

# Religion, Aesthetics, and Superstition in Medieval Japan

# Background to Medieval Buddhism

- Classical Buddhism: Tendai, Shingon
- Economic Growth in 12th/13th centuries creates new classes
  - warriors, craftsmen, merchants, and more peasants
- Concept of “Degenerate Age” (*mappô*)

# Rise of Belief in Amida

- Amida: Salvationist bodhisattva (Tendai)
- “Reliance on others” (*tariki*) vs. “Reliance on self” (*jiriki*)

# 3 Great Advocates of Amida Buddhism

- Genshin (942-1017)
  - Originally Tendai monk
  - *Essentials of Salvation*
- Honen (1133-1212)
  - Monk who broke with Tendai
  - Repetition of “Praise be to Amida”
  - Established Pure Land sect
  - Simplified Buddhism

# 3 Advocates of Amida Worship

- Shinran (1173-1261)
  - Disciple of Honen
  - One truly sincere invocation of *nembutsu*
  - True reliance on others
  - Establishes True Pure Land Sect

# Nichiren (1222-1282)

- Challenged efficacy of *nembutsu*
- Salvationist powers of Lotus Sutra
- Nichiren's *nembutsu*: "Praise be to the Lotus Sutra"
- Denounced other sects
- Established Nichiren Sect

# Literary Expressions of Buddhism

- Recluse Essays
  - *An Account of My Hermitage*
  - *Essays in Idleness*
- War Chronicles
  - *Tales of the Heike*
  - *The Great Peace*

# Themes in Literary Accounts

- Evanescence
- Retreat
- Mercy and Compassion (inspired by Amida)

# Zen Buddhism

- Developed in China in 6th Century
- Introduced to Japan in 12th Century
- Associated with samurai
- No notion of bodhisattva

# Techniques of Zen

- Enlightenment = reaching your inner potential through reflection
  - Seated meditation (*zazen*)
  - Unsolvable *kôan*
    - Separate mind from rationality and the senses
    - Give mind different framework to perceive things
  - *Mondo*: philosophical questions back and forth

# Tea Ceremony and Tea Aesthetics

- Wabi and Sabi together =
  - Rustic simplicity
  - Subtle and aged elegance
  - Asymmetrical earthiness
  - Lonesome melancholy

# Common Superstitions

- Shinto-based notion of purity
- Fox-spirits
- *Oni*
  
- \*\*Religious-based notions that have gained secular currency

