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A Strategic Study of Early Buddhism and Buddhism in East Asia  
(Documented researches) 9 lectures by Piya Tan

### BUDDHISM IN JAPAN (2 lectures)

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#### Lecture 6

#### RISE OF BUDDHISM IN JAPAN

#### 1. SYLLABUS

- (1) Japanese social and religious characteristics.
- (2) Arrival of Buddhism: Shotoku; success of Buddhism.
- (3) Nara period: the 6 schools.
- (4) Heian period: Saichō, Kūkai; Pure Land Buddhism; religious & cultural developments.
- (5) Kamakura period: Hōnen, Shinran; Nichiren, Zen: Dōgen; indigenization.
- (6) Muromachi period: Zen contributions.
- (7) Momoyama period: Christianity.
- (8) Tokugawa: Buddhism as instrument of state; Buddhist contributions.
- (9) Meiji, Taishō, Showa periods: Buddhism in decline; revival; New Religions.
- (10) Heisei period: modern Buddhist scholarship.

#### 2. JAPANESE CHARACTERISTICS

The Japanese psyche, or the way the average Japanese thinks, is dominated by two notions:

- A. Traditional hereditary and hierarchical patterns.
- B. Propensity for borrowing ideas and institutions from abroad.

##### A. Traditional hereditary and hierarchical patterns.

The traditional hereditary and hierarchical patterns of Japanese society comprises two dimensions: the horizontal and the vertical. The horizontal dimension is a linear progression in its history stretching back into time immemorial, anyway, at least to the mythical creation of their homeland by Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess. The vertical dimension is the functional levels of existence that govern their daily lives—the hierarchies.

On closer examination, we will notice 6 persistent aspects or themes of the social and religious life of the Japanese: (1) the closeness of humans, gods and nature; (2) the religious character of the family; (3) the significance of purification, rituals and charms; (4) the prominence of local festivals and individual cults; (5) the pervasiveness of religion in everyday life; and (6) the natural bond between religion and the nation.

(H. Byron Earhart, *Japanese Religion: Unity and Diversity*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1982: ch. 2)



### (1) The closeness of humans, gods and nature.

In Japanese religion, the gods and mortals alike share in the beauty of nature. As it were, god, man and nature are all on the same level in a harmonious interrelationship. However, it is important to understand that the Japanese term *kami* is much more inclusive than the English word “god”. Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801), one of the greatest Shintō scholars, defines *kami* in these words:

Generally speaking, (the word) *kami* denotes, in the first place, the deities of heaven and earth that appear in the ancient texts and also the spirits enshrined in the shrines; furthermore, among all kinds of beings—including not only human beings but also such objects as birds, beasts, trees, grass, seas, mountains, and so forth—any being whatsoever which possesses some eminent quality out of the ordinary, and is awe-inspiring, is called *kami*.

(In Shigeru Matsumoto, *Motoori Norinaga, 1730-1801*. Cambridge, MA: HUP, 1970: 84)

The primary notion is that a *kami* has the power to inspire. As such, the closest general term we have in English for *kami* is “the notion of the sacred” [see Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, tr. Willard R. Trask, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959].

Humans, too, can rise to the status of a *kami*. The emperor was regarded as a living *kami*. Other human beings, such as the shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542-1616) and the founders of Buddhist sects have been revered as *kami*. During the recent centuries, the founders of the New Religions, too, have been regarded as living *kami*.

### (2) The religious character of the family.

The family, including both living and dead members, are sacred and have a crucial religious function. Family unity and continuity are vital for rituals honouring the spirits of the family ancestors. The dead can rise to the level of *kami*. A dead person is euphemistically referred to as a “Buddha” (*hotoke*).

In Japan, the family unit is an extended one, covering over three or more generations and several sets of related parents, sometimes including family workers not biologically related. In ancient times, the head of the family was a priest, and such individuals from prominent families were political and religious leaders combined.

Traditionally, in every Japanese family, there are two shrines: the miniature “*kami*-shrine” (*kamidana*) for daily prayers, and the Buddha altar (*butsudan*) serving as ancestral shrine for periodic worship of specific ancestors. The *butsudan* is found even where the *kamidana* is missing. This is the extent to which the Japanese revere the family.

This sacredness of the family explains why when Shintō and Buddhism became highly organized they developed a hereditary priesthood. Understandably, the reverence for the family entails respect for elders and seniors. Even the New Religions and modern businesses are organized in terms of loyalty and belonging based on the model of the Japanese family.

### (3) The significance of purification, rituals and charms.



The Japanese perception of the close presence of the sacred that pervades all around, especially in nature and sacred places, entails their need to be ritually pure in order to win the favour and protection of such powers. These elements of purification, rituals and charms are often borrowed from Indian and Chinese traditions, but became well integrated into Japanese life.

In front of every Shinto shrine or Buddhist temple, for example, water is provided for washing the hands and rinsing the mouth before approaching the shrine. Paper charms are often distributed by shrines and temples for various kinds of blessings and to ward off specific ill fortunes. Buddhist scriptures and verses are commonly recited for the same magical purposes.

#### **(4) The prominence of local festivals and individual cults.**

Unlike synagogues, churches, or mosques, Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples are not places of weekly worship services, but this does not diminish their importance. **Periodic festivals** are the expression of the whole village or section of a large city, serving as unifying forces that link individual homes with the larger religious community.

The local festival with its carnival atmosphere is typical of Japanese religiosity. In this light, it is understandable why the celebration of Christmas has become popular in Japan, even though Christianity is not widespread.

**Individual cults**, though not organized on a national scale, also play a crucial role in the religious life of a Japanese. Especially popular are the Bodhisattvas, such as Jizo (Kṣitigarbha) and Kannon (Avalokiteśvara), whose statues can be found in the temples or the villages or along the roadside. Individual *kami* are revered by groups of tradespeople like fishermen and others.

#### **(5) The pervasiveness of religion in everyday life.**

From all the previous four aspects of Japanese religion, we can surmise that religion is an important part of the average Japanese. Although the modern Japanese may appear outwardly irreligious and secular, he is part of an important cycle in Japanese society. At regular stages in his life, he would visit shrines and temples.

Traditionally, a young infant is carried to the local Shintō shrine and presented to the guardian deity. In times of illness or special need, one usually visits a shrine or temple that grants an appropriate blessing. Likewise, in recent times, the traditional wedding often takes place in a Shintō shrine, and the funeral mass and the subsequent memorial celebrations are performed in a Buddhist temple.

Even fertility and sexuality are seen in religious terms. For example, conjugal harmony and fertility for rice fields are requested from wayside deities (*dosojin*). Religion is also expressed in the Japanese sense of humour. For example, Bodhidharma, the 1<sup>st</sup> Zen patriarch is represented as a legless dool called Daruma (since Bodhidharma is said to have meditated until his legs fell off!).



### **(6) The natural bond between religion and the nation.**

A central myth of ancient Japan relates that the emperor was a descendent of the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu. In fact, throughout Japanese history up to 1868 (the Meiji period), the emperor, being a sacred person is only the symbolic head of ritual and government.

While Shintō expresses this connection between religion and nation, Buddhism brought it to the highest level by becoming the state religion in various historical periods of Japanese history. Between 1868 and 1945 (the period of the Second World War and Japanese expansionism), the natural bond between religion and nation was used by the state to support nationalism and militarism.

### **B. Propensity for borrowing ideas and institutions from abroad.**

The Japanese **indigenous religions** are folk religion and Shintoism. The other major religious traditions—Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism—were imported. Let us have a quick look at each of these by way of introduction.

## **3. RELIGIOUS ROOTS**

Japanese religion is a blend of at least 5 major strands: folk religion, Shinto, Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism. Christianity, which arrived in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, may be regarded as the 6<sup>th</sup> strand, but since it did not contribute to the formation of traditional Japanese religion, we shall only make a brief mention of it.

### **(1) Folk Religion.**

“Folk religion” generally refers to popular (but informal) beliefs and practices that have existed outside highly organized religion. Some folk practices, such as rituals connected with hunting and rice-growing, may date back to prehistoric times. Such beliefs touch people’s everyday life, such as work, home and annual celebrations.

### **(2) Shintō.**

Shintō, “the way of the gods”, is a formal religion of myths, rituals, shrines and priests. It arose from prehistoric times, but is deeply influenced by Chinese religions. The central belief in Shintō is that Japan is the land of the *kami* (gods or spirits), who embody the national tradition and inhabit nature. The presence of Shintō shrines in the remotest villages and on the roofs of city department stores shows the pervasiveness of the religion even today.

### **(3) Daoism.**

The three major non-indigenous traditions—Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism—all came from Korea and China. The Daoism that is found in Japan is the religious version (as opposed to its philosophy). Daoism developed out of the ancient Chinese reverence for nature and the notion of order in the ever-changing pattern of the cosmos.



#### (4) Confucianism.

Confucianism is a Chinese tradition based on the teachings of Confucius (6<sup>th</sup> century BCE), who, living in a time of great social and political turmoil, taught a return to virtue and benevolence. Central to Confucianism are filial piety and social harmony that provided the basis for an orderly society and centralized government.

#### (5) Buddhism.

Of the three non-indigenous religions, Buddhism is the most important. However, the Buddhism that arrived in Japan was a sinicized new tradition that had further been indigenized in Korea by way of which it arrived in Japan.

### 4. THREE PERIODS OF JAPANESE HISTORY

#### MAP: SPREAD OF BUDDHISM

The unity in diversity of Japanese religions is best understood when we have some idea of the major developments in the history of Japanese religions. This survey is best done by looking at the three periods of Japanese history. As we shall soon see, this chronology will centre around discontinuity in religious institutions.

#### (1) Prehistory to 9<sup>th</sup> century CE.

This was the formative period, when the major non-indigenous religions appeared in Japan.

#### (2) The 9<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

This was the developmental period when the major religions developed independently, but at the same time, they interacted with one another, and with the indigenous religions.

#### (3) The 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present.

This is the formalistic period. The general tendency in this period was that of **formalism**, which in turn generated renewal.

#### Prehistory

The three prehistoric cultures of Japan were known as the Jomon, Yayoi and Kofun. This period, spanning from the 5<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE up to mid-6<sup>th</sup> century CE, saw hunting and gathering culture giving way to rice agriculture and settled village life. Such an arrangement favoured the rise of family life.

Japanese religion at that time was indigenous folk religion centring around agricultural festivals, reverence for the dead, the divine descent of the imperial line, and the family as a religious unit.



## 5. INTRODUCTION OF BUDDHISM

Buddhism was officially introduced into Japan from Korea in the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Between 550 and 600, various Korean kings sent Buddha images and Buddhist texts to the Japanese imperial court. Some Korean monks were already resident in Japan. Following the traditional chronicles of Japan, the formal date would be 552 or 538. However, it is likely that Buddhist influence and presence might have been earlier.

The *Nihongi* (720 CE) records the first Japanese reference to Buddhism, when in 552, **king Sōng (r. 523-554) of Paekche** (southwest Korea) sent the Japanese emperor a tribute including a Buddha image and Chinese translations of the Buddhist scriptures. The Korean king praised Buddhism as the religion of distant India whose doctrine surpasses even the understanding of the Chinese and whose value is without limit.

Since Buddhism was the first foreign religion to enter Japan, it provoked opposition from the established religious tradition. **The Soga family** argued that Japan should accept Buddhism. Others, particularly the Monobe family and the Nakatomi family claimed that the native (Shintō) gods would be offended by the respect shown to a foreign deity. The immediate religious concern was not doctrinal but whether the nobility should worship the statue of the Buddha.

The early Japanese, in their ignorance of Buddhism, had the idea that worshipping the Buddha, a foreign “deity” would bring good luck to the nation and at first judged the new religion on an entirely short-term pragmatic consequences. When a plague broke out, the Buddha images were dumped in the moat, and the first temple burnt down. When another plague occurred later, images were again thrown into the moat and nuns were defrocked. When the plague continued, the fearful emperor then permitted the Buddhist cult to be practised freely.

## 6. PRINCE SHOTOKU (573-621)

Buddhism was publicly accepted after the Soga family’s political and military victory over the Mononobe and became prominent in the reign of the **empress Suiko** (r. 593-628) in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Her nephew and regent, the devout prince **Shotoku** (673-621), was considered the real founder and first great patron of Buddhism in Japan.

However, Buddhism had arrived in Japan earlier on. The 6<sup>th</sup> century emperor **Yomei** (r. 585-587), is said to have “believed in the Law of the Buddha and revered the Way of the Gods (*Shinto*)”. But it was his second son Prince Shotoku who is traditionally honoured as the founder of Japanese Buddhism.

Tradition credits Shotoku with writing several **commentaries** on difficult Buddhist texts, such as the Saddharma,puṇḍarīka Sūtra, the Vimala,kīrti Nirdeśa, and the Śrī,mālā,simhanāda Sūtra. At Nara, he built a large temple complex, the **Horyu-ji**, whose architecture clearly shows Greek influences (through the Silk Road). Today it houses the finest collection of Buddhist art in Japan. It is also the oldest wooden building in the world.

Shotoku built no less than 40 Buddhist temples throughout his kingdom, and various cultural works were produced showing strong Chinese influence. (Some of the oldest extant inscriptions are found on the halos of Buddhist images of the early 7<sup>th</sup> century.)



Shotoku founded a great institution on the west coast of the Sea of Japan facing the mainland. It comprised a religious centre, an orphanage, an old folks' home and a dispensary. It served as a convenient guest-house for Buddhist monks, visitors and immigrants from Korea and China, and for the dispatch of Japanese monks and pilgrims to the continent, where they went to study and bring back to Japan the wisdom and culture of China and Korea.

These advancements ultimately paved the way for **Japan's first constitution**, purportedly written by Prince Shōtoku in 604. The constitution declared Buddhism to be one of the pillars of Japanese society. These advancements led to the Taika reform of 646, which initiated a sinified bureaucracy in Japan.

**The earliest manuscript** of Japanese origin is the 7<sup>th</sup>-century **Hokke-gisho**, a commentary on the Lotus Sutra written in masterly Chinese by prince Shotoku. It is not certain if the manuscript is in his own hand. Japan's earliest surviving example of printed matter is the Great Dharani Sutra of the Immaculate Ray of Pure Light (Raśmī, vimāla Visuddhi, prabhāsa Dhāraṇī Sūtra) (764-770). It is popularly known as the **Hyakumantō-darani** (One Million Pagoda Dharani) after the place where it was installed.

### State control

However, even as early as 624, three years after Shotoku's death, **the empress Suiko** had to regulate the Buddhist clergy. **The Taiho Code of 702** included several sections dealing with religious administration, including the organization of the Shintō bureau and the bureau of religious Daoism. A special section of the code dealt with the regulation of monks and nuns.

This shows that not only had Buddhism become an influential religion, but by that very fact, the state had to take steps to curb its excesses and maintain a religious balance.

## **7. KOREA: SILLA (668-935)**

In 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, some tribes in southern Korea formed a league called **Kaya**. Many Japanese scholars refer to the area as Mimana and claim that it was controlled by Japan in the Kofun period (c. 300-710). Located between the ancient Korean kingdoms of Silla and Paekche, it was conquered by Silla in two stages in 532 and 562.

Silla expansion throughout southern Korea prompted massive emigration of Koreans to Japan (where they called *kikajin*). Many of the cultural and technical achievements of early Japan—such as the development of paddy fields, the construction of palaces and temples, and town planning—were direct results of the expertise introduced by these successive migrations.

### Reasons for success of Buddhism

The success of Buddhism in early Japan was partly due to the fact that the country was undergoing its initial stages of formation, and partly due to the depth of the Buddhist teachings and the great appeal of its **art, ritual and magic**. In fact, soon after the arrival of Buddhism in Japan, the Buddha was worshipped as a *kami*.



Soon after its arrival, Buddhism was gradually accepted by the leading families, then by the court and finally by the state. Later diplomatic missions from Korea brought more Buddhist images and scriptures, and most important of all—Buddhist monks.

The Japanese were just beginning to learn the **Chinese writing system**, so it took specialists like the Buddhist monks to read and expound the Chinese translations of the Buddhist texts. The Buddhist monks also served the religious needs of the court and the state.

### Rich heritages

It is important to note that when Buddhism entered China, she possessed a rich tradition of literature, philosophy, religion and government. It was an uphill task for Buddhism before it came to be fully accepted by the Chinese. At the time of the Buddhist advent, Japan, however, had no literature or philosophy to speak of, and her religion and government were only loosely formed.

The Buddhist monks who first arrived in Japan possessed two highly valued treasures: the religious heritage of Indian Buddhism transformed by Chinese language and custom, and the cultural heritage of China, which included the model for a well-ordered kingdom. These monks also brought with them many technical skills associated with Buddhism, such as paper, printing, carpentry and architecture.

Those Japanese Buddhist monks who went to China on court order, combined religious, commercial and governmental functions.

### Cremation

As exemplars of Buddhism, monks are the best missionaries abroad. Even in death, they exert lasting influence on the people. The first record of **cremation** in Japan was that of the monk Dōshō (629-700). When Buddhism became established in the Nara period, cremation gradually spread from the Buddhist clergy to the imperial family and nobility. By the Kamakura and Muramachi periods, cremation became a common practice for the masses.

Cremation was banned during the Tokugawa period (1600-1868) under the growing influence of Neo-Confucianism, and during the Meiji period (1868-1912) due to upsurge of anti-Buddhist sentiments. In modern Japan, however, some 96% of Japanese burials are cremations (1989).

## **8. THE TAIKA PERIOD (645-710)**

The Taika period saw an influx of Chinese culture, Japan's first contact with a literate and highly organized culture. It was in this period that Japan had its first truly centralized government, patterned after Chinese models (such as the legal codes).

Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism were imported from Korea and China. Shintoism was organized from indigenous traditions. The earliest interactions of these traditions occurred in this period.

### Ikebana



Ikebana, originally referred to classical art of Japanese flower arranging, but today applies to a wide range of styles of Japanese floral art. It is based on the harmony of simple linear construction and an appreciation of the subtle beauty of flowers and natural material.

It was introduced into Japan in the 6<sup>th</sup> century by Chinese Buddhist missionaries who had formalized the ritual of offering flowers to the Buddha. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Ono no Imoko, the former Japanese envoy to China, formulated the rules of arrangement and founded Ikenobō, the first school of flower arranging in Japan.

## 9. THE NARA PERIOD (710-784)

Nara was the first permanent capital Japan had. Life in the imperial court and among the nobility was elaborate and highly formalized. It was a feudal system in which the commoner was widely separated from the higher classes. The first Japanese writings (dynastic chronicles) and the *Manyōshū* (a collection of poems) were composed during this period.

### Todai-ji

A network of Buddhist temples grew up in the provinces with the **Todai-ji** (710-784) at Nara as the central cathedral. Its principal image (*honzon*) is the 16 m (53 ft) tall gilt-bronze image of Birushana (Vairocana) (752), called the Nara Daibutsu (Great Buddha of Nara). In 741 emperor Shōmu (701-756) ordered that two provincial temples (*kokubunji*) be built in every province: a monastery and a nunnery. The monks and nuns would copy and recite the Buddhist texts, thereby bringing divine protection and blessing on the whole country.

It is also noteworthy that the principal image in the Todai-ji is that of the Lochana (Vairocana), the Sun Buddha. Just as the sun sits in the centre of the physical universe, so Todai-ji sits in the centre of the Buddhist network of monasteries and nunneries.

### Sutra copying

In the 8<sup>th</sup> century, copying of the entire Mahayana canon (Jap. issaikyō) was fervently promoted by emperor Shōmu. Sutra-copying was a major industry, institutionalized in the **scriptoria** (*shakyōsho*) set up within the imperial court and in many temples. The three complete sets of **Japanese Tripiṭaka** commissioned by the emperor's consort, Kōmyō (701-760), represented the apex of disciplined elegance in Nara calligraphy.

## 10. THE SIX SCHOOLS OF NARA

During the Nara period, six philosophical schools of Buddhism were introduced: Jōjitsu (625), Sanron (625), Hosso (654), Kusha (658), Kegon (736), and Ritsu (738). As in China, whence they came, each school focussed on one or more of the classic Chinese Buddhist texts, defining their distinctive viewpoints.

(1) **The Jōjitsu** and (2) **the Kusha Schools** were based mainly on Nikāya treatises. The Jōjitsu tradition centred on the *Jōjitsuron* (Chin. Ch'eng shih-lun; Satya, siddhi Śāstra by Hari-varman). The Kusha focussed on the *Kusharon* (Vasubandhu's Abhidharma, kośa Śāstra). The texts of these two schools were also studied by other schools. In fact, these two were not really schools in their own right, but merely traditions based on the texts mentioned.



(3) **The Sanron School** (Chin. Sanlun) was a Chinese elaboration of the Indian Madhyamaka of Nāgārjuna. The word Sanron means “three treatises” on which the school was based: Nāgārjuna’s Madhyamaka Kārikā and Dvādaśa, dvāra, and Āryadeva’s Śata, śāstra. The Madhyamika school negates all philosophical statements on the ultimate truth, calling for a direct experience of Nirvana which is said to be “empty” of all predications.

(4) **The Hossō School** (Chin. Faxiang) based itself on the Yogācāra tradition, that is, the Faxiang (Dharma Characteristic) school introduced into China by Xuanzang.

(5) **The Kegon School** (Chin. Huayan) is devoted to the study of the Avataṃsaka Sūtra (Chin. Huayan jing).

(6) **The Ritsu School** (Chin. Lizhong) is named after the Vinaya tradition, based mainly on Daoxuan’s Nanshan branch of the tradition. In Japan, this sect was responsible for the ordination of the clergy.

### Decline of Nara Buddhism

In due course, Nara became famous for its profound philosophy and magnificent temples. But as the Nara temples grew in prestige and wealth by attracting bequests from the nobility and favouritism from the state, it attracted politically ambitious people into its cloisters. In a short time, the temples became so rich and powerful that their interference in the politics of the state became intolerable.

The Buddhist clergy of Nara, especially under the leadership of Dōkyō during the reign of empress Shōtoku (r. 764-770), showed considerable influence in secular affairs. The situation reached such a critical level that during the transitional period (784-794), emperor Kammu (737-806) moved the capital to Nagaokakyo, between Osaka and Kyoto, and then in 794, again moved, this time, to Heiankyo (Kyoto), which would remain the capital until 1868. (Before the Nara period, it was a normal custom to move the capital at the death of every emperor in the belief that the emperor’s death defiled the city.)

The Nara period saw further interaction between Buddhism and Shintoism. With this, the **Formative Period** of Japanese religion ended, followed by **the Period of Development** (794-1600).

## **11. THE HEIAN PERIOD (794-1185)**

The capital moved to **Kyoto**, where a highly developed aesthetic life existed among the court and nobility. In fact, Heian was the apogee of the Japan’s aristocratic age, which produced one of the world’s most exquisite cultures. During this period, Japan fully assimilated the elements of Chinese society that the builders of the Japanese state had long emulated. It was also a period of **indigenization** of Japanese culture.

The leaders of Heian Buddhism were determined to *indigenize* Buddhism so that it was a genuinely *Japanese* religion. As a result, Buddhism became more closely related to Japanese culture and began to penetrate the countryside. While the “old Buddhism” (the 6 Schools of



Nara) was mainly the religion of the nobility and the clergy, the “new Buddhism” of Heian was increasingly a religion of the masses.

Although the first Heian emperor, Kammu (737-806), disapproved of the Heian clergy, he was benevolent to two young monks of Kyoto: Saichō and Kukai. They founded the two new Buddhist schools that dominated the Heian period: the **Tendai** (Chin. Tiantai) was founded by Saichō in 806 and the **Shingon** (Chin. Chenyan or Mizong) by Kukai in 816. Saichō and Kukai, were both vastly different in character, but motivated by the same disillusionment: to break away from the suffocating domination of the Nara clergy; both went to China for the same purpose: to look for authentic Buddhist teachings. After their return, both monks were allowed to build their own temples, but outside the capital.

### Saichō, founder of Tendai

**Saichō** (Dengyo Daishi, 767-822) founded the **Tendai** (Tiantai) school in Japan. His personal name was Hirono, began studying Buddhism at 12 and two years later took was initiated as a novice at Nara with the name of Saichō. After his higher ordination, he built himself a thatched hut on Mt. Hiei (Hieizan), northeast of Kyoto, intending to lead a life of meditation. This hermitage later became the Tendai headquarters of **Enryaku-ji** on Mt. Hiei, east of Kyōto.

Disillusioned by the scholasticism and formalism of the old schools of Nara, he sought a new form of teaching capable of uniting the different Buddhist viewpoints into one. Sometime in 797, he began to study the texts of Chinese Tiantai and lecture on its doctrines. Emperor Kammu supported Saichō’s new movement, probably as a counterweight to the influence of the Nara clergy.

Receiving permission in 802 to study under a Chinese Tiantai master, Saichō left for China in 804. After his return in 805, Kammu gave official recognition to the Tendai school (806). Tendai is the Japanese form of the Chinese Tiantai, the name of the mountain in China where the school was established by Zhiyi (fl. 6<sup>th</sup> century). An important contribution of the Tendai was the promotion of **the Lotus Sutra** (Saddharma, pūṇḍarīka Sūtra) in Japan, making it the key text for many of the later Japanese schools.

Saichō was uncompromising not only in doctrinal matters, but also in matters of training, ordination and meditation. He prescribed a 12-year period of training for monks on Mt. Hiei, during which time they were not allowed to leave the mountain.

Examinations for novices and their subsequent higher ordinations were all still conducted at Nara. Between 818 and 819, he petitioned for an independent ordination hall on Mt. Hiei. However, due to strong opposition from the Nara clergy, the Tendai sect was granted permission to ordain its own monks only seven days after Saichō’s death in 822. With this permission, the Tendai became an independent sect. In due course, it became the monastic and scholastic headquarters of all Japanese Buddhism.

### Rejection of the Absolute

One of the main features of Japanese thought has been its attitude of accepting **the phenomenal world as the Absolute**. They rejected the concept of an Absolute existing over and above



the phenomenal world and have sometimes regarded the world itself as the Absolute. This can be seen as early as in the ancient Shintō belief that spirits reside in all kinds of things. [2(A)(1)]

The belief that the Absolute is the phenomenal world also conditioned the reception and assimilation of Buddhist philosophy. Because of this acculturation, the Tendai school on Japan is not the same as its Chinese counterpart. The Tendai scholars in mediaeval Japan, using the same nomenclature as that employed in continental Buddhism, arrived at a distinctively original system of thought, called **Honkaku-hōmon**, which asserts that the changing aspects of the phenomenal world are the Buddha.

### Kūkai, founder of Shingon

When **Kūkai** (Kobo Daishi, 774-835) was 18, he entered the national college in Kyoto with the aim of becoming a statesman. However, after a year, he withdrew, justifying his actions by denouncing Confucianism and Daoism, and extolling Buddhism. He then pursued his Buddhist studies while wandering about the country as an itinerant hermit practising meditation.

In 804, he sailed to China as a student monk. In Chang'an, he studied under Huiguo (Jap. Keika), the patriarch of **Shingon** (Chin. Chenyan) or Tantric Buddhism. He returned to Japan in 806 as a Tantric master. The Shingon was established in 816 in Japan. In 819, he initiated the building of a monastic centre on Mt. Koya (Kōyasan) for the practice of Tantric Buddhist meditation. In 823, emperor Saga (r. 809-823) gave him the Tōji, the most important temple at the southern entrance to Kyoto, which became the headquarters for Shingon Buddhism.

For good reasons, Kūkai is considered the father of Japanese culture. He is credited with the invention of the **kana syllabary** (*hiragana*) of 47 cursive signs in which, alone or mixed with Chinese character, Japanese is written. He is remembered as the originator of the pilgrimage circuit of 88 temples in Shikoku and a builder of lakes. He was also known as a poet, calligrapher, sculptor and lexicographer who compiled the *Tenrei banshō meigi*, the oldest extant dictionary in Japan.

To Japanese Buddhists, he was known to be a wandering saint who engaged in severe ascetic practices. Two of his most significant works are *Sokushin jōbutsu gi* (The Meaning of Attaining Enlightenment in This Very Existence) and *Jūjūshin ron* (Treatise on the Ten Stages of Development of Mind).

## **12. HEIAN: PURE LAND BUDDHISM**

### Grace through faith

Buddhism did not at once spread widely among commoners in Heian times, but it grew in popularity through the belief in **the saving grace (*tariki*) of Amida** (Amitābha Buddha), into whose Western Paradise (Sukhāvatī) the faithful dead would be reborn. According to the Pure Land texts, one of the original vows that Amida made was that all who call upon his name—a practice known as **nembutsu** (Chin, *nianfo*)—would be welcomed into Western Paradise.

This Pure Land or Sukhāvatī School was introduced from China by **Ennin** (794-864), a disciple of Saichō. He established the *nembutsu-zammai* (meditation by recitation of the Buddha's name) based on the musical *nembutsu* then current at the celebrated Mt. Wutai in



Shanxi province. This was the very first beginning that would later make Mt. Hiei the centre of Pure Land Buddhism in the Heian period.

### Kūya (903-972)

Pure Land Buddhism was popular because it only demands faith in the grace of Amida for one to be saved. There was another reason for its popularity: the efforts of evangelists like **Kūya** (903-972), also known as Kōya. He is the best example of the prototypes of the *hijiri*, charismatic itinerant “holy men”.

Kūya is best known for his popularization of Pure Land Buddhism, dancing in the streets, singing simple Japanese hymns about Amida. He organized self-help projects for the common people, and even spread the Amidist message among the indigenous Ainu in the remote north.

After some years of study in various temples in the provinces, Kūya underwent a period of ascetic discipline and devotion to the Bodhisattva Kannon of Yushima (now Ishima) in Awa (now Tokushima Prefecture) on Shikoku.

Following a period of evangelization in the far northwestern provinces of Mutsu (now Fukushima, Miyagi, Iwate and Aomori prefectures) and Dewa (now Akita and Yamagata prefectures), he returned to Kyōto in 938 and took up the role of a mendicant monk, distributing the alms he received among the poor and the sick.

He came to be known as Ichi no Shōnin (Saint of the Marketplace) or Ichi no Hijiri (Holy Man of the Marketplace). In 948 he ascended Mt. Hiei and for the first time underwent formal ordination. In 951, seeking divine relief from an epidemic, Kūya constructed an image of the Eleven-Headed Kannon (still housed at Saikō-ji, later renamed Rokuharamitsu-ji, founded by Kūya in 963).

### Gyōgi (668-749)

Another remarkable *hijiri* was Gyōgi who was Kūya’s predecessor, before the introduction of Amidism into Japan. **Gyōgi**, also known as Gyōki (668-749), was a monk of the Hossō school (Chin, Faxiang). After studying Hossō teachings at the Yakushi-ji (in a western suburb of Nara), he devoted himself to the building of temples, especially the Todai-ji.

He also undertook numerous social welfare projects, such as dam and bridge building. During his later years, the emperor Shōmu bestowed on him the name Daibosatsu (Great Bodhisattva) and raised him to the rank of Daisōjō (great bishop or primate).

Because of his outstanding virtue, he was often known as Gyōgi Bosatsu (Bodhisattva Gyōgi) and was popularly taken to be a manifestation of the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī. Long remembered as an ascetic with great charisma, many temples were attributed to him.

### Dharma-ending age

Pure Land Buddhism became very popular in mid-Heian times. The reason for this was the Mahayana idea of *mappō*, the concept that the Dharma would go through three stages after the



Final Nirvana of the Buddha: 500 years of prosperity, 1000 years of decline, and finally the disappearance in the latter days (*mappō*) or Dharma-ending age.

Once *mappō* began, widely believed in Japan to have been in 1052, it would be extremely difficult to attain enlightenment or spiritual liberation through self-effort, as most Buddhist schools taught. The only hope was faith in the saving grace of Amida. Thus the court nobles and ladies chanted the *nembutsu* with fervour and built Amida halls within their residences to show their faith.

Even then, it should be understood that religious belief in Heian society was highly eclectic. The courtiers seemingly made little distinction among the different schools of Buddhism, Shintō beliefs, Confucianism and Daoist concept of *yin-yang*.

### 13. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE HEIAN PERIOD

#### Warrior monks

Major temples recruited **warrior monks** (*sōhei*) for protection in bitter doctrinal disputes within and among temples and in conflicts over *shoen* (landed estate) holdings. These monks were also effective in pressing demands at court. They would march into the capital bearing the sacred palanquin of the protective Shintō deity associated with their temple.

Ironically, it was the warrior-monks of Mt. Hiei at the capital's protective temple of Enryaku-ji who most terrified the court and the citizens of Kyoto. Yet despite occasional intimidation, the separation of religion and politics was largely maintained.

#### Sannō Ichi-jitsu Shintō

During the Heian period, Shintō became more highly organized. At the end of the period, an interesting synthesis of Shintō and Tendai arose: the **Sannō Ichi-jitsu Shintō** (Mountain-king One Truth Shintō), also simply known as Ichi-jitsu Shintō or Tendai Shintō. Sannō is the name of the Shintō mountain god who resides on Mt. Hiei (HQ of the Tendai Buddhist school) and who is considered by members of the Sannō Ichi-jitsu Shintō to be a manifestation of Sakyamuni and also identical with the chief Shintō divinity, the sun goddess Amaterasu.

The name of the school further refers to the Tendai teaching that there is only one absolute reality (*ichi-jitsu*) behind the universe. This was interpreted to mean that the Shintō *kami* (gods or sacred powers) are historical manifestation in Japan of Buddhist divinities, all of whom are ultimately one reality.

#### Cultural developments

During the Nara period, Buddha images were often made of bronze (like the Nara Daibutsu in Todai-ji). However, in the Heian period, wood became the favoured medium for sculpture and would remain so through the modern era. The Heian period saw the emergence of Buddhist monk-sculptors, called **bussshi**, and sculptor lineages as an artistic and economic force in Kyōto and Nara. Through the 10<sup>th</sup> century sculptors resided at major temples, such as the Enryaku-ji.



As early as the Nara period, large temples such as the Tōdai-ji and Hōryū-ji provided a kind of **public steam bath**. Public baths were maintained by temples and by the wealthy for the poor and unfortunate until the Muromachi period (1333-1568). The public bath is still popular in Japan today, though most houses now have their own bath.

Some of Japan's oldest **maps** still extant today are from the Nara period. Wandering monks who explored distant parts of the country drew the first maps ever found in Japan.

A Japanese court lady, **Murasaki Shikibu** (c. 978-c. 1014), wrote *Genji monogatari* (*The Tale of Genji*, tr. Arthur Waley, 1935), which is not only the greatest work of Japanese literature, but believed to be the world's oldest full novel.

Heian was a time when **women** were able to be as independent as the men. This was not to become possible again for a thousand years.

#### 14. KAMAKURA PERIOD (1185-1333)

In 1185, Yoritomo and his younger brother Yoshitsune defeated the forces of the Taira clan in a decisive naval battle in the Inland Sea. He had earlier led a successful campaign against the Ainu (an autochthonous Caucasoid tribe) pushing them northward and was awarded the title of *Seii-tai-shogun* (Barbarian-subduing General).

Shortened to **shogun**, it became the title of the major military commander. Theoretically, the shogun was the emperor's military adviser or chief of staff, but in fact he was the *de facto* head of state, a situation which continued until 1868. As such, this period is sometimes called the Kamakura Shogunate.

The seat of government was moved to **Kamakura**, where the focus of attention shifted from the effeminate nobleman to the powerful warrior. The merchant class was also rising. But there was a general uncertainty as civil strife grew. Political power had effectively passed from the hands of the aristocracy to the emergent military class, initiating an age of feudalism that would last until 1868.

#### The Mongol invasions

Among the most dramatic events of the Kamakura period were **the Mongol invasions** of Japan during the regency of Hōjō Tokimune, the 8<sup>th</sup> *shikken* (regent). The first invasion was launched in **1274** after the Japanese brusquely rejected a Mongol demand that they acknowledge the suzerainty of Kublai Khan (1215-94). Fortunately for the defendants, only a day after the invading force of about 40,000 men landed near Hakata in northern Kyushu, a storm suddenly arose, destroying a good part of the fleet and causing many of the invaders to drown.

Seven years later, in **1281**, the Japanese again rejected Kublai's demands and, furthermore, beheaded his envoys. Kublai dispatched a huge force of 140,000 and 150,000 men to Hakata Bay. Again, after nearly two months of fighting, a fierce typhoon arose, forcing the invaders to retreat.

The repulse of the invasions reinforced the national pride of the Japanese and raised the prestige of the Hōjō regency. The warriors however could not be rewarded since the enemies came from overseas, there were no land booty, so increasing domestic strife. Moreover, the



Shintō priests and Buddhist monks also pressed for rewards, each insisting that their prayers had granted the *kamikaze* (divine wind) that routed the invaders.

### Popularization of Buddhism

During the Kamakura period, Buddhism became more of a religion of the masses, most of them being adherents of Amida pietism, championed by Honen and his pupil Shinran. It was during this time that Nichiren lived and the Zen school was founded. These three schools dominated the Kamakura period. Buddhism had finally entered the life of the common people and spread throughout Japan.

By this time, the Sannō Ichi-jitsu Shintō [13], a highly eclectic combination of Shintō and Tendai became very well developed. In fact, full-scale blending of various the religious traditions became common.

## **15. KAMAKURA: PURE LAND BUDDHISM**

During 12<sup>th</sup> century Kamakura, Pure Land (*jōdo*) Buddhism enjoyed a surge of popularity under Honen (1133-1212). His disciples established it as a school than became independent of the Tendai [11].

### Hōnen (1133-1212)

Hōnen, whose real name was Genkū, was the founder of the **Jōdo school**, and who spearheaded the Kamakura Buddhist “reformation”. The son of a samurai from the Mimasaka Province (now part of Okayama Prefecture), Hōnen entered the Buddhist Order at 8, following the death of his father.

He studied at the Enryaku-ji on Mt. Hiei, and became a monk at 15. Disenchanted with the worldliness and politics at Hiei, he decided to become a wandering ascetic (*hijiri*) [12] and, in 1150, retired to Kurotani, a monastery in another part of Mt. Hiei. After mastering the Tendai doctrines and the scholastics of the Nara schools, he still felt spiritually unfulfilled.

In due course, he realized that the *nembutsu* [12] was the only way to achieve *ōjō*, rebirth in Amida’s Pure Land. In 1175, Hōnen began to teach the path of *nembutsu* in Kyōto and founded the Jōdo school. Urged by his patron-disciple, Kujō Kanazane, he wrote the *Senchaku hongan nembutsushū* (The Selections of the Nembutsu of the Original Vow), or *Senchakushū* for short.

In 1204, the Kamakura Buddhist establishment launched a campaign against Hōnen’s movement, leading to the execution of four of his disciples in 1206. Hōnen himself was defrocked and exiled to Shikoku in 1207. He was finally allowed to return to Kyōto in 1211, just a month before his death.

### Shinran (1173-1263)

Shinran (1173-1263) was the founder of the **Jōdo Shin** school of Pure Land Buddhism, which teaches that pure faith (*shinjin*) alone is enough for one to be reborn into the Pure Land. Shinran entered monastic life at 8 and served as a *dōsō* (menial monk) at the Enryaku-ji until 1201, when he became a disciple of Hōnen.



While associated with Hōnen, he was permitted to copy the master's major work, the *Senchaku hongan nembutsushū*, and his portrait. When Hōnen was exiled to Shikoku in 1207, Shinran was banished to Echigo Province (now Niigata Prefecture). It was probably during this period that he renounced the robe and married to raise a large family.

Shinran was the first Buddhist priest to publicly marry, declaring that he is *hisohizoku*, “not monk, not layman”. Thereafter the practice became fairly common. He did not return to Kyoto even after his pardon in late 1211, for his master died at the beginning of the following year. Instead, he migrated with his family to the Kantō region, where he gathered a body of followers.

A major development in this phase of his life was the compilation of his monumental work, *Kyōgyōshinshō* (Doctrine, Practice, Faith, Realization) (c. 1224). It is an anthology of quotations from the Buddhist texts and commentaries, interspersed with interpretative comments to clarify the True Doctrine (*kyō*), the True Practice (*gyō*), the Truth Faith (*shin*) and the True Realization (*shō*) of the Pure Land School.

From his return to Kyōto around 1235 until about 1260, Shinran devoted himself to literary efforts. He counseled his disciples through a variety of writings, especially correspondence. After he died in 1263 in Kyōto, his ashes were interred in the Ōtani area, west of Higashiyama in Kyōto. The site became a devotional centre and later the location of the school's major temple, Hongan-ji.

### Modern responses

The German theologian Karl Barth in his *Church Dogmatics* (German 1932; Eng. tr. 1936) has noted a striking resemblance between the Amida pietism and evangelical piety of the Christians. This is a positive statement if we consider that Buddhism as a living religion is so protean as to be able to freely accommodate and answer various spiritual needs of specific societies and times.

Trevor Ling is of the opinion that both Amidism and Zen are more correctly described as “Japanese religions”. They can hardly be called Buddhist except in so far as historically their roots were in a Buddhist tradition. “Amidism is about as much as an authentic form of Buddhism as the sect of Jehovah's Witnesses is an authentic form of Christianity.” (*A History of Religion East and West*, 1968:315).

## **16. NICHIREN (1222-82)**

The most radical reformer in Japanese religion, though unsuccessful in his own lifetime, is undoubtedly Nichiren (1222-82). He was not so much interested in bringing the Buddhist past up to date as to create a totally new order within Buddhism itself. In this respect, he serves as an inspiration for all the new and renewed religions of Japan.

During Nichiren's time, the imminent threat of Mongol invasions led to mixed feelings of fear and patriotism in Japan. He declared that the contemporary religions of Japan were leading the country to the verge of disaster. Rejecting all the religious forms of his time, he formulated a gospel of uncompromising aggression—the struggle of the Japanese nation against all foes----based totally on the Lotus Sutra.



Nichiren's ideas drew the most enthusiasm from the warrior class. His school continued to grow during the violent years of the latter half of the 15th century and most of the 16th, up to the Tokugawa period. In modern times, the Nichiren school finds its most radical expression in the Nichiren-shoshu and the lay organization, Soka Gakkai. [See Appendix: *Nichiren: the New Buddhism of Modern Japan*.]

## 17. ZEN

The arrival of the Chan school in Japan was one of the most important events in Japanese religious history. Although Chinese masters came to Japan to propagate the Chan tradition, it did not develop into a major branch of Buddhism until the time of **Eisai** (1141-1215) and **Dōgen** (1200-1253). Through their efforts arose two Zen schools of Kamakura: the Rinzai (Chin. Linji or Lin-chi) and the Sōtō (Chin. Caodong or Ts'ao-tung), respectively.

Both Eisai and Dōgen studied Chan in China, as did a number of other Japanese monks. However, when they returned to Japan, they faced very strong opposition from the Tendai and Shingon clergies. It was only after they were forced to resist these attacks that they were able to establish themselves.

### Eisai (1141-1215)

**Eisai** (1141-1215) was the founder of Japanese **Rinzai Zen**, which emphasized sudden enlightenment. His father was the chief priest of Kibitsu Shrine in Bitchū Province (now part of Okayama Prefecture). Eisai began his study of Buddhism at 7. At 13, he took the preliminary Buddhist precepts at Enryaku-ji and later became a monk there. However, he became increasingly disillusioned with the laxity of monastic discipline there.

In 1168, he set out on a pilgrimage to Song China. During his five months in China, Eisai visited Tendai monastic sites and gathered Tendai texts. In 1187 he made a second journey to China, studying Zen under the Linji master Xu'an Huaichang (Hsü-an Huai-ch'ang), under whose guidance he combined meditation and *kōan* study with the study of Tantric practices and the Vinaya.

Upon his return to Japan in 1191, Eisai began to advocate the Chan teachings in Kyūshū and in Kyōto, quickly arousing the anger of the Enryaku-ji monks and their supporters at court. To defend himself against the charges of heresy, Eisai wrote *Shukke taikō* (1192, Essentials of the Monastic Life) and *Kōzen gokoku ron* (1198, The Propagation of Zen for the Protection of the Nation).

Eisai's apologia did little to appease his enemies in the capital. So, in 1199 he traveled to Kamakura to seek the patronage of the newly established shogunate there. He was warmly received by Hōjō Masako, the widow of the shogunal founder Minamoto no Yoritomo, and her son, the shōgun Minamoto no Yoriie. In 1202 he was made founder-abbot of a new monastery called Kennin-ji, where he taught a combination of Zen, Tendai and Tantra, emphasizing on sudden enlightenment.

### Dōgen (1200-1253)



**Dōgen** (Shoyo Daishi, 1200-1253), also known as Dōgen Kigen, was the founder of the **Sōtō Zen** school which emphasizes sitting meditation. Unlike most of his contemporaries, he totally avoided contact with the ruling and military classes. His Sōtō Zen school traditionally appealed to the farmers.

Taking the original Buddhist ideal of renunciation very seriously, Dogen rejected all worldly honours and preferred to resort to the solitude of the mountains. His writings, especially his chief work, the **Shōbōgenzō** (The Eye and Treasury of the True Dharma) (1231-53), are characterized by such terse and sharp wit that they are among the most fascinating literary documents of Japanese Buddhism.

Dōgen's Zen emphasized sitting practice (**zazen**), which alone is sufficient and true Buddhism. The foundation of Dōgen's teaching is the principle that practice does not *lead* to Enlightenment, but is carried out in the *state* of being enlightened; otherwise, it is not practice. He equates all being—the practitioner, the practice and the world—with the present, the moment of Enlightenment.

When Zen is mentioned in connection with Japanese culture, it almost always refers to the Sōtō Zen of Dōgen. Disapproving of any sectarian emphasis, he regarded Zen simply as the essence of Buddhism. In spite of this, Sōtō Zen ironically became strongly sectarian in Japan.

While Eisai brought back Chinese actors to Japan, Dōgen brought back potters and carpenters. A lay disciple of Dōgen introduced the Chinese art of making **ceramics**, a tradition which was perfected and handed down through the generations in the town of Seto (from which the Seto ware, *setomono*, got its name).

In 1244, Dōgen founded Daibutsuji, two years later renamed **Eihei-ji**, on a mountain that came to be known as Mt. Kichijo. He died in the autumn of 1253 in Kyōto.

## 18. MUROMACHI PERIOD (1338-1573)

In 1336, the warlord Ashikaga Takauji, coming to the assistance of the emperor Daigo II, overthrew the Kamakura shogunate and established a new *bakufu* (shogunate) in Kyōto, and achieved power by 1338. This rule by the warrior class would last until 1573. This rise and establishment of military culture had close association with Zen Buddhism.

The Muromachi generals, living in Kyōto, believed in **Zen Buddhism**, patronized Zen temples, and were influenced by Zen culture. Since Zen, as this time, was studied along with esotericism, it won the support of both the warrior and the noble classes. Later on, Southern Song monks were invited to Japan to introduce the pure Zen of China.

### Cultural influences of Zen

The Muromachi period was one of decline of Buddhist art. The Zen monks, however, made important cultural contributions. The Zen culture of the Muromachi period included practically every form of art. The school's most outstanding contribution is in the field of **literature** (written in Chinese) but which was accessible only to the highly educated. This body of prose and verse became so venerated in the Zen monasteries that in the 15th century it was more important than Buddhism itself.



Zen literature and the other arts developed into what is known as **the Japanese ‘Ways’ (*dō*)** which may be considered as a kind of secularization of Buddhist spirituality. The best known examples of these Ways that dwell on the principle of the highest fulfilment in every instant, every thought and every gesture, are swordsmanship, archery, the tea ceremony, and flower arrangement.

## 19. TEA CEREMONY & ZEN GARDEN

According to tradition, Bodhidharma, the first Zen patriarch, who came from India to China in 520, encouraged the custom of **tea drinking** for alertness during meditation. When Buddhism came to Nara, tea drinking was also introduced in connection with meditation. The practice was popular in Kamakura Japan, and later became an active part of a ceremony honouring Bodhidharma.

It is widely accepted that in 1191, the monk **Eisai** (1141-1215) brought **Chinese tea seeds** back from a temple in China. (They were called *honcha*, ”true tea”, because they were superior to the local breed.) These seeds were planted in Japan and so began the humble origin of Japan’s tea industry.

### Tea ceremony

**Eisai** later introduced the tea-drinking custom of the Song dynasty—called *yatsugashira* (“four heads”), using powdered green tea—that evolved into the famous **tea ceremony** (*cha-no-yu*) and became fully established as a Japanese ritual.

During the Muromachi period, the tea ceremony came to be a gathering of friends in an isolated atmosphere to drink tea and discuss the aesthetic merits of paintings, calligraphy, and flower arrangements displayed in the alcove called the *toko-no-ma*, or quite often to discuss the merits of the tea utensils themselves.

The tearoom (*cha-shitsu*) is so constructed that one has to enter on one’s knees, symbolizing beginning the ritual with humility. A mood of meticulous ceremony and concentration follows. The various tea utensils themselves are carefully chosen by the tea master.

The most famous exponent of the tea ceremony was **Sen Rikyū**, an aesthete at the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Momoyama court of the military dictator Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who codified the ceremony into a style known as **wabi** (roughly meaning “simplicity”, “quietude” and “absence of ornament”), which still enjoys popularity in Japan.

### Zen garden

It was during this period that the “dry landscape”(*kare sansui*) garden was introduced (so called because no water is used). This is the legendary **Zen garden**, ordinarily, a small garden south or east of the abbot’s room. It consists of trimmed trees, sand and rocks, symbolizing a landscape in reduced scale. The landscape is a visual representation of the Zen spirit. An extreme example of the Zen garden is the garden of the Ryōanji in Kyōto, which consists solely of 15 rocks arranged in five groups on a field of white sand.



All considered, one might say that the closest modern notion that approximates (in a very generally sense) of the Japanese Buddhist notion of beauty is that of “small is beautiful”.

## 20. MOMOYAMA PERIOD (1575-1600)

By the 1570s, Ashikaga authority had declined completely, and Japan was torn by fighting between rival clans and their armies until the end of the century. In 1568, a minor feudal lord, **Oda Nobunaga** (1534-1582), won control of Kyoto, where he broke the military power of the major Buddhist monasteries.

### Arrival of the Europeans

In **1498**, the Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope and reached India. Within 50 years, in **1543**, the Portuguese had reached an island off the southern coast of Kyushu. By **1545**, they were trading actively in ports in other parts of Kyushu.

In **1549**, the Jesuit priest Francis Xavier began a major missionary effort in Japan. By **1615**, perhaps as many as half a million Japanese had become converts. However, probably many of them were motivated by their interest in trade and their general curiosity rather than genuine religious conviction.

Nobunaga encouraged the Portuguese as a counterweight against Buddhist power and was also motivated by the hope of trade profits.

In 1573, Nobunaga drove the last Ashikaga shogun out of Kyoto. To consolidate his power, he went on to destroy the great Tendai monastery of Enryakuji on Mt. Hiei. Having subdued the Buddhist monastic centres in the capital, he went on to take over the fortified headquarters of the Shin Buddhists at Kaya on the west coast. Then he laid siege to the Shin branch castle at Osaka and captured it in 1580.

### Toyotomi Hideyoshi

Nobunaga's tactics against his opponents were ruthless, including the burning alive of captives and the slaughter of noncombatants. He himself was murdered by one of his own generals in Kyōto in 1582, but his power was seized by another of his generals, **Toyotomi Hideyoshi** (1537-98).

As Nobunaga's successor, Hideyoshi continued the campaigns against other feudal lords, and in 1585 conquered the island of Shikoku. In the following year, **Tokugawa Ieyasu** (1543-1616), a *daimyo* (landholding magistrate) of eastern Japan, agreed to become Hideyoshi's vassal.

With Ieyasu guarding his rear, Hideyoshi assembled an army of 280,000 men, the largest field force yet in Japanese history, and invaded Kyushu. Having finally unified Japan politically on a larger scale than ever before, in his megalomania, he planned next to conquer China. He had to do this by way of Korea, which he raided twice, in 1592 and 1596. Fortunately for the Koreans, the Ming army came their rescue. During his campaigns in Korea, anyway, Hideyoshi brought back some captive ceramicists and printers. Mercifully, he died in 1598, while his troops were in Korea.



### Japan's "Christian century"

Unlike the Chinese and Indians, the Japanese, as a small, remote and less developed people, were far more open to new ideas, even of foreign origins. The 16<sup>th</sup> century, sometimes called "Japan's Christian Century", saw significant numbers of Christian converts as well as flourishing trade with Europeans, centred in Nagasaki, Osaka, Edo (Tokyo) and other ports. Hideyoshi at first welcomed the Christian missionaries and the profitable trade with the Portuguese.

### Challenge to the Christians

Earlier Portuguese missionaries in Japan were told that if Christianity was, as they asserted, the only true religion, it would long have been known to and adopted by the Chinese. This helped convince the Jesuits, like Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), to try to convert the Chinese first, as a key to the rest of East Asia, but as history witnessed, that effort failed mainly due to the human weakness of the church at its highest levels.

After missionary work in Goa and SE Asia, **Francis Xavier** spent two years (1549-1551) in Japan preaching, teaching and disputing with Buddhist monks. But the Christians were soon seen as troublemakers.

### More sinning than sinned against

The foreigners were rivals with each other in both trade and missionary effort, and they took sides in internal conflicts. Japanese converts also developed loyalties to a foreign pope, and the Catholics themselves were split among various orders: Franciscan, Dominican, Augustinian and Jesuit, who contested with each other.

The Spanish, already established in the Philippines, tended to support the Franciscans; the Portuguese the Jesuits, and all four orders quarreled bitterly with each other. Following their usual strategy, the Jesuits concentrated on the elite, and even converted some of the *daimyo*, and later some of Hideyoshi's retinue.

The Spanish plotted against the Portuguese, and both were mortal enemies of the Dutch and the English (both were Protestants anyway). All of them had now reached Japan. It was understandable that Hideyoshi feared that the foreign missionaries were an advance guard for foreign political aggression.

In 1587, Hideyoshi banned the missionaries, but this order was not enforced for some years. He seemed to have feared that the spread of Christianity was becoming a disruptive influence in Japanese society and also a political menace.

In 1597, he officially banned Christianity and crucified 6 Spanish Franciscans, 3 Jesuits and 17 Japanese converts, though many Jesuits remained in hiding. However, he did not go further for fear of losing out in the trade with the Portuguese, which had also become an important source of technical knowledge, especially about firearms, and as the supply route for Chinese goods.

### Highest percentage of Christians



The number of Catholic priests were always small, never exceeding 200, but they managed to convert as many as 300,000 converts by the first decade of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. If the population of Japan then were between 20 million and 25 million—the highest percentage of the population that the Christian population of Japan had ever reached!

The contending missionaries were seen as increasingly disruptive, even more so in the Tokugawa period. In 1639, during the Tokugawa shogunate, Christianity was finally suppressed. Thousands of converts were crucified, and all foreigners expelled. Contact with the outside world was limited to one Dutch ship a year, allowed to trade only in Nagasaki harbour.

The generally unfavourable treatment given by Nobunaga and Hideyoshi, and the ultimate expulsion of foreign Christians from Japan were not religiously motivated. Indeed, the Momoyama rulers had subjected all Japanese religions under their power, and during the Tokugawa period, all religions were state-controlled. The various military rulers, governing over a centralized Japan, saw the growing Christian community, Japanese and foreign alike, with their vastly non-Japanese values, as a growing threat to the established and centralized order.

Moreover, the bitter quarrels between the Portuguese Jesuits and the Spanish Franciscans, and between the Spanish and the Dutch priests, for example, made the rulers aware of danger of Christianity as a political machine, and that Christian evangelism was only a wedge for the subsequent colonization of the country (as had happened in south and southeast Asia and elsewhere).

## 21. TOKUGAWA PERIOD (1600-1867)

When Hideyoshi died, a power struggle ensued amongst his former vassals. After a decisive victory at Sekigahara in 1600, **Tokugawa Ieyasu** (1543-1616) brought Japan the longest period of peace and stability that lasted until the end of the shogunate in 1868. But Tokugawa Japan was still a feudal system closed to the outside world. In fact, the feudal system was becoming even more rigid and more effectively controlled from the centre of the shogun's power at **Edo** (modern Tokyo).

With the Tokugawa shogunate began the second period of Japan's Buddhist history, **the developmental period**.

### Guns outlawed

In an interesting and unprecedented move in world history, the Tokugawa **outlawed all guns**, which the Japanese had learned from the Europeans in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and which they had themselves used in internal wars and in Korea with devastating effect. Anyone with a gun could become a serious threat to authority or at least the civil order. Obsessed with order and control, the Tokugawa regarded guns as an obvious threat to both, and an invitation to disorder and rebellion.

Furthermore, guns were regarded as (in our modern terms) “ungentlemanly”. The elite warriors of ancient Japan were the *samurai*, the “gentleman warriors”. Peasants were made (as before) to surrender their swords and other weapons to the *bakufu*. In this way, the hereditary warrior class, the *samurai*, was left in complete charge of the military government.

### Registration and guarantee



From 1630s onwards, in their effort to exterminate the Christians, the Tokugawa government formed a **religious inquisition** (*shūmon aratame*) and used the nationwide Buddhist temple network as their policing system by way of the *danka* and the *terauke* systems.

In a system known as ***danka*** (fr. Sanskrit *dānapati*, “lay supporter” and *ka* Jap. for “house”), all Japanese had to register periodically at Buddhist temples. A *danka* identified a family that requested a particular Buddhist temple to conduct all its funeral, memorial, and other services in exchange for which it offered remuneration and partial provision for the upkeep of the temple.

In addition to the *danka*, the Tokugawa authorities introduced the ***terauke*** (temple guarantee) system to seek out the adherents of the proscribed Christianity faith, but it had a wider effect of the surveillance of the entire population. A certificate of affiliation with a Buddhist temple was required as proof that a suspect was not a Christian. In 1665, the shogunate ordered a detailed scrutiny of the population, “listing the name of the temple that stood as guarantee of each person’s religion”.

At birth every person was enrolled as a parishioner of his family’s temple and the register was forwarded to the lord of the domain. The temple attestation was also required prior to marriage, travel, change of residence, or entry into service.

The ***terauke*** system was also used against other proscribed religious groups, such as the uncompromising Fujū Fuse (“not giving, not receiving”) sect of Nichiren Buddhism from 1669. The system collapsed along with the Tokugawa shogunate in the Meiji Restoration in 1868.

Clearly, the Tokugawa had bitter experiences with the missionaries and did not want to repeat their mistake. However, the Tokugawa proscription of Christianity was not totally effective. Those few who escaped went underground and kept Christianity alive until the appearance of Western missionaries in the 1860s.

### Hokusai

The art of **woodblock print** (especially in colour) reached its peak in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. The best known of Japanese wood-block printmakers was **Hokusai** (not his real name) (1760-1849). He was a devout Buddhist from Edo who chose the name by which he is known (which means “north studio”), to honour a Buddhist saint who was thought to be an incarnation of the north star.

His early work centred on book illustration, but his fame rested on his magnificent set of “Thirty-seven Views of Mount Fuji”. Such works (and those of Hokusai’s contemporary, Ando Hiroshige) had a great influence on Western artists, especially the Impressionists in France and the American painter, James Whistler (1834-1903). Vincent Van Gogh (1853-90) carefully copied prints by Hiroshige.

## **22. TOKUGAWA: BUDDHIST DEVELOPMENTS**

### Mahayana canons



The Tokugawa Shogunate encouraged the Buddhist clergy in scholarly pursuits, hoping thereby to divert them from political mischief. The Tokugawa period as such produced a vast body of learned literature, especially sectarian commentaries and monastic biographies.

During the first half of the 17th century, two editions of the **Mahayana Canon** appeared. The first was by the monk **Sōzon** but it was incomplete. The second edition was that of the Tendai monk **Tenkai**. However, it was the edition of **Tetsugen** (1630-1682) of the Ōbaku school, a new Zen sect, that gained the widest circulation. This is known as the Tetsugen-ban or Ōbaku-ban [*ban* = Chin. *pen*, meaning “edition”].

### Zen monks

The **Ōbaku-shu** was founded by a Chinese master, Yinyen Longzhi (Ingen Ryōki, 1592-1673), a Linji Chan (Rinzai Zen) monk who came to Japan. It not only syncretized with Amidism, but also introduced rituals, customs and a new architectural style imported from Ming China. Another innovation was the use of chairs.

The Zen monk, artist and writer **Hakuin** (1685-1768) helped in the restoration of Rinzai Zen in modern times. He revived the use of **koans**, statements of Zen masters that are used as problems set to novices in Zen monasteries. Hakuin's this-worldliness and realism are reflected in his *Hymn on Sitting in Meditation* which contains koans like ‘Outside the beings there is no Buddha’; ‘This very place is the land of the Lotus Flower’; ‘This body is the Buddha’.

Hakuin belonged to the Zen tradition of **Japanese art** in which the object represented in a painting is not as important as what it evokes in the spectator's mind. Unlike the haughty monks who served the Shogunate, Hakuin lived humbly in great poverty among his peasant followers, and his humility and spirituality became the foundation for modern Zen in Japan.

### Books

Buddhist **books** continued to be printed during the Tokugawa period but were given secular treatment. Doctrinal texts of the Amida school, for example, were printed with the phonetic *kana* syllabary [11] to assist the newly literate public. Mythical accounts of the lives of Japanese ‘saints’ were published with profuse illustrations. Maps and pictorial guide-books for pilgrimages were issued in their thousands to organized tour groups.

### Rebus

To reach out to the huge illiterate public of Tokugawa Japan, the Buddhists of Edo introduced an ingenious method of teaching the sutras and mantras through the use of **rebus**. A rebus is a representation of a word or syllable by a symbol or picture of an object the name of which resembles in sound the represented word or syllable (eg ‘IOU’).

The Heart Sutra, for example, was transcribed into a rebus in an effort to bring Buddhist teachings within reach of the common people.

### Outstanding monks



The period of Japanese reunification produced two outstanding Zen monks. One was the Rinzai monk **Takuan** (1573-1645) who is especially known for his application of the Zen spirit to the art of **fencing (*kendō*)**. In his *Recordings on the Mystery of Motionless Wisdom*, he says: “To look at things without permitting the mind to stop at them is called ‘to be motionless’”.

The other figure is **Suzuki Shōsan** (1579-1655) who became a Sōtō Zen monk at 42 after having fought for the first Shōgun, Ieyasu. His conception of Zen was not so much monastic as it was of daily work that “everyone can become a Buddha in his own profession”. There is no practice of the Buddhist Way outside the profession.

### 23. THE MEIJI RESTORATION (1868-1912)

Japan’s modern era (1868-1945) encompasses three historical periods: the Meiji (1868-1911), the Taishō (1912-25) and the Showa (1926- ). The Meiji Reformation was a period of transition from feudalism to the modern system. With the abolition of the feudal state, the military stepped down while the emperor was made the head of new nation-state with authority centralized at Tokyo.

Soon after the arrival of Commodore Perry of the US (1853, 1854), other foreign powers (England, Russia, France and the Netherlands) too signed treaties of trade and cooperation with the Japanese. Unable to repulse foreign demands after that, the people (especially the elite) began to lose faith in the military government as the protector of the nation.

#### State Shintō

After years of ideological and armed struggle amongst factions, the military regime finally yielded its power on 3rd January 1868 when a coup d'etat restored imperial rule—and so began the Meiji Restoration (1868-1912). Within a few decades, the imperial regime modernized Japan's political and social system and brought her out of the feudal age into the modern era.

The fact that it was associated with the Tokugawa administration made Buddhism quite unpopular at the beginning of the Meiji period, at least among the elite who wished to install Shinto as the new state religion. To achieve this goal, it was necessary for the ruling class at that time to separate Shinto from Buddhism.

To purge Shinto of foreign (especially Buddhist) elements and to further unify religion and state, the new government decreed the ‘Separation of Gods and Buddhas’ (1868). By this decree, Buddhist monks and priests attached to shrines were secularized. Buddhist images could no longer be objects of Shinto worship and were removed from Shinto shrines. Shinto priests and their families had to be given a Shinto (not Buddhist) funeral.

In 1889 a constitution was promulgated which declared the ‘sacred’ and ‘inviolable’ character of the emperor. He was proclaimed a direct descendent of the sun goddess Amaterasu Ōmikami and as such deified and regarded as *kami*, that is, a living deity. This concept formed the nucleus of Japanese imperialism that was to launch the country into the Second World War.

#### Buddhism persecuted



The new edict led to a nationwide zeal, originating mainly in Shinto circles, aimed not only at severing the ties between Buddhism and Shinto, but actually suppressing Buddhism. Temple lands were confiscated (mostly for agrarian reform) and many Sangha members were defrocked. In many cases, Buddhist temples and objects of worship were desecrated or destroyed. Buddhist beliefs and worship were forbidden in the imperial household.

The main force behind this persecution and iconoclasm against Buddhism was known as *haibutsu-kishaku* (Exterminate the Buddhas, destroy Shakyamuni). Though this was a grave setback for Buddhism, it also gave rise to some great Buddhist figures at that time. Many of them, such as Shimaji Mokurai (1838-1911) of the Jodo Shin-shu, went to Europe to study. During his European tour (1872-1873) Mokurai studied the religious situation there. On his return, he advocated the disestablishment of all creeds and the freedom of religion.

The persecution of the Buddhists came to a climax around 1871 but was soon brought under control. In 1875, **freedom of religion** was guaranteed to all. But to preserve a special status for Shinto, ranking above Buddhism, Shinto was officially not recognized as a religion, but as a form of state cult--**State Shintō**. This new religious freedom gave the Buddhists the impetus for revival.

## 24. STRUGGLE AND REVIVAL

The reaction to Christianity provided the Buddhist revival of 1877-1889 with its greatest inspiration. There was a general tendency toward nationalism and to attack “foreign” Christianity with slogans like *haja kenshō* [reject the wicked (Christianity); clarify the right (Buddhism)]. Buddhist apologetics stressed both the dangers of Christianity and the harmony of Buddhism with Shinto, and to a lesser degree with Confucianism.

This revival brought Buddhism into alliance with the government and a dependence on state funds. It failed, however, mainly because anti-Christian attitudes merely allied Buddhism to nationalism rather than brought resurgence of fundamental Buddhist doctrines. Japanese Buddhist ingenuity however found other ways of regeneration (Davis, 1989).

### Buddhist universities

The Buddhists under the Meiji Restoration had learnt a valuable lesson from the widespread Shinto-inspired persecutions. With the impact of Westernization and modernization, the Buddhists have a new challenge to contend with. In the face of adversity, the Japanese Buddhist groups found themselves unified with the common objective of taking steps to modernize themselves.

The Japanese Buddhists founded schools and universities, and reorganized their old temple schools and transformed them into universities. Their spirited response was reflected in the rise of numerous **Buddhist universities**:

- 1882 — Komazawa University, Tokyo (Soto Zen) [founded as a temple in 1759]
- 1905 — Otani University, Kyoto (Jodo Shin-shu) [founded in 1655 as a study centre]
- 1922 — Ryokoku University, Kyoto (Jodo Shin-shu) [started as a temple in 1639].

Other examples include Hana-zono University (Rinzai Zen), Bukkyo University (Jodo Shin-shu), Shuchiin University (Shingon), Koyasan University (Shingon), Rissho University (Nichiren), Taisho University (serving the Jodo Shin, Tendai and Shingon sects), and the Kyoto Women's University (Jodo Shin-shu).



A number of **research institutes** specializing in Buddhism and oriental studies were also founded, e.g. the Nippon Buddhist Research Association and the Japanese Association of Indian and Buddhist Studies (Indogaku-bukkyogaku-kai). The Japanese Buddhists found the compatibility of Buddhism with the theories and discoveries of modern science a redeeming inspiration. They became better equipped to ride the waves of Westernization and modernism and to ward off Christian influence.

### Nanjō's Catalogue

In 1876, the eminent Japanese Buddhologist and Sanskrit scholar, **Bun'yū Nanjō** (1849-1927), a priest of the Ōtani branch of the Jōdo Shin sect, went to England to study English and Sanskrit, and to research Buddhist texts in Europe. In the course of his studies, he discovered that *The Buddhist Tripitaka* (1876), Samuel Beal's English-language catalogue of all sutras in the Obaku Edition was full with errors.

Nanjō corrected Beal's errors and in 1883 published *Catalogue of the Chinese Translation of the Buddhist Tripitaka*, commonly known as *Nanjō's Catalogue*. His catalogue generally follows the Ming Dynasty Catalogue of the Tripitaka (Daming sanzang shengjiao mulu), the compendium of the Northern Ming Edition of the Tripitaka, on which the Wanli Edition (and hence the Obaku Edition) was based. *Nanjō's Catalogue* was very well-received by scholars throughout the world and remains the only reliable English-language record of Chinese translations of Buddhist sutras.

### Radical changes and responses

An interesting and important development in Japanese Buddhism after the Meiji Restoration was the practice of **married priesthood**, which had its roots in the examples of the Jodo Shin-shu pioneers like Shinran [15]. With the disestablishment of Buddhism the monks lost most of their lay patronage and were forced to support themselves and their temples in more mundane ways. During the Meiji era a decree was issued allowing the clergy of all sects to marry. Today, except for young monks under training, nearly all Japanese priests lead married lives. [The term “priest” here applies to the non-celibate clergy while “monk” refers to the ordained who keep to the rule of celibacy.]

[See Yoshiharu Tomatsu, “The Secularization of Japanese Buddhism” in 1998: 46-56.]

Some priests, instead of lamenting the **disestablishment of Buddhism**, recognised it as a blessing in disguise. They had the courage to acknowledge the criticisms levelled against Buddhism and advocated its spiritual rebirth. An outstanding example is that **Kiyozawa Manshi** (1863-1903) who openly criticized the traditional pattern of hereditary family membership in temples. He advocated a renewal of personal faith and a reorganization of Buddhism as a “brotherhood” based on small groups of believers. Although he was not successful, his ideas provided ideas for post-War Buddhist reforms.

## **25. TAISHŌ PERIOD (1912-1926)**

The Japanese contact with the West also acquainted them with the methods and results of modern scholarship. Through the study of Sanskrit and Pali they gained direct access for the first time to the Indian sources of Buddhism. This resulted in the foundation of Buddhist universities at the beginning of this century.



During the Taishō period, the new liberal attitude of scholars towards Buddhist studies contributed much to the modernization of Buddhism in Japan. Buddhist thought found its way into literary and philosophical works. A prominent Japanese who was influenced by Buddhism was **Nishida Kitarō** (1870-1945), Japan's leading philosopher who established a truly universal philosophy transcending traditional Eastern and Western categories of thought. These modernists were, however, often criticized by their own sects. Some of them were even expelled and some lost their university positions.

### Taishō Canons

The comparative study of northern and southern Chinese editions of the Tripitaka late in the Tokugawa period (1603-1868) [21] influenced Japanese Buddhist studies during the Meiji period and the following Taishō period, leading to the publication of three modern editions of the Chinese Canon produced by consolidating the Koryo (Korean) and Wanli (Chinese) editions.

The first of these Japanese Tripitaka editions was the **Dai Nippon Kōtei Daizōkyō**, popularly known as the Shukusatsu-zōkyō, or Small-type Canon (1880-1885). The second was the **Dai Nippon Kōtei Zōkyō**, generally called the Manji-zōkyō, or Fylfot-letter Tripitaka (1902-1905). The third was the **Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō**, generally called the Taishō Daizōkyō, or Taishō Edition of the Tripitaka (1924-1934). Each of these Canons was an enlargement of its predecessors.

The Taishō Edition was published through the effort and sacrifices of **Junjirō Takakusu** (1866-1945), a pioneer Japanese Buddhologist who supervised its preparation with the assistance of Kaigyoku Watanabe and others, and published by the Taishō Issaikyō Kankō-kai. Unlike the other Canons which followed the traditional arrangement of sutras according to whether they were Nikāya Buddhism or Mahayana, the Taishō Edition organized the sutras chronologically, according to the historical development of their teachings.

The four-part Taishō Edition contains a hundred volumes which records 3,053 works in 11,970 fascicles. This Edition is still the most widely used edition of the Mahayana Tripitaka because its easy system. For example, care was taken to point out each Pali or Sanskrit word that corresponded to or was similar to a particular Chinese rendering, and Chinese translations were frequently supplemented with Indic-language notations to increase clarity and to correct errors.

## **26. SHŌWA PERIOD (1926- 1989)**

During the early Showa period (1926-1945), i.e. before the Second World War, Japan continued to experience the impact of modernization and Westernisation. It was also a period of **ultra-nationalism** (around 1930-1945) when Buddhist radicals called for the unification of the East in one great “Buddha-land” under the tutelage of Japan. This dangerous period saw Japan wage three major wars: the Sino-Japanese (1894-95), the Russo-Japanese (1904-05) and World War II (1938-45).

After the invasion of China (1937) and Japan's subsequent participation in the Second World War, the government tightened its grip on Buddhist institutions. Any Buddhist writing that placed Buddhism above the authority of the state or emperor was forced to be modified or were suppressed. There was little open opposition except from the Soka Gakkai [Appendix: *Nichiren: the New Buddhism of Modern Japan*].



## 27. POST-WAR PERIOD (1945-1989)

The Allied occupation (1945-52) following Japan's defeat in the Second World War marked Japan's first major defeat and occupation of her territory. Pre-War nationalism and militarism gave way to greater liberty and tendency towards democracy and globalism. There was a remarkable rebuilding of Japan's cities and industrial facilities. In due course, Japan emerged as a major economic and political power in Asia.

Early in this period, Shintō was disestablished. There was complete religious freedom but a general demoralization and disorganization among the older religions. Recovery and reorganization were gradual. Most conspicuous were **the New Religions**, but religious indifference and secularism were widespread.

After the war, however, Buddhist groups, new and old alike, began to emphasize Buddhism as a religion of peace and fellowship. In spite of financial difficulties and widespread indifference to religion, Buddhist activities revived. Religious bodies became more democratic in their composition. There were more contacts with Buddhists overseas. Missions were sent to the Americas and to Europe; contacts with Buddhist countries (especially those of southeast Asia) were renewed.

Social and cultural activities flourished under the Buddhist banner mostly run by the laity. As academic studies advanced and produced a stream of excellent scholarly publications, Japan was becoming the foremost "Buddhological" country in the world.

## 28. THE HEISEI PERIOD (1989- )

The era name of the present emperor, Akihito, is based on two quotations from the Chinese classics *Shi ji* (*Shih chi*, Book of History) and *Shu jing* (*Shu ching*, Book of Documents) that signify the attainment of peace in heaven and on earth, at home and abroad. It began as a prosperous period: the Heisei Boom, ending in early 1991.

This is a period of excellent interdisciplinary Buddhist studies, most of which however are in Japanese. The extensive scope and depth of recent Japanese studies can be seen in such work as Hajime Nakamura's *Indian Buddhism: A Survey with Bibliographical Notes* (Osaka: KUPS Publications, 1980).

### Keiji Nishitani (1900-1990)

**Keiji Nishitani** (1900-1990) was a leading Japanese philosopher. He graduated from Kyoto University and became a professor there in 1943. His primary concern was the fundamental relation between human existence and religion. He compared "nothingness" and "detachment" in the mysticism of Meister Eckhart (c. 1260-1327) with the Buddhist notion of "emptiness" (*kū*), finding a common transcendental or absolute stance.

He developed a philosophy of absolute nothingness as the religious realization of a self located in a bottomless abyss. The new kind of nihilism serves to synthesize Eastern and Western thought. His major works include *Kami to zettaimu* (1948) and *Shūkyō to wa nani ka* (1961; *Religion and Nothingness*, tr. Jan Van Bragt, Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1982).

### Hajime Nakamura (1912-1999)



**Hajime Nakamura** (1912-99) was a leading Japanese scholar of Indian philosophy and Buddhism. He graduated from Tokyo University and taught there from 1954 to 1973. He produced a large number of works in the comparative study of ideas and promoted cultural exchange between Japan and other nations.

His best known work is *Tōyōjin no shii hōhō* (1948-49), tr. *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples: India, China, Tibet, Japan* (tr. Philip P. Wiener, Honolulu: East-West Center, 1964). In 1974, he completed a three-volume dictionary of Buddhist terms, *Bukkyōgo dajiten*. He received the Order of Culture in 1977.

In *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples*, Nakamura attempts to explain why after the Nara period onwards, celibacy was commonly disregarded by the clergy:

While the Japanese are keenly conscious of their membership in their small, closed nexus, they are hardly fully aware of themselves as individuals, or as social beings, to the extent the Western people are. In the light of such a way of thinking, it is easy to understand why Japanese Buddhists have tended to disregard the Universalistic Buddhist Precepts. (1964: 415)

### International academic cooperation

International scholarly cooperation has provided two positive results on Japanese Buddhist scholarship. Where formerly Japanese knowledge of Buddhism was filtered through Chinese Buddhism, concerned Buddhists hoping for reform now have **a direct knowledge of early Indian Buddhism**.

In *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples: India, China, Tibet, Japan* (1964: pt. IV), Nakamura discusses various problems that Japanese Buddhism faced, such as, as he plainly put it: “the Japanese frequently misinterpreted the original Chinese texts” (1964: 348).

A second positive result is the growing confidence in western methods of critical scholarship and western philosophy. Scholars like **Nishida Kitaro** (1870-1945) have brought Japanese Buddhist philosophy to international standards.

The next step is to collate the various studies on Buddhism by Japanese scholars, translate them into English for publication.

## **29. RECAPITULATION**

We have looked at the Buddhist history of Japan in terms of the three periods, which scholars like H. Byron Earhart have used. First, there is the formative period from prehistory to the 9<sup>th</sup> century (that is, up to the Heian period), which was a period of **assimilation** of Korean and Chinese cultures.

Then follows the developmental period from the 9<sup>th</sup> century until the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries (that is, up to the Tokugawa period). This was a time of growing **indigenization** of foreign cultures, when Buddhism became distinctly Japanese, or simply more so.

Finally, we have the formalistic period from the 17<sup>th</sup> century Tokugawa era up to our own times, which is also accompanied by renewal and innovation, or what might be said to be



**contextualization**, where Japanese culture and Buddhism are increasingly seen in the local as well as global contexts. There is an on-going scholarly commitment to view Buddhist studies in the light of early Indian Buddhism.

This has been an exciting survey of a living history of Buddhism in Japan from which we have much to learn, and the best is yet to come.

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