patronage, Zuiryūji did not secure official designation as a *bikuni gosho* until after Nisshū's death (see below). According to Oka Yoshiko 岡佳子, most of the imperial convents in Kyoto received *shuinjō* 朱印状 ("vermillion seal document" affidavits of official recognition) from Shogun Tokugawa Hidetada in the Genna 元和 era (1615–1624), but Zuiryūji was initially excluded because of its affiliation with the House of Toyotomi.²⁴ Thus from the start, Zuiryūji was set apart from the other *bikuni gosho*, which were headed by imperial princesses and women from noble families. Little is known about Zuiryūji's original appearance, but with backing from the powerful Toyotomi family, Zuiryūji no doubt was splendidly outfitted, whatever its official status.

Around 1600, Nisshū seems to have moved her Saga sanctuary to its present-day location near Okazaki Park in east-central Kyoto, and to have formally established it as the

20 For biographical information on Hidetsugu, see Fujita 2015.

21 Fujita 2015, p. 218.

22 Recorded in *Oyudono no ue nikki* 御湯殿上日記. Included in *Goyōzei tennō jitsuroku*; see Fujii and Yoshioka 2005, vol. 1, p. 502.

23 Section on Zuiryūji in "Meiji hachinen nijūsan-ka-in yuisho torishirabe shorui."

24 Oka 2002, pp. 46–47.



Figure 3. Portrait sculpture of Nisshū enshrined at Zenshōji. 1601. Wood. H. 40 cm.

temple Zenshōji 善正寺.²⁵ The name derives from Hidetsugu’s posthumous dharma name, Zenshōin-den Kōgandōi 善正院殿高巖道意, and the temple’s mountain name (*sangō* 山号), Myōezan 妙慧山, comprises the two characters “Myōe” that form part of Nisshū’s Buddhist name. Priest Nichiei 日銳, the twenty-eighth abbot of Honkokuji, was designated as the founder and it was here that Hidetsugu’s remains were laid to rest.

In 1601, the year marking Hidetsugu’s seventh death anniversary, Abbess Nisshū installed portrait sculptures of her son and herself (figure 3) in Zenshōji’s main worship hall.²⁶ According to inscriptions on the statues, Hidetsugu’s was completed in 1597 and Nisshū’s in 1601.²⁷ The earlier date of Hidetsugu’s statue suggests that it was made at the time of his third death anniversary, and that it had perhaps been first enshrined at Nisshū’s sanctuary in Saga. Priest Nichiei performed the “eye-opening” or consecration ceremonies for the statues, both still preserved in niches flanking a central image of Nichiren. The painted wood sculptures are approximately one meter in height, and are housed in portable shrines that were donated by Tokugawa Ieyasu 徳川家康 (1543–1616).²⁸

25 From 1624, one year prior to Nisshū’s death, until 1872, Zenshōji became a university (*danrin* 檀林) for Nichiren priests and was commonly referred to as Higashiyama Danrin 東山檀林. *Nichirenshū jiten*, p. 536 (entry on Zenshōji).

26 For a photograph of Hidetsugu’s statue, see Shigemori 1935, figure 1. The paired statues at Zenshōji bring to mind Kōdaiin 高台院, where Hideyoshi’s principal wife Nene installed portrait sculptures of her late husband and herself.

27 The inscription on Hidetsugu’s portrait sculpture records that it was made by Minbukyō Hōgen 民部卿法眼, better known as Kōshō 康正 (1534–1621). See Shigemori 1935, figure 2 for a photograph of the inscription. Kōshō was a well-known Buddhist sculptor who succeeded his father as head of the Shichijō Bussho 七条仏所 atelier. Patronized by the Toyotomi family, he produced and restored images for major temples such as Tōji 東寺 and Mt. Kōya 高野. The sculptor of Nisshū’s portrait is not identified, but stylistic similarities suggest that it is also by the hand of Kōshō. For further information on Kōshō, see Kanbe 2005.

28 Shigemori 1935, p. 201.



Figure 4a (left) and 4b (right). Portrait of Nisshū. Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk. 78.5 x 33.7 cm. Zenshōji.

Sculptural and Painted Portraits of Abbess Nisshū

At the time Zenshōji's portrait statue of Nisshū was consecrated, the abbess was sixty-eight years old. In her portrait, she wears formal clerical robes with a gold brocade draped over her right shoulder. Following the standard format of Hokke sect portraits, in her left hand she holds a scroll (one of the fascicles of the *Lotus Sutra*), and in her right, a ceremonial scepter (*shaku* 笏). Her crystal eyes open wide, staring straight ahead, as she embodies inner strength and determination; wrinkles on her forehead are the only hint of her old age. The inscription by the priest Nichiei on the back of the statue refers to it as a "longevity image" (*juzō* 寿像), a term often used to describe portraits of living people.²⁹ Such portraits were intended to serve as memorial images once the sitter had passed away. A second portrait sculpture of Abbess Nisshū, preserved at present-day Zuiryūji in Ōmi Hachiman, presumably dates to after 1788, the year when the convent was largely destroyed in a conflagration in Kyoto. The pose of this seated image is similar to that of the Zenshōji sculpture, but in this image, Nisshū holds a rosary in her right hand instead of a *shaku*. The shape and demeanor of her face follow the Zenshōji sculpture, but the carving is crisper and more stylized, indicative of a later date.

Likewise commissioned by the abbess herself, a painted portrait of Nisshū also survives at Zenshōji (figure 4). This and the "longevity" portrait sculpture are among the most important material objects remaining that transmit Nisshū's persona. The hanging scroll, painted with ink and colors on silk, follows the format typical of Hokke sect portraits, with Abbess Nisshū kneeling beneath a jeweled canopy and "Namu myōhō renge kyō," the

²⁹ For the full inscription on Nisshū's portrait sculpture, see Shigemori 1935, p. 202.

title of the *Lotus Sutra*, inscribed above her head. It is undated, but at the right is a line of characters reading “Zuiryūji Nisshū yoshu” 瑞龍寺日秀預修 (Offered by Nisshū of Zuiryūji in advance of her death). The characters *yoshu* 預修 have the same meaning as *gyakushu* 逆修 (literally “reverse rites”), indicating that the portrait was for use in premortem rituals to secure benefits in the next world.

Here, Nisshū is dressed more regally than in her sculptural portrait, with a brocade robe overlaying a brown robe of simpler design. Her head covering is typical of women who have taken the tonsure. Compared to the sculptures, the painting presents more signs of age: lines on her forehead and under her eyes, and the “crow’s feet” wrinkles around the corners of her eyes (figure 4b). Before the abbess sits a small table, on which are placed scrolls inscribed with the *Lotus Sutra*. Nisshū holds the second scroll from the set of eight; her mouth is slightly open as though to capture her as she is chanting. This portrait clearly emphasizes her devotion to the scripture and her diligent practice.

The Toyotomi clan was decimated in 1615 after Tokugawa Ieyasu’s siege and destruction of Osaka Castle 大坂城. No record survives to recount Nisshū’s experience of the event, but surely it wreaked havoc upon her life. The absence of writings known to have been from her hand has led to speculation that she may have been illiterate. That lack makes these portraits all the more poignant, as they reveal that she wished to be remembered as a nun deeply devoted to the Hokke sect and to her family, none of whom survived her.

Nisshū lived to the age of ninety-two. She was buried at Zenshōji, nearby Hidetsugu’s memorial grave. Zenshōji subsequently became the mortuary temple and burial ground for all later Zuiryūji abbesses. There is also a “memorial grave” (*kuyōbo* 供養墓) for Nisshū at Honkokuji, the temple where she was ordained and to which she was an important donor.³⁰

Zuiryūji after Nisshū

Nisshū died in 1625, but fifteen years passed before a successor was appointed. Following the pattern of *bikuni gosho*, the abbacy shifted to aristocratic women. A daughter of the high-ranking nobleman Kujō Yukiie 九条幸家 (1586–1665) and Toyotomi Sadako 豊臣完子 (1592–1658) entered the convent around 1640. She was given the Buddhist name Nichi-i 日怡 (1625–1664). (Sadako was the daughter of Nisshū’s son Hidekatsu; she later was adopted by Tokugawa Hidetada, making her a half-sister of Empress Tōfukumon’in 東福門院.) Considering that Nichi-i was born in the year Nisshū died, she is likely to have been designated as the next abbess of Zuiryūji when she was still a young child. There was no doubt a search for someone who could lift the convent into *bikuni gosho* status, and Nichi-i fulfilled this by being born into one of the prestigious five regent houses (*gosekke* 五摂家), which were connected with the Fujiwara 藤原 clan.³¹ The fact that there was no one to take responsibility for her care and training at the convent may explain why Nichi-i did not enter Zuiryūji until she reached the age of fifteen.

After her niece was appointed abbess, Empress Tōfukumon’in became an avid patron of Zuiryūji. She was, no doubt, instrumental in persuading her brother Tokugawa Iemitsu

30 In addition, a separate “joint” memorial grave (*gōshibo* 合祀墓), for Tomo’s father, mother, husband, and third son, sits near Nisshū’s grave at Honkokuji.

31 The five regent houses were: Konoe 近衛, Takatsukasa 鷹司, Kujō 九条, Ichijō 一条, and Nijō 二条.

徳川家光 (1604–1651) to grant five hundred *koku* in landholdings to the convent.³² It was during Nichi-i's tenure of fourteen years that Iemitsu also donated to Zuiryūji a section of the guest house (*kyakuden* 客殿) from Nijō Castle 二条城. Through such benefactions, the convent's Toyotomi heritage was gradually overshadowed by its relationship to the Tokugawa family.

Later, Zuiryūji achieved official recognition as a *bikuni gosho* with a *shuinjō*.³³ Until the Meiji period (1868–1912), in terms of landholding it was second only to Donkein 曇華院 (684 *koku*) among the imperial convents. Popularly referred to as the “Murakumo Gosho” 村雲御所, Zuiryūji's distinct identity as the only Hokke-sect *bikuni gosho* set it apart from the others, which were mostly affiliated with Rinzai Zen or Jōdo schools.

Nichi-i's Patronage of Kuonji

Following in the footsteps of founding Abbess Nisshū, Nichi-i herself began to patronize other Hokke temples. Abbess Nichi-i contributed to the construction of a so-called *Jōroku* Śākyamuni statue 丈六釈尊像, still enshrined in the Shaka Hall (Shakadō) 釈迦堂 at Kuonji.³⁴ *Jōroku* is a measurement term equivalent to approximately 4.8 meters; in Japan, many large-scale Buddhist images were made to this specification, which was purportedly the height of the historical Buddha Śākyamuni. The hall to accommodate the statue was donated by Jufukuin 寿福院 (1570–1631), principal wife of the daimyo Maeda Toshiie 前田利家 (1538–1599) who presided over the Kaga 加賀 domain.³⁵ The huge Śākyamuni image, made by the famous Nichiren priest-sculptor Chūshōin Nichigo 中正院日護 (1580–1649), was completed around 1643. Funding came from more than one hundred donors, including Abbess Nichi-i and Tokugawa Ieyasu's consort Oman no kata お万の方 (Yōjuin 養珠院, 1577–1653).³⁶ Documents detailing these contributions were later discovered in the statue's left hand and both feet. Among them is a scroll which lists one hundred and three donors and the amount each contributed. It revealed that Zuiryūji made four separate donations, totaling twenty-five *monme* and one *fun* in silver.

A painted portrait of Nichi-i is preserved at Zenshōji in Kyoto (figure 5). The composition is similar to Nisshū's portrait, with Nichi-i wearing a light blue head cloth and sitting under a canopy below which is written “Namu myōhō renga kyō.” The abbess faces to the left (the reverse of Nisshū's portrait), and is seated at a table on which is laid a set of scrolls of the *Lotus Sutra* along with a rosary. Nichi-i holds the third scroll in her hands and looks at it intently. At the left is an inscription reading “Zuien'in-den Nichi-i eizō” 瑞圓院殿日怡影像 (Portrait of Zuien'in Nichi-i). Since this inscription refers to her by her posthumous dharma name (Zuien'in) as well as Nichi-i, we can assume it was done after her death.

32 Hanafusa Miki gives the year as 1641 (Kan'ei 寛永18), citing the *Ōuchi nikki* 大内日記, vol. 11. See Hanafusa 2009, pp. 329 and 336.

33 This was around 1665. See Oka 2002, p. 46.

34 The Shaka Hall is commonly referred to as the Jōrokudō 丈六堂. The primary source of information about the Jōrokudō sculptures at Kuonji is the *Minobusan shodō ki*, cited in Mochizuki 2007.

35 Mochizuki 2006, p. 116.

36 For a discussion of the donors, see Mochizuki 2007, n. 12, pp. 331–332. A list of the individual donors appears on pp. 333–337. Other women of the *ōoku* 大奥 or women's quarters of Edo Castle 江戸城 also made contributions. See Mochizuki 1989.



Figure 5. Portrait of Nichi-i.
Hanging scroll, ink and colors on
silk. 77 x 35 cm. Zenshōji.

Succession of Abbesses from High-ranking Court Families

Nichi-i's niece Otokimi 乙君 (1653–1672) entered the convent as a novice (*kasshiki* 喝食) in 1664, the year that Nichi-i died. She was formally tonsured by Honkokuji priest Nichiun 日運 three years later (1667), and was given the Buddhist name Nittsū 日通. However, she was only in residence for eight years, as she died at the age of twenty. For the next century and a half, Zuiryūji saw a succession of abbesses heralding from high-ranking aristocratic families (Nijō, Takatsukasa 鷹司, Arisugawa 有栖川, Fushimi 伏見). Nearly all of them were adopted into the Kujō family prior to entering the convent, continuing the lineage that began with Nichi-i. Adoption for “political” purposes, that is, eligibility to become abbess, was practiced at other *bikuni goshō* as well. Brief biographical details for the third to eighth generation abbesses are provided in the table below.

Biographical details for Zuiryūji abbesses.

ZUIRYŪJI GENERATION	BUDDHIST NAMES	BIRTH/DEATH DATES	FAMILY BACKGROUND	TONSURE DETAILS	YEARS AT CONVENT
3rd	Nittsū 日通 Zuishōin 瑞 照院	1653–1672	Daughter of Nijō Yasumichi 二条康道 (1607–1666), son of Nichi-i's father Kujō Yukiie. Mother was Teishi Naishinnō 貞 子内親王, daughter of Emperor Goyōzei and Konoe Sakiko 近 衛前子. Adopted by Kujō Kaneharu 九条兼晴 (1641–1677).	1667 by Honkokuji priest Nichiu 日運	1664–1672
4th	Nichiju 日壽 Zuihōin 瑞法院	1647–1691	Daughter of Takatsu- kasa Norihira 鷹司教 平 (1609–1668). Mother was daughter of Reizei Tamemitsu 冷泉為満 (1559– 1619). Adopted by Kujō Kaneharu 九条兼晴 (1641–1677).	1672 by 9th abbot of Zenshōji, Nichijo 日成	1672–1691
5th	Nikken 日顕 Zuigen'in 瑞 現院	d. 1690	Daughter of Takatsu- kasa Fusasuke 鷹司房 輔 (1637–1700).		Arrangements were made for her to become Nichiju's pupil and successor, but she died at the age of five without ever taking the tonsure *No abbess from 1691 to 1713
6th	Nichiji 日慈 Zuiōin 瑞應院	1699–1716	Daughter of Takatsu- kasa Kanehiro 鷹司兼 熙 (1660–1725). Adopted by Kujō Sukezane 九条輔實 (1669–1730).	1714 by Nissen 日宣 of Honkokuji	1713–1716 Entered convent in 1713 (age fifteen), but died three years later *No abbess from 1717 to 1727
7th	Nichigo 日護 Zuimyōin 瑞 妙院	1717–1746	Daughter of Nijō Tsunahira 二条綱平 (1672–1732) and Ma- sako Naishinnō 榮子内 親王 (1673–1746), daughter of Emperor Reigen'in. Adopted by Kujō Sukezane 九条輔實 (1669–1730)	1727 by Nichidatsu 日達 of Honkokuji	1724–1746 Entered convent in 1724 (age eight) *No abbess from 1747 to 1761
8th	Nissō 日照 or Nichien 日圓 Jōkōin 常孝院 Given name was Momi- nomiya 茂見宮	1753–1778	Daughter of Arisugawa Otohitō 有栖川音仁 (d. 1758). Adopted by Kujō Naokane 九条尚實 (1717–1787).	1762 by Nissei 日誠 of Honkokuji	1762–1778 Entered convent in 1762 (age ten) *No abbess from 1779 to 1815

As one can see from this table, there were four periods from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth century during which Zuiryūji had no abbess. This absence occurred at other convents as well, for it was not always easy to find an appropriate candidate to fill the abbacy position. During those stretches, the convent was maintained by other lower-ranking nuns.

Destruction of Zuiryūji in the Great Fire of Kyoto and Reconstruction

In 1788, Zuiryūji nearly burned to the ground in a conflagration that devastated 80 percent of Kyoto. The flames raged for three days, destroying the imperial palace as well as other temples and convents. No abbess was in residence at Zuiryūji at that time. The convent was later rebuilt during the term of the ninth-generation abbess, Nisson 日尊 (1807–1868). A daughter of Fushimi Sadayoshi 伏見貞敬 (1776–1841), she entered the convent in 1816 at the age of ten and was tonsured by the priest Nichiryō 日陵 (1745–1819) of Honkokuji.³⁷ Begun in the 1820s, the reconstruction of Zuiryūji took twenty years to complete; Nisson was later honored with the title of “restorer” (*chūkō* 中興) for her tireless endeavors to bring the convent back to life during the fifty-three years of her abbacy.

For a time, the convent was back on its feet. In 1862, Nisson found a successor: her niece Masanomiya 萬佐宮 (1855–1920), a daughter of her brother Fushiminomiya Kuniie 伏見宮邦家 (1802–1872). After being adopted by Kujō Hisatada 九条尚忠 (1798–1871), who held the position of chancellor (*kanpaku*), she entered the convent at the age of two and was tonsured by Abbess Nisson at the age of eight, at which time she was given the name Nichiei 日榮. Two of Nichiei’s sisters also entered imperial convents and became abbesses: Seien 誓圓 (1828–1910) at Zenkōji Daihongan 善光寺大本願 in Nagano, and Bunshū 文秀 (1837–1926) at Enshōji 圓照寺 in Nara. In addition to religious teachings, Nichiei received lessons in calligraphy and *waka* from two distinguished Nichiren priests, Kubota Nichiki 久保田日龜 (1841–1911) and Binisatsu Taigon 毘尼薩台嚴 (1829–1909) respectively.

Turmoil Following the Meiji Restoration

Nichiei’s mentor Nisson died in 1868 at the turn of the era, leaving her to face heretofore unimaginable obstacles.³⁸ With the dissolution of the bakufu and formation of a new government, Zuiryūji and other *bikuni gosho* confronted new challenges in what was to become a chaotic and volatile era for Buddhist institutions. Just around the time Nichiei turned twenty, the anti-Buddhist *haibutsu kishaku* 廃仏毀釈 (literally “abolish Buddhism and destroy Śākyamuni”) movement erupted. The impetus for this crusade was the government-initiated separation of Shinto and Buddhism (Shinbutsu Hanzenrei 神仏判然令), and the designation of Shinto as the state ideology. The imperial family was forbidden from taking Buddhist vows, and in 1871, a law went into effect abolishing *bikuni gosho* titles.³⁹

Thereafter, little by little, convents were divested of their historical ties to the imperial house. In 1873, abbesses were instructed by the government to return to lay life as part of

37 Nisson’s childhood name was Tamenomiya 為宮. Prior to entering the convent, she was adopted by Kujō Suketsugu 九条輔嗣 (1784–1807).

38 Nisson was posthumously known as Zuishōmon’in 瑞正文院.

39 The edict reads: *Shomonzeki bikuni gosho gō tō o haishi, jin wa chibō kankatsu to nasu* 諸門跡比丘尼御所號等ヲ廢シ寺院ノ地方官管轄ト為ス. See *Hōrei zensho* 法令全書, vol. 4, p. 16.

Figure 6. Photograph of Nichiei.
Undated. Author's collection.



the separation of religion and state.⁴⁰ Temples were shuttered, land was seized, and countless temple buildings and treasures were destroyed. Deprived of their traditional status and financial resources, many temples and convents once connected with the imperial family were reduced to poverty.

Nichiei and her two sisters adamantly protested the 1873 government order to return to secular life, declaring that they had taken unbreakable vows to uphold the precepts and the strict lifestyle set forth in original Buddhist teachings. By refusing to abandon the Buddhist path, they succeeded in regaining the trust of society after the initial suppression, and figured importantly in the later revival of Buddhism in the Meiji era. Nichiei devoted the remainder of her life to proselytizing, making a name for herself and Zuiryūji. Through donations, she eventually secured the financial stability of her convent.

She began by promoting Buddhist teachings among women at Hokke temples in Kyoto from the late 1870s, gradually expanding to the Kantō 関東 area (initially Tokyo and Yokohama).⁴¹ Whereas previous abbesses had confined themselves primarily to overseeing their own convent, the circumstances of the times led Nichie to shift her attention more

40 The edict reads: *Bikuni chikubatsu nikushoku enzuki kizoku tō zuii to su* 比丘尼蓄髮肉食縁付躰俗等随意トス. See *Hōrei zensho*, vol. 6, p. 23. For further information on the effect of the *haibutsu kishaku* movement on the imperial house, see Sakamoto 1983, pp. 470-496 and Takagi 2013.

41 Ishikawa 2008, p. 231.

to the public arena. She participated in the Great Promulgation Campaign (*taikyō senpu undō* 大教宣布運動) initiated by the Ministry of Doctrine (Kyōbushō 教部省) in 1872, since anyone involved in religious teaching had to join.⁴² National instructors, known as *kyōdōshoku* 教導職, were recruited from Shinto and Buddhist clergy, who were asked to preach doctrines promoted by the new government, known as the Three Great Teachings (*sanjō kyōsoku* 三条教則).⁴³ The *kyōdōshoku* system was abolished in 1884, however, presumably leaving Nichiei free to focus on teaching the doctrines of her own faith.

Relaunching Zuiryūji and a Spiritual Network for Women

In 1885 Nichiei established a branch (*betsuin* 別院) of Zuiryūji in Tokyo's Nihonbashi Kodanma-chō 日本橋小伝馬町 district, constructing a hall to enshrine an image of Kishibojin 鬼子母神 (Sk. Hārīti), which she had transported from Kyoto.⁴⁴ Kishibojin (or Kishimojin) was a popular female deity who was incorporated into the Nichiren pantheon during the Edo period. Nichiei gave sermons and led practice/worship sessions for women in Tokyo. From there she began traveling to temples in northeastern Japan (Niigata, Gunma, and Nagano prefectures). By 1887, she was proselytizing in western Japan as well. Over the years she visited Osaka, Hyōgo, Ōita, Fukuoka, Kumamoto, Nagasaki, Saga, Shimane, and Tottori prefectures. In Kumamoto, home to a large number of Nichiren followers, she set up a society dedicated to the preservation of Zuiryūji convent (Murakumo Monzeki Hozonkai 村雲門跡保存会) and was successful in collecting donations.⁴⁵ Nichiei realized that it was essential to garner financial support to replace the former system of patronage of *bikuni gosho*, which had received stipends from the shogunate. She was no doubt a compelling speaker and religious figure, but part of her appeal was due to her status as a member of the aristocracy, which still commanded respect among the general public despite the anti-Buddhist policies of the new Meiji government. The fact that she was not an actual member of the imperial family made it acceptable for her to continue serving as abbess after the Meiji Restoration. An undated photograph of her wearing a vestment displaying the imperial chrysanthemum crest conveys some sense of her noble character (figure 6).

The Nichiren sect in general was active in proselytizing inside and outside of Japan from the early 1890s.⁴⁶ Although Nichiren himself had promoted aggressive evangelizing, Nichiren clergy may have been inspired by the outreach activities of Christian missionaries as well as native Pure Land sects. For example, the Jōdo Shinshū school had set up branch temples in Pusan 釜山, Korea, where many Japanese were living as a result of Japan's growing influence in the peninsula, and the Nichiren

42 Ishikawa 2008, p. 231. Nichiei was first appointed to the *gonchūkyōsei* 權中教正 rank, but was promoted to the higher rank of *chūkyōsei* 中教正. Her sisters Seien and Bunshū also served as a *kyōdōshoku*. See Inoguchi et al. 1965, p. 21; Odaira 2016, pp. 78, 81 nn. 17 and 18.

43 The Three Great Teachings were: 1) instill respect for the gods and patriotism; 2) elucidate the principles of heaven (*tenri* 天理) and the way of humanity (*jindō* 人道); and 3) revere the emperor and obey the will of the court.

44 Ishikawa 2008, p. 232. I draw much of my information regarding Nichiei's proselytizing from this book. Ishikawa carefully documented her visits to Nichiren temples throughout Japan by investigating Nichiren sect bulletins.

45 During the Azuchi Momoyama 安土桃山 era (late sixteenth century), the castle's lord, Katō Kiyomasa 加藤清正 (1562–1622), was a devout Nichiren believer. Ishikawa 2008, p. 258.

46 Ishikawa 2008, p. 242.

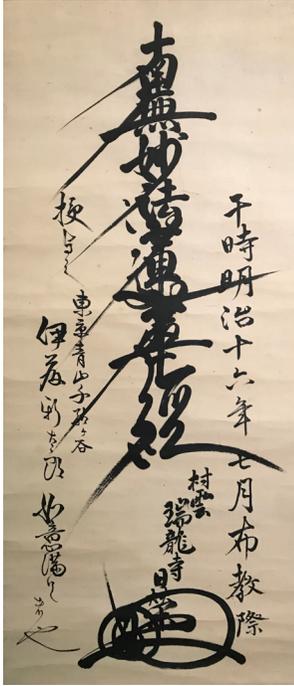


Figure 7. *Gohonzon* mandala written by Nichiei. 1883. Hanging scroll, ink on paper. 67.7 x 30 cm. Private collection.

sect decided to follow suit.⁴⁷ Nichiei herself donated a calligraphic mandala and a calligraphy plaque to a Nichiren temple that was constructed in Pusan.⁴⁸ She was a skillful calligrapher, and judging from the large corpus of remaining examples, she was frequently asked to write calligraphic mandalas (*gohonzon* 御本尊) for worshippers. Mounted as hanging scrolls, *gohonzon* serve as the main object of devotion to which chanting is directed. The example in figure 7 was calligraphed by Nichiei when she was preaching in Tokyo in 1883. In the center she has written the sacred *daimoku* “*Namu myōhō renga kyō*,” followed by her name (Murakumo Zuiryūji Nichiei 村雲瑞龍寺日榮) and a stylized cypher signature (*kaō* 花押). To the left she has written the name of the recipient (Itō Shintarō 伊藤新太郎) and location (Tokyo, Aoyama Sendagaya 青山千駄ヶ谷). Her calligraphy follows the Nichiren style, with the characters written closely together and swordlike brushstrokes extending out dramatically.

Seeking to further expand Zuiryūji’s network, Nichiei traveled to Hokke temples in Chiba, Miyagi, Akita, Yamagata, Tochigi, and Fukushima prefectures.⁴⁹ She gained an ever-increasing following and in 1893, she even went to preach in Hakodate 函館 and Sapporo in

47 Nichiren clerics involved in Meiji-era propagation efforts in Korea also cited the example of Nichiren’s direct disciple Nichiji 日持, reputed to have crossed over to the Asian continent to spread Nichiren Buddhism there.

48 Myōkakuji Betsuin 妙覚寺別院. See Ishikawa 2008, p. 243.

49 Ishikawa 2008, p. 243.

Figure 8. Murakumo Fujin Kai pin badge. Author's collection.



Hokkaido. By proselytizing throughout the country and achieving a kind of celebrity status, Nichiei dramatically stood out from the abbesses of other imperial convents.⁵⁰

In addition to promoting Nichiren's teachings and the efficacy of the *Lotus Sutra*, Nichiei's spiritual message to Buddhist women included social welfare and humanitarian concerns. During the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), she worked for the Red Cross Society, which had been actively supported by the Japanese imperial family from its initiation in Japan in 1887. At this time, it was patronized by Empress Shōken 昭憲皇太后 (1849–1914; wife of Emperor Meiji) with whom Nichiei maintained close ties (Shōken was her niece).⁵¹ Nichiei was also close to Empress Dowager Eishō 英照皇太后 (1835–1897), a daughter of Nichiei's adoptive father, Kujō Hisatada. Both the empress and empress dowager were devotees of the Hokke sect; when Eishō died in 1897, a memorial service honoring her was held at Zuiryūji.⁵²

After the Russo-Japanese War ended, Nichiei began to work toward forming a national support group for her convent called the Murakumo Zuiryūji Monzeki Hozonkai 村雲瑞龍寺門跡保存会 (Murakumo Zuiryūji Convent Preservation Society). This association eventually came to comprise wealthy private and company donors. In conjunction with this organization she also set her sights on the establishment of a women's association, and in 1906 was given approval by elders in the sect to inaugurate the Murakumo Fujin Kai 村雲婦人会 (Murakumo Women's Association), whose purpose was to promote Nichiren teachings and spiritual development, as well as encourage feminine virtues and morality. Originally based at the Hokke temple Jōshinji 浄心寺 in Tokyo's Fukagawa 深川 district, the association opened branches throughout Japan.⁵³ In the beginning there were approximately five hundred members, but after ten years the number had swelled to more than ten

50 Her sister Bunshū, who as abbess of Enshōji was affiliated with the Rinzai Zen school, was also engaged in speaking to Buddhist women's groups, but on a much smaller scale.

51 Shōken's adoptive mother was a daughter of Nichiei's father, Fushimi Kuniie.

52 Ishikawa 2008, pp. 253–254.

53 Branches were set up in Hokkaido (Sapporo, Otaru 小樽, Asahikawa 旭川, Hakodate); Kantō (Mito 水戸, Utsunomiya 宇都宮, Gunma, Mōbara 茂原, Yokohama, Katase 片瀬); Chūbu (Shizuoka, Yamanashi, Mie); Kyūshū (Moji 門司, Kumamoto, Kagoshima); and Taiwan. Branches were also set up in Korea (Pusan); Manchuria (Mukden 奉天, Dalian 大連, Lushun 旅順); and Hawaii. Ishikawa 2008, p. 310.

thousand.⁵⁴ Members received pin badges (figure 8) which they proudly wore to meetings and events.

Other Buddhist sects were actively establishing women's associations around the same time, especially Jōdo Shinshū.⁵⁵ They were likely influenced by the popularity of Christian women's education and women's societies in the early Meiji period.⁵⁶ Zuiryūji's women's association sponsored monthly lectures and provided aid to charitable organizations. For example, it dispatched members to help after the Great Kantō flood in 1910.⁵⁷ Nichiei said it was not enough to simply recite the *Lotus Sutra*; one had to pour one's heart and body into religion, not just pray for the well-being of the country and people of the world, but physically become a bodhisattva and help others.⁵⁸ Even at the age of sixty, she kept up an exhausting schedule from morning to night, traversing the country, giving lectures, attending ceremonies, and visiting charity organizations and hospitals to pay her condolences. Like her work for the Red Cross Society mentioned above, these activities are reminiscent of those undertaken by the high-ranking female members of the imperial family from the Meiji years onward. The fact that Nichiei had close ties to some of those women suggests that she may have been inspired by them.

Her activities and efforts to preserve Zuiryūji during the fifty-nine years she was in residence were instrumental in keeping the convent and Buddhism "alive" after the anti-Buddhist movement. A perusal of the *Yomiuri Shinbun* 読売新聞 digital archives reveals a number of short articles noting her travels around the country and attendance at meetings of the various branches of the Murakumo Fujin Kai, suggesting that she was regarded as a kind of celebrity.⁵⁹

Nichiei's successor was decided a couple of years before her death: Haruko 温子 (1896–1962), a daughter of Sengoku Masayuki 仙石政敬 (1872–1935). After being adopted by Kujō Michizane 九条道実 (1870–1933), Haruko was tonsured by Nichiei in 1918 (age twenty-three) and given the name Nichijō 日淨. In commemoration of the tonsuring of her successor, in 1919 Nichiei established a training center for nuns (Nishū Shūdōin 尼衆修道院), located in Matsugasaki-mura 松ヶ崎村 north of Kyoto, which is still in existence today.⁶⁰ At that time Zuiryūji covered tuition fees. Nichiei died the following year (1920).⁶¹

Following the path laid out by her predecessor, Nichijō poured her heart and soul into promoting the activities of the Murakumo Fujin Kai. A few years ago, I had the good fortune to purchase an old album that includes several photographs of her officiating at

54 Ishikawa 2008, p. 310.

55 Ishizuki Shizue has done some pioneering research on Buddhist women associations in modern Japan. See Ishizuki 1999.

56 One of the largest and best-known women's organizations in modern Japan was the Aikoku Fujinkai 愛国婦人会 (Patriotic Women's Association) established in 1901 by Okumura Ioko 奥村五百子 (1845–1907), whose objective was to provide support to war-bereaved families. Like Nichiei, she traveled all over the country seeking to expand the organization's membership and activities.

57 Ishikawa 2008, p. 310. Ishikawa mistakenly notes the year as Meiji 44, but it should be Meiji 43 (1910).

58 Ishikawa 2008, p. 310.

59 I am grateful to Saka Chihiro 坂知尋 for searching for articles related to Zuiryūji and the Murakumo Fujin Kai in the *Yomiuri Shinbun* digital archives database (<https://database.yomiuri.co.jp/rekishikan/>).

60 Now called the Nichiren-shū Nishū Shūgakurin 日蓮宗尼衆宗学林, it celebrated its one hundredth anniversary in 2019. Schools for training nuns had been established earlier in Kyoto, for example the Nishū Gakkō 尼衆学校 run by the Jōdo-sect temple Chion'in 知恩院, which opened in 1887.

61 Nichiei's posthumous Buddhist name became Zuihōin 瑞法院.



Figure 9. Nichijō (center) with members of the Murakumo Fujin Kai at Myōshōji 妙照寺 in Okayama. Dated 18 April 1961. Author's collection.



Figure 10. Nichijō (center) with members of the Tokyo branch of the Murakumo Fujin Kai attending a 650th death anniversary memorial service for Nichiren in Nagoya in October 1961. Author's collection.

various meetings and ceremonies (figures 9 and 10), as well as a full view portrait. In April of 1926, the association announced its plans to build a large Western-style assembly hall near Zuiryūji called the Murakumo Fujin Kaikan 村雲婦人会館.⁶² This hall was ostensibly constructed to commemorate a visit by Empress Teimei 貞明皇后 (1884–1951; wife of the Taishō emperor), and was to be used to accommodate large gatherings for events and for lodging for members of regional branches.⁶³ A set of postcards produced at the time of its inauguration in April 1929 shows views of both the exterior and interior (figures 11a and 11b). Empress Teimei visited Zuiryūji on 6 December 1924.⁶⁴ Her visit was commemorated in a photographic album published by Zuiryūji, showing the empress being greeted by all of the regional branch heads in front of the convent’s gate, walking along a corridor inside the compound, and leaving in a black automobile.⁶⁵ It appears that the imperial visit was attended by approximately one hundred people.

Not long after Nichijō became abbess, the Murakumo Fujin Kai began publishing the bulletin *Zuiun* (Auspicious clouds) in 1923.⁶⁶ In addition to announcing upcoming lectures, it included short articles on topics such as Nichiren’s teachings, women and Buddhism, and self-cultivation, as well as reports on events and activities at Zuiryūji and the various branches. The brief reports reveal that the abbess regularly associated with other convents in Kyoto and Nara, and that abbesses participated in each other’s ritual events. This demonstrates that Zuiryūji was accepted and treated as an equal among the other convents, despite sectarian differences. The bulletin also includes calls for donations and lists of contributions received. The information contained in *Zuiun* makes clear the immense scale and scope of Zuiryūji’s network.

The Murakumo Fujin Kai also published books.⁶⁷ Abbess Nichijō herself authored *Nihon fujin no shinkō* 日本婦人の信仰 (Japanese women’s faith, 1941). A photograph of Nichijō together with a *tanzaku* 短冊 poem card by her hand is included as a frontispiece, presenting her as both a cultured noblewoman, and religious figure. Her activities are less

62 An announcement appeared in the morning edition of the *Yomiuri Shinbun* newspaper, which reported that Zuiryūji had held a memorial service honoring the seventh death anniversary of Nichiei on 22 April, a memorial service honoring the three hundredth death anniversary of its founder Nisshū on 23 April, and a national meeting of the Murakumo Fujin Kai on 24 April, at which the construction plans were announced.

63 *Zuiun* 瑞雲, the bulletin published by the Murakumo Fujin Kai, notes in October 1929 that a ceremony of completion (*shunkōshiki* 竣工式) had been held in April of that year. The July 1929 issue records that a three-day summer worship meeting was convened from 11–13 July (with eighty attendees), and that the first public lecture was held at the hall on 13 July. The April 1930 issue of *Zuiun* includes a list of various regional groups who stayed overnight there, ranging in size from ten to thirty-four people. See also note 67.

64 Her visit is mentioned in the Buddhist newspaper *Chūgai Nippō*, 6 December, 1924, p. 5. I am grateful to Sōkendaï graduate student Gu Setsuken 虞雪健 for checking the *Chūgai Nippō* microfilm archives at Nichibunken to confirm the exact date. In addition to Zuiryūji, the empress visited other temples and shrines to pray for the emperor, whose health was failing. Afterwards she donated a large bronze incense burner to Zuiryūji as an invocation for her husband’s convalescence. See “Kōgōgū gokashi hin” 皇后宮御下賜品, *Zuiun* 9:2 (1925), p. 14.

65 The title of the album is *Kōgō heika gyōkei kinenchō* 皇后陛下行啓記念帖. It was privately published by Zuiryūji and Tsuji Shinjirō 辻信次郎 in May 1925. I tried to purchase this album when it appeared in a Yahoo auction in 2019, but regretfully was unsuccessful. Since then I have not been able to locate any other copies. I only have printouts of the photographs made available on the internet by the dealer at the time of the auction.

66 The name of the bulletin combines the *zui* 瑞 character from Zuiryūji and the cloud (*un/kumo* 雲) character from Murakumo. Sixty volumes (1923–1935) are preserved in the archives of the Gifu-ken Rekishi Shiryōkan 岐阜県歴史資料館. Further detailed investigation of this bulletin is a desideratum for future scholarship.

67 Examples include *Budda no jokun* 仏陀の女訓 (1907) and *Nichiren shōnin goibun monogatari* 日蓮上人御遺文物語 (undated).



Figure 11a. Postcard showing the exterior of the Murakumo Fujin Kaikan. Author's collection.

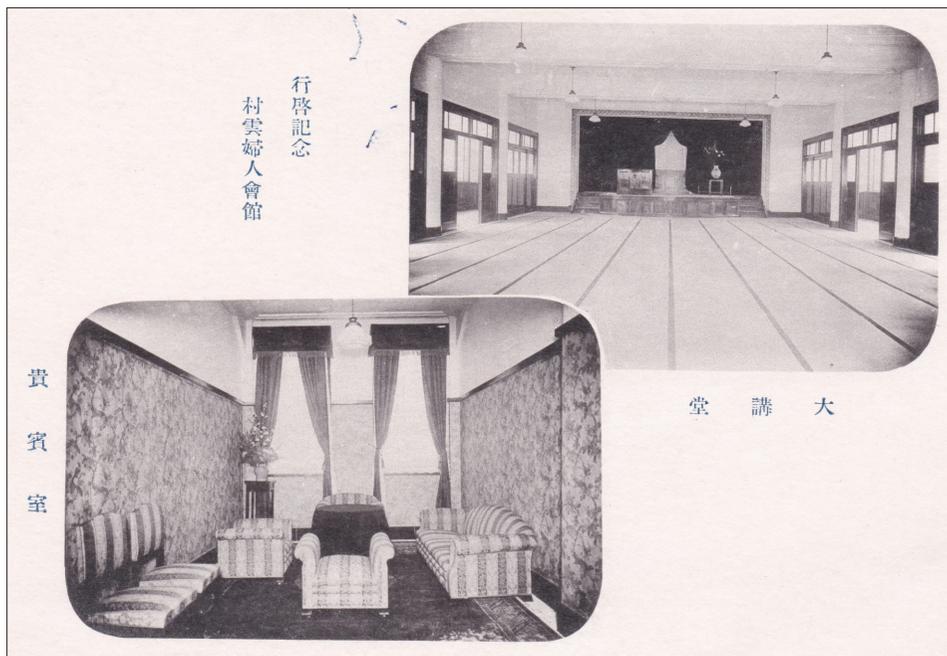


Figure 11b. Postcard show interior views (lecture hall and reception room) of the Murakumo Fujin Kaikan. Author's collection.



Figure 12. Nichijō arriving at Tokyo station on 7 July 1936. Special edition of *Osaka Mainichi Shinbun*.

well documented than Nichiei's, but an article in the *Osaka Mainichi* newspaper (figure 12) shows her arriving ceremoniously at Tokyo Station on 7 July 1936 to attend the ceremony installing her as the new president of the Dai Nihon Reiyūkai 大日本霊友会, a “spiritual friendship” lay Buddhist association dedicated to the *Lotus Sutra* and ancestor rites.⁶⁸ Another photograph taken in the same year shows her at a temple in Mukden, Manchuria, participating in a Buddhist teaching tour, indicating that she continued to build upon Nichiei's network.⁶⁹

The Asia-Pacific War (1941–1945) disrupted the activities of Zuiryūji and the Murakumo Fujin Kai, and after the war ended, public interest tended to shift away from imperial-related institutions. The war thus signals the end of an era in which the convent enjoyed significant public and private support. The branches of the Murakumo Fujin Kai that had been established throughout Japan withered away, and as a result funding for Zuiryūji dried up. In 1959, believing that there was no longer any benefit to be gained from being affiliated with the Nichiren sect headquarters at Kuonji Temple, the convent considered withdrawing: around this time, many former *bikuni gosho* were establishing themselves as independent temples (*tanritsu jin* 単立寺院).⁷⁰ However, sect officials, who wanted to keep the convent with its *monzeki* status within its orbit, discovered what they cited as the improper disposal of assets and reportedly wanted to dismiss Nichijō as abbess.⁷¹

68 For more information on this lay Buddhist association, see Hardacre 1984.

69 Ishikawa 2008, front matter. A branch of the Murakumo Fujin Kai was located in Mukden.

70 This trend may have resulted in part from the financial burden of having to pay fees on a regular basis to maintain their affiliations with large *honzan* 本山 (headquarters) temples.

71 Majima 2006, p. 383. For further details on what transpired, see the entry on “Zuiryūji iten” 瑞龍寺移転 in *Nichirensū jiten*, p. 802.

In addition to political and financial problems, there was disagreement among the convent's board members. Eventually a compromise was reached in 1961. It was decided to sell the land in Kyoto and relocate the convent on the top of a mountain in Ōmi Hachiman, the site of a castle built by the founder's son Hidetsugu in 1585. Nichijō, however, did not live to see the move completed: she died in September 1962.⁷² The transfer of the temple's buildings in December 1962 from Kyoto to Ōmi Hachiman was financed by the founder of the Seibu Railway Company, Tsutsumi Yasujirō 堤康次郎, a native of Shiga Prefecture who had been a long-time supporter of Zuiryūji.⁷³ While much of the convent's sculptural imagery was reinstalled at the new site, scroll paintings, calligraphy, and historical documents appear to have been scattered or even lost during this turbulent period.

Zuiryūji in the Twentieth Century: A Change in Façade

Only three years after Nichijō's death was her successor decided, and the relocated convent ready to be reset. The selection of the first abbess without any imperial connections was another dramatic turning point for Zuiryūji. The new abbess Nichiei 日英 (1914–1988) was born in Tokyo as the fifth daughter of Ogasawara Nagayoshi 小笠原長幹 (1885–1935). She married in 1931, after graduating from Gakushūin Joshi Daigaku 学習院女子大学. She had three children, but later divorced, leaving the children with her ex-husband. At the age of forty-nine (1960) she was tonsured by the abbot of Chōshōji 長勝寺 in Kamakura, who arranged for her to take over the abbacy of Zuiryūji five years later (1965). By that point, nearly one third of the temple compound had fallen into disrepair, and the Murakumo Fujin Kai had been more or less disbanded. To take up residence atop a mountain in Shiga Prefecture, in a temple partly in ruins, Nichiei must have had sincere commitment to the Buddhist path and an intrepid spirit.

Before long she was joined at Zuiryūji by a woman who was officially adopted into Nichiei's family, making her Ogasawara Eihō 小笠原英法 (1914–2002).⁷⁴ Eihō's background was even more unconventional than Nichiei's. Before becoming a nun, she had been one of the star performers at the Takarazuka Revue, an all-female musical theater troupe based in Hyōgo Prefecture.⁷⁵ She retired from her singing/dancing career in 1940. In 1965, at the age of fifty, she decided to take the tonsure, and eventually she found her way to Zuiryūji.

Nichiei and Eihō were both the same age. Dedicating themselves to reviving Zuiryūji, as well as the Murakumo Fujin Kai, they broke down barriers by opening up the convent to the public, and by banishing the historical image of an *amamonzeki* 尼門跡 (former imperial convent) as a place for daughters of emperors or women from aristocratic families. In addition to giving sermons, they counseled people seeking help in dealing with personal matters. According to Eihō, Nichiei put up a sign at Zuiryūji: "Any person filled with worries amid dark clouds who visits Zuiryūji for whatever reason will be illuminated by the wisdom of Buddha."⁷⁶ The revitalized Murakumo Fujin Kai met monthly at Zuiryūji,

72 Her posthumous Buddhist name became Zuishuin 瑞珠院.

73 Ishikawa 2008, p. 322.

74 Her original name was Kanzaki Fujiko 神崎不二子.

75 Her artistic name was Sakura Hisako 桜緋紗子. For further details about Eihō's life, see the Wikipedia entry (in Japanese) for Sakura Hisako at <https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/桜緋紗子>

76 In Japanese the sign reads 一人でよくよ悩むのは・暗い暗い雲の中・どんなことでも瑞龍寺参り・仏の智慧で光さす. This story is related in Shufu no Tomo Sha, p. 109.

but members were no longer just women affiliated with the Nichiren sect. Women of all sects participated, and after chanting in the main worship hall, they would move to another building and listen to a lecture on the *Lotus Sutra*.⁷⁷ When Nichiei died in 1988, Eihō took over.⁷⁸ Upon becoming the thirteenth-generation abbess, she adopted the name Nichiō 日鳳. Both nuns authored books targeting a popular audience.⁷⁹

Nichiō was succeeded by Nitchō 日澄 (1917–2011), the fourteenth and final abbess of Zuiryūji.⁸⁰ She entered Zuiryūji in 2003 after having headed the Nichiren sect temple Saimyōji 最妙寺 in Osaka Prefecture for more than forty years. Nitchō served at Zuiryūji for eight years until her death. She was succeeded by her eldest son, Washizu Etoku 鷺津恵得 (?–2019). He, too, was only head for eight years before passing away.

I visited Zuiryūji twice during his residence, and he kindly showed me around and answered questions. When I inquired about remaining historical documents, he replied that there was “nothing.” Of course, this absence may have resulted from the fire in 1788 and the more recent move to Ōmi Hachiman, but I could not help feeling that records and objects may have been dispersed due to ignorance or lack of interest. After all, an inventory of the convent’s holdings carried out by Kyoto Prefecture around 1897 lists a number of paintings, pieces of calligraphy, and other documents.⁸¹ I was dismayed to find that he seemed to be more interested in the founder’s son, Hidetsugu, than in the generations of abbesses who had lived at Zuiryūji during the Edo and Meiji periods. Since the precedent has now been set for a male to become chief priest, the future of this convent is uncertain. Two Nichiren sect priests knowledgeable about Zuiryūji told me of their conviction that it should continue as a convent and hoped that a suitable nun would be found. The current situation has incited me to continue searching for materials related to Zuiryūji so that the generations of nuns who served there will not be consigned to oblivion.

As the only Hokke/Nichiren-sect imperial convent in Kyoto, Zuiryūji has always had a unique status. But faced with unprecedented challenges to survive in the modern era, its abbesses broke through the glass walls traditionally defining “convent culture” by pursuing unorthodox and innovative activities that extended far beyond the convent’s walls. In particular, the Murakumo Fujin Kai led by Nichiei and her successor Nichijō played a significant role in propagating Buddhist teachings among women throughout Japan. As the compilation of the history of this convent is a work in progress, I hope that this interim report will encourage further attention to a vital, if threatened, piece of Kyoto’s Buddhist heritage.

77 Ishikawa 2008, p. 323.

78 Nichiei’s posthumous name was Zuikōin 瑞興院 and Eihō’s was Zuikain 瑞華院.

79 Nichiei, *Torawareru kokoro kara dasshutsu* 捉われる心から脱出 (Toki Shobō 朱鷺書房, 1978) and Nichiō, *Gujo issin* 愚女一心 (Shirakawa Shoin 白川書院, 1971).

80 Nitchō’s original name was Washizu Keisei 鷺津啓静; her posthumous Buddhist name is Zuisen’in 瑞仙院.

81 *Kyōto-fu jūin jūkibo*.

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